



Lorenzo Vidino

**Home-Grown Jihadism in Italy:
Birth, Development and
Radicalization Dynamics**

Foreword by Stefano Dambruoso



EUROPEAN FOUNDATION FOR
DEMOCRACY

ISPI
ISTITUTO PER GLI STUDI DI POLITICA INTERNAZIONALE

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FOREWORD

by Stefano Dambruoso¹

Terrorism is an old, continuously evolving and intrinsically complex phenomenon whose dynamics are difficult to interpret. These difficulties are further complicated by the fact that the concept of terrorism is related to that of non-conventional or asymmetric warfare, that is, any conflict characterised by a disparity of means in which one side is forced to defend itself from an invisible enemy, therefore finding itself in a condition of clear disadvantage.

The contemporary era has witnessed various terrorist manifestations that have bloodied Europe for decades: from Basque and Northern Irish independentist terrorism to the RAF in Germany and right-wing terrorism in Italy. But it was only with the international terrorism of al-Qaeda and its late founder Osama bin Laden that terrorism gained the attention of the entire world, monopolising the political and security agendas of governments and international organisations.

With the attacks in New York and Washington of September 2001, and later those of Madrid in March 2004 and London in July 2005, international terrorism definitively entered in our daily lives, triggering a change in the perception of (in)security that has affected all of mankind.

However, this has not been the only change. The surge in terrorism over the last few years has brought two crucial aspects of the terrorism inspired by Islamic fundamentalism to the attention of the diverse community charged with safeguarding the community. The first is that

1. Stefano Dambruoso, Member of Parliament and former investigative magistrate. Dr. Dambruoso's foreword was written with the support of Dr. Riccardo D'Andrea.

it can hit anyone, in any place and at any time. The second is the threat caused by so-called home-grown (or second-generation) terrorists. This phenomenon is particularly evident in Europe, but it is also sadly true that many of the 9/11 hijackers had lived and planned part of the attacks on American soil.

During my experience as a magistrate at Milan's district attorney's office, I often dealt with international terrorism – at the beginning almost by chance. At the time the issue had significantly less importance – something that soon changed. With time it became increasingly evident that actions carried out by individuals motivated by jihadist ideology but operating independently (that is, they were self-radicalised and self-trained, whether as individuals or in small groups) posed a growing threat.

In that sense it appears that, sadly, the appeals by al-Qaeda's ideologue Abu Musab al Suri have been applied. "Al-Qaeda", he argued, "does not represent the apex of the global jihadist network, but rather is an appeal to all Muslims worldwide to carry out jihad". Similarly, a few days after the famous missions by US Navy SEALs in Abbottabad, al-Qaeda spokesman Azzam al Amriki disseminated via the Internet a clip entitled "Thou Are Only Responsible for Thyself" in which he called for do-it-yourself terrorism. He also cited episodes concerning Italy (the attempted attack against the Holy Father Benedict XVI during the 2009 Christmas Mass and the throwing of a blunt object at former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi) as examples of the potential permeability of the security surrounding world leaders.

In the vast majority of cases we are dealing with extremists devoid of any link to organised structures at the international level-lone terrorists who, often due to social disenfranchisement and psychological imbalances, enter the path of jihad by learning operational techniques on the web. An example of this dynamic is provided by the Libyan national Mohammed Game, whose (fortunately) failed attempt to detonate a rudimentary explosive device in front of the Santa Barbara military barracks in 2009 highlighted the growing threat and the unpredictability of home-grown jihadist terrorism. This threat arrived in Italy a few years

later than in other European countries, mainly for demographic reasons: the first wave of second-generation Muslims has only recently entered adulthood.

One of the main consequences of these developments is the greater unpredictability of terrorist activities and, consequently, the greater difficulties faced by security apparatuses in identifying and deactivating lone operators or small groups, which can become operational without any forewarning.

For these reasons it is my opinion that our attention should be focused on the ‘threeIs’: (1) the Internet, which has a crucial role in the process of self-radicalisation and often represents the main (if not the only) operational platform for lone actors; (2) (illegal) immigration, because, even though simplistic equations between migratory fluxes and terrorism should be refuted, it is undeniable that there is the threat of uncontrolled extremist infiltrations within the migrant masses that, on an almost daily basis, arrive on our shores, particularly in light of the recent socio-political upheavals in North Africa; and (3) integration, which is necessary to build sincere agreements between these two ancient and rich cultures which have their roots in different precepts.

In all its manifestations, terrorism remains an international phenomenon and for this reason cooperation between countries plays a crucial role, particularly when it comes to sharing information and best practices. In this regard – first as a legal expert at the United Nations in Vienna and at the European Union in Brussels, and later as head of the Office for the Coordination of International Activities of the Ministry of Justice – on several occasions I have had the opportunity to discuss with foreign counterparts the danger posed by terrorism and the necessity of a united response from the international community.

At the national level the strategies adopted by the relevant investigative and intelligence authorities are of the highest quality and have accomplished important results. Without indulging in pointless technicalities, it is worth mentioning the invaluable contributions of the Carabinieri’s ‘Project JWEB’, the Ministry of Interior’s Committee of Counter-Terrorism Strategic Analysis (CASA) and, most importantly, of

all the loyal servants of the state who, in their daily work, have made our society safer and, therefore, freer.

In his report, written in cooperation with two of the most prominent European think tanks on the subject of global affairs (the Milan-based ISPI and the Brussels-based European Foundation for Democracy), Dr Vidino relies on his long experience as an esteemed researcher and scholar in the international security field to conduct an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the evolution of jihadism in Italy.

Vidino's detailed investigation into home-grown jihadism in Italy is particularly noteworthy. As previously noted, it is a complex and difficult to foresee phenomenon that, as the above-mentioned case of Libyan national Mohammed Game shows, is affecting our country, albeit on a smaller scale than other European countries. Proof of this development is the growing number of investigations conducted by our law enforcement agencies and magistrates to arrest individuals suspected of carrying out attacks in Italy. The 'Jarmoune case', 'Operation Niriya' and other important examples of individuals of Arab descent but who have grown up and become radicalised in Italy are described and analysed in detail by Vidino.

Thanks to a careful and balanced analysis of the main characteristics of home-grown jihadism in our country, Vidino highlights several points that are fundamental to understanding such a complex phenomenon: the seeming lack of contact between home-grown jihadists and traditional jihadist structures; the massive use of the Internet to indoctrinate, train and communicate; the dual path lone terrorists could embark on (either to plan attacks in Italy or to go abroad to 'join a jihad', which was the path chosen by Genovese convert Ibrahim Giuliano Delnevo, who was killed in Syria while fighting with a jihadist militia – a story about which Vidino introduces some interesting considerations); and last, but not least, the seemingly limited relationship between a lack of socio-economic integration and the radicalisation of home-grown Italian jihadists.

Among the many merits of this study is the wise and careful way in which it identifies the two main consequences of the presence of home-

grown jihadism in Italy. The first is of an operational nature and is the difficulty of monitoring and comparing individuals, often Italian citizens, who have no ties to terrorist structures. The second is of a socio-political nature and has to do with the negative consequences that a terrorist attack carried out by a Muslim who has grown up in Italy would have on the delicate national debates about immigration and integration.

Concluding with what I said at the beginning, terrorism is an old phenomenon, in constant evolution and inherently complex and articulated. Thus, in order to be effectively countered or, even better, prevented, it requires the diverse counter-terrorism community to have an in-depth and detailed knowledge of its every component, whether internal or external. Vidino's work is crucial to understanding, in a balanced and precise way, an important aspect of the terrorism of Islamist inspiration – its home-grown nature – of which, hopefully, we will learn only in textbooks.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Jihadism in Italy has followed a route that differs somewhat from the paths it has taken in most Western European countries. Italy was one of the first countries on the Continent to witness jihadist activities on a relatively large scale: as early as the first part of the 1990s, various Italian-based North African networks were playing a prominent role in the nascent global jihadist movement. Yet, in the early and mid-2000s, when most Western European countries were confronted by various challenges coming from both traditional and home-grown jihadist networks, the situation in Italy was relatively quiet.

This was the result of two factors. First, the pressure put by Italian authorities on structured networks either disrupted them or forced them to decrease the intensity of their activities. At the same time, this diminished role did not correspond to a growth of home-grown networks. Throughout the early and mid-2000s, Italian authorities did not detect any sign of the forms of home-grown radicalisation that were increasingly spotted throughout Europe.

The attempted suicide attack carried out by Libyan national Mohammed Game in Milan on 12 October 2009 is widely considered a watershed event. In its 2009 report to Parliament, the Italian intelligence community saw in the case the confirmation of a fear it had long expressed: “the sudden operational activation of individuals residing on national soil who, independent of any structured terrorist formation, elaborate their own hostile project, adhering to the call of global jihad”. Game

might not be considered a 'pure' home-grown jihadist, since, although he was radicalised in Italy, he had arrived in the country as an adult. Yet, the Game incident was unquestionably a first, strong manifestation of the arrival in Italy of home-grown jihadism, even if not in its purest form. Over the past few years, various cases with quintessentially home-grown characteristics have surfaced:

- In March 2012 authorities in Brescia arrested Mohamed Jarmoune, a 20-year-old Moroccan man who had grown up in Italy, on suspicion that he was planning an attack against Milan's Jewish community. In May 2013 Jarmoune was sentenced to five years and four months in prison for having distributed jihadist material with terrorist intentions. Given his characteristics (having grown up and been radicalised in Italy, active on the Internet and unconnected to established groups), Jarmoune arguably represents the first case of an Italian home-grown jihadist convicted in a court of law.

- A related investigation – Operation Niriya, which ended in 2012 – also brought to light the existence of a network of Italy-based jihadist enthusiasts spread throughout the country's territory, most of them converts, who translated and shared jihadist texts on an array of blogs, web forums and social network sites.

- In June 2013 authorities arrested for terrorist activities Anas el Abboubi, another young man of Moroccan descent who, like Jarmoune, had grown up in the Brescia area. The man, who attempted to start the organisation Sharia4Italy, was accused of planning attacks in Brescia. Later released on appeal, el Abboubi travelled to Syria, where he reportedly joined an al-Qaeda-linked formation.

- In June 2013 an Italian convert from Genoa, Ibrahim Giuliano Delnevo, was killed in Syria while fighting alongside a jihadist militia.

These cases indicate that the phenomenon of home-grown jihadism, long visible in other European countries, has arrived in Italy, albeit on a significantly smaller scale. The delay in its emergence there is the result of a simple demographic factor: large-scale Muslim immigration to Italy began only in the late 1980s and early 1990s, about 20 (or, in some cases, 30 or 40) years later than in more economically developed European countries such as France, Germany, the Netherlands or Great Britain. The first, relatively large, second generation of Italian-born Muslims is

coming of age only now, as the sons of the first immigrants are becoming adults in their adoptive country. A statistically insignificant proportion of these hundreds of thousands of young men and women (and the thousands of Italian converts to Islam) embrace radical ideas.

The current panorama of jihadism in Italy is extremely fragmented and diverse, characterised by the presence of various actors with markedly different features. The arrival of home-grown jihadism to Italy does not mean that 'traditional' networks are no longer operating. Many of them have been significantly weakened by the waves of arrests and expulsions carried out by authorities over the past 15 years, yet they are still very much active, mostly in logistical support activities.

At the same time, small clusters and lone actors with home-grown characteristics are increasingly active. Providing exact numbers is an impossible task, but rough estimates can be given. The individuals actively involved in this new home-grown jihadist scene can be numbered at about 40 or 50 people. Similarly, those who in various ways and in varying degrees sympathise with it can be estimated to be somewhere in the low hundreds. It is a small, informal milieu of individuals with varying sociological characteristics who share a commitment to jihadist ideology. Most of them interact online with like-minded individuals both in Italy and outside of it. Most are scattered throughout northern Italy, from big cities like Milan, Genoa and Bologna to tiny rural villages. A few are located in the centre or the south of the country. The majority have not been involved in any violent activity. Most limit their commitment to an often frantic online activity aimed at publishing and disseminating materials ranging from the purely theological to the operational.

This milieu possesses some core characteristics, although exceptions are always possible:

- Its members tend to operate outside the realm of Italian mosques, where their ideas have little traction.
- There seems to be no overlap between them and traditional networks affiliated with al-Qaeda-linked groups, who tend to distrust the new militants.
- The Internet is their main operational platform.
- Some make the leap from 'keyboard jihadism' to action, whether that entails planning attacks in Italy or travelling for jihad. Those who seek to travel generally look for 'gatekeepers' to facilitate their linkage with established groups operating elsewhere. Linkage patterns for aspiring Italian jihadists are varied and difficult to determine.
- Issues of discrimination and lack of socio-economic integration do not seem to be primary reasons for the radicalisation of Italian home-grown jihadists, although those are elements that should not be overlooked. Each case, of course, deserves a separate analysis.

The implications of the arrival of home-grown jihadism to Italy are twofold. The first is operational. Home-grown clusters or lone actors are difficult to detect; they do not operate as part of a structure whose communications and activities authorities can easily monitor. Article 270 quinquies of the Italian penal code, which punishes an individual who 'trains or in any way provides instructions on the preparation or the use of explosive materials, firearms or other arms, dangerous chemical, bacteriological substances, or any other technique or method' for the execution of terrorist acts, has been used on various occasions by authorities to arrest home-grown radicals, active on the Internet, well before they take concrete steps to plan attacks. Yet the article's application, as the el Abboubi case showed, could be problematic.

Moreover, the jihadism phenomenon poses a challenge to Italy's frequent use of deportations as a counterterrorism tool. As a result of Italy's strict naturalisation laws, some home-grown jihadists, despite being born or having grown up in Italy, may not have citizenship and,

therefore, be subject to deportation. But many, starting with converts, are full-fledged Italian citizens and have a right to remain in the country.

Moreover, it is arguable that home-grown radicalisation poses an even more severe challenge at the socio-political level. If it turned out that Italian-born Muslims were behind terrorist attacks on Italian soil – thus replicating a dynamic seen throughout central and northern Europe – this could have enormous repercussions on the already tense and highly politicised national debate over immigration and the presence of Muslims in Italy.

INTRODUCTION

Since 11 September 2001, the assessment of most European countries has been that although political violence motivated by other ideologies exists throughout the Continent, ‘jihadist’ terrorism represents the biggest threat to their security. Even though the last large, successful attack – the London bombings – took place in 2005, European authorities arrest some 200 militants and thwart a handful of plots of jihadist inspiration every year. In some cases – Frankfurt in 2011, Toulouse in 2012 and London in 2013 – small-scale attacks have been carried out by individuals of jihadist persuasion, acting independently.

The nature of jihadism in Europe has changed significantly. Europe’s first networks, in the 1990s, were composed mostly of first-generation immigrants with close ties to organisations operating elsewhere. Today most militants are ‘home-grown’ – second- or third-generation European-born Muslims and a small number of converts to Islam. Whether they carry out their actions independently or manage to link up with al-Qaeda-affiliated groups elsewhere, European jihadists tend to have first embraced jihadist ideology independently in Europe, a troubling phenomenon that raises a variety of security and socio-political questions and challenges.

Home-grown jihadist radicalisation has been common in most central and northern European countries since the early 2000s. But, over the past few years, authorities have begun to detect signs of the phenomenon in Italy as well. The delay in its emergence there is the result of a simple demographic factor: large-scale Muslim immigration to Italy began only in the late 1980s and early 1990s, about 20 (or, in some cases, 30 or 40)

years later than in more economically developed European countries such as France, Germany, the Netherlands or Great Britain. The first, relatively large, second generation of Italian-born Muslims is coming of age only now, as the sons of the first immigrants are becoming adults in their adoptive country. A statistically insignificant proportion of these hundreds of thousands of young men and women (and the thousands of Italian converts to Islam), embrace radical ideas. Yet those who do are relevant to policymakers.

Recent counterterrorism operations have highlighted these dynamics. In March 2012 authorities in Brescia arrested a 20-year-old Moroccan man who grew up in Italy, Mohamed Jarmoune, on suspicion of planning an attack against Milan's Jewish community. Raised in Italy, having become radicalised there, active on the Internet and unconnected to established groups, Jarmoune could be said to represent the first case of a home-grown Italian jihadist. A related investigation brought to light the existence of a network of jihadist enthusiasts spread throughout the country, most of them converts, who translated and shared militant texts and operations manuals on an array of blogs, web forums and social-network sites.

In June 2013 authorities arrested another young man of Moroccan descent, Anas el Abboubi for terrorism activities. He, like Jarmoune, had grown up in the Brescia area. El Abboubi, who ran various extremist websites and social-media profiles, was accused of planning terrorist attacks in Brescia. Released by the court after just a few weeks in detention, el Abboubi travelled to Syria, where he is currently reportedly fighting alongside the al-Qaeda-linked Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

A week after el Abboubi's arrest, news broke that an Italian convert from Genoa, Ibrahim Giuliano Delnevo, had been killed in Syria while fighting alongside a jihadist militia. Delnevo was the first Italian known to have died in Syria.

These cases are just the most visible manifestations of a phenomenon about which Italian counterterrorism officials have grown increasingly aware and concerned. 'Traditional' jihadist networks are still active

on Italian territory. But, although a much smaller phenomenon than in most Western European countries, lone actors and small clusters of jihadist-influenced activists are increasingly spotted throughout Italy. They have grown up in Italy, become radicalised on their own, operate independently from mosques and traditional groups, and are extremely active online.

The implications to Italy are twofold. Home-grown clusters and lone actors are difficult to detect because they are not part of a structure whose communications and activities authorities can easily monitor. They also pose a challenge to Italy's frequent use of deportations as a counterterrorism tool. Due to Italy's strict naturalization laws, some home-grown jihadists, despite being born or having grown up in Italy, might not have citizenship and, therefore, be subject to deportation. But many, starting with converts, are full-fledged Italian citizens and have a right to remain in the country.

What might be a more severe challenge is posed by home-grown radicalisation at the socio-political level. As in central and northern Europe, the possibility that Italian-born Muslims could be behind terrorist attacks on Italian soil could dramatically intensify the highly politicised national debate over immigration and the presence of Muslims in Italy.

This report aims to provide a critical analysis of home-grown jihadism in Italy. It seeks to analyse the history of jihadism from its early days in Italy until the detection of the first home-grown cases over the past few years, analysing and comparing Italy's experience to that of other European countries. It concludes by outlining future challenges and policy implications.

Aims of the study

Before delving into the substance of the study, some clarifications will help, starting with its scope. This study aims only at analysing the dynamics of jihadist radicalisation in Italy. It is not meant to be a study

of Islam or of the Italian Muslim community¹. Rather, it describes a phenomenon that, in Italy as in any other Western country, affects a statistically insignificant percentage of the Muslim population. Throughout Europe, jihadism is a fringe phenomenon, much debated but affecting only a few isolated individuals within largely peaceful Muslim communities.

Terminology

A second necessary premise is related to terminology. In this introduction and throughout the report the terms radicalisation, Islamism, Salafism and jihadism are used. Each needs to be clarified and defined, although for none of these terms is there a universally accepted definition. Each is the source of endless debate among scholars and, given the important policy consequences of their definitions, policymakers. What follow are working definitions only, adopted by this author.

The term radicalisation and the related terms radical and radicalism have become extremely fashionable in the counterterrorism community over the past few years. Yet its many critics argue that the concept is inherently arbitrary, lacking a common definition and often used simply to negatively connote ideas that one side or the other does not like². It has also been noted that the concept of radicalism changes. The early twentieth-century suffragette movement, for example, was in its time commonly labelled 'radical' for advocating votes for women, a concept

1. For studies on the broader issue of Islam in Italy, see, among the many works available, Stefano Allievi, *Islam italiano. Viaggio nella seconda religione del paese*, Torino, Einaudi, 2003; Stefano Allievi and Felice Dassetto, *Il ritorno dell'Islam. I musulmani in Italia*, Roma, Lavoro, 1993; Silvio Ferrari, *Musulmani in Italia. La condizione giuridica delle comunità islamiche*, Bologna, Mulino, 2000; Renzo Guolo, *Xenofobi e Xenofili: Gli Italiani e l'Islam*, Bari, Laterza, 2003; Maria Bombardieri, *Moschee d'Italia*, Bologna, Emi, 2011; 'Il nostro Islam', *Limes*, Gruppo Editoriale L'Espresso, Roma, 3/2004.

2. See, for example, Mark Sedgwick, 'The Concept of Radicalization as a Source of Confusion', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2010, pp. 479-94.

few would debate only 50 years later. Similarly, ideas and values that are considered radical in one culture might be mainstream in another.

Many of these criticisms are fair. Nonetheless, despite its many limitations, the term radicalisation is still useful to describe dynamics related to the field of political violence. One of the most complete definitions is that coined by Charles E. Allen, which encapsulates a range of elements included by most scholars. According to Allen, radicalisation is “the process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use, support, or facilitate violence, as a method to effect societal change”³. Scholars often distinguish between cognitive and violent radicalisation. Cognitive radicalisation is the process through which an individual adopts ideas that are severely at odds with those of the mainstream, refutes the legitimacy of the existing social order and seeks to replace it with a new structure based on a completely different belief system. Violent radicalisation, as in Allen’s definition, occurs when an individual takes the additional step of using violence to further the views derived from cognitive radicalism⁴.

But even the adoption of a definition does not solve several of the issues related to radicalisation. Who defines, for example, what an ‘extremist belief system’ is? Similarly contested is the analysis of the factors causing radicalisation. Few issues have proven more divisive and controversial among experts, both within and outside government, than trying to identify the reasons people embrace radical views and act on them in violent ways.

It should also be clearly stated that the potential for radicalisation exists in a range of ideologies. This report will focus exclusively on radicalisation of jihadist inspiration. But it goes without saying that the author is fully

3. Charles E. Allen, ‘Threat of Islamic Radicalization to the Homeland’, testimony before the US Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, 14 March 2007, p. 4.

4. For further analysis of the difference between cognitive and behavioural radicalisation, see, for example, *The Radical Dawa in Transition: The Rise of Islamic Neoradicalism in the Netherlands*, Amsterdam, AIVD, 2007; and Froukje Demant et al., *Decline and Disengagement: An Analysis of Processes of Deradicalisation*, IMES Report Series, Amsterdam, 2008, pp. 12-14.

aware that in Italy, as in all European countries, radicalisation exists in relation to right-wing, left-wing, ethno-nationalist/separatist, animal-rights and various other forms of single-issue extremism⁵.

The next term to be clarified is Islamism. Borrowing Peter Mandaville's definition, Islamism can be defined as "forms of political theory and practice that have as their goal the establishment of an Islamic political order in the sense of a state whose governmental principles, institutions and legal system derive directly from the shariah"⁶. It must be said that Islamism is a highly diverse movement. While embracing some core ideas, Islamist groups differ significantly from one another over many issues, from theological to strictly political, from tactical to strategic.

