In a New Connected World

Costantino Cipolla, Antonia Roberta Siino

1. **Authors information**
   Costantino Cipolla
   Department of Sociology and Business Law, University of Bologna, Italy

   Antonia Roberta Siino
   Department of Sociology and Business Law, University of Bologna, Italy

2. **Contact authors'**
   Costantino Cipolla
   E-mail: costantino.cipolla@unibo.it

   Antonia Roberta Siino
   E-mail: antoniaroberta.siino@unibo.it

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Costantino Cipolla[*], Antonia Roberta Siino[**]

Corresponding authors:
Costantino Cipolla
E-mail: costantino.cipolla@unibo.it
Antonia Roberta Siino
E-mail: antoniaroberta.siino@unibo.it

Abstract

In the last decades, societies had to face great social changes. In the current globalised world, individuals are always more connected one to each other and the social network in which they are inserted have a deep influence on them. At the same time, ancient phenomena like the terroristic one have shown great capabilities in adapting to them. Even if secular and religious terroristic groups are not so different as they could appear, different explanations for a different type of terrorism have been defined. The great challenge of our days is to understand the real meanings of the change occurred; above all, a new form of relations and interrelations must be considered. Indeed, all social transformation concerning individuals and their social networks are reflected by larger phenomena. In this perspective, the globalisation process, the spread of the digital era and the spread of Information Communicational Technologies have had a great impact on the social structure of current communities. Indeed, the easy access to new technologies and their potentialities are key elements in the evolution of terroristic organisations. The aim of this article is to offer an overview on this subject inserted in the international context, underlying the deep change occurred from an organised relation to a connected organisation of actors.

Keywords: terrorism, communic-action, digital era.

1. Introduction

In the last decades, societies had to face great social changes. In the current globalised world, individuals are always more connected one to each

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[*] Department of Sociology and Business Law, University of Bologna, Italy.
[**] Department of Sociology and Business Law, University of Bologna, Italy.

other and the social network in which they are inserted has a deep influence on them. At the same time, ancient phenomena like the terroristic one have shown great capabilities in adapting to these changes. Even if secular and religious terroristic groups are not so different as they could appear, different explanations for a different type of terrorism could be defined.

The great challenge of our days is to understand the real meanings of the changes occurred; above all, as far as concerns a new form of relations and interrelations. Indeed, all social transformations concerning individuals and their social networks are reflected by larger phenomena. In this perspective, the globalisation process, the spread of the digital era and the spread of Information Communicational Technologies must be considered, because of their great impact on the social structure of current communities. All this is fundamental in the analysis concerning terrorism phenomenon because the easy access to new technologies and the potentialities they offer are key elements in its evolution.

The first part of the paper will focus on the phenomenon of terrorism itself. Firstly, the analysis will underline the lack of a common definition of the phenomenon and the necessity to establish what should be considered as a terroristic action. Secondly, a brief excursus concerning the historic evolution and the sociological explication of the phenomenon will be presented.

The second part of the paper will focus on the effect that the globalisation process has had both on the phenomenon of terrorism and the society as well. In this case, the analysis will focus on the impact of new technological tools types of communication on the organisation and structure of terroristic groups. Moreover, the analysis will include the application of the communic-actional approach to the terroristic subject and a more complex reflection on the great social changes occurred in the last decades.

The aim of this article is to offer an overview of the terroristic phenomenon underlying the deep change occurred between the organised relation of the past years and the connected organisation of nowadays.

2.   A missing definition

Terrorism is a fluid, not static, concept; thus, it is difficult to nail down (Laqueur, 1978; Innes, Levi, 2012; Vertigans, 2016). Many authors underline the complexity in defining this phenomenon (Schmid, Jongman, 1988; Smelser, 2007; Innes, Levi, 2012, Vertigans, 2016) because it 'may be deployed as a relative, emotive, pejorative, or ideologically driven label' (Scott, 2014). Moreover, different forms of terrorism have occurred during the last centuries, reflecting the characteristics of their historic context (Laqueur, 1978; Oliverio, Lauderdale, 2005). Even if different events cannot be compared, the

different approaches adopted by social scientists (English, 2008; Weston, Innes, 2010) have underlined some common elements, such as: political violence, communicative violence, and (the often contested) asymmetry of power (Cohen, 2001; Innes, Levi, 2012). However, the comprehension of the phenomenon is far to be arranged.

