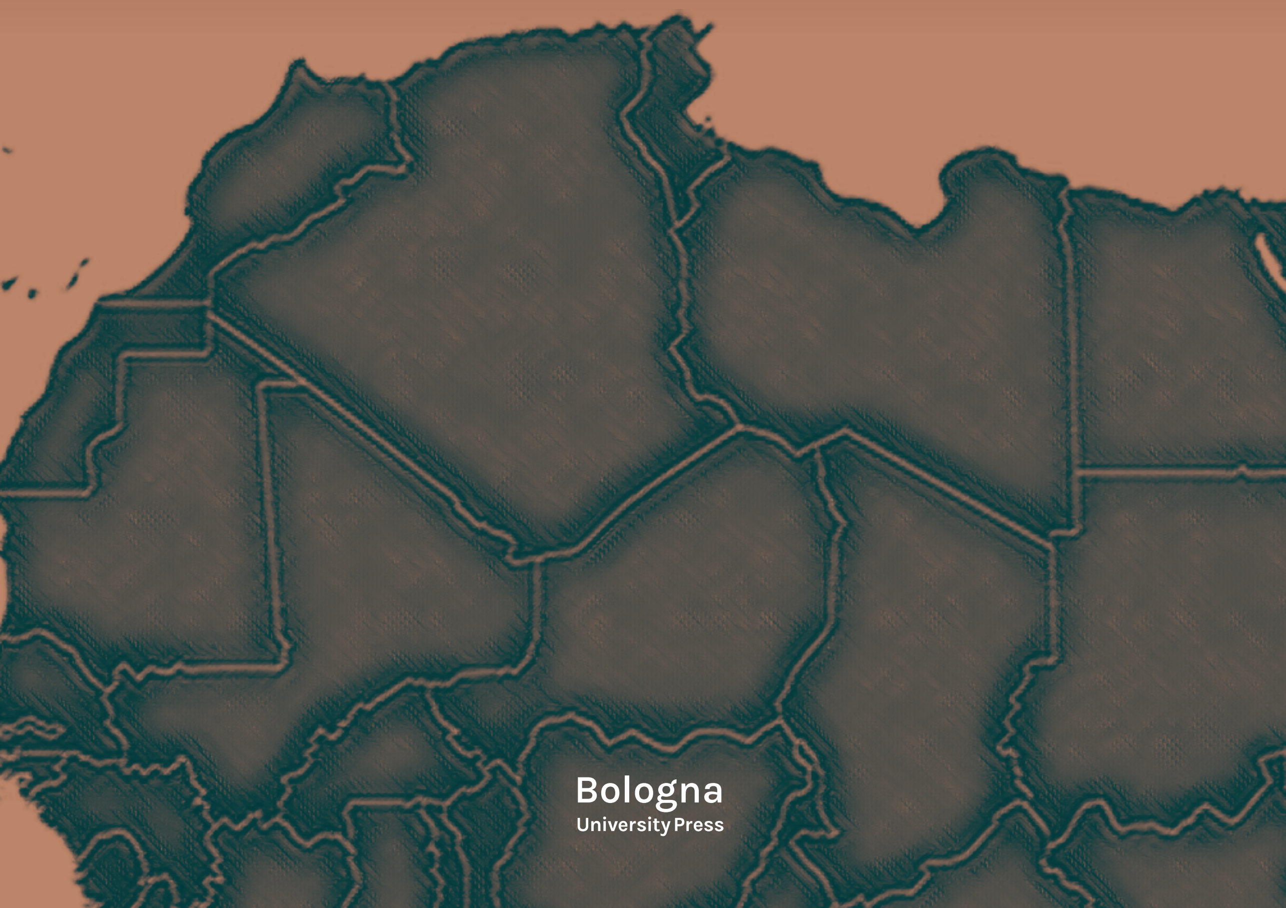
BETWEEN INTEGRATION AND RADICALIZATION IN NORTH AFRICA

A focus on Morocco and Tunisia

Marco Borraccetti
Susanna Villani
(eds)



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Acknowledgments

This book is the outcome of a research carried out in the scope of the JASMIN project '*Juenesse Active pour une Société capable de promouvoir l'eMployabilité e l'INclusion*' (Project n. AID 011417), coordinated by the Italian NGOs Overseas and CEFA, and co-founded by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation.