Keeping in mind the unavoidable oversimplification of this, one way of differentiating Islamists is according to their *modus operandi*. This yields three subcategories: violent rejectionists, non-violent rejectionists and participationists. Violent rejectionists, often referred to as jihadists, are individuals and networks that, frequently linked to or inspired by al-Qaeda, reject participation in the democratic system and use violence as the primary method to advance their goals. Non-violent rejectionists are individuals and groups that openly reject the legitimacy of any system of government not based on Islamic law, but do not, at least not publicly and openly, advocate the use of violence to further their goals. Finally, participationists are individuals and groups which adhere to the strand of Islamism that advocates interaction with society at large, both at the micro-level, through grassroots activism, and at the macro-level, through participation in public life and the democratic process. The Muslim Brotherhood, despite the diversity of its many incarnations worldwide, can be put in this category. When not addressed separately, non-violent rejectionists and participationists will be referred to as non-

5. See, for other forms of extremism in Italy, the 2012 annual report to the Italian Parliament (*Relazione sulla politica dell'informazione per la sicurezza*), <https://www.sicurezzanazionale.gov.it/sisr.nsf/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Relazione-2012.pdf> (accessed on 21 October 2013).

6. Peter Mandaville, *Global Political Islam*, London, Routledge, 2007, p. 57.

violent Islamists, although the author is fully aware of the inherent flaws in this term.

The lines between these artificial and oversimplified categories are blurry, of course, and at times it is difficult to position groups or individuals in one of them. Similarly, it is not uncommon for groups and individuals to move from one category to another. Since the Arab Spring, for example, several Islamist groups throughout the Arab world that for years had vehemently rejected any participation in politics have begun to form parties and run in elections. Islamist groups change their positions, aims and tactics according to the environment in which they operate. Also, characteristics, agendas, dimensions and challenges of Islamist movements in Europe are significantly different from those of their counterparts in Muslim-majority areas.

A term that will be used throughout this report is Salafism. In its original manifestation, which took shape in the nineteenth century, Salafism was a political/religious movement advocating, as a solution to the many challenges facing the global Muslim community or *ummah*, a return to the allegedly uncorrupted form of Islam embraced by the early followers of the prophet Mohammed. Over the past 30 years, the term Salafism has come also to indicate a contemporary ideological movement that, while certainly advocating a return to its early days as the best way forward for the *ummah*, has rejected the modernism of nineteenth-century Salafism and is characterised by a deep conservatism, literalism and, in some cases, intransigence and intolerance.

Contemporary Salafism is an extremely diverse movement encompassing countless currents and trends. With inevitable oversimplification, scholars commonly divide Salafists into three categories: quietist, political and jihadist⁷. Quietist Salafists are those who believe that a strict and literal interpretation of core Islamic texts should shape every aspect of a Muslim's life, but that such efforts should be limited to the private sphere, as they do not seek to be involved in politics. Political Salafists, on the other hand, argue that Islam is

7. See Samir Amghar, *Le Salafisme d'aujourd'hui: Mouvements Sectaires en Occident*, Paris, Michalon, 2011.

inherently political and that an involvement in public affairs is a natural part of their strict adherence to Islamic teachings. Jihadist Salafists, finally, adopt some of the most extreme forms of Salafism and advocate the use of violence to pursue their goals. This tripartite division, while useful, does not come close to exhausting the complex differences and dynamics within Salafism worldwide⁸.

Over the past few decades Salafism has appealed to a growing audience not just in Muslim-majority areas but also among European Muslim communities. The reasons for this phenomenon are many, starting with Salafism's ideological appeal of simplicity, authenticity, meaning and moral superiority. Dutch scholar Roel Meijer argues that "in a contentious age, Salafism transforms the humiliated, the downtrodden, disgruntled young people, the discriminated migrant, or the politically repressed into a chosen sect (*al-firqa al-najiya*) that immediately gains privileged access to the 'Truth'"⁹.

Similarly, French scholar Mohamed-Ali Adraoui perfectly describes the appeal of Salafism on some French and, by extension, European Muslims who find themselves in those conditions. "Muslims looking for existential answers are attracted by the 'absolute Islam' that Salafism provides", he argues. "This has led to a revolution in their lives. Instead of being passive 'followers', they have become active 'models' for others. Where before the migrant lived on the fringe of society (mentally rather than effectively), as a Salafi he now stands at the centre of the world and embodies a sacred history. Morally and symbolically the migrant has climbed up the social ladder and is able to look down on the rest of society"¹⁰.

It must be noted that the term Salafism has often been used as a de facto synonym of extremism and terrorism, particularly in Western debates on the subject. This approach is problematic. There is no doubt

8. For more, see Roel Meijer, *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2009.

9. Roel Meijer, 'Introduction', in Roel Meijer (ed.), (2009), p. 13.

10. Mohamed-Ali Adraoui, 'Salafism in France: Ideology, Practices and Contradictions,' in Roel Meijer (ed.) (2009), p. 367.

that Salafism, even in its more moderate and mainstream strands, adopts ideas and positions that are extremely conservative, controversial and at times severely at odds with the modern interpretation of, for example, women's rights and religious freedom. It is also unquestionable that cross sections of the Salafist movement not only endorse violence, but directly engage in it. Yet Salafism remains a large intellectual movement that cannot be reduced to nor identified with extremism and violence. The vast majority of Salafists live in both Muslim-majority and non-Muslim majority societies without engaging in violent actions.

Methodology

The author relied on a variety of sources to research this report. Unfortunately academic literature on the topic is limited, if not non-existent. Various practitioners and journalists have written books on the subject, some of excellent quality, yet most describe the 'traditional' forms of jihadism in Italy¹¹. Italian media have covered the arrests and cases of the past few years, yet rarely with in-depth analysis or investigation.

While these secondary sources were useful, the author relied much more extensively on primary sources: official documents and interviews. Annual reports by Italian intelligence agencies to the Italian Parliament, and court records and documents by various governmental agencies to which the author obtained access were crucial in reconstructing the most recent developments of Italian jihadism. Interviews were equally important. Some 40 interviews were conducted throughout Italy in the

11. Guido Olimpio, *La rete del terrore. Come nascono e agiscono i militanti delle Guerre Sante*, Milano, Sperling & Kupfer, 2002; Marcella Andreoli, *Il telefonista di Al-Qaeda*, Milano, Dalai editore, 2005; Stefano Dambruoso, *Milano-Baghdad. Diario di un magistrato in prima linea nella lotta al terrorismo islamico in Italia*, Milano, Mondadori, 2004; Magdi Allam, *Bin Laden in Italia*, Milano, Mondadori, 2002; Carlo Corbucci, *Il terrorismo islamico in Italia. Falsità e mistificazione all'esito dei casi giudiziari, delle risultanze oggettive e delle indagini geo-politiche, storiche e sociologiche*, Roma, Agorà, 2011. Dealing somewhat with the theme of the evolution of jihadism in Italy is the more recent Stefano Dambruoso, *Un istante prima. Com'è cambiato il terrorismo fondamentalista in Europa dieci anni dopo l'11 settembre*, Milano, Mondadori, 2011.

span of 9 months (from May 2013 to January 2014). The interviewees ranged from government officials to academics, from Muslim community leaders to members of the Italian Salafist community. Some interviewees are quoted by name, some only by their positions; others are not cited at their own request.

The author also researched the online presence of Italian Salafists. The blogs, facebook pages and twitter accounts of several individuals arguably belonging to the country's informal Salafist community provided important insights into its thinking and activities. Information coming from these sources, while unquestionably important, should be taken with a grain of salt, given the impossibility of verifying in many cases the true identity of online users.

In essence, the author has sought to conduct an objective, 360-degree analysis of the recent evolution of the phenomenon of jihadist-inspired radicalisation in Italy. The limits of this work are many. Identifying radicalised individuals, describing their radicalisation process and the activities of the physical and virtual networks they belong to is an extremely difficult task. In other European countries, a handful of studies have sought to do this, analysing case studies of individuals or small clusters¹². But doing this at the national level is extremely challenging.

This is not, in any case, the aim of this study, which does not seek to be a complete survey of all jihadist activities in Italy. Rather, all this study can do is identify some case studies, observe dynamics and highlight general trends. It can then provide some analysis, assessing the current situation and outlining potential developments. In doing that, it takes into consideration similarities to, and differences from, other Western European countries, which can provide a useful frame of reference. But this study does not claim to portray all radicalisation dynamics in Italy. Nor does it claim to be infallible in its analysis of those it does portray. It

12. See, for example, Quintan Wiktorowitz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005, which provides an excellent extended case study of Al-Muhajiroun in Great Britain.

is, in essence, only an overview, a general framework supported by a few examples and, hopefully, a base for further studies and debate.

1 A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE EVOLUTION OF JIHADISM IN EUROPE

As said above, the growth of a home-grown jihadist scene in Italy is a relatively new phenomenon that has manifested itself only over the past two or three years, and on a comparatively small scale. In order to better understand this development, it might be useful to examine how this process took place in other Western European countries that witnessed it to a larger extent and at an earlier stage. The experience of each country is characterised by specific factors that make comparison an inevitably flawed exercise. It is nonetheless useful to briefly analyse the phases of historical development of jihadism in countries like Great Britain, the Netherlands, Germany, France or the Scandinavian nations, which saw the growth of home-grown jihadist-inspired activity by the early to mid-2000s.

The first phase of jihadism in Europe took place between the late 1980s and the first half of the 1990s, as a few hundred experienced jihadist militants established a base in Europe. Seeking to avoid repression in their native countries, veterans of the Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union and members of various militant organisations from the Middle East and North Africa sought, and in most cases received, political asylum in several European countries. Europe's freedoms, the presence of large diaspora communities and a lack of attention from local authorities made Europe an ideal logistical base from which militants could continue their

activities¹. Such organisations as the Egyptian Gamaa Islamiya and the Algerian Armed Islamic Group created sophisticated propaganda, fund-raising and recruitment networks that provided crucial support to their own efforts in North Africa².

This first phase is characterised by the operational separation of the various groups in Europe. Although they shared an ideological base, outfits from different countries maintained a certain degree of autonomy from one another. Aside from isolated episodes, in fact, coordination among them tended to be limited to statements of support of their brethren's cause. Another defining operational characteristic of the first-phase networks was their hierarchical and well-defined structure. Algerian, Egyptian, and Tunisian networks, arguably the three most extensive in Europe at the time, were organised under a strict chain of command whose centralised leadership directed a well-compartmentalised structure of cells in all aspects of their activities³. By the same token, roles and responsibilities within each cell were predefined and strictly enforced⁴.

Finally, it is noteworthy that, during this first phase, most networks showed no violent intent toward their new host countries, which they viewed only as temporary and extremely convenient bases of operations. Although it was apparent from their sermons and propaganda that European jihadists strongly disapproved of Europe's liberal moral standards, secularised societies, foreign policies and perceived anti-Muslim biases, the jihadists tended to target only the regimes of their countries of origin. European countries were spared the militants' fury

1. Petter Nesser, 'Chronology of Jihadism in Western Europe 1994-2007: Planned, Prepared, and Executed Terrorist Attacks', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol. 31, no. 10, 2008, pp. 924-46; Michael Taarnby, *Recruitment of Islamist Terrorists in Europe: Trends and Perspectives*, Centre for Cultural Research, University of Aarhus, 14 January 2005.

2. Lorenzo Vidino, *Al-Qaeda in Europe: The New Battleground of International Jihad*, Amherst, Prometheus, 2005.

3. Peter R. Neumann and Brooke Rogers, *Recruitment and Mobilisation for the Islamist Militant Movement in Europe*, study for the European Commission, King's College London, December 2007.

4. Petter Nesser, 'How Did Europe's Global Jihadis Obtain Training for Their Militant Causes?', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, no. 20, 2008, pp. 234-56.

provided they did not directly interfere with the militants' struggles in North Africa and the Middle East. The only violent acts against a European country carried out during this phase were the series of attacks that bloodied France in 1994 and 1995, a campaign orchestrated by Algerian militants to punish the French government for its support of the Algerian regime during the African country's civil war⁵.

The second phase of jihadism in Europe took shape slowly during the last half of the 1990s. By 1998, Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri had perfected al-Qaeda's reorganisation in Afghanistan, creating a global platform that was formalised with the launch of the World Islamic Front Against Jews and Crusaders⁶. Al-Qaeda's project was the zenith of a phenomenon that had been under way throughout the 1990s in the Afghan training camps; on the battlefields of Bosnia, Chechnya and Kashmir; and in the most radical mosques of a handful of European cities. Thanks to these interactions, various jihadist groups operating throughout Europe began increasingly to work together, their cooperation now transcending simple moral support and becoming operational.

Moreover, Bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders expressed the idea that the best strategy to topple secular regimes in the Muslim world was to end the economic and military support these regimes received from the United States and other Western countries. Therefore, the jihadist movement had to switch its emphasis to attacking the United States and making a continued American presence in the Middle East too painful to bear. Al-Qaeda, in Bin Laden's mind, was to become the umbrella organisation for jihadist groups from throughout the Muslim world; united under its banner, all would fight together against both secular regimes in the Muslim world and their protectors in the West.

The result of these two developments was that, by the end of the 1990s, many of the networks that had been formed throughout Europe

5. Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2002, pp. 8-13.

6. *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States*, New York, Norton, 2004, pp. 63-70.

had fallen, with varying degrees of allegiance, into the orbit of Bin Laden's project. Al-Qaeda established only a small direct presence in Europe and, for the most part, co-opted already existing networks, particularly the Algerian ones. Because of their familiarity with the West, Europe-based militants led two of the first operations planned by the jihadist movement against the American homeland: the failed Millennium bombing of the Los Angeles International Airport in 2000 and the attacks of 11 September 2001.

The two attacks indicate important developments. The Millennium bombing showed that a network that was still heavily involved in a bloody civil war in its country of origin, Algeria, was willing to put its forces at the service of al-Qaeda's global project, signalling a clear break with the national focus maintained by jihadist groups in the past. By the same token, the core 9/11 hijackers, having become radicalised together in Hamburg, represented a clear indication that Europe was home to small clusters of militants who, although unaffiliated with any organisation at their outset, could be easily co-opted and used by the global jihadist movement. Despite these shifts, Europe did not become a primary target of jihadist networks during this phase. Algerian networks did plan some attacks in Europe during the second phase, but most of them did not mature. Europe was home to a growing number of militants, many of whom, unlike the pioneers of the first phase, had become radicalised while in Europe itself. It was also a major logistical hub for various jihadist outfits, and, tellingly, most of the attacks perpetrated by al-Qaeda at the time had at least some link to Europe. Yet, Europe itself remained only an occasional target.

Dynamics began to change around the mid-2000s, when in several European countries authorities began to observe the surge of home-grown clusters. The global crackdown that followed 11 September 2001 drastically reduced the ability of al-Qaeda's leadership to communicate with its networks in Europe. Neither was completely annihilated in the crackdown, but the chaotic situation after the loss of the Afghan sanctuary forced Europe-based jihadists to change their methods. Although a certain level of coordination still existed, European

networks began to operate more autonomously, remaining loyal to al-Qaeda's ideology and goals but becoming virtually independent in their day-to-day operations⁷. As Marc Sageman writes in his influential book *Leaderless Jihad*, "the present threat has evolved from a structured group of al-Qaeda masterminds, controlling vast resources and issuing commands, to a multitude of informal local groups trying to emulate their predecessors by conceiving and executing operations from the bottom up. These 'home-grown' wannabes form a scattered global network, a leaderless jihad"⁸.

If outside pressure was arguably the main driver behind this shift, the demographic change taking place inside European jihadist networks also played a crucial role. Small numbers of European-born Muslims had joined jihadist networks well before 9/11, but the vast majority of militants operating in Europe in the 1980s and 1990s were first-generation immigrants. After 2001, as a result both of the waves of arrests and deportations that targeted the first generation of militants and the surge in numbers of European Muslims joining jihadist networks, the trend was rapidly reversed. Although patterns differ, in some cases quite significantly, from country to country, by 2003, many northern and central European authorities began to witness the growth of small clusters of home-grown jihadist networks.

Unlike their predecessors, these clusters were composed mainly of individuals who were either born or grew up in European countries and become radicalised while in Europe. Moreover, these clusters, at least at their onset, seldom possessed ties to al-Qaeda and affiliated groups operating elsewhere. They were, rather, spontaneously formed clusters of like-minded individuals who decided to translate their independently acquired jihadist zeal into activities that could range from joining groups outside of Europe for training, fighting in foreign countries, or

7. Bruce Hoffman, 'The Changing Face of Al-Qaeda and the Global War on Terrorism', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol. 27, no. 6, 2004, pp. 549-60.

8. Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008, p. vii.

carrying out attacks in Europe independently or with the supervision of established groups.

The growth of home-grown networks does not mean that the traditional model of the 1990s has been completely supplanted. Rather, the current panorama of jihadist networks in Europe is an extremely diverse one and can be visualised as a continuum. At one extreme, we find the quintessentially home-grown manifestation: small clusters – or at times, lone actors – of mostly European-born radicals who act with absolute operational independence and have no ties to external groups. At the opposite end of the spectrum, we see compartmentalised cells contained in a well-structured network and subjected to a hierarchical structure, as was the model of jihadist groups operating in Europe in the 1990s. Between these two extremes is a whole spectrum of realities, positioned according to the level of autonomy of the group. The most common model seems to be that of the 7 July 2005 London bombers: a small group of young men, most of whom were born and raised in Europe, who know each other either from the mosque or from the neighbourhood and who had become radicalised in Europe. Some of these locally groomed jihadist wannabes travel abroad to gain from various al-Qaeda-affiliated groups the necessary bomb-making expertise to allow the group to jump from an amateurish cluster of friends to a full-fledged terrorist cell.

1.1 Radicalisation, recruitment and linkage

Several questions flow almost spontaneously regarding the growth of home-grown jihadism in Europe. How do seemingly assimilated young men living unremarkable lives in Europe embrace jihadist ideology? And how do they go from their tranquil life as students, workers or professionals to fighting in remote, unfamiliar places alongside some of the world's most notorious terrorist organisations? In other words,

what are the psychological and operational processes that lead young European citizens or long-time residents to jihadist militancy?

To answer these questions and understand the recent dynamics of jihadism in Europe, it is necessary to clarify the difference between three separate, albeit interconnected, phenomena: radicalisation, recruitment and linkage⁹. As seen, scholars and policymakers have not found a consensus on the definition of what radicalisation is. But from an operational perspective, it is nevertheless possible to observe that, in the case of the vast majority of European Muslims who join jihadist networks, radicalisation is a bottom-up process. Studies by Marc Sageman and other scholars have convincingly demonstrated that the image of a terrorist recruiter “lurking in mosques, ready to subvert naive and passive worshippers” does not correspond to reality throughout Western Europe¹⁰. A top-down process in which a specifically tasked member of a jihadist group seeks out a potential recruit, introduces him to jihadist ideology, grooms him and eventually inserts him into the group is a rare phenomenon.

That pattern was more common in some of the North African networks of the 1990s, where individuals were often introduced by relatives or friends to mid-ranking members of jihadist groups who oversaw the entire radicalisation process from the beginning¹¹. There are reports that members of al-Shabaab, the Somali al-Qaeda affiliate, approach non-radicalised individuals in Europe with the idea of grooming them and eventually enlisting them in the group¹². But for the most part, the absorption of jihadist ideology by European Muslims is an independent

9. Lorenzo Vidino, *Radicalization, Linkage, and Diversity: Current Trends in Terrorism in Europe*, RAND Corporation, 2011.

10. Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004, p. 122.

11. Petter Nesser, ‘Joining Jihadi Terrorist Cells in Europe: Exploring Motivational Aspects of Recruitment and Radicalization’, in Magnus Ranstorp (ed.), *Understanding Violent Radicalisation: Terrorist and Jihadist Movements in Europe*, London, Routledge, 2009, p. 89.

12. European intelligence officials, interviews by the author, The Hague and Brussels, December 2009; Paris, February 2010, London, April 2010.

process. In some cases subjects undergo the whole radicalisation process on their own via the Internet, without interacting with anyone else. That is the case, for example, with Roshonara Choudhry, the King's College London student who stabbed British MP Stephen Timms for his support of the war in Iraq. Choudhry, who had no connections to any militant network, became radicalised by obsessively watching over months on YouTube the speeches of Anwar al-Awlaki, the leader of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Heeding the cleric's call for individual jihad, she eventually decided to act. Cases similar to Choudhry's, albeit not always with a violent ending, have been monitored throughout Europe.

In most cases, though, radicalisation takes place in small groups. Individuals are often introduced to jihadist ideology by relatives, friends or even casual acquaintances. A soul searching at the individual level is a key part of any radicalisation process, but often the decisions and the phases of the process are influenced by an individual's interaction with his pre-existing social networks. Fellow travellers on the radicalisation path can be relatives and lifelong friends or new acquaintances. Several studies have shown that, in most cases, radicalisation takes place when like-minded individuals interact¹³.

Radical preachers, veterans of various conflicts and web masters of jihadist websites have acted as radicalising agents, further exposing already sympathetic individuals to jihadist ideology. Although it is not uncommon for these radicalising agents to have connections to various jihadist groups, rarely do they act as formal agents on a radicalising drive. By the same token, there is no question that websites and other forms of propaganda created by jihadist groups serve the purpose of radicalising European Muslims. However, these efforts are directed to the masses, and there are few indications of direct, face-to-face involvement of jihadist groups operating outside of Europe in the radicalisation of individuals. Jihadist radicalisation in Europe is largely, in substance, a bottom-up process.

A different, yet related, phenomenon is recruitment, the process through which a terrorist group inserts an already radicalised individual

13. See, for example, Marc Sageman (2008).

into its ranks¹⁴. In the case of many terrorist organisations which operate primarily outside of Europe, from Hamas to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, it is fair to speak of a top-down effort, where members of the group act as enlistment officers¹⁵. Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups act in a similar manner in various parts of the world¹⁶. But, in Europe, the dynamics are quite different. Although some exceptions do exist – Europe-based al-Shabaab support networks reportedly do conduct what can be more properly considered recruitment efforts – there is little evidence of a concerted effort by jihadist groups to recruit European Muslims. Contrary to public perceptions, there are few indications of a consistent top-down effort by al-Qaeda-affiliated groups operating outside of Europe to attract and recruit new militants in Europe by deploying recruiters to spot new talent on the ground.