Because of its 'fluidity and amorphousness' (Vertigans, 2016), the agreement on a common definition of terrorism is difficult to achieve not only from a sociological point of view but also from a political one. The confusion concerning the definition of this phenomenon has neither been solved by the intervention of the United Nations: 'The United Nations ability to develop a comprehensive strategy has been constrained by the inability of Member States to agree on an anti-terrorism convention including a definition of terrorism. This prevents the United Nations from exerting its moral authority and from sending an unequivocal message that terrorism is never an acceptable tactic, even for the most defensible of causes' (UN, 2004: §4,157; Muller, 2006). The UN definition reflects the lack of a common political agreement (Innes, Levi, 2012) but its intervention risks to produce other kinds of problems concerning this matter. A complex phenomenon such terrorism is always subjected to political orientation, as far as concerning the reaction against them too: what can be considered as normal in a democratic regime could be considered as subversive in a dictatorial one (Oliverio, 1998)[1]. UN' statement does not apply any kind of distinction in this field. Indeed, its explicit affirmation that there are no circumstances that could justify the commitment of this kind of activities has been often criticised, due to the prospect that a terroristic label can also be applied to groups acting against dictatorial regimes.

In this regulatory perspective, the definition offered by the Italian case will be now presented. According to the Italian Criminal law[2], and as established by the Court of Cassation[3], subversive and terroristic acts are those committed by 'who promotes, constitutes, organizes and leads associations aiming to subvert the socio-economic order of the State and to

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[1] For instance: violence expressed against monarchist regime during the French Revolution, anti-colonial movements or political dissidents in the second half of 20th century was considered as terroristic movements by the related government (Scott, 2014).

[2] Art. 270 c.p. and art. 270bis c.p..

[3] Court of Cassation, Sez. V penal, 2 April 2012, n. 12252. The current version of the cited article has been often criticised because of the risk to violate constitutional rights concerning the promotion of associated movement, considered as one the most important way in which citizens can enhancement themselves into the social context (Musuraca, 2007).

establish the dictatorship of a political/social class through violent actions' (TBA)[4]. Referring to this definition it is possible to fix the main elements that characterise the terroristic phenomenon from the Italian point of view.

Firstly, according to the Italian criminal law, the specific aims of a terrorist action must be: the subversion of the constitutional/democratic system and the dismantling of state structures. In other words, the voluntary spread of terror is necessary but not sufficient to define an action as a terrorist; indeed, the distinguishing element is the aiming to prejudice constitutional principles of the State (Centonze, Giovedì, 2016).

Secondly, the reference to a domestic origin of the attempt to the state's integrity makes evident the importance of the domestic horizon. For this, actions that could be prosecuted are those committed inside the Italian territory and against the Italian State. However, an internal subversive group can be supported by external actors like foreign volunteers or foreign government (Laqueur, 1978). Analysis focusing on state's involvement in terroristic activities are scarce even if an increasing interest in the last decades is underlined by the 'critical terrorism studies' (Scott, 2014)[5]. In this field, the most important – and often forgotten – example in the Italian history is offered by the interest of United States in the failing of democratic election after World War II. In that period, the concrete spreading of socialist/communist thought in many western countries represented the most important danger for the U.S. government, compared to which Nazi-fascism was just a 'moderate' danger. For these reasons, U.S. adopted open strategies to support fascism both in Greece and Korea; according to official documents now available, military interventions were not necessary for Italy because 'it was enough just to carry out subversion – and the United States took that very seriously. So we funded ultra-right Masonic Lodges and terrorist paramilitary groups in Italy, the Fascist police and strikebreakers were brought back, we withheld food, we made sure their economy could not function' (Chomsky, 2002: 185). In this case, open activities against the rising democratic system was not necessary because 'we can probably buy off the election by the threat of starvation and extensive terrorism and subversion, which in the end turned out to be correct' (Chomsky, 2002: 185); for the same reasons, U.S. also supported both the reconstruction of mafia type organization (hardly stroke during the fascism) and activities aiming to employ Nazi war criminals to

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[4] The Italian Criminal law differentiates terrorism and subversive acts, basically referring to the lack or presence of the systematic use of violence to achieve aims that in most case are the same.
[5] For further information about this topic, see: *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda* by Jackson, Gunning, Breen Smyth (2009).

contrast the resistance forces[6]. As a complementary example, the Fascist Italian government had a fundamental role in supporting the terrorist group of Ustasha in Croatia, in the '20s, including the guaranteeing of hospitality to their leaders when they had to leave their country (Laqueur, 1978).