What is a significantly more common occurrence is the linkage between the already radicalised individual or cluster in Europe and various jihadist groups operating outside the area. And, in the vast majority of cases, this linkage is initiated by the individual or cluster rather than by the jihadist group. If any form of loosely defined recruitment exists, it is because the ‘applicant’ reached out to the ‘employer’, and not the other way around. Limiting its assessment to the Netherlands but, incidentally, describing a trend seen throughout Europe, in 2010 the AIVD (Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst, the Netherlands’ domestic-intelligence agency) stated that “contacts between active jihadist networks or individuals here and long-established transnational networks elsewhere” are established in various ways. But, the agency added, “the initiative for first contact usually seems to come from the

14. Scott Gerwehr and Sara Daly, ‘Al-Qaida: Terrorist Selection and Recruitment’, in David Kamien (ed.), *The McGraw-Hill Homeland Security Handbook: The Definitive Guide for Law Enforcement, EMT, and all other Security Professionals*, McGraw-Hill, 2006, pp. 73-87.

15. Todd C. Helmus, ‘Why and How Some People Become Terrorists,’ in Paul K. Davis and Kim Cragin (eds.), *Social Science for Counterterrorism: Putting the Pieces Together*, Santa Monica, CA, RAND Corporation, 2009, p. 77.

16. For an excellent analysis of al-Qaeda-affiliated networks’ recruitment in Saudi Arabia, for example, see Thomas Hegghammer, ‘The Recruiter’s Dilemma: Signalling and Rebel Recruitment Tactics’, *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1-16.

Dutch side; there appears to exist no planned recruitment strategy on the part of the transnational networks concerned”¹⁷. Aside from limited exceptions, recruitment in Western Europe exists not as a traditional, top-down phenomenon but, rather, only in the sense of a bottom-up process that is better defined as linkage.

1.2 Theories on radicalisation

The growth of home-grown terrorism of jihadist inspiration has triggered a flurry of theories, in the absence of reliable supporting evidence, seeking to explain the phenomenon. Some focus on structural factors such as political tensions and cultural cleavages; these are sometimes referred to as the root causes of radicalisation. Others emphasise personal factors, such as the shock of a life-changing event or the influence of a mentor. Finally, several theories have been formulated to specifically explain the radicalisation of European Muslims; these range from a search for identity to anger over discrimination and relative economic deprivation¹⁸.

Most experts tend to agree that radicalisation is a highly complex and individualised process, often shaped by a poorly understood interaction of structural and personal factors. Individuals who have embraced jihadist ideology range from the well-educated scion of a billionaire Saudi family – Usama bin Laden – to poor and illiterate young men. Even in Europe, the profile of jihadists includes criminals living at the

17. Algemene Inlichtingen-en Veiligheidsdienst (General Intelligence and Security Service), *Violent Jihad in the Netherlands: Current Trends in the Islamist Terrorist Threat*, March 2006, p. 6.

18. For an excellent overview of the literature on radicalisation among European Muslims, see Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, ‘Violent Radicalization in Europe: What We Know and What We Do Not Know’, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 33, no. 9, 2010, pp. 797-814. See also Michael King and Donald M. Taylor, ‘The Radicalization of Home-grown Jihadists: A Review of Theoretical Models and Social Psychological Evidence’, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 23, no. 4, pp. 602-22; and Randy Borum, ‘Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 4, no. 4, pp. 7-36.

margins of society and trained physicists working in some of Europe's most prestigious scientific institutions, teenagers and men in their fifties, converts with virtually no knowledge of Islam and Muslims with degrees in Islamic theology, men and women. It seems apparent that there is no one path to radicalism and no common profile, but each case must be analysed individually. And in many cases, it seems clear, psychology is more useful than sociology in identifying the dynamics of radicalisation.

Condensing what appears to be the opinion of most scholars and practitioners in the field, in 2008 the European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation argued that radicalisation takes place "at the intersection of an enabling environment and a personal trajectory"¹⁹. An individual's personal profile and history is crucial in understanding why he reacted in the way he did to outside stimuli, influences, pushes and pulls on the radicalisation path. Understanding his (or her) psychological processes is extremely difficult but of fundamental importance. At the same time, the Expert Group argues, the immediate environment in which the individual lives is equally important when trying to understand the radicalisation process. It is, therefore, necessary to identify the places, whether in the physical or virtual world, where individuals are first introduced to jihadist ideology and where they can subsequently develop and nurture their devotion to it.

19. European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation, *Radicalisation Processes Leading to Acts of Terrorism*, 15 May 2008.

2 THE HISTORY OF JIHADISM IN ITALY

As said, the arrival of home-grown jihadism to Italy comes with a few years of delay and with a lower intensity compared with the phenomenon in most other Western European countries. Yet, historically, and paradoxically, the country was one of the first on the Continent to witness jihadist activities on a relatively large scale. Even by the early 1990s, Italian authorities had detected and investigated sophisticated jihadist networks operating in the country. This dynamic was arguably caused by the presence of particularly active networks on Italian territory during the early days of European jihadism and by a level of attention to the phenomenon by Italian authorities that, with the exception of France, surpassed that of most of their counterparts throughout Europe.

Small clusters of militants from several North African countries established themselves in various areas of the country, but the northern city of Milan has always been the undisputed hub of jihadism in Italy¹. The city's Islamic Cultural Institute (ICI), a former garage turned mosque, has been controlled by members of the Egyptian Gamaa Islamiya since its foundation in 1988². The ICI, locally known as the Viale Jenner mosque, acquired enormous importance for the global jihadist movement when the conflict broke out in Bosnia in 1992. Not only was the ICI's imam, Anwar Shabaan, the commander of the foreign

1. For a more detailed history of jihadism in Italy, see Lorenzo Vidino, 'Islam, Islamism and Jihadism in Italy', *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, no. 7, August 2008.

2. DIGOS (Divisioni Investigazioni Generali e Operazioni Speciali), report on the searches at the ICI, 15 September 1997; DIGOS, memorandum on the ICI, 20 May 1994.

fighters' Mujahideen Battalion, but the network in Milan was a crucial node supplying documents, money and other forms of logistical support for volunteers around the world seeking to reach the battlefield³. The same network was also behind what is Europe's first suicide bombing, a car-bomb attack against a police station in the Croatian city of Rijeka carried out in 1995 by a Milan resident of Egyptian descent to avenge the killing of Shabaan by Croatian troops. (The only victim was the suicide bomber)⁴.

A long investigation carried out by Italian authorities on the ICI ended with a dramatic raid on the mosque in June 1995, and the indictment of 17 militants, only a fraction of those investigated. Inside, police found hundreds of false documents, radical magazines, tools for forging documents and documents proving the Institute's ties to extremists worldwide. Yet the ICI continued its activities throughout the 1990s and the early 2000s, remaining, in the words of the US Department of the Treasury, "the main al-Qaeda station house in Europe"⁵. The Institute established various businesses, which provided money and the option to sponsor visa applications for militants. Radical preachers of global stature routinely visited the Institute. While the leadership remained Egyptian, militants from Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco began to congregate there, turning the ICI into a hub for radical networks throughout northern Italy. Forged documents, funds and recruits from Milan went to support jihadist groups from Algeria to Afghanistan. Particularly noteworthy was the contribution of Milanese jihadists in

3. DIGOS, report on the searches at the ICI, 15 September 1997; Evan F. Kohlmann, *Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe: The Afghan-Bosnian Network*, Oxford, Berg, 2004.

4. DIGOS, report on the searches at the ICI, 15 September 1997.

5. David S. Hilzenrath and John Mintz, 'More Assets on Hold in Anti-Terror Effort; 39 Parties Added to List of Al-Qaeda Supporters', *Washington Post*, 13 October 2001.

Iraq, where several individuals recruited at the ICI carried out brazen suicide operations⁶.

By the late 1990s, jihadist clusters, many connected to the ICI, were present in various Italian cities, particularly in the north. Relying on their charisma and, when they found opposition, on the use of violence, ICI affiliates established or took over mosques in other Lombard cities such as Como, Gallarate and Varese. Particularly noteworthy is the cluster that developed around the mosque of the quiet rural town of Cremona. Born out of the initiative of members of the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group, since the mid-1990s the Cremona network had been active in recruiting, fund-raising and spreading propaganda for various jihadist outfits. The cluster's leader, Ahmed el Bouhali, reportedly died as a result of American bombing in Afghanistan in 2001, but the network continued its operations until 2004, when most of its members were convicted of various terrorism-related crimes. The network had also allegedly planned attacks against Cremona's cathedral and Milan's metro system⁷.

Between the late 1990s and the early 2000s, small clusters of militants were detected in several cities throughout Italy, mostly, but not exclusively, in the north. Various operations, including a large seizure of weapons, were conducted against North African networks in Turin and Bologna. Naples also played a crucial role in the European-wide logistical network of all Algerian groups⁸.

The vast majority of clusters monitored or dismantled by Italian authorities during this stage possessed similar characteristics. The cells

6. Milan resident Lotfi Rihani, for example, reportedly died in September 2003, when he, along with two other Tunisian passengers, struck US forces with a car laden with explosives. Algerian national Fahdal Nassim died in the August 2003 bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad that killed 22 people, including UN special envoy to Iraq Sergio Vieira de Mello. Kamal Morchidi, a 24-year-old Moroccan who had served on the board of an ICI front company, died in October 2003 during an attack against Baghdad's Rashid Hotel. See Lorenzo Vidino (2005), pp. 215-90.

7. For the history of the Cremona network, see Tribunal of Brescia, indictment of Kamel Ben Mouldi Hamraoui and Nourredine Drissi, 2006.

8. For an overview of the Algerian networks in Naples see, for example, ROS Carabinieri, the report to the Tribunal of Naples, 10 May 1995. See, for example,

were part of well-established networks run by charismatic leaders and were connected to groups operating in North Africa⁹. Even though some of them did plan attacks inside the country, most of their activities provided logistical support. They raised funds through a variety of activities, ranging from petty crime to legitimate business operations. They provided weapons, false documents and various supplies to groups operating outside Europe, and recruited new fighters for them. Their demographics mirrored migration patterns, as the vast majority of individuals involved were first-generation immigrants from Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Libya and Egypt. Many of them were in the country illegally and lived in conditions of socio-economic disenfranchisement.

2.1 First lone actors

In the first half of the 2000s, as has been said, most European countries witnessed the growth of the home-grown phenomenon. Clusters with quintessentially home-grown characteristics were behind several thwarted or successful attacks (such as the London 2005 bombings or the 2004 assassination of Theo van Gogh) or their members travelled to Pakistan and Iraq to fight or obtain terrorist training. The phenomenon did not touch Italy, where the vast majority of jihadist activities were still very much of the traditional nature. Yet, at the time, Italy witnessed some isolated incidents which, in hindsight, could be considered forerunners of dynamics seen only later in other European countries. In the early 2000s, in fact, Italy witnessed a handful of lone-actor plots

Tribunal of Naples, indictment of Yamine Bouhrama, Mohammed Larbi and Khaled Serai, 23 December 2005; and Tribunal of Naples, indictment of Yacine Gasry, 24 January 2004.

9. Armando Spataro, 'Il terrorismo islamico in Italia e nel mondo', lecture at a meeting of the Superior Council of the Magistrature, Rome, 29 March 2004, <http://www.osservatoriosullalegalita.org/04/inchiesta/007spataroterror.htm> (accessed on 5 December 2013).

that possessed many of the characteristics of actions taken by European jihadists in later years.

The first manifestation of this phenomenon took place in Sicily in the months immediately following the 11 September attacks¹⁰. On 5 November 2001, a gas canister exploded on the steps of the Temple of Concordia, a majestic Greek temple in Agrigento's famed Valley of Temples, causing light damage to the fifth century-BC structure. Authorities found a bed sheet close to the detonation site praising Islam and urging the end of the American attack against Afghanistan. A similar bed sheet was found on the night of 14 February 2002 next to a stolen car that caught fire in front of the walls of Agrigento's penitentiary. The car contained a gas canister that did not ignite, thanks to authorities' quick arrival on the scene. An identical incident took place two weeks later when firemen prevented the explosion of a five-kilogram gas canister that had been placed in a trash bin in front of Agrigento's courthouse and an evangelical church.

On 11 May 2002 an all but identical episode took place 1,500 kilometres north of Agrigento, in Milan. Around 10 p.m., a gas canister exploded in an underpass of the Duomo underground station, Milan's busiest, causing some light injuries. Nearby authorities found a bed sheet written in a style identical to those found in Agrigento, stating, "[w]e fight for the cause, we will not stop until when you will submit to worshipping the one God. Allah is great"¹¹. The investigation led Italian authorities to the perpetrator of the four attacks, Domenico Quaranta, in July 2002. Poorly educated and mentally unstable, Quaranta was a Sicilian-born handyman in his late twenties who had worked at odd jobs before being detained in the Trapani penitentiary for petty crimes. There Quaranta had been introduced to a fundamentalist interpretation

10. *La Repubblica*, 'Arrestato presunto responsabile attentati Milano e Agrigento', 17 July 2002; Francesco Cascini, 'Il fenomeno del proselitismo in carcere con riferimento ai detenuti stranieri di culto islamico', in *La Radicalizzazione del Terrorismo Islamico, Quaderni dell'Istituto Superiore di Studi Penitenziari*, June 2012, p. 34; Stefano Dambrosio and Vincenzo R. Spagnolo, (2011), pp. 40-43.

11. *La Repubblica*, 'Arrestato presunto responsabile attentati Milano e Agrigento', 17 July 2002.

of Islam by some fellow inmates and, upon release, had decided to carry out attacks on his own.

Two incidents involving lone actors which were similar to each other took place in northern Italy in the following two years. The first was in Modena, in December 2003, when a 33-year-old Palestinian man, Muhannad al-Khatib, filled his Peugeot 205 with gas and petrol canisters and parked it in front of a local synagogue. Al-Khatib reportedly first tried to set the car on fire from the outside. Having failed, and confronted by police agents who had arrived on the spot, he went inside the car and turned his action into a suicide operation. The ensuing explosion killed him but caused no other injuries or damages¹². Al Khatib was not known to have radical sympathies or connections. On the contrary, acquaintances described him as chronically depressed and as having expressed the desire to kill himself¹³.

A second incident took place in Brescia on the evening of March 28, 2004¹⁴. A 36-year-old Moroccan man, Moustafa Chaouki, parked his Fiat Tempra, loaded with four large kitchen gas canisters, in the drive-through lane of a local McDonald's and triggered an explosion. As in Modena, the explosion killed the perpetrator but caused no other injuries or relevant damages. Two days after the incident, the police headquarters at Brescia received a letter sent by Chaouki in which he claimed responsibility for the attack, stated that nobody else participated in it and that he had done it as reprisal for the suffering of the Arab peoples, in particular in Palestine and Iraq.

Like al-Khatib, Chaouki was not known to authorities. He had lived in Italy since 1989, working as a handyman and driver in the Bergamo and Brescia area. He had no criminal record, and landlords and employers described him as a model individual. After separating from his wife in 2002, he had become more withdrawn, alienating himself from his four brothers who lived in the area and going to live in a caravan by himself.

12. Stefano Dambruoso and Vincenzo R. Spagnolo, (2011), p. 121.

13. *Quotidiano Nazionale* (Modena), 11 December 2003.

14. Brescia DIGOS, report on Mostafa Chaouki, 12 July 2004; Stefano Dambruoso and Vincenzo R. Spagnolo, (2011), p. 120.

A few weeks before killing himself, he had lost his job delivering milk. He had told his brothers he felt he was a failure in both his professional and private lives. In the first months of 2003, Chaouki had approached a Brescia-based organisation that provides support to depressed people, meeting on various occasions with one of their counsellors. After the incident at McDonald's, the counsellor told authorities that Chaouki had never expressed any animosity towards Italy, and had no apparent political or religious inclination or suicidal tendencies.

The three episodes have much in common. In all three, the attackers acted as quintessential lone actors, involving no other person in any stage of their plan. It appears that in none of the cases did anybody else even know about the attacks before they happened. The men did not belong to any radical circle and, in the case of al-Khatib and Chaouki, were not known to espouse any violent or radical views. An almost inevitable by-product of this operational independence is the poor degree of sophistication of the explosive devices assembled by the three men.

It is legitimate to have second thoughts about labelling these incidents, particularly the episodes in Modena and Brescia, as terrorism. On one hand, it is apparent from their *modus operandi*, targets and, in the case of Chaouki, from the letter claiming responsibility for the attack, that there was, at least to some degree, a political/religious nature to their actions. On the other, the perpetrators' psychological condition, mental instability and deep depression cannot be ignored and are possibly the main reasons for their deeds. While it is difficult to fully understand these dynamics after the fact, it is likely that al-Khatib and Chaouki wanted to cover their suicides, an act considered shameful and sinful in their culture, with a political mantle that could give it some legitimacy.

2.2 The decline of traditional structures

By the mid-2000s most Western European countries were increasingly confronted by various challenges from both traditional and home-grown networks. The most visible manifestation of the growing threat

from jihadism was represented by the various successful plots – Madrid 2004, Amsterdam 2004, London 2005 – and those that were thwarted throughout the Continent. In opposition to this European-wide trend, the Italian jihadist scene went through a phase of relative tranquillity during those years. Some of the long-established networks and some new actors (Pakistani groups, for example) continued some of their activities but with a markedly lower intensity. It is noteworthy, then, that other than a few far-fetched plots, no attacks against Italy were planned by established networks in this period.

A combination of factors can explain this, and the pressure Italian authorities put on established jihadist networks should be considered the most important. Continuous waves of arrests, beginning in 2000, dismantled several cells in the Milan area and throughout the country. Once the main targets of an investigation were arrested, Italian authorities focused on those who had been at the periphery, netting layers of militants. Thanks to this aggressive approach, dozens of militants were jailed for a few years and deported to their home countries upon release. Many more were simply expelled from Italy on national-security grounds with an administrative decree.

One prominent member of Milan's jihadist scene, the Egyptian imam of the ICI's satellite mosque on the southern outskirts of the city, was abducted by the CIA while walking near the ICI in February 2003, an event that had important repercussions in US-Italian relations and within Italy's jihadist community¹⁵. Many militants also decided to leave Italy of their own volition. Also, possibly influenced by the pressure put on them by Italian authorities, several Italian-based militants left the country to fight in Afghanistan, Iraq and Algeria. Most of them died on the battlefield or decided not to return to Italy.

These developments led to a significant decline of the role of the ICI in Italian jihadism. While still serving as a gravitational pole for various jihadist networks, the ICI partially changed its ways. Recruitment and criminal activities, previously conducted inside the ICI with the consent

15. See Steven Hendricks, *A Kidnapping in Milan: The CIA on Trial*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010.

of the Institute's leadership, moved for the most part to other mosques or to private gatherings. The realisation that they were under close surveillance led the ICI and most of Italy's jihadist networks to operate in more discrete ways.

This diminished role of traditional structures did not correspond to a growth of home-grown networks. The incidents in Agrigento, Modena and Brescia cannot be considered more than isolated episodes, their terrorist nature debatable, and, in the case of al-Khatib and Chaouki, without home-grown characteristics. Throughout the early and mid-2000s, Italian authorities did not detect any sign of the forms of home-grown jihadist radicalisation that were increasingly spotted in the rest of Europe. Tellingly, in January 2007, then Interior Minister Giuliano Amato clearly stated that "at the moment, it is not an Italian problem. But I can tell you that we fear it will become [one] in the future"¹⁶.

A few cases in the second half of the 2000s demonstrated that jihadist dynamics in the country were undergoing change. The first took place in July 2007, when authorities charged four Moroccan men living in the Perugia area under Article 270 quinquies of the penal code. The article had been introduced in July 2005, and punishes individuals who provide or receive training in explosives, weapons or any other techniques that could be used for terrorism purposes¹⁷.

The case revolved around Mostapha el Korchi, the 40-year-old imam of a little mosque in Ponte Felcino, a small suburb of Perugia¹⁸. Charismatic and entrepreneurial, el Korchi had become a leader of the local Muslim community. He was a member of the local municipality's advisory board on immigration and had received funds to run classes for children of immigrants on the premises of Ponte Felcino's middle school. In 2006 authorities became aware that el Korchi embraced extremely

16. Gregory Viscosi, 'Italia non ha terrorismo islamico interno, per ora-Amato', *Bloomberg News*, 5 January 2007.

17. See the section on the law in Chapter 5.

18. Tribunale di Perugia, 'Decreto di applicazione della misura della custodia cautelare in carcere', caso 5220/06, 18 July 2007; Stefano Dambruoso, and Vincenzo R. Spagnolo, (2011), pp. 99-100.

radical views and was spreading them inside the community. They decided to conduct surveillance on him and his closest collaborators, and to put listening devices in the mosque.

Over the following months authorities listened to some of the radical sermons el Korchi gave during Friday services in front of all worshippers. On 9 February 2007, for example, he thundered, “May God welcome Muslim martyrs. ... May God protect us from the Americans ... the Jews and the Christians. ... May God destroy and weaken them!” Even more disturbing, el Korchi spread similar views during an Arab language and culture class for children which he ran inside the mosque. On 14 April 2007 authorities listened to Korchi tell his pupils, “There will be a judgment day in which all Muslims will go to paradise, while the unbelieving Italians will go to hell and burn. ... Those who do not understand the Muslim religion will go to hell and will be tortured. ... Hit the other [non-Muslim] children until they bleed”¹⁹.

But authorities were particularly concerned about the activities el Korchi conducted behind closed doors. El Korchi, in fact, had hand-picked a small group of followers and spent countless hours indoctrinating them once the doors of his small mosque closed. He ran what authorities called a ‘terrorism school’, showing his followers videos of terrorist attacks, which he had downloaded from password-protected jihadist forums; manuals on how to conduct terrorist operations; and sermons from renowned jihadist speakers. He interspersed the viewings of downloaded materials (authorities seized some 20,000 files from the mosque’s computer) with his own speeches in which he encouraged his followers to pursue jihadist goals and use violence.

The operation conducted by Perugia’s DIGOS (Operation Hamman, from the nickname used by El Korchi to log on jihadist sites) ended in July 2007 with the indictment of el Korchi and three of his followers. The investigation is similar to two others conducted in the Milan area (Macherio, Operation Shamal) and in Calabria (Sellia Marina, Operation Hanein) in the following months. In the first, concluded in December

19. Tribunal of Perugia, ‘Decreto di applicazione della misura della custodia cautelare in carcere’, case no. 5220/06, 18 July 2007.

2008, Milan's DIGOS arrested two Moroccan men and accused them of planning attacks against various targets in the Milan area²⁰. In the second, authorities charged three Moroccan men, including the imam of the local mosque, under Article 270 quinquies for disseminating jihadist propaganda and operational information²¹.

The cases, which have important similarities, possess elements that signify a partial break from the dynamics seen in the past. All three clusters, in fact, operated largely independently of established networks. El Korchi did possess connections with members of the Moroccan Islamic Fighting Group and had facilitated the passage of a militant to Iraq to join an al-Qaeda-linked group. Despite these connections, however, his and the other two clusters did not function within a larger structure but were, from an operational perspective, completely independent.

Moreover, even though most of the militants of the traditional scene also used the Internet, the three clusters seem to put the Web at the centre of their activities. Possibly because they were otherwise unconnected to the global jihadist scene, the three clusters used the Internet with an unprecedented intensity to learn about jihadist ideology and operational tactics and to celebrate the gestures of jihadist groups. The Internet was – for the clusters in the small towns of Ponte Felcino, Macherio and Sellia Marina – the lifeline to the jihadist world they aimed to be part of, a characteristic typical of home-grown jihadist groups seen throughout Europe.

At the same time, some characteristics of the three clusters are markedly different from those of most European home-grown networks. All members of the clusters in Ponte Felcino, Macherio and Sellia Marina were first-generation immigrants (all from Morocco,

20. Milan DIGOS, briefing on Operazione Shamal, undated; Enrico Lagattola, 'Terrorismo, il giudice: 'Parlare di attentati non è reato'', *Il Giornale*, 6 October 2010. The men were acquitted in July 2010.

21. Polizia di Stato, 'Terrorismo: arrestato l'Imam che predicava la jihad', press release, 31 January 2011, <http://www.poliziadistato.it/articolo/20963/> (accessed on 4 September 2013); *Il Giornale*, 'Terrorismo su Internet, l'imam di Catanzaro arrestato con il figlio', 31 January 2011.

incidentally) who had arrived in Italy as adults and were, for the most part, poorly integrated into Italian society. If home-grown radicals are thought to be those who were born or at least lived their formative years in Europe, a common assumption, the men from the three clusters did not meet the definition.

Moreover, all three cases revolved around mosques, albeit small, makeshift prayer rooms. The new generation of home-grown jihadists throughout Europe tends to be unaffiliated with mosques. Some shun places of worship altogether. Some might visit them but they tend not to occupy positions of leadership, meeting at the mosque's margins and often hiding their jihadist sympathies from most other worshippers. In Ponte Felcino, Macherio and Sellia Marina, on the other hand, the mosque still played the crucial role typical of traditional jihadist networks; in all three cases, the imams were driving forces behind the clusters.

The level of sophistication of all three clusters was quite low. In all three cases the men limited themselves to talking about action (only in the case of Macherio did this entail attacks in Italy), an intention that was expressed in vague terms. All three clusters could be seen simply as informal aggregations of young, disenfranchised men with no previous connections to jihadism, who followed a charismatic personality who himself had limited or no connections to established jihadist networks.

2.3 The Game case: a turning point

An incident that marks a shift in the dynamics of jihadism in Italy took place on the morning of 12 October 2009 at the Santa Barbara military barracks, a large facility on the western outskirts of Milan²². At 7:40 a.m., at a time when the main gate opened to allow in the flux of cars, a man walked up the driveway and attempted to enter the facility. Confronted by a guard, he knelt, detonated a dark box he was carrying under his arm and yelled something in a language (probably Arabic) that people around him did not understand. Authorities later said that the

22. Tribunal of Milan, Verdict 10/1583, 4 October 2010.

explosion of the 4.6 kilogram TATP-based explosive device he carried would have been much greater had the device not malfunctioned as a result of the incorrect balancing of the explosive charge and the poor quality of the detonator. The explosion nonetheless severely injured the man's face and cost him his right hand. The guard who had confronted him and another soldier suffered minor injuries.

Seconds after the explosion, police rushed to the scene. Despite the injuries, the man managed to whisper to the first policeman he saw, "You have to leave Afghanistan". As the police searched his body, he added, "I have nothing else, nothing. My name is Game and I am from Libya". The investigation that followed revealed that the man's full name was Mohammed Game and that, indeed, he was a Libyan who was born in Benghazi in 1974. Game had arrived in Italy in 2003 after having studied as an electrical engineer in Libya²³. He initially ran a successful business, but his entrepreneurial fortune took a turn for the worse after a few years. He began working at odd jobs and lived in a small, squatted flat without a bathroom near Milan's San Siro stadium with his Italian wife and their four children²⁴.

Game was not known to Italian counterterrorism officials, and the investigation revealed that he had become radicalised very recently. Game's wife and brother Imad told investigators that Game had suffered a heart attack in 2008 and, since then, had completely changed his lifestyle. Imad recounted that Game had begun frequenting the ICI and calling Imad an infidel because he did not pray and did not fast during Ramadan. Game's 17-year-old nephew stated that his uncle spent his days visiting jihadist websites and that he had recently told him he wanted to "do jihad" in Italy, to carry out suicide operations on a bus or a McDonald's, since that was the way to earn paradise. His wife confirmed these stories, telling investigators he had become increasingly religious

23. Stefano Dambruoso and Vincenzo R. Spagnolo, (2011), p. 31.

24. Carlo Bonini, 'Dal sogno di fare fortuna ai debiti il mistero di Mohamed, lupo solitario', *Repubblica*, 13 October 2009.

and spent his days online or with two North African men who lived in the neighbourhood and also frequented the ICI.

The picture painted by relatives matched what investigators found on Game's personal computer, that Game was an avid consumer of jihadist materials and had stored 788 files of that nature on his computer. He had accessed or downloaded a vast array of sources but seemed to have been particularly fascinated by the writing of Abu Musab al-Suri, of which he had downloaded 185 files. Al-Suri, one of the most celebrated ideologues of the global jihadist movement, is particularly known for having elaborated the concepts of leaderless resistance and the "jihad of individualised terrorism"²⁵. Introducing an idea that has been adopted by various al-Qaeda-linked leaders and groups over the past few years, al-Suri advocated a system in which isolated individuals or small groups operate autonomously, without developing links to other networks. What would bind all these networks together is simply "a common aim, a common doctrinal program and a comprehensive (self-) educational program"²⁶. Al-Suri's work, which dates mostly to the 1990s, is widely seen as the theorisation of the current phenomenon of home-grown terrorism in the West.

Game's computer history showed the man's strong aversion to Italian foreign and domestic policies. As for the former, several Internet searches and writings show Game's clear opposition to the presence of Italian troops in Afghanistan. But Game also displayed an interest in various domestic issues, in particular the activities of the Northern League and its opposition to the presence of mosques in Italy. Game

25. Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of Al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus'ab Al-Suri*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2008. Al Suri's real name is Mustafa Setmariam Nasar.

26. 'Paths to Global Jihad: Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terror Networks', proceedings from an FFI seminar, Oslo, 15 March 2006, pp. 51-3.

was also very interested in the history of Italian colonialism in his native Libya and the local resistance against it²⁷.

For months Game spent all his nights browsing political, religiously conservative and openly jihadist websites. Yet, even though the tone of the websites he visited was increasingly radical, Game did not access websites that provided practical instructions until a few weeks before carrying out the attack against the Santa Barbara military barracks. The triggering event that seems to have made Game and his internet searches take a more operational direction was an incident that took place on 20 September 2009 in front of the Ciak Theatre in Milan. On that day Italian politician and Islam critic Daniela Santanchè had arrived with a small group of supporters in front of the theatre to protest the treatment of Muslim women. The mosque was being used by some of the most conservative sections of the Milanese Muslim community to celebrate the end of Ramadan. A confrontation ensued and the former Member of Parliament reported some minor injuries. Pictures later emerged showing that Game was one of the men who confronted Santanchè²⁸.

The incident was a triggering event for Game, dramatically accelerating his radicalisation process²⁹. He began telling people he trusted that he wanted to carry out suicide attacks in Italy; praising al-Qaeda by saying it was the only movement that was fully implementing Islam. His Internet searches became less focused on theoretical materials and significantly more operational. He downloaded various manuals on explosives, including Abdallah Dhu Al Bajadin's infamous *Illustrated Encyclopedia for the Fabrication of Explosives* and *Lessons to Destroy the Crucifix*.

27. Game's strong feelings about Italian colonialism in Libya are also evident in his choice of date for the attack. Interrogated by authorities, he claimed to have chosen October 12 because it was the first day Italian soldiers had entered Libya. Game also stated that his intention when walking inside the Santa Barbara barracks was that of talking, "spreading peace and the necessity of the military's withdrawal from Afghanistan".

28. *Corriere della Sera*, 'Santanchè contro il burqa: aggredita', 20 September 2009; *Corriere della Sera*, 'Game in coma, slitta interrogatorio E intanto spunta una foto al Ciak', 14 October 2009; Andrea Morigi, 'Il kamikaze era il 'pierre' di viale Jenner', *Libero*, 15 October 2009.

29. Ministry of Interior official, interview by the author, Milan, August 2013.

He also began searching personal information on potential targets: then Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and his family, various ministers of his centre-right government, the Milan metro and water systems, the San Siro stadium and the Santa Barbara barracks.

Most important, it was at this time that Game began stockpiling chemical substances to be used to fabricate explosives. Game stored them in an apartment a few metres from the Santa Barbara barracks that belonged to the son of Abdel Kol, an Egyptian man Game had befriended after becoming religious³⁰. The apartment had been turned into a full-fledged laboratory. Authorities found dozens of kilograms of chemical substances there, and countless tools used to fabricate explosives.

The ensuing investigation led to the arrest of Kol and Libyan national Mohamed Israfel, who also aided Game. The trial ended with the sentencing of Game to 14 years, Kol to 4, Israfel to three and a half years (later reduced to 3). According to authorities, Game, Kol and Israfel constituted a microcell that acted in complete operational independence. All three men frequented the ICI but there are no indications that they were inserted into any jihadist structure linked to the Institute or operating in the Milan area³¹.

It is debatable whether the Game case can be considered an episode of pure home-grown radicalisation. If, on one hand, his radicalisation did take place in Milan, Game had grown up in Libya and moved to Italy only as an adult, making his characterisation as home-grown dependent on the criteria used to define the category. Irrespectively, Italian counterterrorism authorities saw the incident as a watershed event and, possibly, as the tip of the iceberg³². In its 2009 report to Parliament, the Italian intelligence community saw in the case the confirmation of a fear it had long expressed: “the sudden operational activation of individuals residing on national soil who, independent of any structured terrorist

30. Tribunal of Milan, Verdict 10/1583, 4 October 2010.

31. Ministry of Interior official, interview by the author, Milan, August 2013.

32. 2009 annual report to the Italian Parliament (*Relazione sulla politica dell'informazione per la sicurezza*), p. 19.

formation, elaborate their own hostile project, adhering to the call of global jihad”³³. It also warned about “second generation immigrants or individuals born and raised in the West who, having become vulnerable due to situations of socio-economic or emotional disenfranchisement, embrace violence as the outcome of a radicalisation trajectory favoured by online propaganda and the influence of co-religionaries who embrace extremist views”³⁴. If not in its purest form, the Game incident was unquestionably a first, strong manifestation of the arrival of home-grown jihadism in Italy.

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*, 18.

3 THE ARRIVAL OF HOME-GROWN JIHADISM TO ITALY

The 2009 report by the Italian intelligence community to Parliament clearly indicated an additional shift it had monitored on the ground. Authorities, according to the report, had “detected signs of a ‘new generation’ of Islamic extremists not inserted in any structured organisation and mostly not known earlier who have embarked on a path towards jihadist beliefs and have embraced militant activism”. “In some cases”, continued the report, “the assimilation of this radical ideology was triggered by the encounter with important Islamists of the Italian scene during a detention for common crimes. More frequently, nonetheless, the formation of these young militants is favoured by the indoctrination and training they obtain online. Particularly noteworthy is, in this regard, the propaganda efforts of Italian-speaking subjects and, in some cases, of Italians who have converted to radical Islamism and who disseminate communiqués from al-Qaeda’s leadership in our language”¹.

The report condensed the findings of an investigation conducted by various branches of the Italian counterterrorism community since the mid-2000s. It was, in fact, at that time that authorities began monitoring the growth of a micro-community of Italian-speaking individuals scattered throughout the country (and, in a couple of cases, outside of it) who openly embraced jihadist sympathies and interacted online.

One place where this informal community coalesced was on a series of blogs run by an iconic figure of Italian Islamic fundamentalism, Barbara Aisha Farina. Born in Milan, Farina converted to Islam in

1. *Ibid.*, 19.

1994, at the age of 22, after taking a graduate course on Arab culture². Farina immediately adopted an extremely rigid interpretation of Islam, and throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, she periodically gained the spotlight in Italian media for her views and actions. A few months after converting, for example, she fought a very public battle protesting the fact that Italian women could not wear the *hijab* on their identity card pictures³. Years later she once more gained notoriety after publicly and proudly admitting that she had entered into a polygamous relationship. In fact, she had married in an Islamic ceremony Abdelkader Fall Mamour, a Senegalese imam who was already civilly married to an Italian woman. Mamour himself was well known to authorities. A self-avowed disciple of ICI imam Anwar Shabaan, Mamour had been investigated during a 1996 operation that Milan and Turin DIGOS had carried out against cells providing logistical support to Algerian groups⁴.

By the late 1990s Farina, who by then had become one of the first Italian women to sport the *niqab*, had become one of Italy's most active Islamic activists. Together with a female convert from Bergamo, she published a magazine called *al Mujahidah* (the female fighter)⁵. Distributed in many mosques throughout Italy, the publication ran original articles and Italian translations of writings of well-known Islamic thinkers. It also had a section for children titled *the Mujaheddino*, with games and

2. Carlo Lovati, 'Il velo negato a Barbara l' islamica', *Corriere della Sera*, 16 October 1994

3. Magdi Allam, (2002), pp. 55-61.

4. Claudio Galzerano and Vincenzo Di Peso, 'Le convertite', *Polizia Moderna*, April 2012, http://www.poliziamoderna.it/articolo.php?cod_art=2699 (accessed on 17 October 2013).

5. The convert helping Farina in the publication of *al Mujahidah* was Anna Khadija Pighizzini. Pighizzini was married to Moroccan-born naturalized Italian citizen Abou Elkassim Britel. Britel was the involuntary protagonist of a saga that began in February 2002, when he was apprehended in Pakistan and handed over to US authorities. While Pighizzini claims her husband was in Pakistan raising funds for the development of an Islamic-themed website the couple was running, authorities believed the man was closely linked to al-Qaeda. Britel was subsequently 'renditioned' to Morocco, where he was detained until 2011, when King Mohammed VI pardoned him.

trivia⁶. Most articles openly praised various jihadist groups, jihadist leaders such as Osama bin Laden and, in general, espoused an extremely militant interpretation of Islam. Published in years in which the Internet had only limited diffusion, *al Mujahidah* was one of the first vehicles attempting to disseminate a jihadist-leaning interpretation of Islam to an Italian-speaking audience.

After becoming a nationally known figure for having publicly defended Bin Laden in the wake of the 11 September 2001 attacks, Mamour was expelled from Italy to his native Senegal in November 2003 for “posing a threat to the public order and the safety of the state”⁷. Farina and her children followed him and the couple continued their propaganda efforts, this time online, from Senegal. The couple, in fact, operated various blogs that translated into Italian jihadist texts and messages from al-Qaeda leaders. Italian authorities shut down two of the sites and investigated a handful of individuals based in Italy who were in contact with Farina and operated mirror websites⁸.

Farina soon opened other blogs and sites, starting a cat-and-mouse game with the Italian police, similar to those seen between online jihad activists and authorities in other Western countries. But Farina’s online efforts are particularly important from an Italian perspective. Even though she operated them from Senegal, the blogs created by Farina were among the first attempts to create a community of Italian speaking jihadist sympathisers. At a time when similar efforts were flourishing in European languages such as English, French, German or Dutch, Farina’s blogs sought to bridge that gap for the small yet growing number of Italians (whether converts or second-generation immigrants) interested in jihadism.

And it was on Farina’s blogs that the embryo of an Italian online jihadist community was formed. Given her status as a respected long-time Islamic activist, her blogs attracted a relatively large number of

6. Copies in possession of the author.

7. *Corriere della Sera*, ‘Espulso l’imam di Carmagnola’, 17 November 2003.

8. Claudio Galzerano and Vincenzo Di Peso (2012); Stefano Dambruoso, and Vincenzo R. Spagnolo (2011), p. 132.

visitors among Italian-speaking individuals who shared, to one degree or another, her views. At a time when facebook and other online social media either had not been invented or had only a limited diffusion, it was in the comments section of Farina's blogs that jihad enthusiasts scattered throughout Italy could get to know each other and interact. Obviously not everybody who was active on her blogs should be seen as embracing jihadist ideology, but the informal community that coalesced there shared a very conservative and politicised interpretation of Islam and included individuals with openly jihadist sympathies.

During the second half of the 2000s, as they were monitoring (and routinely shutting down) Farina's blogs, Italian authorities received from a partner intelligence agency information about the activities of several Italian-based individuals on the website Minbar SOS⁹. Minbar SOS was a jihadist forum established in the early 2000s by Moez Garsallaoui and Malika el Aroud, a couple with important al-Qaeda links who lived between Switzerland and Belgium. Over the years, despite many attempts by authorities to shut them down, Minbar SOS and its incarnations became the online forum of reference for francophone jihad enthusiasts.

Unsurprisingly, some of the Italian-based individuals that were active on Minbar SOS were also frequent commentators on Farina's blogs. In 2009 Italian authorities decided to open a police investigation on them. The investigation, dubbed Niriya, was led by the Cagliari DIGOS and for years monitored the online activists of this small group of mostly converts. It ended in April 2012 with a series of raids against 10 people carried out in Cagliari, Milan, Palermo, Pesaro, Salerno and Cuneo¹⁰. "It is the first time that we uncover jihadist sympathisers who are 100% Italian", stated Claudio Galzerano, the head of the international

9. Claudio Galzerano and Vincenzo Di Peso, *Divisione Terrorismo Internazionale della Direzione Centrale della Polizia di Stato*, interview by author, Rome, October 2013; Ministry of Interior official, interview by author, Milan, August 2013; 2009 annual report to the Italian Parliament (*Relazione sulla politica dell'informazione per la sicurezza*), pp. 19-21; Brescia DIGOS, attachment number 1 in the Jarmoune case, 3; Polizia di Stato, 'Inneggiava al terrorismo su Internet, arrestato', 25 April 2012.

10. Procura di Cagliari, 'D.I.G.O.S.: Operazione 'Niriya'', news release, 24 April 2012.

terrorism division at UCIGOS. “Some”, he continued, “take care of translating al-Qaeda texts in Italian, while others provide information on how to build explosives”¹¹. Indeed the range of texts exchanged by the targets of Niriya reportedly included extremist but purely religious and/or political texts, but also a wide array of operational manuals providing instructions on paramilitary techniques, weapons, explosives and counter-surveillance.

Some of the individuals targeted in Operation Niriya were charged under Article 270 quinquies of the penal code for disseminating training material for terrorist purposes. Details on the investigation are still classified. Moreover, none of the individuals has yet been tried and should therefore be considered innocent until proven guilty. As Galzerano highlighted, among them are individuals with a profile quite different from those traditionally encountered by Italian counterterrorism authorities. One of them, Luca Abdullah Nur de Martini, was a 38-year-old high school professor from Cagliari. Widely respected in his school and in Cagliari’s small Muslim community, de Martini is a trained glottologist. He proudly admits his allegiance to Salafist views but denies supporting violence¹².

A primary target of Niriya was Andrea Campione, a 28-year-old frame maker who has since converting to Islam under the name Abdul Wahid As Siquili. Described as quiet and a good worker, he lived with his parents and his younger brothers in the rural town of Montelabbate, near Pesaro. Yet, according to Italian authorities, Campione had a double life online, where he was one of the most active members of the Italian jihadist scene. He reportedly disseminated to a wide network of contacts hundreds of documents, including some manuals with detailed

11. *Il Resto del Carlino*, ‘Terrorismo internazionale, arrestato 28enne pesarese convertito all’Islam’, 23 April 2012.

12. Fabrizio Paladini, ‘Jihadisti. Il caso del professore di Cagliari Luca de Martini: sono italiano come voi ma rispetto Maometto’, *Panorama*, 7 May 2012; *L’Unione Sarda*, ‘I paradisi di Luca Abdullah de Martini L’intervista a Giorgio Pisano nel 2009’, 24 April 2012.

instructions on weapons, explosives and guerrilla tactics¹³. Campione had repeatedly expressed to several online contacts his desire to participate in jihad in Afghanistan or other places, and authorities arrested him based on article 270 quinquies shortly before he was to fly to Morocco on a one-way ticket¹⁴.

3.1 *The Jarmoune case*

The Niriya investigation incidentally led authorities to the tracks of Mohamed Jarmoune, a young Moroccan-born man living in Niardo, a quiet mountain town in Valcamonica, in the province of Brescia¹⁵. Since his teenage years Jarmoune, who was born in Morocco in 1991 but had grown up in Italy, had been known in the Italian online jihadist scene. He was active on various online social networks and ran a blog (gharib.highbb.com) that had attracted the attention of other jihadist sympathisers – many of which were targets of Niriya – for its fiery tones¹⁶.

Starting from the fall of 2010 authorities monitored email exchanges between Jarmoune and Campione in which the former expressed his radicalism by saying that his opinion differed slightly from Campione's; he believed that jihad was "*fard'ayn* [an individual obligation], an

13. DIGOS, document on Niriya; Virginia Piccolilli, *Corriere della Sera*, 'L'italiano convertito e pronto alla Jihad; Arrestato a Pesaro', 24 April 2012; *Il Resto del Carlino*, 'Terrorismo internazionale, arrestato 28enne pesarese convertito all'Islam', 23 April 2012.

14. It is unclear what exactly Campione aimed to do once in Morocco and whether his visit was motivated by personal reasons (as he had a relationship with a Moroccan woman) or whether it was supposed to be the first leg of a trip taking him to a field of jihad. Polizia di Stato, 'Inneggiava al terrorismo su Internet, arrestato', 25 April 2012.

15. Ministry of Interior official, interview by author, Milan, September 2013; police officials, interview by author, Brescia, October 2013; Tribunal of Brescia, Verdict 613/13, 16 May 2013; Tribunal of Cagliari, Ordinanza della misura della custodia cautelare in carcere nei confronti di Jarmoune Mohamed, no. 984/2012, 13 March 2012.

16. DIGOS, document on Niriya.

obligation equal to *salat* [prayer] and fasting”¹⁷. Jarmoune’s views were so extreme that Campione initially suspected him of being a spy, an agent provocateur seeking to collect intelligence or trigger criminally relevant behaviours. In a July 2011 email conversation, Campione expressed his doubts to Farina, who reassured him by saying that Jarmoune was not a spy, that he had been writing her and her husband for years and that he had asked Farina’s husband to ‘help him leave’¹⁸. Farina said her husband had told Jarmoune to stop saying certain things on the Internet and to improve his Arabic in order to do better *dawa* [proselytising]¹⁹.