Finally, both in the case of internal and external terrorism, political ideology appears as another important element which terrorist actions are based on. If terrorism is highly politicised, the same can be said as far as concerns the counter-reaction too; it explains the reason why the previous version of the article 270 c.p., introduced in the Italian Criminal law during the fascism period, was directly addressed to communist, socialist and anarchical associations. After the fall of fascism, this legislative reference has been applied to repress protests and political fights of 70's and 80's (Ronco, Romano, 2012)[7].

The lack of a common definition of terrorism has direct and concrete effects. Terrorism could not be considered as traditional conflict[8] between States and so rules of war could not be applied (Burton, 2007); as consequence, actions could be prosecuted just by the criminal law of the State in which they are committed and the status of their perpetrator is hard to define because they could not be considered neither civilian nor prisoner-of-war (Burton, 2007)[9]. All this determines a murky situation that forces societies and States to reflect and define a different way to react against these (old and new) forms of violence. To achieve a complete comprehension, the most

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[6] For further information about the influence of U.S. government on Italian politics, see Schmitz, *The United States and Fascist Italy, 1922-1940*; *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919*, Vol. I ('Paris Peace Conference'), Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1942. For further information about mafia phenomenon after the II World War and its role in the Italian history, see Marino, *Storia della mafia*, Newton Compton, Roma; Lupo, *Storia della mafia. La criminalità organizzata in Sicilia dalle origini ai giorni nostri*. Donzelli, Roma.

[7] Among the most important event of this period: the massacre of Piazza Fontana, in Milan on 12th December 1969, and the murder of Aldo Moro, the 9th May 1978.

[8] 'irregular armed forces, such as guerrillas and other insurgents, are governed by these rules [of war] only when they carry their weapons openly, wear uniforms clearly displaying a recognizable emblem or insignia, conduct their operations in accordance with the laws of war, and are commanded by a superior who is responsible for subordinates' (Burton, 2007: §2).

[9] During the 'War on terrorism' launched by United States after the September 11th Attacks most of the arrested members of the al-Qaeda organization 'failing to wear uniforms with insignia clearly displayed, failing to carry their weapons openly, and failing to organize themselves in units subject to a hierarchical chain of command. [For this,] despite criticism from international observers formally denied the Guantanamo detainees prisoner-of-war-status' (Burton, 2007: §2).

important element on which the analysis must be focused is the change occurred in the organisation and structure of this kind of organisations.

2.1   *Socio-historic context and types of terrorism*

As mentioned, the analysis of terrorism must be embedded in the socio-historical context in which it manifests itself. For this reason, the analysis will now be focused on the socio-historic context, considering the fundamental role played by both technological and doctrinal dimensions in the evolution of such complex phenomenon (Rapoport, 2002; Akrivopoulou, Garipidis, 2012).

The terrorist phenomenon has manifested itself in all the time and in all kind of societies, fostered by different kinds of motivations such as 'religious protest movements, political revolts and social uprising' (Laqueur, 1978: 18). Historically, first pieces of evidence of this phenomenon are those concerning the *sicarii* of the AD 66-73, the Assassins of the 11th century, the secret society of Thugs in India, the Chinese Red Spears and the Ku Klux Klan of the first period (Laqueur, 1978). These first cases apparent very far from the current expressions of terrorism but this dissimilarity depends just on the different historic context in which they manifested themselves.

Behind these embryonic types of terrorist groups (if compared to the current ones), four waves can be pinned in the evolution of terrorism The first wave (starting from the second half of 19th century) is characterized by the 'dedication to an idealized revolutionary version of society' (Hai-Jew, 2012: 191; Rapoport, 2002); such as: Russian revolutionaries' activities, radical nationalist groups (Irish, Macedonians, Serbs, Armenians), the working-class in the United States, agrarian and industrial groups in Spain. As Laqueur notes, 'seen in historical perspective the various manifestations of terrorism, however, different their aims and the political context, had a common origin: they were connected to the rise of democracy and nationalism' (1978: 22). The second wave of terrorism refers to the post-World War I period, in which terroristic activities were mainly based on national and separatist motivations: the Croatian Ustasha and fascist groups in Germany, French and Hungary. This period has seen a decrease in using terror, mainly still adopted by individuals and not groups until the Second World War[10] (Hai-Jew, 2012). This decrease can be explained reflecting on the historic period once again. In the second half of 19th century, the socialist parties of continental Europe organised themselves on a mass basis. Unlike cadre parties, mass-based parties were based on the support of a large number of labourers to which they

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[10] Just after the WWII, the main manifestation of terrorism was represented by the urban one; first of all, in Cyprus and Algeria (Laqueur, 1978).

attempted to make an appeal (Duverger, nd). The socio-political aim of this kind of parties was to organise each citizen's life dimensions: political, educational, recreational, and so on. Behind the concrete – and in many cases, disastrous – consequences determined by their policies, mass-based parties clearly represented a reference point for their members, a sort of 'alternative Church'. Indeed, to achieve their final aim, mass parties needed a strong structure – highly hierarchical and based on a widespread presence – and took advantages of the tradition of collective action and group discipline characterising the working class (Duverger, nd). The involvement in this kind of organisations concerned not only the democratic dimension of life but the subversive one, too. During the mass-based parties' era, political conflicts were conduct by the parties themselves and political activities were deeply organised. In this period, the distinction between legal political activities and subversive one was not always so easy to define: 'the same parties may sometimes make use of both procedures, either simultaneously or successively, depending upon the circumstances. In the 1920s, for example, communist parties sought power through elections at the same time that they were developing an underground activity of a revolutionary nature. In the 19th century, liberal parties were in the same situation, sometimes employing the techniques of conspiracy, as in Italy, Austria, Germany, Poland, and Russia, and sometimes confining their struggles to the ballot box, as in Great Britain and France' (Duverger, nd: §3).

The third wave of terrorism is linked to the fall of the great ideologies and the consequent fall of mass-based parties after the Cold War. It has determined the loss of reference points for many people, not only from a political point of view. Since then, every reference crumbled and societies had to deal with a spreading fragmentation determining a change in social relations, too. The following period, the '60s, has surely represented the thorniest years, not only in Europe. Indeed, they have been characterised by the phenomenon of urban terrorism in which three elements emerged (showing how different terrorist movements can be even if the historic period in which they appear is the same): the separatist-nationalist terrorism (Ulster, Middle East, Canada, Spain), the *sui generis* Latin American terrorism, and the failure of the left parties (North America, Western Europe, Japan). Many differences between these movements and the previous ones can be noticed; among them: the collaboration between different groups and the commitment of attacks in foreign territories[11]; the development and the use of new weapons and techniques; the minor people' support on which this groups can

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[11] The first evidence of it can be found in the Palestinian intervention in Paraguay or France in '60s.

rely, seemed to be substituted by the international support of other types of terroristic groups (Laqueur, 1978).

The fourth wave of terrorism started in 1990's and it is spreading just nowadays. This new cycle is mainly characterised by religious motivations and great violence addressed to the common citizenry (Hai-Jew, 2012). The current form of terrorism, which modern societies must face on, reflects the new world in which we live. After the end of the Cold War and the failing of strong ideologies to which individuals referred to, many changes occurred. In many cases, ideology, both liberalism and communism, has been substituted by religious extremism[12]. New problems have been mixed with old ones, creating an explosive mixture. The political dimension and the religious one have been overlapped: the political enemy has been substituted by the enemy of faith and faith, nor politic, is now assumed as the pretext for terroristic activities. Indeed, most of the current terroristic groups[13] pretend to have a religious baggage: from the Islamic values of the well-known al-Qa'ida to the 'religious hybrid that synthesised strand of Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism and Christianity, and ancient theological roots' (Vertigans, 2016: 152) of the Aum Supreme Truth in Japan.

2.2   *Explanations*

The terroristic phenomenon has been studied in the perspective of different social science disciplines such as international relations, social psychology, political science, and criminology too (Innes, Levi, 2012).

During the centuries, many authors tried to explain the terroristic phenomenon from different analytic perspectives: Lombroso (vitamin deficiencies), Zenker (anarchism and pauperism), Dollard (conflict studies and the role of frustration) and Rummel (macro cross-national research), just for instance[14]. One of the first sociological attempt to define terrorism was made by Hardman in the 20th century, in the Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences of the 1930s. In this, the author underlined the differences of terrorism both

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[12] The political element is very important in considering that many terroristic groups grew after the failure of other – democratic – form of political activism: see Muslim Brotherhood's policies, radical student movement, extra-parliamentary political involvement in Italy (Silj, 1979; Vertigans, 2016).

[13] A different analysis should be made concerning another kind of groups like Northern Ireland and Palestinian territories nationalist movements, on which globalisation seemed to have had a minor impact, thanks to the most relevant link with local context and institutions (Vertigans, 2016).

[14] For further information about different interpretation of terrorism elaborated by political scientists and sociologists, see: Laqueur, 1978.

from 'governmental terror' and 'mass insurrection', describing it as a method used by an organised group to achieve its goal thanks to a systematic use of violence (cit. in Laqueur, 1978).