Jarmoune was only a secondary target of Cagliari’s DIGOS’ investigation, but in October 2011, Brescia’s DIGOS, concerned by his growing radicalism, opened a full-fledged investigation on him, intercepting his communications and monitoring his movements²⁰. Jarmoune lived a quiet life, working full time for a small company that installed electrical systems and living with his parents. He rarely went out, did not visit any mosques and had almost no social life, earning the nickname “Mimmo the shy one” in his hometown²¹.

But Brescia’s DIGOS soon discovered that, if watching Jarmoune’s movements was an easy job, monitoring his online activities required an enormous effort. Jarmoune, in fact, spent virtually all the time he was not at work (at times as much as 15 hours a day) on the Internet, disseminating jihadist materials and connecting with like-minded individuals throughout the world²². The texts and videos he posted online ranged from popular jihadist works, such as Anwar al Awlaki’s *44 Ways to Support Jihad*, which Jarmoune himself translated into Italian,

17. *Ibid.*

18. In all likelihood the expression should be interpreted as meaning “to leave for jihad”.

19. DIGOS, document on Niriya.

20. Antonio Chiappani, written conclusions by prosecutor, 15 May 2013.

21. Police officials, interview by the author, Brescia, October 2013; Claudio del Frate, ‘Mimmo il timido, un cane sciolto; Jihad tra cimeli nazisti e musica rap’, *Corriere della Sera*, 17 May 2013.

22. Tribunal of Cagliari, case no. 984/2012, indictment of Mohamed Jarmoune, 13 March 2012.

to documents he penned himself. One of them, titled *How to torture a Muslim*, aims at describing how Westerners, the CIA in particular, have tortured Muslims, and Jarmoune ended it by wishing “May Allah destroy their states and put terror in their hearts and their eyes!”²³. Some of his postings were of a more operational nature. Jarmoune posted many videos and manuals, including the same one Game had used, *Lessons to Destroy the Crucifix*, providing detailed instructions on how to fabricate explosives, use weapons and make bombs from readily available items like instant ice. He also obtained from a Padua-based store a price list of chemicals commonly available on the market, and posted it online.

Jarmoune obtained jihadist propaganda from several password-protected forums and later emailed them directly to his contacts or posted them on various facebook groups. He belonged, in fact, to several facebook groups, with the telling names Secrets of the Internet fighters, Call to jihad, The Islamic revolution of Afghanistan, Voice of jihad and “Getterò il terrore nel cuore dei miscredenti” (I will throw terror in the hearts of the disbelievers). Many of his activities took place on Shreds!!!, a facebook group he administered²⁴. The invitation-only group, which Jarmoune boasted had 330 members, was co-administered by a 40-year-old Yemeni woman living in London who was married to a senior member of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb²⁵. The group aimed at sharing mostly operational information, as one of its rules, “no videos of nasheeds [Islamic chants] and jihadi, just weapons and explosives”, clearly stated. Jarmoune repeatedly scolded members of the online group who breached its security. “This is not a game”, wrote Jarmoune once,

23. Tribunal of Brescia, richiesta di rinnovo di Misura Cautelare personale, 19 March 2012.

24. Ministry of Interior official, interview by the author, Milan, September 2013; Police officials, interviews by the author, Brescia, October 2013; Tribunal of Brescia, Verdict 613/13, 16 May 2013.

25. Police officials, interviews by the author, Brescia, October 2013; Antonio Chiappani, written conclusions by prosecutor, 15 May 2013.

“but 25/30 years in jail if they discover our real identity! May Allah love you and help you kill them!”²⁶.

Jarmoune had proudly devoted his life to spreading jihadism. In an essay he wrote, “I am 20, I have been living in Italy since I was 6 and I started following Islam at the age of 16 and initially found only books and files in Italian, written by modern, phony and moderate Muslims. ... I read them in depth and later I found the truth thanks to God and so I began translating books and files for Italian Muslims but later these Italian brothers abandoned me and I don’t know why? Maybe they are afraid ... and so I stopped speaking to Italian Muslims ... and I began helping Muslims and the nation all over the world. And later I worked with important jhd [jihad] as video producer and other important projects. Now I am the moderator of the jhd forum of God, a great challenge for me and I am very happy about this”²⁷.

Jarmoune, whom authorities describe as a self-taught computer genius, took particular efforts to protect his communications²⁸. He used countless facebook accounts, email addresses, MSN and Yahoo Messenger profiles. Fearing his online activities were monitored, he employed various precautions, including encrypting his messages. In order to do so he accessed the al-Qaeda-linked forum Ansar al-Mujahiddeen, where he took a tutorial in Internet security and downloaded the cryptography software Mujahideen Secrets²⁹.

Yet, despite these precautions, Jarmoune frequently had online conversations that clearly displayed not only his radicalism but also his desire to carry out acts of violence. He chatted with like-minded people, none of whom he had met in person, about jihad, and sought operational help. He asked a self-professed American-based jihadist, for example, whether he could ship weapons to Jarmoune, from the United States to Italy. And in Internet and SMS conversations with a Dutch-Moroccan

26. Tribunal of Brescia, Verdict 613/13, 16 May 2013.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*; Ministry of Interior official, interview by the author, Milan, July 2013; Police officials, interviews by the author, Brescia, October 2013.

29. Ministry of Interior official, interview by the author, Milan, July 2013.

woman he was romancing, he openly stated his desire to die for jihad³⁰. In November 2011, for example, Jarmoune told the woman in a text message that, “[w]hen I will have my home u and the kids can live with us ... but im a mjd [mujahid, Islamic fighter] so u must be ready for all”³¹. He also told her, “I have a j. [jihad] mission ... and maybe I will die soon inshallah [if God wills] ... I will ask intercession for u if I will be shahid [martyr]!” In another conversation he said, “I really want to marry and train you, but you have to know that I cannot promise that, because I do not know when I will die or what will happen to me. As for the operation, you have to think if you are ready to push the button and leave this life forever, not everybody can do that”³².

Some of Jarmoune’s behaviours give the impression of a shy young man who has created a powerful and courageous online persona for himself, a not uncommon dynamic for many people his age. Yet authorities detected signs that gave them the impression Jarmoune could make the leap from simply endorsing and spreading jihadist propaganda – a conduct, to be sure, that is criminally relevant under Italian law – to directly engaging in violence. In January 2012, in fact, Jarmoune saved a file with a Google Maps record of Milan’s main synagogue and the headquarters of Milan’s Jewish community. The video clearly focused on access ways and features such as security cameras and police cars. A similar online surveillance was conducted via Arzaga, where various Milanese Jewish institutions (including a school and a retirement home) are located. Authorities feared that Jarmoune, who had consistently expressed anti-Semitic views, was scouting targets for an attack³³.

On March 15 authorities decided to arrest Jarmoune at his parents’ house. They seized a large amount of computer-related material and found in his car two analogic watches connected to electric wires, a

30. The woman, Amal Azarkan, was linked to the Hofstad group, the network of Dutch radicals that carried out or attempted various attacks throughout the country, including the assassination of Theo van Gogh, in the mid-2000s.

31. Tribunal of Brescia, Verdict 613/13, 16 May 2013.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*; Police officials, interviews by the author, Brescia, December 2013.

commonly used form of detonator³⁴. In his room they also found what appeared to be a blueprint of a circuit connected to four tanks, a battery and a cell phone³⁵. As part of the same operation, British authorities questioned the Yemeni woman who co-administered Shreds!!! with Jarmoune³⁶. And authorities in Gorla Minore, a small town near Varese, searched the home of a 19-year-old female high-school student. The girl, who comes from a well-integrated Moroccan family, had reportedly met Jarmoune online and had become radicalised, downloading and disseminating jihadist material herself³⁷.

Jarmoune was charged under Article 270 quinquies for having trained an unspecified number of people and having provided them with instructions on explosives, weapons, combat and methods to carry out acts of terrorism. In May 2013 he was sentenced to five years and four months. Jarmoune's case can be considered the first case of a pure home-grown jihadist in Italy to have been examined by a court. Unlike Game or other Italian-based jihadists of the past, in fact, Jarmoune is 'sociologically Italian'³⁸. While born in Morocco, he came to Italy at a very young age and all his socialisation (and, a fortiori, his radicalisation) took place in the Brescia area. Moreover, he possessed other characteristics typical of home-grown jihadists, as he became radicalised independently, did not visit mosques, had no real-life connections to established groups and used the Internet as his main platform.

34. Antonio Chiappani, written conclusions by prosecutor, 15 May 2013.

35. Mara Rodella, 'Inflitta una severa condanna al qaedista della porta accanto', *Corriere della Sera*, 17 May 2013.

36. The woman was held under Section 58 of the Terrorism Act on suspicion of 'possessing a document or record containing information of a kind likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism'. See Tom Whitehead and Nick Pisa, 'London woman held as Italians fear plot to target synagogue', *Telegraph*, 15 March 2012.

37. The girl was a friend of another girl whom Jarmoune intended to marry. Police officials, interview by the author, Brescia, October 2013; Claudio del Frate, 'L'islam di Selima, scelta radicale', *Corriere della Sera*, 17 March 2012.

38. See later for an explanation of the term.

3.2 *The el Abboubi case*

As they wrapped up the case against him, authorities stumbled upon another young man of Moroccan descent who, like Jarmoune, lived with his well-integrated family in a small rural town near Brescia. The investigation of Anas el Abboubi began in an unusual and peculiar way. On 17 September 2012 el Abboubi walked into the police headquarters in Brescia and asked if he could obtain the permit necessary to organise a public protest. He told officials that the event aimed at protesting the movie *The Innocence of Muslims*, an anti-Islamic low-budget movie that appeared on the Internet during the late summer of 2012 and sparked protests and riots within Muslim communities worldwide. The young man also said that he planned to publicly burn Israeli flags during the event and display banners containing offensive material targeting US president Barack Obama³⁹. During his visit he also asked stunned officials if they had news about Jarmoune, whom he openly praised⁴⁰.

Brescia police authorities, surprised by the request and the views expressed by the young man, decided to look into his background, starting what became known as Operation Screen Shot⁴¹. Born in Marrakech in October 1992, el Abboubi moved to Italy when he was seven. He lived with his father, who was already living in Italy, his mother and younger brother in Vobarno, a town with 8,000 residents in the Valle Sabbia, a quiet and remote mountainous area 40 kilometres from Brescia⁴². The family is described as well-integrated, and Anas himself is, tellingly, more fluent in Italian, which he speaks with a strong Brescia accent, than in Arabic. In his teen years he attended a technical high school in

39. The event took place in front of Brescia's Freccia Rossa mall on 6 October. Reportedly less than a dozen people attended it.

40. Police officials, interviews by the author, Brescia, October 2013; Wilma Petenzi, 'Nel mirino dello studente pure questore e piazza Loggia', *Corriere della Sera*, 13 June 2013.

41. Polizia di Stato, Operazione "Screenshot", press release, <http://questure.poliziadistato.it/Brescia/articolo-6-91-56067-1.htm> (accessed on 8 December 2013).

42. Ubaldo Vallini, 'A colloquio con papà El Abboubi', *Valle Sabbia News*, 15 June 2013.

Brescia and developed a passion for rap. He was relatively well-known in Brescia's thriving rap scene under the name McKhalifh and often performed with Dr. Domino, another rapper of Moroccan descent from Brescia who has since become known nationwide⁴³.

Providing a uniquely direct insight into what, in hindsight, could be considered the very first stage of his radicalisation process, in March 2012 el Abboubi was profiled by MTV Italia. In an 18-minute interview titled *Nel Ritmo di Allah: La storia di McKhalifh* (In the Rhythm of Allah: The story of McKhalifh), El Abboubi explained his life, views and aspirations with a revealing candour⁴⁴. In what is a clear difference from Jarmoune, who was nicknamed Mimmo the Shy One, the MTV mini-documentary showed the volcanic, at times uncontrollable personality of el Abboubi as he guided the viewers through Vobarno and Brescia, explaining his past, present and future.

The mini-documentary opens with el Abboubi describing his life in the quaint but very small and dull mountain town of Vobarno, which el Abboubi jokingly calls 'Heidi's village'. After saying that Vobarno is a wonderful place and that many people are nice, he adds that "Heidi is often racist", a comment that highlights the ambivalent feelings towards Italians that characterise the entire mini-documentary. Joined by his friend – and fellow Vobarno resident of immigrant origin – B. (who will later become involved in some of el Abboubi's militant initiatives), el Abboubi spoke at length about being subjected to racism and exclusion throughout his life in Vobarno. 'It is a block in life, you are dirty for them,' he stated, 'it is from there that starts this hatred, this differentiating yourself.'

Similar feelings were expressed in the second part of the interview, which was conducted in central Brescia, where el Abboubi was joined by his rapping partner Dr. Domino. Dr. Domino told the interviewer that during the 2006 football World Cup, he and his second-generation immigrant friends were among the loudest in celebrating Italy's final

43. Raffaella Mora, 'Dr. Domino, il fenomeno del rap', *Giornale di Brescia*, 28 January 2013.

44. <http://www.mtvnews.it/storie/la-storia-di-mc-khalifh> (link no longer active).

victory in the streets of Brescia, “proud of being Italian”. Yet, he confessed, waking up the next day and looking in the mirror, his first thought was: ‘Shit, I’m still Moroccan’. El Abboubi agreed, saying, “Me too, same thing”. Yet at times el Abboubi seemed to cherish his dual identity. “When I go to Morocco I represent Italy”, he cheerfully stated. “When I am here they call me Moroccan. I like it like this, it’s OK, it’s not a problem”.

Between performing short rap songs for the cameras, Dr. Domino and el Abboubi also spoke about their desire to obtain results their first-generation immigrant parents could not. ‘My father was a worker so I have to be an entrepreneur,’ stated el Abboubi. Speaking with a thick Brescia accent and even occasionally attempting to speak the local (proverbially difficult) dialect, el Abboubi stated, “I love the *tricolore* [Italian flag], I love Italy”. But he attacked the concept of integration adopted by most Italians, saying they are intolerant of people with different customs and traditions. He also complained about the role of the Northern League, which he said demonised immigrants for political gain and has made people suspicious and diffident.

The last part of the interview focused on el Abboubi’s newfound Islamic faith. He claimed to have converted to Islam a year and a half prior to the interview and that his conversion had had a positive influence on his life. While at age 16 all his concerns, he stated, revolved around how to score drugs and how many beers to drink to get drunk, Islam had completely changed him, giving him meaning, peace and serenity. “Before, I never laughed because society really ruined me. Now I just need to do the ablutions, do the washing, and I feel free, I spiritually fly”.

But something in el Abboubi changed very rapidly. Within a very short time, he went from being a rebellious teenager using alcohol and light drugs to a rapper motivated by Islam and, finally, a committed Islamic militant⁴⁵. By the summer of 2012, in fact, he had abandoned rap, describing music as *haram* (forbidden by Islam), wearing long white

45. Police officials, interviews by the author, Brescia, October 2013; Alessandra Troncana, ‘La mamma: ‘È bravissimo’ I compagni: ‘Un talebano’, *Corriere della Sera*, 13 June 2013.

robes and cutting many of his previous social ties. He also began spending a substantial amount of time online, visiting a vast array of jihadist websites and forums. He had various facebook (Anas Shakur, Anas Abdu Shakur) and twitter profiles (@anas_abdu). He also changed the content of the YouTube channel (McKhalifh) he had held since his rap days to make it more in tune with his newly found religious fervour⁴⁶.

Shortly after el Abboubi's spontaneous visit to Brescia's police headquarters, these activities began to be monitored by the local DIGOS team, which developed an interest in the previously unknown young man. In their analysis, DIGOS officials detected an unusually fast progression towards increasingly radical subjects, tones and views. In September 2012, in fact, el Abboubi's Internet activities displayed strong anti-American and anti-Israel views that, per se, are not uncommon, illegal or particularly alarming. But only a couple of months later el Abboubi was posting texts from Anwar al-Awlaki (the omnipresent *44 Ways to Fight Jihad*⁴⁷), browsing for operational manuals on weapons and on how to make explosives from readily available substances, and translating jihadist texts⁴⁸.

El Abboubi also produced his own material. He made a video entitled *Is this true civilization?*, aimed at criticising Western civilisation and depicting Pope Benedict XVI as a vampire with bloody hands and face. He also posted a poem praising jihad whose Italian-language rhyming lyrics are reminiscent of el Abboubi's rapping days. "Martyrdom seduces me", he wrote, "I want to die armed, I keep the target on the crusade, I am the bullet that inflicts you. ... I thirst for battle, jihad against Italy. ...

46. <http://www.youtube.com/user/MCKHALIF>, accessed on 2 December 2013.

47. Police officials, interviews by the author, Brescia, October 2013

48. When arrested, el Abboubi was reportedly translating the book *The Absent Obligation-Expel the Jews and Christian from the Arabian Peninsula*, written by the leader of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad Mohammed Abdus Salam Faraj, information which came from Brescia police officials in personal interviews in October 2013.

The enemy fears death, the mujahid knows that, France oppresses the weak, the mujahid will kill it'⁴⁹.

By the late fall of 2012 el Abboubi was openly expressing his desire to travel for jihad. While he was fascinated by Mali, where al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb had recently been defeated by French troops, his main interest was the civil war taking place in Syria. He began to seek contacts that could facilitate a trip to the Arab country. Not having any connection in the 'real world', he turned to the Web. Through the Internet he came in contact with several jihadist sympathisers on the Italian scene, including some individuals involved in the Niriya investigation. There are also documented contacts between him and Giuliano Delnevo, the Genoa convert who died in Syria in June 2013 (see later). Authorities are aware of a long phone call between the two on 28 October 2012, and in November Delnevo posted repeatedly on el Abboubi's facebook page. El Abboubi also unsuccessfully attempted to call Delnevo on 25 May 2013, when the Genovese convert was already in Syria⁵⁰.

But many – and, arguably, the most important – of el Abboubi's contacts were not in Italy but abroad. Through twitter and facebook, he connected to Millatu Ibrahim, a German-based militant Salafist group, and participated in various Paltalk lectures given by Omar Bakri, the infamous Lebanon-based cleric who, in the 1990s, was one of the founders of Britain's militant Islamist scene. El Abboubi also managed to connect with Anjem Choudary, Bakri's right-hand man during the cleric's London days, and later the founder of Sharia4UK. The group soon developed as a global franchise, as informal branches of it were opened in Europe, North America and various Middle Eastern and Asian countries. It advocates the introduction of shariah law as a solution to all of society's problems, and its activists, generally few more than a dozen

49. Tribunal of Brescia, Ordinanza di applicazione di misura cautelare 28496/12, 10 June 2013.

50. Police officials, interviews by the author, Brescia, October 2013; Wilma Petenzi, 'Terrorista' a Vobarno, la procura pronta a ricorrere in Cassazione', *Corriere della Sera*, 2 July 2013; Mara Rodella, 'Anas adesso 'rinnega la Jihad: 'Io religioso, ma non terrorista', *Corriere della Sera*, 26 June 2013.

in each country, often engage in highly provocative and confrontational actions aimed at garnering media attention.

El Abboubi was particularly interested in the Belgian offshoot of the movement, Sharia4Belgium. The group, which started as a small outfit devoted mostly to Internet propaganda and the occasional publicity stunt, has, over the past few months, surprised Belgian authorities with its prominent role in helping Belgian volunteers to fight in Syria. In December 2012, el Abboubi, who was in regular contact with a senior member of the group, purchased a ticket to fly to Brussels to meet in person with leaders of Sharia4Belgium. The meeting was postponed because of the arrests carried out against the group by Belgian authorities a few days before el Abboubi's scheduled departure⁵¹.

Even though he reportedly never managed to meet his Sharia4 contacts in person, el Abboubi decided to open the Italian branch of the organisation. On 23 August 2012, in fact, the web page of Sharia4Indonesia celebrated the birth of Sharia4Italy and sent el Abboubi best wishes for his endeavour⁵². In reality, Sharia4Italy was a much smaller and lower-key version of its counterparts in Great Britain or Belgium. To imitate the efforts of more developed branches, el Abboubi involved two friends, one of sub-Saharan descent (B., seen in the MTV mini-documentary) and one of Moroccan descent, from the Vobarno area, and, occasionally, a few other individuals. The young men did some 'street *dama*', took pictures of themselves donning robes and showing an Italian flag with the *shahada* (Islamic profession of faith) in

51. Police officials, interviews by the author, Brescia, October 2013; Laura Damiani, 'Manette al padre di 'Sharia4Italy,' terrorista internazionale', *Corriere della Sera*, 12 June 2013; Wilma Petenzi, 'L'aspirante bombarolo sgridato dal padre per cento euro spariti', *Corriere della Sera*, 14 June 2013. *Il Giorno Brescia*, 'Blitz antiterrorismo, arrestato studente marocchino. Cercava obiettivi da colpire in Italia', 13 June 2013; Wilma Petenzi, 'Post e contatti da Vobarno con i combattenti in Siria', *Corriere della Sera*, 21 June 2013.

52. <http://sharia4indonesia.com/2012/08/lahirnya-gerakan-sharia4italy/> (accessed on 1 December 2013); Police officials, interviews by the author, Brescia, October 2013; Laura Damiani (12 June 2013); Wilma Petenzi (14 June 2013).

central Brescia, and went to the mountains for some hiking and physical training⁵³.

El Abboubi also started the *Sharia4Italy* blog, where he posted his writings, outlining his criticism of global capitalism and man-made legal systems and advocating an Islamic order that would bring about peace and social justice⁵⁴. Together with the other blog he started, *banca-islamica.blogspot.it*, most of el Abboubi's writings focused on a fierce criticism of the Western banking system and a wish to divulge information about Islamic banking. "Enough with interests!" stated a flyer posted online by the group, "Suggest the introduction of an Islamic banking system to your city council"⁵⁵.

In May 2013, authorities, who had observed with growing nervousness el Abboubi's fast-paced radicalisation, became concerned by the fact that the young man had begun researching on Google Maps a variety of iconic sites in Brescia⁵⁶. Authorities feared that el Abboubi, having failed to connect to individuals who could facilitate his trip to Syria or any other country where he could join a jihadist group, had decided to carry out attacks in Italy, and that his Google Maps searches, as with Jarmoune's, were a surveillance of potential targets⁵⁷. On 12 June 2013 authorities

53. Police officials, interviews by the author, Brescia, October 2013; photo available at <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=307303602715564&set=pb.100003077808791.-2207520000.1385657145.&type=3&theater> (accessed on 5 December 2013).

54. <http://sharia4italy.blogspot.it/> (accessed on 5 December 2013).

55. <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=278023758976882&set=pb.100003077808791.-2207520000.1385651977.&type=3&theater> (accessed on 5 December 2013).

56. The sites include Brescia's train station, the Goito military barracks, the Cristal Palace skyscraper, piazza della Loggia and the Kennedy overpass. Tribunal of Brescia, case no. 7456/11, Indictment of Anas El Abboubi, 10 June 2013; Wilma Petenzi, 'Nel mirino dello studente pure questore e piazza Loggia', *Corriere della Sera*, 13 June 2013.