However, all studies failed their attempts to give a whole comprehensive definition of terrorism phenomenon. Their failure is determined by the variation of terrorism itself in time and space: religious (al-Qa'ida in Muslim nation-states, Japanese cult); nationalist (Irish Republican Army); pro-state (UVF, UFF, LVF); religious-nationalist (Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the Palestinian territories); 'red' urban (America, Germany, Italy[15], Japan); militant and racial (US). Considering what mentioned above, the complexity of terrorism is apparent. Indeed, the historic existence of the phenomenon and its spread all over the world, in all kind of societies imply that multifactorial explanation must be considered in the attempt to define it (Laqueur, 1978; Gupta, 2005). Thus, a correct theoretical approach must take into account the impossibility to enclose all the possible types of terrorism in just one definition (Laqueur, 1978).

According to the popular opinion, terroristic actions can be explained by poverty conditions, a personal problem (like mental ills or weak personalities) (Shaw, 1986; Vertigans, 2016) or any kind of common social background or personal beliefs. However, these reducing explanations show all their ineptitude to achieve the goal. Indeed, evidence shows that educated, rich, people are involved in terroristic groups – like the Italian Red Brigades or al-Qa'ida –, their member are not necessarily unbalanced and they do not have personality characteristics in common (Laqueur, 1978; McCauley, 1991; Horgan, 2005; Hoffman, 2006; Atran, 2010; Vertigans, 2016). Nevertheless, individuals who decide to join terroristic groups can have different inspiration' sources such as political involvement, represented by pursuing the whole community's good; materialist dimension, such as economic situation; and individualistic reasons, such as the excitement felt during terroristic activities and the consequent feeling of success. Behind each peculiarity, the main emerging element is the slowness of the radicalization process and the heterogeneity of the motivations on which it is based (Rashid, 2002; Kepel, 2004; Brady, Phillips, 2005; Fielding, 2005; Kalpakian, 2005; Thompson, Townsend, Bright, McMahon, 2005; Burke, 2003, 2006; Wiktorowicz, 2005; Hoffman, 2006; Vertigans, 2016). In this perspective, terrorism must be considered as product of a social process, in which the radicalization can be highly influenced by the way in which political events and socio-economic conditions are personally perceived by individuals (Wiktorowicz, 2005;

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[15] For further information about the 'red' urban terrorism in Germany and Italy, see MacDonald (1991), Della Porta (1995), Taylor (1998, 2000), Varon (2004).

Richardson, 2006; Vertigans, 2016)[16]. Thus, the influence that socio-historical context may have on society cannot be ignored.

3. The role of globalisation

Globalisation, 'an era of a new metaphorical dimension of space and time' (Akrivopoulou, Garipidis, 2012: xv) has had a great impact on many aspects of daily life. Together with its complementary dimension of the digital and technological era, the process of globalization represents a critical turning point in the human history. In this, new risks have appeared, mainly linked to a new form of victimisation, social exclusion and violation of human rights, migration and identity building processes (Vezzadini, 2012; Daniele Ruggiu, 2012; Akrivopoulou, Garipidis, 2012). Above all, fragmentation revealed itself in all aspect of life: from the socio-political to the economic one. In this context, globalisation and the spread of technologies had a great role also as far as concerns the change in the field of interpersonal relations.

Globalisation exacerbated the incompatibility between national and transnational ideologies (Vertigans, 2003, 2016)[17]. As far as concerns terroristic phenomenon, this process has seemed to offer: an alternative to the lack of domestic socio-political reference; a concrete instrument to link distant countries and their citizens; new ideological references and the possibility to construct new social identities thanks to the easier access to technologies. The spreading of internet determined a so radical social change that, behind both advantages and risks, could not be stopped; in this new digital era, individuals are able to make different choices but the frames in which they act has not been erased at all: they have become pluralist and relative (Cipolla, 2015).

As mentioned, the terroristic phenomenon has been greatly subjected to the changes determined by the globalisation' process. Different terroristic groups share the same disillusionment with governments and political parties,

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[16] As far as concerning this topic, Richardson (2006) underlines the role of the subjective perception and a 'conductive surround', while Wiktorowicz (2005) underlines the impact of personal crises in determining a 'cognitive opening' towards a certain kind of messages.

[17] For example, the civil rights movement in the United States inspired movements in other countries while the American war in Vietnam created considerable anger across the United State and other parts of the world. When these two influences were experienced in certain localised conditions in Germany, Italy and Japan, they contributed towards the emergence of 'red' terrorism (Vertigans, 2016).

materialism and individualism[18]. For these reasons, the conflict involved in the terroristic movement of nowadays has larger borders: it is not merely against a kind of government or a politic class but it assumes the shape of a culture war. A war conducted against cultures based on different religious values, or on the lack of them. As consequence, the reference point of terroristic activities is not limited to a specific territory but it is potentially extended to the entire world, aspiring to change all the existing societies that are not based on the same principles. From a different point of view, the enemy does not come from the within anymore; on the contrary, it comes from outside of domestic borders. This statement can be valid just if we consider that the inside/outside reference is no more determined by the territory in which the individual lives but by the values and principles in which he believes. For this reason, a common citizen could become a foreign fighter, presuming to belong to a State that is not the one in which he/she has grown.

Terrorism is a phenomenon that must be more analysed to have a complete and exhaustive knowledge of him and to understand how to react to it, too[19] (Innes, Levi, 2012). Indeed, this phenomenon is influenced by local social processes, such as social interactions, but also by worldwide ones; in the latter case, the main role is played by the globalization process and the spread of the digital era that makes it subjected to unpredictable change and evolution (Laqueur, 1978; Vertigans, 2016).

3.1 Communication and new technologies

In the asymmetric conflict between terroristic groups and state, Information and Communications Technologies assume a relevant role.

Digital era determined a great change in the communicational dimension – above all as far as concerns the theories of the traditional communication research – determining institutional changes within societies themselves[20]. In turn, the communicational dimension has a high impact on the possible form of citizenry participation. Indeed, the traditional form of participation is mainly characterized by: relations within and between groups, neighbourhood communities, non-voluntary local ties, associations, high social control, high

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[18] Concerning this topic, behind the role of globalisation itself, Vertigans (2016) underlines the spreading anti-Americanism, too. See also Kaplan and Marshall, 1996; Karmon, 1999; Reader, 2000.
[19] In this perspective, different analytic approaches must be considered, both quantitative, such as the application of Social Network Analysis (Sageman, 2004), and qualitative (Atran, 2010).
[20] For further analysis concerning the link between society and communication, see: McQuail (2007), Cavallo (2012).

level of social capital, well-defined groups, strong ties, cohesion, whole responsibility, direct knowledge, interiorization of values and norms, visibility, conflicts based on social class, scarcity of information and communication. On the contrary, the web participation of the global society is mainly characterized by: individuals connected one-to-one, communities lacking of spatial references, associations based on the sharing of specific interest, voluntary and diversified ties, not well defined borders between groups, weak social ties, high level of fragmentation linked to a shared and limited responsibility, indirect knowledge and visibility, conflict based on culture differences, overloaded information and the transformation of simple communication into communic-action (Cipolla, 2015).

Thus, inter-personal relations, based on physical ties, moved into ideal connections, embedded into the digital dimension (Cipolla, 2015). Individual radicalisation reflects this process of auto-isolation because, as Crenshaw (1998: 250) notes, 'terrorism is not a direct result of social conditions but of individual perceptions of those conditions'; in this perspective, radicalisation is the consequence of a slow process of individual marginalization (Silke, 2003) influenced by global changes.

Because of these great changes, the way in which political organisations could appeal to potential members has had to change too. This change concerns also subversive and terroristic groups. 'Modern media allow for wide-dissemination of user-generated contents, and the low cost of entry has meant that terrorist organisations may directly reach out to their various publics. Terrorist organisations may create their own brands […] that may spin off franchises and stand-alone freelancers; this brand may inspire cross-border fund-raising, fanaticism, and follower-ship (Venhaus, 2010)' (Hai-Jew, 2012: 197). In this perspective, political proselytism of small group has been substituted by online personal initiation. Organisations attempt to appeal to individuals exploiting the vulnerabilities exacerbated by these changes while new technologies offered by the digital era seem to be a fundamental element to achieve this goal. Indeed, technology development and informal social networks have given to these groups different way to communicate (Vertigans, 2016; Jenkins, 1975). Hiding remains a fundamental strategy for terroristic actors but they must absolve anyway the need to share and communicate their interest and aims. For this, remaining hidden in their refuges, members of terroristic associations achieve to communicate with the rest of the world through the great chance offered by the deep web. And doing so, they achieve to transform a traditional act of communication in a communic-action. The Internet shows his role in this new world, once again. In other words, the transition from an analogue society to a digital on – occurred between 20th and 21st century and characterised by the

reproducibility, velocity and the horizontally transfer of communication – allows terroristic groups to count on new instruments to redefine themselves in a virtual context that continuously changes (Hai-Jew, 2012; Antinori, 2015).