57. Police officials, interviews by the author, Brescia, October 2013.

arrested el Abboubi and charged him under Article 270 quinquies for having provided training and instructions for terrorism purposes⁵⁸.

On 18 June el Abboubi's lawyers filed a motion to dismiss the case against him.⁵⁹ They claimed that, unlike Jarmoune, el Abboubi was only an occasional and passive consumer of jihadist propaganda. Most files, they argued, had been watched but had not been saved or sent to other individuals. Moreover, the few files that had been shared did not provide specific instructions or actual training. Rather, they argued, they were not dissimilar to documentaries that anyone can watch on television. Tellingly, added the lawyers, most came from YouTube, not password-protected, al-Qaeda-linked sites. Moreover, concluded the lawyers, el Abboubi had researched locations in the Brescia area out of pure curiosity. Those were, in fact, places he frequented regularly and, had he sought to target them, he had no need to scout them online when he could visit them in person any day. The court accepted the lawyers' arguments and el Abboubi was released. In November 2013 the Corte di Cassazione, Italy's highest court, confirmed the court's decision⁶⁰.

By then, el Abboubi had apparently left Italy. In August 2013 he created a new facebook profile under the name Anas Al-Italy and indicated his location as Aleppo, Syria⁶¹. In apparent open defiance to Italian authorities, on 16 September he wrote, "[f]ree to run like a bird in the sky". Three days later, he praised Syrian children, writing that "here children are very dignified despite their situation; every time I offer them money or food, they refuse, as if they were already rich". He also posted several pictures of himself shooting or posing with heavy weapons. Italian authorities contacted for this study confirm that shortly

58. Tribunale of Brescia, Ordinanza di applicazione di misura cautelare, case no. 28496/12, 10 June 2013.

59. Tribunale del riesame, case no. 348/2013, 1 July 2013; Antonio Chiappani, Brescia prosecutor, and Nicola Mannatrizio, El Abboubi's lawyer, interviews by the author, Brescia, September and October 2013; Wilma Petenzi, 'Terrorista' a Vobarno, la procura pronta a ricorrere in Cassazione', *Corriere della Sera*, 2 July 2013.

60. *Brescia Oggi*, 'El Abboubi resta libero, ma è 'scomparso'', 9 November 2013.

61. <https://www.facebook.com/anas.alitaly.7> (accessed 24 November 2013)

after his release el Abboubi indeed travelled to Syria and joined the al-Qaeda-linked Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant⁶².

El Abboubi's facebook page, which has more than 200 contacts, is quite active. He posts pictures, comments and links, many of which generate a lively debate among his friends. Particularly noteworthy is a video titled *Response to secular fundamentalism* in which el Abboubi, speaking in front of a camera, outlined his spiritual testament. In a cadence reminiscent of his rap days, he delivered a 15-minute condemnation of Western society, which he describes as 'perverse and melancholic'.

In the first minutes of the video, el Abboubi spoke about his detention in Italy, condemning how authorities sought to submit, terrorise and label him as an extremist without attempting to understand his positions and his rejection of Western society. "I am one of the many immigrants who have rooted their childhood in this Europe consumed by hypocrisy", he charged, before delving into a 360-degree indictment of Western society. "With whom should I integrate my principles?" asks el Abboubi before accusing Italian society of crimes ranging from individualism to sexual promiscuity, and from discrimination to maltreatment of its elderly. Aside from a handful of occasional references to the Islamic banking system and the Sykes-Picot agreements, el Abboubi's speech is devoid of references to global issues and is an indictment of the values (or, better, lack thereof) of Italian and Western society.

It is interesting to note that his comments triggered lively debates among his facebook friends, most of which are Italian Muslims. Many of his friends loudly cheer his bravery for travelling to Syria. Yet many also challenge his views and actions. Interestingly, many of the challengers are women who, judging from their facebook profile, do not appear to be Muslim. But some are conservative Salafists, who challenge el Abboubi's positions on jihad from a theological perspective. Yet others, including some active members of the Italian online jihadist scene,

62. Ministry of Interior officials, interviews by the author, Rome, November 2013; Police officials, interviews by the author, Brescia, November 2013. See also Claudio del Frate, 'Anas, 'l'islamista rap' cresciuto nel Bresciano e scappato in Siria a inseguire la Jihad', *Corriere della Sera*, 22 November 2013.

counter these challenges, arguing that fighting in Syria constitutes jihad and praising those who travel there. These long debates with hundreds of posts provide interesting insights into a certain cross section of the Italian Muslim community.

3.3 From Genoa to Syria: the Delnevo case

Another active member of the Italian online jihadist scene gained the spotlight in June 2013, when news broke that Giuliano Ibrahim Delnevo had died in Syria. Delnevo was born in Genoa in February 1989, the second son of parents who separated when he was still an infant. He grew up mostly with his mother in an apartment in Genoa's historic centre, a maze of medieval alleys a stone's throw from the sea and one of Italy's most ethnically diverse areas.

Described by most, including his father, as quiet and somewhat introverted, Delnevo grew up without many friends⁶³. An average student, he enrolled at a nautical technical high school after graduating from middle school. Experiencing academic and socialisation difficulties, according to his father, he found refuge in the only person he befriended, a classmate of Moroccan descent. The two became inseparable and Delnevo became close to his friend's friends, all second-generation immigrants of North African descent. The group was not religious but, rather, enjoyed clubbing and other 'Western' activities.

Once they turned 18, Delnevo and his Moroccan friend decided to drop out of school and leave for Ancona, where Delnevo's older brother worked as a nautical engineer. There Delnevo got a job as a handyman in a shipyard and met a group of fellow workers who reportedly were members of Tablighi Jamaat, a missionary movement whose adepts

63. Carlo Delnevo, Giuliano's father, interview by the author, Sestri Levante, October 2013; Marco Imarisio, 'Quei 40-50 jihadisti partiti per la Siria dalle città italiane', *Corriere della Sera*, 19 June 2013; Giulia Guerri, 'All'improvviso è cambiato e voleva vietare di vendere alcol', *Il Giornale*, 19 June 2013; Bruno Persano, 'Mio figlio è morto da eroe e oggi sono orgoglioso di lui', *La Repubblica*, 19 June 2013.

focus on spreading their conservative interpretation of Islam⁶⁴. Delnevo converted to Islam and began taking part in the city's Muslim community. It is difficult to assess what drove Delnevo to Islam first and then to increasingly militant interpretations of the religion, but various sources speculate that he may have found, in the creed, a stability, certitude and sense of belonging that he had longed for when growing up.

Once back in Genoa after a few months in Ancona, Delnevo obtained a high-school diploma and enrolled in university. But his studies did not interest him, and he devoted all his time to Islam. He befriended Umar Andrea Lazzaro, another Genovese convert who was known for his previous militancy in the local right-wing scene. (It is noteworthy that, according to his father, Delnevo himself had held Fascist sympathies since an early age and had occasionally frequented the local headquarters of the right-wing group *Fronte Nazionale*)⁶⁵. Lazzaro, who currently runs several blogs related to conservative interpretations of Islam, described the beginning of his friendship with Delnevo: "We did not want to follow the mass, we were looking for a link with the transcendent that went beyond our produce-consume-die [routine]"⁶⁶.

The two immediately formed a close relationship and were the driving forces of a small group of Genovese converts that became active in the local Islamic scene. The group was attracted at various stages by different, albeit all very conservative, forms of Islam, but eventually settled for the Deobandi school. The Genovese men were reportedly introduced to this South Asian form of ultra-orthodox Islam by a Pakistani man living in Bologna⁶⁷. After several trips in both directions, the Genoa-Bologna link was eventually interrupted, but Delnevo, Lazzaro and the

64. Police officials, interviews by the author, Genoa, October 2013; Carlo Delnevo, Giuliano's father, interview by the author, Sestri Levante, October 2013; Marco Imarisio, 'Quei 40-50 jihadisti partiti per la Siria dalle città italiane', *Corriere della Sera*, 19 June 2013; Bruno Persano (19 June 2013).

65. Carlo Delnevo (October 2013).

66. Marco Imarisio (19 June 2013).

67. Police officials, interview with the author, Genoa, October 2013.

small group of Genovese converts remained strongly influenced by the Deobandi school.

The small group sought to create a thriving Islamist scene in Genoa but did not find a fertile environment. All local mosques, even the most conservative, shunned the men. Interviewed by *Corriere della Sera* shortly after Delnevo's death, the imam of a small prayer room in Vico Amandorla, an alley a few blocks from Delnevo's mother's apartment, described his mosque's approach: "You Italians, you always exaggerate. At the end we were forced to kick them out, the Italians. Here we pray, we teach Arabic to children and we try to avoid fanaticism"⁶⁸. There is no doubt that many mosques did so because they disagreed with the men's views. Others, initially more accepting, eventually kicked them out for fear, possibly, that the men were bringing unwanted attention from authorities. Delnevo and Lazzaro, in fact, dressed in traditional Muslim garb, an unusual sight even in Genoa's diverse historical centre, and openly expressed ultra-conservative, if not militant, views inside mosques. It is quite likely that some mosques and the few 'traditional' radical clusters in the Genoa area decided not to interact with the group of converts, deeming them a security risk. An ethnic gap, a reluctance by some first-generation Muslim immigrants to trust Italian converts, could also have played a role.

Struggling to establish connections locally, but desperately seeking ways to increase their Islamic knowledge and commitment, the group started looking abroad. The men began establishing connections in other European countries with more established Islamist scenes. Given their fascination with the Deobandi school, they naturally gravitated around Great Britain, where various Islamic organisations cater to the large South Asian population. The men travelled to Birmingham, home to countless conservative Islamic institutions, and attended a seminar in Dewsbury, the European headquarters of Tablighi Jamaat⁶⁹. There are no indications that these meetings involved anything related to violence, but they unquestionably reinforced the group's commitment

68. Marco Imarisio (19 June 2013).

69. Police officials, interview with the author, Genoa, October 2013.

to an extremely conservative interpretation of Islam and provided them with connections with like-minded individuals throughout Europe and beyond.

Equally important in this process was the Internet. Through social networks Delnevo was in contact with many like-minded individuals throughout Italy, including various targets of the Niriya investigation and, as seen, Anas el Abboubi⁷⁰. He also started his own YouTube channel, which he called Liguristan (a play on word on the name Liguria, the Italian region of which Genoa is the capital). The channel clearly displayed Delnevo's progressive radicalisation, as *nasbeeds* [Islamic songs] and Qur'an recitations were increasingly replaced by political and religious messages characterised by aggressive tones.

With his life revolving around Islamic activism, Delnevo did not work or study. Online he met a Moroccan woman 13 years his senior and married her shortly thereafter. He moved to Tangier to live with her, studying Arabic and deepening his Islamic studies, but went back to Genoa without her after a few months. According to all accounts, Delnevo was driven by the all-consuming, obsessive desire to fight in jihad. He therefore soon became disenchanted with the activities of his small group of converts in Genoa and started detaching from it⁷¹. If the more intellectually prone Lazzaro was apparently satisfied with posting erudite translations of Deobandi and other conservative Islamic writings and commentaries online, Delnevo was a man of action who saw in jihad, which he clearly intended as armed struggle, the apex of his Islamic life. In the words of Usama al Santawy, a prominent leader of the informal second-generation Salafist movement in Italy, who knew him personally, Delnevo had "jihad running through his veins"⁷².

Having broken with Lazzaro, Delnevo abandoned the Genovese scene. He began looking for individuals with more militant views and,

70. *Ibid.*

71. Others have suggested that the reasons for the split were theological (Italian convert J., telephone interview by the author, November 2014). It is likely that both factors played a role.

72. Usama el Santawy, interview by the author, Milan, November 2013.

most importantly, connections that would have allowed him to join a field of jihad, wherever it may have been. He began frequenting a mosque in the Imperia province run by Egyptians with known militant ties and the larger militant scene in Milan. In the summer of 2012, Delnevo attempted to fulfil his desires to fight in jihad by travelling to Turkey, and from there seeking to cross into Syria. His attempt failed and he returned to Italy. Alfredo Maiolese, one of the leaders of Genoa's Muslim community, spoke with Delnevo shortly thereafter. "He had been in two refugee camps, but he could not find the right contact, he could not get in", recounted Maiolese. "He complained that he could not find work here in Italy, he was saying that his studies were pointless. He had a strange light in his eyes. I told him to calm down, that Islam means helping, not shooting. He said he only needed to be better organised, that next time would have been the good one. I never saw him again"⁷³.

Indeed, the second time, Delnevo did appear to have been better organised. In the fall of 2012 he shaved his beard and started wearing Western clothes again, giving many the impression he had shed his radicalism, when, in hindsight, these changes were likely intended to make him less conspicuous. In December he flew from Milan to Turkey. A few weeks later he called his father, telling him he had reached Syria and was fighting with a group of foreign fighters led by Chechen militants. Authorities are currently trying to establish how Delnevo managed to enter Syria and connect with the Chechen-led militant group. Details are unclear but, based on an analysis of general patterns and the preliminary findings of the investigation, it is widely believed that Delnevo benefited from ties he had built before arriving in Syria. It is likely, in fact, that Delnevo had finally managed to find a gatekeeper that, trusting him, allowed him to enter into contact with an established jihadist group. The hypothesis that Delnevo did so without external help seems highly unlikely. What constitutes a difficult and relevant puzzle is where and how this facilitation took place, particularly if it took place in Italy.

Once in Syria, Delnevo seemed to be, as his father said, 'happier than I had ever heard him'. He told his father in their frequent Skype

73. Marco Imarisio (19 June 2013).

conversations that he had found his life's calling in the war-torn Arab country (using the Qur'anic expression '*assirat al mustaqeem*', the right path) and did not mind the harshness of the conflict⁷⁴. This enthusiasm was also shared with J., a fellow Italian convert he had met online, to whom Delnevo said that martyrs killed in Syria had a sweet scent, and to whom he expressed optimism about the final outcome of the conflict⁷⁵.

In a dramatic Skype conversation on June 11, Delnevo told his father that the enemy was only 100 metres away and to pray for him⁷⁶. On the next day the father received a call from a man using Delnevo's cell phone, telling him that his son Giuliano had died the night before while trying to help a fellow fighter of Somali origin who had been shot⁷⁷. Delnevo was the first Italian known to have died while fighting against the regime of Bashar al Assad in Syria. His eulogy, which referred to him as Abu Musa, was featured on various jihadist websites⁷⁸. Some Italian users honoured him on the Al-Fidaa web forum, one of the global movement's most prominent⁷⁹.

74. Carlo Delnevo (October 2013); Bruno Persano (19 June 2013).

75. J., telephone interview by the author, November 2013.

76. Carlo Delnevo (October 2013).

77. Bruno Persano, 'Mio figlio è morto da eroe e oggi sono orgoglioso di lui', *La Repubblica*, 19 June 2013.

78. <https://www.facebook.com/ghurabasyrien.syrien> (accessed on 21 September 2013).

79. <https://twitter.com/IntelTweet/status/349040844843659265>

4 ANALYSING ITALIAN HOME-GROWN JIHADISM

Cases like those of Jarmoune, el Abboubi and Delnevo indicate that a home-grown jihadism with characteristics similar to the phenomenon seen over the past few years throughout central and northern Europe has arrived in Italy. Three cases do not make a trend, but there are indications that those three cases are not isolated incidents, but, rather, the tip of the iceberg, the most visible manifestations of a (relatively) larger phenomenon.

The current panorama of jihadism in Italy is extremely fragmented and diverse, characterised by the presence of various actors with markedly different features. The arrival of home-grown jihadism in Italy does not mean that traditional networks are no longer operating. Many of them, as seen, have been significantly weakened by the waves of arrests and expulsions carried out by authorities over the past 15 years. And, more recently, several important players have voluntarily left Italy in the wake of the Arab Spring to join jihadist groups that have become more active throughout North Africa. But, as the 2011 and 2012 intelligence reports to the Italian Parliament clearly state, individuals and clusters inserted into predominantly North African jihadist networks are still active throughout Italy¹.

Following traditional patterns, most of these networks are located in Lombardy, but there are important presences also in Campania, Piedmont,

1. 2011 annual report to the Italian Parliament (*Relazione sulla politica dell'informazione per la sicurezza*), p. 76; 2012 annual report to the Italian Parliament (*Relazione sulla politica dell'informazione per la sicurezza*), p. 20.

Veneto, Toscana and Emilia Romagna². Occasionally their presence is also detected in other regions, as a May 2013 operation carried out by the Carabinieri ROS showed. The operation, dubbed Masrah (which means theatre), dismantled a cell of North African militants operating between Apulia, Sicily and Belgium. The men were first-generation immigrants with close connections to Milan's ICI. Authorities accused them of recruiting and planning attacks against American, Israeli and Italian targets³.

Among these networks Italian authorities have grown particularly concerned about the Tunisian component. Several of the top leaders of Ansar al Sharia Tunisia have strong ties to Italy⁴. Ansar al Sharia Tunisia is a Salafist group with strong jihadist tendencies that, since its foundation in the wake of the overthrow of then President Ben Ali, has posed a serious political and security threat to post-revolutionary Tunisia. Many of its leaders have spent time in Italy and been, at some stage, arrested and deported to Ben Ali's Tunisia, where they generally spent additional time in jail. These individuals retain contacts in Italy and indications are that they are currently leveraging them to obtain various forms of logistical support for their struggle in Tunisia⁵. Ansar al Sharia's main goal appears to be the establishment of an Islamic order in Tunisia and there are no indications the group has any plan to attack Italy. But considering the personal grudge some of its top members have against the country, the possibility of an attack should be taken into consideration.

Operating, as it will be seen, with virtually no overlap with these traditional networks, is the second component of the current phase of Italian jihadism: home-grown lone operators and small clusters. Even though scholarly opinions on the definitions are not homogeneous, the

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

3. *Reuters*, 'Italian police Arrest Four Suspected Islamist Militants', 30 April 2013.

4. Aaron Y. Zelin, 'Who's Who in Tunisia's Salafi-Jihadi Community: A Look at Key Leaders of Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia', *Militant Leadership Monitor*, April 2013; Aaron Y. Zelin, 'Meeting Tunisia's Ansar al-Sharia', *Foreign Policy*, 8 March 2013.

5. Italian intelligence officials, interviews by the author, Rome, November 2013.

characteristic commonly used to define a militant as home-grown is that he or she was born or grew up in the country. The important element, in substance, is that the individual has been socialised in Italy; citizenship is not relevant. In this specific case, since Italy's current legislation does not automatically give citizenship to individuals born on Italian soil if at least one of their parents is not Italian (and it is difficult to obtain naturalisation), few individuals of immigrant origin are Italian citizens. The term 'sociological Italians' is used to describe those individuals.

The 2012 intelligence report to the Italian Parliament mentioned the presence of individuals "belonging to the second generation of immigrants and Italian converts who are characterised by an uncompromising interpretation of Islam and attitudes of intolerance towards Western customs"⁶. It is an extremely small phenomenon, statistically insignificant when related to the numbers of Muslims living in Italy, and smaller than in most central and northern European countries. Providing exact numbers is an impossible task, given, among the many factors, the arbitrariness of certain categorisations and the difficulties in obtaining reliable empirical data. But, based on the monitoring of online social networks conducted for this study, and conversations with several senior Italian counterterrorism officials, it is possible to provide some extremely rough estimates.

It can be argued that the number of individuals actively involved in this new home-grown jihadist scene is about 40 or 50, and that those with varying degrees of sympathy with it number somewhere in the lower hundreds. It is, in substance, a small milieu of individuals with varying sociological profiles – age, sex, ethnic origin, education, social condition – who share a commitment for jihadist ideology⁷. Most of them interact with like-minded individuals both in Italy and outside of it online. Most of them likely know each other through various online social networks. Most of them are scattered throughout northern Italy,

6. 2012 annual report to the Italian Parliament (*Relazione sulla politica dell'informazione per la sicurezza*), p. 46.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

from big cities like Milan, Genoa and Bologna to tiny rural villages. A few are located in the centre or the south of the country⁸.

Most of these people have not been involved in any violent activity. Most of them limit their commitment to jihadist ideology to often frantic online activity aimed at publishing and disseminating materials that range from the purely theological to the operational. While this activity at times represents a violation of Article 270 quinquies of the Italian penal code, most home-grown Italian jihadist wannabes are just that – wannabes – and do not resort to violence. Yet, as the cases of Jarmoune, el Abboubi, and Delnevo show, occasionally some members of this country-wide informal scene do – or, at least, attempt to – make the leap from the keyboard to the real world. When, why and how that leap from virtual to actual militancy happens is the subject of much debate and concern among counterterrorism officials and experts.

This chapter will attempt to analyse various issues related to the nascent Italian home-grown jihadist scene. It will first outline its key characteristics, including its dearth of ties to mosques and traditional jihadist networks, its massive online presence, and its links with foreign-based like-minded networks. It will analyse linkages, highlighting dynamics that have led individuals into action. It will then look at two controversial issues: the relationship between radicalisation and integration, and the legal challenges posed by the phenomenon.

4.1 Little mosque, lots of Internet

Most home-grown jihadist networks seen throughout Europe over the past 12 years possessed similar core characteristics. There are exceptions, but most of them possessed few ties to large mosques; held, at least at the onset of their activities, no connections with established jihadist groups; and the Internet played a crucial role in all of their activities, from the

8. Ministry of Interior officials, interviews by the author, Rome, November 2013; Italian intelligence officials, interviews by the author, Rome, November 2013.

radicalisation to the operational phase. Similar dynamics are at play in the Italian scene.

Similarly, it seems apparent that the nascent Italian home-grown jihadist scene has few connections to mosques. An important distinction, despite its inherent arbitrariness, should be made between radical and non-radical mosques. As for the latter, which are obviously in the majority, many cases have shown that wannabe jihadists get little or no traction inside them and are often asked not to attend. Dynamics change from case to case, and are often shaped by local and personal factors. Occasionally a mosque whose leadership has no radical views is frequented by Italian home-grown activists, in some cases because activists do not openly express their views. In other cases, it could be that mosque officials are unaware of their views, which activists might spread to a handful of worshippers unbeknownst to mosque officials. Some mosque leadership tolerates certain jihadist-inspired activities. But, generally speaking, mosques are not a welcoming place for Italian home-grown activists. In some cases activists do not frequent them anyway, either because they consider them out of tune with the activists' interpretation of Islam or because they fear surveillance by authorities⁹. But in most cases, it is mosque officials who make it clear that certain views and activities are not tolerated on the premises. That appears to be what happened, as recounted earlier, with Delnevo and his small group in Genoa. Most Italian mosques, have, in the words of Claudio Galzerano, a dean of the Italian counterterrorism community, the 'right antibodies,' and screen out bad apples from the start¹⁰.