Relationships with the media have always been fundamental for 'old' terroristic groups and, for this reason, they have always maintained good attitudes towards journalists (Laqueur, 1978). Otherwise, from the point of view of an organisation who wants the spreading of terror to achieve its specific goals, make people known its activities may have more relevance than the activity itself. Thus, information and publicity have a fundamental role. Contrary to the past, terroristic groups of the digital era do not need the 'traditional' mass media's attention; indeed, they can have a direct access to the same channels of communication. An Algerian leader asked, 'is it better for our cause to kill ten of our enemies in a remote village where this will not cause comment, or to kill one man in Algiers where the American press will get hold of the story the next day?' (cit. in Duchêne, 1962; Laqueur, 1978). Nowadays the answer should be different considering that, thanks to the internet, the killing of a single man in the middle of nowhere can be known by the whole world at the same moment in which it happens; and without the filter of a journalist. Terroristic groups can maintain the complete control of the media message they want to send and of the relative process 'from conceptualization to launching off of websites' (Hai-Jew, 2012: 197).

However, to avoid an unintentional demonization of global tools, other two important elements must be noticed as far as concerning the great challenge in which globalised terrorism meets globalised media. Firstly, the great risk implied for terrorists represented by the unintentional information that they may leave using technologies. Indeed, thanks to the same technological development, the police force may determine who and where is having access to a determined device or website. Secondly, as it has happened, common people or police forces may use the same technologies to spread useful information in the case of a terroristic attack (Hai-Jew, 2012). Thus, the same instrument allows achieving opposite goals.

3.2   *Organization and action*

As far as concerns the organisational and structural dimension, some terroristic groups, from al-Qa'ida to the Islamic State, embody the social changes occurred. Firstly, the mentioned groups show a high level of heterogeneity, concerning their member's origin (from the Syrian area to the Caucasian one), social identity, clusters of age, and so on. Groups associated with Islamic extremism have their own representatives in different countries, from Europe to Africa, and attempt to achieve their aim through a double

strategy addressed both to the local and the international context (Laqueur, 2003; LaFree, Morris, Dugan, 2010; Pedahzur, Perlinger, 2006; Innes, Levi, 2012; Vertigans, 2016); they differentiate tactics depending on the main aim that they should achieve, taking advantage both of the democratic system and its mainly components (freedom of movement, freedom of assembly, free access to the media, citizen's possibilities to force the government through the ballot) and the dictatorial ones (Laqueur, 1978; Pedahzur, Perlinger, 2006). Thanks to this, they can adapt themselves to a different situation in which they may have to act; they are unpredictable but preserve a high level of efficiency (Antinori, 2015).

Moreover, they have demonstrated to be able to use re-elaborated ideological and religious heritage in an instrumental way – such as Wahhabism and Deobandis in the case of Islamic State – aiming to create a platform of values on which individuals of different countries and with different backgrounds could rely on (Vertigans, 2016). These groups are characterised by a high level of autonomy, minor dependence on intermediaries, and a great relevance of religious duty. In order to realise goals on an international level, the hierarchical structure has had to be abandoned in favour of a network structure (Pedahzur, Perlinger, 2006). The heterogeneous structure of these groups is also shown by the so-called *lone wolves* (Antinori, 2015), individuals who act autonomously and without referencing to a structured group (Hoffman, 2006). Just because unpredictable, lone wolves can be greatly dangerous. In a sense, they represent the lack of reference point and the social crumbling mentioned above. Indeed, they represent both the new vulnerabilities of actual societies and the capabilities of these terroristic groups to exploit them.

The mentioned changes concerning the structure and the organisation of these groups have a clear impact on the type of action adopted, too. As noticed, in the digital era technologies influence the evolution process of terroristic groups while the way in which a terroristic group decide to manifest themselves assume a new meaning. In the perspective of the communic-actional approach, the action becomes a way to convey a message in order to confirm own role both to group members and the outsiders. Terroristic group manipulate the power of the image to declare its existence. In this sense, terroristic' *modus operandi* could be considered as communic-actional in itself. In this perspective, the types of attack adopted by new terroristic groups are greatly interesting. The main terror tactic of past terrorist group was the assassination of leading representatives symbolising the system itself. An indiscriminate form of terror began to spread thanks to the development of new weapons and above all with the innovation concerning the use of explosives (Laqueur, 1978). Contrary to our days, this type of terror – in

addition to bank robbery, kidnapping and extortion, agrarian terror and hijacking of aeroplanes – was just addressed to foreign enemies. As mentioned, 'traditional' actions have now changed and current actions mainly include: slitting of prisoner's throat, suicide-bombing[21], mass murdering and drowning (Hai-Jew, 2012; Antinori, 2015). Terrorism is not a uniform phenomenon so that each group adopts different types of strategies (Asal, Rethemeyer, 2007; Hai-Jew, 2012). Among them, a common instrument has been detected in the suicide bombing (Asal, Blum, 2005; Hai-Jew, 2012). To achieve their goal, terrorists are disposed to commit suicide and it assumes a new meaning if the self-mutilation is considered as a new way to achieve the exaltation of the self. In the terrorist activities of the '60s and '70s 'with time bombs left in public places [taking benefit of being hidden by the mass itself] and the dispatch of letter bombs, the struggle has become anonymous and much of the heroism and sacrifice have gone out of it' (Laqueur, 1978: 162); on the contrary, nowadays, member of terrorist groups look for a personal involvement and organise activities in which their death is not a simple eventuality. The actual meaning of suicide such terrorist instrument dates to 1980's when it was included in the terror strategy of Hezbollah in Lebanon (Pedhazur, Perlinger, 2006). The way in which suicide is used as an instrument of terror war differs from region to region and from time to time. Anyway, a common distinction concerns the possibility to consider suicide attack as the *way* that allows the success of the mission[22] or as *a part of* the mission itself (Moghadam, 2006a). Suicide attacks are closely linked to the phenomenon of the so-called culture of martyrdom (Juergensmeyer, 2003; Moghadam, 2006b), the latter being considered as the distinguishing element between suicide terrorism and ordinary one (Moghadam, 2006b). Even if martyr is an element with a long historic tradition and has been deeply analysed (Juergensmeyer, 2003; Durkheim, 2007; Girard, 2004), it has been recently defined as a: 'network of reimagined and reawakened medieval myths and popular-culture hero worship. This culture combines modern-day marketing techniques like trading-cards, film music, and video-clips, with a "creative" reinterpretation of theology that lends religious legitimacy to the attackers' suicides by characterizing them as the noblest form of fearlessness in the face of death' (Reuter, 2004: 13). Finally, as social changes are influent for the life of a terroristic group, they are influent for their death, too. Indeed, terroristic

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[21] For further information concerning the commitment of suicide and its instrumental use, see: Pedahzur (2004), Reuter (2004) and Bloom (2005).

[22] In this case, some authors underline the de-personalization allowed by the suicide itself, thanks to which terrorist can avoid a direct confrontation with their potential victims (Collins, 2008; Innes, Levi, 2012).

groups must be able to face the same continuous changes that allow them to survive; anyway, evidence show that the life expectancy of the 90 percent of terrorist groups is less than a year (Hoffman, 2006; Hai-Jew, 2012) and the 'failure to transition to the next generation' is one of the main ways (Cronin, 2006).

4. Conclusions

Terrorism is a complex phenomenon on which social context has a great influence, showed by the level of heterogeneity that differentiates terroristic groups all over the world. Considering the fundamental role of social processes and individual experiences, it is apparent that current evolution of this phenomenon cannot be analysed without a continuous reference to the context itself.

The main revolution of the historic moment in which we live is represented by the spread of internet and the affirmation of the digital era whom social effects are not completely manifest. In the transition between the modern era and the digital one, a new form of connectivity has determined new forms of sociality, characterised by always higher levels of contingency. Real actions are strictly linked to digital ones just like our daily life is limited by institutional frameworks.

In this context, forms of participation are multiplied and, as far as concerns the subject of this paper, we assist to the transition from a relational dimension – embedded into associations or institutions in an offline macro-social dimension – to a connective one – embedded into widespread connections in an online micro-social dimension (Cipolla, 2015). In other words, we assist to the paradox of the so-called 'network individualism' (Rainie, Wellman, 2013) in which small groups and associations, meso-social dimension, must face on the spread of social networks, whose weaker ties influence individuals' behaviour in a structural sense. This kind of transition has clearly impact not only on the online dimension but also on the offline one. The belonging to a specific association has been substituted by the belonging to multiple social worlds and all this is based on the individual potentiality to communicate and transfer information with others. The group dimension is overpassed in favour of a network in which the borders between information, communication and action appear always more ambiguous (Cipolla, 2015).

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