A separate analysis should be devoted to radical mosques, dividing them into two categories: radical mosques traditionally controlled or heavily influenced by militant networks (like Milan's ICI) and unconnected radical mosques. As for the former, the less permissive

9. That appears to be the case for Jarmoune and el Abboubi. The former was not known to attend any mosque and authorities never spotted him entering one during the months they tailed him. The latter sporadically attended Vobarno's mosque, where the father was active, but did not regularly attend any mosque.

10. Claudio Galzerano, *Divisione Terrorismo Internazionale della Direzione Centrale della Polizia di Stato*, interview by the author, Rome, October 2013.

environment of the past few years has put an end to the era of openly jihadist mosques in Italy, as in Europe. Most historically militant mosques have retained their outlook, and in many cases certain activities still take place. Operation Masrah showed that the leadership of a traditional, first-generation jihadist mosque (Andria's) still at times involves itself in openly militant activities. But, generally speaking, most mosques linked to well-established jihadist networks have learned to operate with much greater discretion. As for unconnected radical mosques, the cases of Ponte Felcino, Macherio and Sellia Marina show that there are cases in which the leadership, despite its limited or non-existent ties to well-established jihadist structures, involve themselves directly in militant activities.

Yet, interestingly, there are virtually no indications of any links between radical Italian mosques, whether connected or unconnected, and the nascent home-grown scene¹¹. Most of its members, in fact, do not appear to attend well-known radical mosques. And, based on their monitoring of both milieus, authorities are inclined to believe that there are few or no contacts between jihadist networks of the first generation and home-grown activists. Small exceptions do exist. At the beginning of his radicalisation process, Delnevo did frequent a well-connected Bologna-based Pakistani militant. And reportedly Andrea Campione did find a mentor with a radical pedigree¹². But these connections seem episodic and of limited consequence. For the most part, the two milieus seem to inhabit parallel universes, sharing a common ideology but almost never crossing paths.

Various factors might explain this dynamic. One appears to be the linguistic barrier between the two groups. While militants of the first generation are largely North Africans whose native language is Arabic and whose fluency in Italian is often limited, the home-grown activists are the opposite, often hampering communication between the two. But arguably more important in explaining the disconnection between the

11. Ministry of Interior officials, interviews by the author, Rome, November 2013, and Milan, September 2013.

12. *Ibid.*

two groups is the diffidence with which traditional groups view the new home-grown generation.

The secretive and risk-averse traditional groups appear unreceptive to the newcomers. It is likely that they suspect some of the home-grown activists, particularly Italian converts, to be spies seeking to infiltrate them. Even if the veracity of the home-grown activists' commitment is proven, their behaviour is often deemed risky. Many of them, in fact, look (long white robes, military fatigues, long beard) or act in extremely conspicuous ways. They often openly express their radical views online or in various public venues. This inevitably attracts the attention of authorities, making the home-grown activists extremely unattractive in the eyes of the traditional groups.

In other European countries, this gap has often been closed, and home-grown and traditional structures cooperate or even merge. That might be because the linguistic gap has been bridged or because a home-grown scene has existed for longer. And it is possible that, in some cases, that gap is closing in Italy as well. Dynamics on these matters do not follow predetermined patterns, and in some cases individual, local circumstances (a casual encounter, a trust connection formed between a militant of the old generation and one of the home-grown scene) could close the gap. But, for the time being, there are no indications of any overlap between the two.

Completely at odds with mainstream mosques and Islamic organisations, shunned by established jihadist networks and operating as individuals or small clusters throughout the national territory, Italian home-grown jihadists have created their own scene, mostly Internet-based. The importance of the Internet in the radicalisation process of most contemporary European jihadists cannot be overstated. As in the case of many ideologies, it is on the Internet that many jihadists first discovered jihadist ideology, deepened their interest in it and interacted with like-minded individuals. Jihadist groups have long discovered the enormous potential of the Internet and had already established a strong online presence by the 1990s. Today there are countless websites disseminating jihadist propaganda and allowing jihadist sympathisers

to interact among themselves. Some of these websites are run directly by jihadist groups or people affiliated with them, but over the past few years there has been a remarkable growth in websites run by unaffiliated individuals. The boom of online social media has exponentially increased the ability of individuals to access and disseminate jihadist propaganda online through interactive platforms such as facebook, twitter, YouTube, Paltalk and Instagram.

While in the 1990s most jihadist websites were in Arabic or, to a lesser degree, other non-European languages, over the past 10 years there has been a remarkable increase in the number of websites in English and, albeit to a lesser degree, other European languages such as French, German and Dutch. Individuals throughout Europe, whose degree of proximity to 'real' terrorist networks ranges from close to nil, post online statements from jihadist groups, news about various conflicts, texts from prominent Salafist/jihadist clerics and commentaries on related issues. Initially limited to websites and blogs, this material is now posted on more interactive platforms as well. Interactions on the many forums, Paltalk chat rooms, facebook, twitter and Instagram pages allow wannabe jihadists to feel part of a global community, largely increasing their belief in and commitment to the cause.

The many manifestations of this phenomenon are present also in Italy, albeit with a lower intensity than in most northern and central European countries. The author of this report sought to observe the online activities of seemingly Italian-based individuals frequenting Salafist virtual circles and, in many cases, supporting jihadist views. In order to do this, the author searched for Italian users on well-known jihadist forums. Using vBlueprint, a tool developed by the US security consulting firm Flashpoint Global Partners, the author was able to geolocate individuals in Italy accessing a range of top-tier jihadi forums including Shumukh, Ansar al-Mujahideen Arabic, al Qimmah, Ansar al-

Mujahideen English. It found that hundreds of Italian-based individuals regularly access those sites¹³.

Moreover, the author observed the activities on facebook of a small, loosely-knit community of Italian-speaking individuals supporting some of the most militant interpretations of Salafism. In order to do this, the author, with the help of three experienced research assistants, first identified the facebook pages of some core Italian-based individuals who are well known for their radical views – Jarmoune, Delnevo, el Abboubi, Farina – and a handful of suspects identified by authorities in Operation Niriya. The author and his assistants then scanned the Friends sections and the comments on their facebook profiles, examining all their contacts' facebook pages. The Friends sections of these people's facebook profiles were similarly analysed.

Of the more than 10,000 profiles identified with this method, a few hundred were selected as being of interest. Various admittedly subjective and unempirical considerations were used to determine whether a profile was of interest. The main two were consistently posting jihadist-leaning material and being connected to several individuals that showed jihadist sympathies. Both actions constitute merely a preliminary indication that the subject has jihadist sympathies and not proof, since many alternative explanations might be given to account for their activities. The public facebook profiles of the roughly 200 individuals identified with this method were monitored from August 2013 to January 2014¹⁴.

For legal reasons it is not possible to publish details and personal information about the postings of Italian-based individuals observed

13. It should be noted that vBlueprint recognizes only the IP from which a jihadi website is accessed and that only authorities – and not this researcher – can identify the individual connecting from the given IP address. It is therefore impossible for this author to determine whether these Italian-based individuals belong to the first or the second generation of Italian jihadism. It is also possible that some of the Italian-based individuals accessing those sites are law-enforcement and intelligence officers, researchers, individuals who have stumbled upon them by coincidence or curiosity, or individuals that happen to be in Italy for a time but are not Italian residents.

14. This kind of monitoring does not provide an even remotely complete view of the online activities of Italian-based individuals supporting Salafist and jihadist views. The author is not in possession of any of the tools authorities employ to verify

for this study. But it is nonetheless possible to highlight general trends that characterise the activities of what can be defined as the small but active online community of Italian-based jihad enthusiasts. The term community should not be interpreted to mean that there is a cohesive and well-established group of Italian-based online activists. Rather, there are Italian-based individuals who, with varying degrees of frequency, visit a small number of websites or interact among themselves through online social networks. They represent a community only in the broad sense of the term.

It should also be noted that not all individuals belonging to this scene can be lumped together or automatically identified as jihadists or dangerous. Rather, each case should be viewed individually. Some people openly endorse some of the crudest actions carried out by jihadist groups worldwide, post eulogies of Osama bin Laden or Anwar al-Awlaki, write comments with somewhat veiled threats to Italy and the West, and, as seen in some of the cases described above, exchange among themselves operational manuals. Most others post mostly theological materials with a clear Salafist spin, controversial but entirely legal political commentary and some occasional 'likes' of jihadist videos posted by other users. Proof that lumping these profiles and individuals together would be misleading comes in the frequent, vitriolic, online spats that pit two or more members of the scene against each other over a myriad of political and religious issues. The legitimacy of the use of violence (where, when, how, against whom) is one of the most frequently debated issues.

Yet, despite these differences, all individuals belonging to this scene are interested in some of the most conservative and militant fringes of Salafism and, to some degree, jihadism, and are connected to each other on facebook. Even though it is difficult for this author to establish these dynamics, it is apparent that many of these people know each other also in 'real life'. In some cases, the real-life connection takes place after they have met online. In others, it is the reverse; individuals connect online after having met at an event, mosque or through common friends. By

the real identities of online users. It is therefore possible that some of the data posted by online users (names, locations and so on) are not accurate.

the same token, facebook communications provide only a partial view of the interactions among these subjects, who often move their potentially sensitive conversations to other, more private platforms, such as email, private facebook chat or instant messaging platforms.

Some 50 individuals are the key connectors of this scene, extremely active online (and, in some cases, also in the real world) and in constant communication with many other online users. Their sociological profiles are diverse but many of them are Italian converts in their late twenties and early thirties. Others are individuals of foreign background who were either born or have spent many years in Italy. Interestingly, individuals of North African descent (one of the largest cross sections of the Italian Muslim population and traditionally at the heart of jihadist networks in Italy) are underrepresented. Somewhat over-represented, on the other hand, are individuals tracing their roots to Albania, Kosovo and, to a lesser degree, Bosnia.

For them, militant Salafism, whether in its openly jihadist or less extreme forms, seems to be their main interest in life. Aside from frequently updated facebook pages, many of these connectors also run one or more blogs and twitter accounts. Unlike most of the militants of the first generation, who were passive consumers of online propaganda, the new generation of home-grown activists are often also active producers of their own jihadist materials. As seen in the case of Jarmoune, el Abboubi, Delnevo and many others, these activists translate and post various texts and produce their own videos – of remarkable quality in some cases.

Revolving around these core activists is a larger group of individuals whose commitment, at least judging from the limited evidence their facebook profiles provide, seems less intense. In this much larger milieu, it is not uncommon to find individuals who occasionally express a ‘like’ for some militant video or post a short endorsement of some jihadist-related individual or activity, but whose commitment appears to stop there. Some of them appear to have a less stereotypical profile. They are usually Muslims (in some cases it is not clear) but most of their interests

(clubbing, hip hop, dating) are not those commonly associated with militant Islamism.

The loose and informal jihadist-sympathising, online community in Italy acts in ways similar to most online communities. Members 'friend' each other, tag each other in photos and post on each other's wall. They advertise local events and news of interest, they set up meetings and discussion groups, they interact among themselves in ways that range from egging each other on to having furious spats. One of the most common forms of interaction is debate of current affairs. Members of facebook groups or groups of friends comment on issues that range from Italian politics to various conflicts in Muslim-majority countries, adding information in the form of links or videos and providing commentary.

Many members of the community post jihadist links and occasionally click 'like' but do not openly endorse jihadist groups (expressing a 'like' does not necessarily mean endorsement of the group's actions). Others are less cautious, openly expressing their support for various jihadist groups' views and actions. Posts expressing strong anti-Semitic views, and wishing harm against specific individuals, are also not uncommon. Some users even post pictures of individuals (in some cases, apparently, themselves) in military fatigues and holding automatic weapons.

These endorsements for jihadist groups and their actions can be seen in different ways. On one level, one should not be alarmist. Several studies have demonstrated that people adopt online positions and statements that are significantly more extreme than any stance they would take in real life. There are countless online forums for right-wing militants, anarchists, animal-rights activists and other ideologies, brimming with individuals threatening bellicose actions. Yet most people who invoke extreme violence online are unlikely to engage in any kind of similar activity in real life. Most 'jihadist cyber warriors' are exactly like all other cyber warriors: virtual extremists who will never translate their keyboard fantasies into action. Many individuals who frequent the Italian online community of jihad sympathisers will eventually grow out

of their enthusiasm. Many others will retain certain views but will never act upon them in any violent way.

Yet, experience has shown that, in some cases, individuals who are active on online platforms do eventually make the leap into physical action, even without real-life interactions with other militants. The dynamic occurs in relation to several ideologies, but just limiting it to jihadism in Europe, two of the most prominent examples of cyber warriors turned real-life terrorists are those of Roshonara Choudhry and Arid Uka. The former, seen above, was the King's College London student who in May 2010 stabbed British MP Stephen Timms.

Arid Uka was a young man of Kosovar origin who, in March 2011, shot and killed at point blank two US soldiers at Frankfurt airport¹⁵. Uka was not known to German authorities before carrying out the attack, and there are no indications he frequented Salafist networks in the physical world. After the attack, German authorities retraced Uka's online activities, discovering that he had been reading and posting on a variety of websites. It also became apparent that Uka had been connected to various elements within Germany's Salafist scene via facebook and other media sharing sites like DawaFFM¹⁶. It is apparent that Uka was, in the words of Bundesamtes für Verfassungsschutz' Vice-president Alexander Eisvogel, "a typical example of self-radicalisation through the Internet"¹⁷.

4.2 Other influences

The Internet somewhat compensates for the lack of a developed home-grown jihadist scene on Italian territory. Shunned by the shrinking

15. The most prominent example of an individual inspired by an ideology other than jihadism fitting this profile is that of Anders Behring Breivik, *the perpetrator of the mass casualty attacks in Oslo and the island of Utøya* in July 2011.

16. Matthias Bartsch *et al.*, 'The Radical Islamist Roots of the Frankfurt Attack', *Spiegel Online*, 3 March 2011.

17. Markus Wehner, 'Wir haben längst den Online-Dschihad', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 February 2012.

and suspicious traditional jihadist networks, the new wannabe militants have to resort to the Web to find material that informs their path and to interact with like-minded individuals, both normal tendencies for individuals embracing any radical ideology. Yet, as is also normal, most Italian home-grown activists are not satisfied with online interactions and seek connections in the real world as well¹⁸.

A place where some of these individuals occasionally interact is the small and developing Italian home-grown Salafist scene. Over the past few years, in fact, some Italian-based individuals, both second-generation immigrants and converts, have formed a loose and informal milieu that embraces various currents of Salafism. Some of these people are self-taught and self-styled activists, while others have obtained or are currently pursuing degrees in various Islamic disciplines from prestigious foreign institutions. Among that latter category is a small contingent of Italian converts that has studied at the University of Medina in Saudi Arabia. With few exceptions these individuals do not control mosques, and operate with small means. Yet they are very active online and occasionally organise meetings where foreign Salafist speakers lecture. This Italian scene, often mired by personal and theological infighting, is in its infancy and is significantly smaller than the corresponding scene in countries like Great Britain, the Netherlands or Germany.

From their endorsement of stoning, polygamy and the death penalty for apostates (views, it must be said, not supported with the same modalities by all members of the scene) to their support for violent jihad in lands where they deem Muslims to be under attack, the views of some of the leaders of the Italian Salafist community are unquestionably controversial and unpalatable to most Italians. Yet this scene should not be confused with the jihadist scene described so far. It should be noted that its members do not generally endorse acts of violence against Italy and, to the contrary, some of them have openly spoken against

18. That is not always the case. Jarmoune, for example, did not seem to have any interest in acting outside of the virtual world.

it¹⁹. Confusing or automatically identifying this scene with the jihadism adopted by Jarmoune, el Abboubi and Delnevo is an analytical error.

Yet there are points of contact, as one of the leaders of this informal scene, Usama el Santawy, admits²⁰. Bright and well-connected, the 28 year-old Milan native is one the best-known Islamic activists of the second generation in Italy. Born into a not particularly devout Egyptian family, at age 19 he began a journey of religious discovery that started, as he explains, with Salafism. Yet el Santawy does not define himself as a pure Salafist, saying that he also admires the method of the Muslim Brotherhood and the *dawa* of the Tablighi Jamaat²¹. Despite these definitional differences, it is arguable that el Santawy is at the centre of Italy's nascent home-grown Salafist scene. While also working in the Milanese headquarters of the international aid organisation Islamic Relief, he has hosted his own show on a small Brescia-based TV station and frequently travels throughout Italy and abroad to speak in various venues.

Despite his lack of formal training in Islamic studies – for which he arguably compensates with a congenial personality and excellent oratorical skills in both Arabic and Italian – el Santawy is somewhat of a reference point for second-generation Italian Salafists. Among this larger community some individuals that flirt with or completely embrace jihadist ideology have also interacted with el Santawy – unsurprising, given the extremely small size of the scene. El Santawy, in fact, interacted, both online and in person, with Delnevo, el Abboubi and some of the targets of Operation Niriya.

El Santawy's online posts, particularly a few years back, have been accused by some commentators of being not just incendiary but also of

19. See, for example: <http://sezioneislamicaitaliana.com/Islam%20contro%20il%20terrorismo%20ver%202.pdf> (accessed on 24 December 2004).

20. Usama el Santawy, interview with the author, Milan, November 2013.

21. In previous years Santawy was close to Abu Imad, the notorious imam of the ICI who was sentenced to three years and eight months for membership in a terrorist organisation, and to Abu Shwaima, imam of the Segrate mosque and a historical figure in Muslim Brotherhood-leaning sections of the Italian Muslim scene.

advocating violence against various Italian critics of Islam²². While these charges are debatable, there is no question that el Santawy's rhetoric is controversial and at times deliberately provocative²³. Yet there are no indications that el Santawy has ever participated in, encouraged or even knew of any terrorist-related activity. Rather, he claims to have reprimanded el Abboubi for his radical tone. In an interview with this author he unequivocally condemned the views expressed by both el Abboubi and Jarmoune and expressed outrage at the latter's alleged intent of carrying out an attack against Milan's Jewish community. At the same time, consistent with his view that the conflict in Syria is a legitimate jihad, el Santawy has publicly praised Delnevo, whom he had met on several occasions. "We see him as a *shahid*, a martyr, someone who fights for the cause", el Santawy said in an interview with *Linkiesta*. "He dies in a land that God blessed; those who die there do not die"²⁴.

There is no doubt that the mainstream home-grown Salafist scene, of which el Santawy is one of the key representatives, is not engaged in any violent activity in Italy. Its activists speak in prayer rooms and gatherings throughout the country, carry out street *dawa*, publish books and post unrelentingly online. Some of them are engaged in interfaith dialogue and interact with local authorities and communities on various issues. At the same time, it is apparent that some individuals involved in jihadist activities interact with this milieu to find ideas that, while not completely identical, have many similarities.

Aside from their disconnect from the traditional scene, the almost desperate search for guidance on the part of home-grown jihadist enthusiasts also springs from the limited presence of many organisations that shape similar scenes in other European countries. A group like Hizb

22. Maria Giovanna Maglie, 'Se tocchi l'islam "muori": su Internet le minacce a chi denuncia gli estremisti', *Il Giornale*, 5 July 2009.

23. In the wake of the election of Pope Francis, for example, el Santawy wrote an open letter urging the new pontifex to convert to Islam. See <http://usamaelsantawy.wordpress.com/2013/03/15/lettera-a-papa-francesco-i/> (accessed on 24 November 2013).

24. Rosaria Talarico, 'Delnevo è un martire, esempio per la sua generazione', *Linkiesta*, 30 June 2013.

ut Tahrir, the transnational movement advocating the reinstatement of the Caliphate as the only solution to the *ummah's* current ills, which possesses a widespread presence throughout Europe, operates only on a very small scale in Italy²⁵. Similarly, the most recent direct or indirect incarnations of Hizb ut Tahrir – extremist groups such as Sharia4Belgium, Forsane Alizza in France or Millatu Ibrahim in Germany, which operate with one foot within the law and one outside of it – do not seem to exist in Italy. El Abboubi's attempt to constitute the Italian branch of the Sharia4 franchise, attracting only a couple of friends, shows the limited appetite for this kind of activities among Italian Muslims, at least for the time being.

Occasionally, foreign Salafist preachers, with more or less evident jihadist tendencies, come to Italy to speak in mosques or at small gatherings. Bilal Bosnic, for example, a key player in the most radical fringes of Bosnia's Salafist community, has visited Italy on various occasions²⁶. These visits are carefully monitored by Italian authorities, who seek to prevent them by stopping the speakers at the border, if possible²⁷. In some cases, Italian activists travel abroad, attending seminars (in the case of Delnevo) whose content can be strictly religious or more militant, or (in the case of el Abboubi's attempt) visiting like-minded representatives of more developed scenes (mostly, but not only, in central and northern Europe).

25. Ministry of Interior officials, interviews by the author, Rome, November 2013.

26. Ministry of Interior officials, interviews by the author, Rome, November 2013. News about some of his visits are also advertised on the facebook profiles of various Italian activists. A clip showing Bosnic in Cremona can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqIfKA06Dpk> (accessed on 12 December 2013). On the Internet it is possible to view various videos in which Bosnic calls for the destruction of America and sings songs with lyrics such as 'with explosives on our chests we pave the way to paradise', for instance, at <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/3459.htm> (accessed on 21 December 2013).

27. Ministry of Interior officials, interviews by the author, Rome, November 2013.

4.3 Linkage dynamics

Even among those who interact with the most radical fringes of the Salafist movement, only a marginal fraction will make the leap into violent radicalism. Many individuals who are part of this loosely knit milieu do cheer the actions of certain jihadist groups. But most do so from the sidelines and, for personal or ideological reasons, will never become actively involved. In substance, only a statistically insignificant minority of what is already a numerically small milieu will engage in violence.

What drives an individual to embark on the path of violent militancy is a personal trajectory determined by a complex mix of psychological, ideological and circumstantial factors unique to every case²⁸. Similar factors also determine the decisions made by individuals once they have opted to actively embrace violence as a means to further their ideology. Do they travel abroad to join jihadist groups? If so, where? Or do they opt for staying in their home country and carry out attacks there? If so, against what targets? And are they going to act alone or with other like-minded individuals?

As has been said, a multiplicity of factors shapes these dynamics. Some are psychological, related to a person's natural tendencies. Theological views also play an important role. Some individuals might see fighting in open conflicts like Syria or Somalia as legitimate jihad while considering it contrary to the tenets of Islam to carry out attacks against civilian targets in the West. For others such a distinction makes little sense. Finally, the role of contingent factors and pure fate cannot be overemphasised. Frequently, aspiring jihadists chose a certain path simply because they had a chance encounter that led them in that direction. The experience of other countries shows that it is not uncommon for aspiring jihadists to change the destination of their trip from one field

28. See, on this debate, James Khalil, 'Radical Beliefs and Violent Actions are not Synonymous: How to Place the Key Disjuncture between Attitudes and Behaviors at the Heart of our Research into Political Violence', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol. 37, issue 2, 2014.

of jihad to another simply because they met an individual who facilitated their passage to the second destination. Similarly, it is not uncommon for Western jihadists who managed to reach their jihad destination to be redirected back to the West to carry out attacks there²⁹.

Since, at this stage, there are only three publicly known cases of Italian home-grown individuals who have engaged or attempted to engage in acts of violence, it makes no sense to speak of patterns. Yet, from what can be ascertained, Jarmoune seemed to act as a quintessential lone actor. While he engaged with hundreds of like-minded individuals online, he apparently never sought to develop these contacts into any operational form. He did not seem to be interested in travelling for jihad but, according to authorities, aimed to carry out an attack against Milan's Jewish community. There are no indications that in this effort (which, to be sure, appeared to be in a very initial stage) Jarmoune sought the cooperation of other individuals.

El Abboubi and Delnevo seemed to have had different interests. Both desperately longed to travel outside of Italy and sought to leverage any possible contact to do so. Like most aspiring jihadists, neither was particularly focused on one specific country. Both aimed to reach any place where, in their view, a jihad was being fought. Delnevo made some inquiries about travelling to Afghanistan, and el Abboubi seemed at some point fascinated with the conflict in Mali³⁰. But, by the summer of 2012, they were both focused on Syria, which had become, and still is, the most attractive destination for aspiring jihadists for both ideological and logistical reasons.

Analysing the el Abboubi and Delnevo cases, a few questions are obvious; they could be addressed to any other aspiring jihadist seeking to travel from Italy to a field of jihad. How does a young resident of Italy manage to join infiltration-wary terrorists groups operating in parts of the world where he has no personal connections? Does he travel there

29. Guido Steinberg, *German Jihad: On the Internationalization of Islamist Terrorism*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2013, pp. 125-205.

30. Police and judicial officials, interviews by the author, Genoa, September and October 2013; police officials, interviews by the author, Brescia, October 2013.

independently in the hope of being accepted? Or are there elements, in Italy or in other places, providing a linkage between him and the terrorist group?

Answering these question is extremely complicated and too ambitious a task for this report, as the specific details of both the el Abboubi and Delnevo case are still unclear, even, to some degree, to authorities. What could be useful is to make suppositions supported by patterns observed in other European countries and by the limited facts known about the handful of Italian cases that have been identified. Based on these shaky foundations, and risking enormous oversimplification, it is possible to argue that the paths that bring an aspiring jihadist to militancy (which, in substance, means travelling abroad for jihad) are three: travelling solo, facilitated travel and recruitment.

The first takes place when an individual, irrespective of how he became radicalised, does not benefit from anybody's help to contact al-Qaeda and affiliated groups outside of Italy. The aspiring jihadist would leave Italy without receiving any kind of support from any accomplice and, most important, would make contact with the jihadist organisation he seeks to join without having anybody facilitate the process.

Cases witnessed throughout Europe have shown that, apparently, some individuals or small groups of aspiring jihadists have successfully managed to link up with established jihadist groups without any previous connection just by showing up. At the height of the war in Iraq, for example, it was not uncommon for unaffiliated jihadist wannabes to simply travel to Syria and there start asking around for a way into Iraq, hoping to make the right connection. While some did not succeed, many did and joined Iraqi-based jihadist groups that way.

Recently, there are indications that the current conflict in Syria has offered opportunities for individuals without connections. Their large numbers and the nature of their activities put foreign fighters in Syria in a situation more like that of those fighting the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s than like those who have joined various al-Qaeda-affiliated outfits in Pakistan, Somalia or Yemen over the past 10 years. Militant groups do have security procedures set up to prevent

infiltration, but it appears that it is relatively easy even for individuals without prior connections to enlist in some of them.

Most counterterrorism experts nonetheless consider solo travelling an exception. In most cases, individuals manage to link up with established jihadist groups outside of Europe because somebody facilitates the process. Basing their acceptance policy on selection rather than outreach and recruitment, jihadist groups tend to open themselves to individuals whose background, commitment and usefulness to the cause can somehow be verified. Exceptions are always possible and, in recent months, there have been indications that some volunteers reaching Syria without facilitation have been accepted. But most experts argue that it is unlikely that such security-conscious and infiltration-wary groups would accept individuals who just show up. A facilitator, a gatekeeper, somebody who can somehow vouch for the aspiring jihadist is, in most cases, necessary.

Facilitators are individuals who possess the right connections with one or more jihadist groups and can therefore vouch for the aspiring European jihadist. Often facilitators are committed militants who have fought in various conflicts and established solid links to various al-Qaeda-affiliated networks outside of Europe. Charismatic and generally older, they do not recruit in the traditional sense of the word; rather, they make things happen, connecting various European individuals and clusters with those abroad. The ways in which facilitators come to meet these individuals and clusters are varied, and can happen in places ranging from a mosque to a gym, from an Internet cafe to a kebab store. Pre-existing social and family networks play a crucial role, as they reinforce trust among militants.

A phrase that most accurately described this process is ‘scenarios of opportunity’. Unless they opt to travel solo, European-based jihadist wannabes looking for ways to train or participate in conflicts abroad generally seek people who might help them. In some cases, they might do this online, asking chat room interlocutors for travelling tips. But, in many cases, this sort of search is done in person, as the wannabe jihadist looks for individuals who can help him join jihadist groups abroad. They

might look for facilitators who are known to have a radical presence at the margins of certain mosques. They may activate social networks, asking around within trusted circles and looking for the friend of a friend, the one-time acquaintance, the individual rumoured in the community to have had a militant past.

The degree of involvement of the facilitator can vary. Some can simply provide advice, indicating to the aspiring jihadist how to best enter the country he seeks to reach or, once there, in what places he is most likely to find people with connections to jihadist groups. But facilitators can take more active roles, particularly after they have come to trust the aspiring jihadist. In that case, they might provide him with the phone number of the right contact in the destination country, provide him with a letter of recommendation or directly set up a meeting with a jihadist group's member. They may even provide the aspiring jihadist with visas, documents, air tickets and money, making their efforts similar to those that could properly be defined as recruitment.

At the time of writing there are limited publicly available information as to how el Abboubi and Delnevo managed to reach Syria. As for Delnevo, his two trips seem to confirm the general view that a facilitator is necessary. When he first travelled to Turkey in the summer of 2012, the Genovese convert apparently did not have any connection that could facilitate his passage into Syria and his adventure ended ingloriously on a flight back to Italy. But over the following few months, Delnevo apparently managed to find the right connection and his next trip, in December, was successful. Not only did he manage to cross the border into Syria, but he also joined a prominent jihadist militia. While authorities are still working on establishing the details of how Delnevo managed that, there is a consensus that he could achieve such result only through pre-existing connections.

Preliminary and previously undisclosed evidence seems to indicate that also el Abboubi's journey to Syria was facilitated by 'gatekeepers'. It appears that, shortly after having been released by the Brescia court, el Abboubi entered in contact with an Albanian jihadist network with a strong presence in Italy. Despite a failed trip to Albania to meet its

leaders, el Abboubi managed to gain the network's trust. Within a few weeks the Albanian network reportedly paid for his trip to Syria (via Turkey) and, most importantly, vouched for his credentials with the al-Qaeda-linked Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant³¹.

4.4 A problem of integration?

Understanding what factors drive an individual to radicalise has been one of the most controversial subjects of the terrorism-related academic and policymaking debate of the past 15 years³². Theories seeking to explain the phenomenon abound. One of the factors often mentioned is the lack of integration. Particularly in the first part of the 2000s, many argued that at the root of the problem was the sense of marginalisation, disenfranchisement and discrimination felt by many Muslims throughout the Continent. Unwilling to tolerate these miserable conditions, argued the theory, some European Muslims chose jihadism as a way to challenge the system and obtain revenge over it.

Over the past few years, that theory has been criticised by many experts who see no empirical basis for it. First, an analysis of the cases of home-grown jihadists in both Europe and North America has shown that many, if not most, did not suffer any socio-economic disenfranchisement. Many were indeed drifters, individuals who had suffered problems that ranged from substance abuse to being chronically unemployed and in financial turmoil. But many others were university students or relatively successful professionals, often faring much better than most of their peers. They spoke the language of their resident country fluently, had stable lives and normal social interactions. Moreover, the theory linking radicalisation to lack of socio-economic integration is flawed also

31. Italian government officials, personal interview, January 2014.

32. See, for an Italian take on the subject, 'Povertà e terrorismo', article posted on the website of the Italian intelligence community on 19 December 2013, <http://www.sicurezzanazionale.gov.it/sisr.nsf/il-mondo-intelligence/poverta-e-terrorismo.html> (accessed on 3 January 2014).

because it does not explain why only a statistically insignificant minority of the European Muslims that live in conditions of disenfranchisement become radical. It is obvious that some other factor must determine this phenomenon.

While it is impossible to provide answers that are applicable to all cases, it can be argued that socio-economic disenfranchisement, while playing a possible role, has not proven to be a determining factor in the radicalisation of the vast majority of European Muslims. Perhaps the answer lies in another kind of integration, more difficult to assess but arguably more important. Integration – in the sense of a feeling of belonging to a certain society, irrespective of one's socio-economic conditions – appears to be a more important factor. Many European Muslims who become radicalised are individuals who are confused about their identity and find their sense of belonging in a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam rather than in their European citizenship.

Moreover, many young men of all socio-economic conditions traditionally have been attracted by radical ideas, an additional disproof of the lack-of-integration-equals-radicalisation argument. Limiting the analysis to Italy, many of those who joined both the left- and right-wing militant groups that bloodied the country's streets in the 1970s and early 1980s were university students and scions of middle-class, and, in some cases, upper-class families. The personal desire for rebellion, meaning, camaraderie and adventure, are factors that are not secondary when analysing radicalisation patterns, whether of jihadist or any other nature.

Even though issues of discrimination and a lack of socio-economic integration should not be overlooked, it is more fruitful to look for the roots of radicalisation in the individuals' psychological profiles. The search for a personal identity as a cause of radicalisation is supported by the analysis of the few cases of Italian home-grown jihadists seen so far³³. Neither Jarmoune nor el Abboubi, in fact, can be considered poorly integrated from a socio-economic perspective. Both lived with

33. Fernando Reinares, '¿Es que integración social y radicalización yihadista son compatibles?: una reflexión sobre el caso de Mohamed Jarmoune en Brescia', Real Instituto Elcano, ARI 27/2012, 17 April 2012.

their families in more than dignified dwellings in small towns in the Brescia province where they grew up and where they knew everybody. Jarmoune worked for a company that installed electrical systems and had a permanent contract, a luxury many of his Italian peers do not have. El Abboubi studied with profit at a local school. The families of both are described as well-integrated, even though several of el Abboubi's relatives who lived in the area had extensive criminal records. It is at the same time true that, in the MTV Italia mini-documentary, el Abboubi repeatedly complained about the racism he had had to confront since his early years in Italy.

This argument can be applied to the case of Delnevo with even greater effect. Born into a middle-class Italian Catholic family, Delnevo could have none of the integration problems attributed by some to European Muslims who become radicalised. It is obvious that in the case of Delnevo – but no differently from Jarmoune and el Abboubi – the roots of his radicalisation are to be found in his personal traits and his unwillingness, rather than inability, to fit into Italian and Western society. The three young men struggled to find an identity and flirted with various alternative ideologies – Delnevo had a fascination with Fascism and el Abboubi with hip hop – before embracing jihadism. But this trajectory seems clearly dictated by an intellectual evolution determined by personal factors and not so much by forms of socio-economic disenfranchisement.

4.5 Legal challenges

In response to Italy's long history of terrorism inspired by various ideologies, the country's legal system has developed a number of provisions to deal with the phenomenon. Traditionally, most Italian-based jihadists have been charged with membership in a terrorist organisation (Article 270 bis of the Italian penal code). The charge, as modified in December 2001, states that “whoever promotes, constitutes, organises, directs or finances associations with the goal of committing

acts of violence with the aim of terrorism or subversion of the democratic order is punished with detention from seven to fifteen years. Whoever participates in said associations is punished with detention from five to ten years. The terrorist aim occurs also when the acts of violence target a foreign country, an institution and an international body”.

Article 270 bis covers forms of terrorism where the associative nature is a crucial element. As is the case for most European legislators, when they crafted this norm, Italian authorities had in mind a traditional form of terrorism, one that entailed a more or less hierarchical structure or, at least, a stable association of people. But terrorism dynamics have changed significantly throughout Europe over the past few years and many European legal systems have struggled to keep up. Particularly complex are the increasingly frequent cases of small, informal networks or, even more difficult, lone operators that, while clearly displaying jihadist fervour and support for violence, do not belong to any structured organisations. While authorities throughout the Continent express the necessity not just to monitor but, in some cases, to arrest these individuals before they commit a terrorist act, that impulse is counterbalanced by the necessity not to criminalise individuals simply for expressing opinions. The debate on the issue is very heated, touching upon the need to balance security with respect for basic freedoms.

In 2005 Italian legislators opted for a solution that favours security needs, and introduced Article 270 quinquies of the penal code. The article punishes with detention of between 5 and 10 years an individual who “trains or in any way provides instructions on the preparation or the use of explosive materials, firearms or other arms, dangerous chemical, bacteriological substances, or any other technique or method” for the execution of terrorist acts. The norm, in substance, aims at punishing behaviours that precede and are functional to the commission of terrorist acts. Given the new nature of terrorism, where, thanks to the Internet, it is relatively easy for any individual to independently obtain information helpful to the realisation of a terrorist attack, Italian authorities have

thought that obtaining and supplying operational materials with clear terrorist intentions should be criminally relevant behaviour.

The norm, as the Italian Corte di Cassazione has explained in the verdict against Mustafa el Korchi, punishes both those who provide the information, which the Court identifies either as ‘trainers’ or ‘information providers’, and those who receive it, the ‘trainee’³⁴. Moreover, it is not necessary for the individual receiving knowledge to have put it into practice or even to have understood it³⁵. It is, nonetheless, considered not criminally relevant to be the ‘mere information recipient’, that is the individual who receives occasional information outside of any trainer-trainee relationship³⁶.

The norm has been used in a handful of cases related to jihadist terrorism since its introduction. Critics have argued that it punishes individuals who have committed no violent act but have simply expressed views and disseminated materials that are, in most cases, already publicly available online. That was, for example, the defence used by Jarmoune’s lawyers after Brescia prosecutor Antonio Chiappani charged the young man under Article 270 *quinquies* for having trained an unknown number of people through his online dissemination of various training manuals and other technical materials³⁷.

If judges in Brescia confirmed the prosecution’s thesis in Jarmoune’s case, identical charges filed in Brescia against el Abboubi had a different fate. A few days after his arrest, in fact, el Abboubi’s lawyers filed for his release³⁸. They argued that their client, whom they claimed harboured no radical or violent sentiments, had visited websites that provided

34. Corte di Cassazione, Sezione Penale I, case no. 872, 12 July 2011 (Korchi et al.). The difference between trainer and information provider is subtle: in a nutshell, the former establishes a close, personal relationship with the trainee while the second is more of a transmission vehicle, somebody who gathers information and then disseminates it without establishing that close, personal connection.

35. Tribunale del riesame, case no. 348/2013, 1 July 2013.

36. Corte di Cassazione, Sezione Penale I, case no. 872, 12 July 2011 (Korchi et al.).

37. Claudio del Frate (17 May 2013).

38. Tribunale del riesame, case no. 348/2013. 1 July 2013.

instructions on weapons and explosives only occasionally and simply out of curiosity, just to deepen his general knowledge. He had sent links with instructions to other individuals only a couple of times, they argued, and, therefore, he did not demonstrate any of the behaviours punished by Article 270 quinquies³⁹.

The court argued that it was evident that el Abboubi fully espoused radical views and that he had disseminated them online. Yet, agreeing with el Abboubi's lawyers, it also argued that his behaviour did not constitute a violation of Article 270 quinquies. El Abboubi had indeed watched instructional videos on weapons and explosives, but had done so only sporadically and had not even saved them. He had occasionally shared some of these materials with other individuals. But such files were considered amateurish, or akin to a TV documentary, and unsuited to providing recipients with any usable knowledge⁴⁰. In substance, the court argued that, given the poor operational value of the files occasionally shared by el Abboubi with a handful of online contacts, his behaviour indicated a clear embrace of Islamic fundamentalism but not a violation of Article 270 quinquies⁴¹. As seen, shortly after being released, el Abboubi left Italy and reportedly travelled to Syria, a location from which he incites like-minded Italian militants through the Internet.

El Abboubi's case shows one of the main difficulties Italian authorities face when dealing with the nascent threat of home-grown jihadism in the country. Since it seems impossible to charge lone operators like Jarmoune or el Abboubi under Article 270 bis, Article 270 quinquies appears a useful alternative. Yet the article, while well written, is inevitably open to wide gaps in judicial interpretation. Different judges in the same court (Brescia) evaluated the two cases differently. There is no question that Jarmoune's almost maniacal online activities constituted a much more clear-cut violation of 270 quinquies than el Abboubi's. But it is also clear that the application of an article that punishes behaviours not necessarily

39. Mara Rodella (26 June 2013).

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Qui Brescia*, "Riesame: "Anas non è un terrorista"", 2 July 2013; Wilma Petenzi (2 July 2013).

linked to a violent act depends heavily not just on the circumstances of the case but also on individual judge's persuasions and sensitivities.

As the few Italian cases and the significantly more extensive experience of the other countries have shown, home-grown terrorism brings additional operational challenges to authorities. When monitoring an individual displaying clear jihadist sympathies, authorities are constantly faced with the intertwined dilemmas of whether they can and should arrest him. Article 270 quinquies provides Italian authorities with a more aggressive tool than available in other European jurisdictions as a wide array of activities can fall within the article's range. Yet authorities might want to delay the arrest for operational reasons – to accumulate additional evidence against the target and/or to gather additional intelligence about the target's contacts and *modus operandi*.

The desire to extend the length of this kind of operation is countered by the fear that the target might engage in acts of violence. Experience from Italy (in, for example, the Game case) and other countries has shown that lone individuals or small clusters might go into action without much warning. Cognizant of this fear, authorities constantly have to balanced intelligence-gathering needs with the fundamental goal of keeping the public safe.

Assessing whether a monitored individual is planning to make the leap from 'keyboard jihadist' to actual terrorist – and, if so, how and when – is an extremely challenging task. And also in this case, two opposing needs are at play. On one hand, letting the individual carry out some of the preparation for an attack can provide authorities with damning evidence to use against him at trial. At the same time, allowing him to do that is risky, as authorities cannot be certain they will be able to monitor and control their target's every action.

In the few cases of home-grown terrorism they have faced so far, Italian authorities seem to have erred on the side of caution. The cases of Jarmoune and el Abboubi are instructive in this regard. Both men were monitored by Brescia's DIGOS for months, and authorities had collected enough evidence to charge them under Article 270 quinquies. In order to gather more evidence for the trial and more intelligence

on the targets' contacts, authorities would have liked to extend the monitoring. Yet, as soon as they observed that the men had conducted online surveillance of possible terrorist targets (Jewish institutions in Milan in the case of Jarmoune, various iconic sites in Brescia in the case of el Abboubi), authorities arrested them.

Even though the online surveillance was mentioned in the two indictments, in neither case did prosecutors charge the defendants with planning a terrorist attack but simply with Article 270 quinquies, as the evidence for the former and more severe charge was too flimsy. The fear that individuals who clearly embraced jihadist ideology could take action, and do so in ways that could escape surveillance, appears to have led Italian authorities to wrap up a case they would otherwise have kept open in order to gather additional information. In the case of el Abboubi, given the man's release, that decision, while inevitable, might have jeopardised the legal case against him.

Home-grown terrorism might also bring an additional problem. Traditionally, Italian authorities have relied heavily on deportations as a counter-terrorism tool. Whether it targeted individuals after they were sentenced to jail time or it was applied via administrative decree against individuals who had not been arrested for any crime (as in the case of Farina's husband, Mamour), deportations have allowed Italian authorities over the past 20 years to get rid of dozens of jihadists who did not hold Italian citizenship.

The tactic is not always applicable in cases of home-grown jihadists. Many of them are converts and therefore, as Italian citizens, not deportable. Among second-generation immigrants, only some have Italian citizenship (as the requirements to obtain it, even for individuals born and raised in the country, are very stringent). Yet an increasing number of them are citizens and are, therefore, not deportable, short of a decision revoking their citizenship if they were naturalised. It is evident that the convenient tool represented by deportations can be usable only in some cases of home-grown terrorism.

CONCLUSION

As in any other European country, radicalisation of jihadist inspiration in Italy seems to affect only a statistically marginal segment of the local Muslim population. But radicalisation in Italy also appears to be a limited phenomenon in relative terms when compared with other European countries. As seen, despite the fairly aggressive approach of Italian authorities towards the phenomenon and the availability of flexible legal tools, only a handful of individuals with home-grown characteristics (Niriya, Jarmoune and el Abboubi) have been arrested in Italy, numbers significantly lower than in countries of similar size such as France, Great Britain or even smaller countries such as Denmark or the Netherlands.

Equally telling are the number of fighters estimated to be fighting in Syria. Authorities in most European countries express vivid concerns about relatively large contingents of their citizens and legal residents who have travelled to the Arab country to join jihadist groups in their fight against Bashar al Assad's regime. Exact numbers are difficult to identify but, as of the late fall of 2013, it is believed that some 200-400 individuals had left from France, 200-300 from Great Britain, 200 from Germany, 100 from Belgium and 80 from Denmark¹. As of September 2013, on the other hand, Italian authorities assess that only 10-15 Italian residents have travelled to Syria to fight². Moreover, most of them are

1. Thomas Hegghammer, 'Number of foreign fighters from Europe in Syria is historically unprecedented. Who should be worried?', *Washington Post*, 27 November 2013; for Denmark see *Associated Press*, 'Denmark: 80 Danes Have Joined Syria Fight', 24 November 2013.

2. *Adnkronos*, 'AISE: una quindicina i jihadisti giunti in Siria dall'Italia', 24 September 2013.

Syrian nationals whose motivations and ideology might differ from those of other European jihadists travelling to Syria.

It is difficult to explain this apparent cleavage between Italy and most other Western European countries. Yet, as this report seeks to document, home-grown radicalisation exists in Italy, albeit on a different scale. It is, arguably, impossible to predict in what direction this phenomenon will move, whether it will grow and, if so, how much. The experience of other European countries might provide some useful clues. But it is paramount that law enforcement and intelligence agencies (who, to be sure, have already largely done so), policymakers and the public at large familiarise themselves with this new development of jihadism in Italy.