Preface

Marco Borraccetti and Susanna Villani

In the past years jihadist terrorism and radicalization have become some of the most critical threats to the Mediterranean region, including the European side. Indeed, along with a general rise of extremism, many Mediterranean countries have become the source of a large exodus of foreign fighters who travelled to conflict zones and now face the danger of a return of extremist militants with combat skills and experience. The need to add alternative actions of prevention and rehabilitation to the already existing repressive policies violence and has been highlighted by authorities throughout the region. Emerging trends, lessons learned and overviews of the security status of the countries in the area, however, point out that radicalization and extremism are complex global phenomena that may differ from country to country. Radicalization is a very individualised process, making it difficult and counterproductive to make broad generalisations about the factors that may lead to violence and extremism.

Against this background, while approaching the phenomenon according to a multidisciplinary perspective, the *file rouge* of this volume is the intention to describe challenges and strategies of security with a view to the preventive dimension thus going beyond the simple adoption of *ad hoc* measures of response. Indeed, moving from radicalization and extremism in Italy, new trends and policies of contrast, prevention and de-radicalization in North Africa, with a specific focus on Morocco and Tunisia, are illustrated according to a comprehensive approach. Each contribution makes evident the need to involve both the national/local authorities and the society at large in efforts against violent radicalization and extremism, and broadly speaking terrorism, as well as to cooperate with regional and international organisations, like the European Union, the African Union and competent branches of the United Nations.

In Chapter I, Sara Brzuszkiewicz proposes a preliminary presentation of the research carried out within *Project Jasmin*, realized by the nongovernmental organization CEFA in Tunisia, and *Je Suis Migrant*, realized by ProgettoMondo.mlal in partnership with CEFA. After proposing an overview of the history of Islamist

radicalization in Italy and its most important stages, it focuses on the patterns of radicalization among Moroccan and Tunisian citizens in Italy. The notion of places of vulnerability to radicalization is analysed in depth and the role of the so-called "radicalization hubs" are scrutinized in relation to crucial case studies involving individuals of Moroccan and Tunisian origin who radicalised in Italy.

By remaining in the sphere of vulnerability, in Chapter II Chiara Scissa intends to move from Italy to the North African countries in order to verify whether vulnerability to climate change may constitute a common factor influencing the decision (not) to leave an adverse environment and to join violent extremist groups in the region. Indeed, situational vulnerability, characterised by a complex set of socio-cultural, economic, political and environmental factors, could exacerbate drivers of (im)mobility and radicalization in certain contexts. According to the author, the compliance with States' human rights law and environmental obligations would help reduce vulnerability and, ultimately, the risks of recruitment into violent extremist groups.

After illustrating the potential drivers of radicalization in the North Africa region, the volume is dedicated to evaluate the effectiveness of the measures of de-radicalization most recently adopted by national authorities. In this regard, Chapter III intends to illustrate the different trajectories of Tunisian Islamic activism with a specific focus on the relationship between integration and radicalization. In particular, combining the analysis of post-Islamism and socio-economic marginality against the backdrop of the political changes that took place in the country from 2011 until 2019, Ester Sigillò underlines the necessity to break Islamism-radicalization nexus, presenting radicalism as a multifaceted notion and radicalization as a multidimensional process; a complexity that counter-terrorism measures should reflect.

In Chapter IV, Giulia Cimini and Guendalina Simoncini go into the details of the post-revolutionary Tunisia and on the passage from a contingency-based approach mainly focused on counter-terrorism to a more inclusive, long-term strategy involving society at large in counter-radicalization efforts. It has been considered as an interesting "laboratory" of counter-terrorism practices and prevention. Despite the adoption of new comprehensive measures, it is argued that the replacement of counter-terrorist measures in favour of initiatives for the prevention of extremism is still ongoing.

Finally, in Chapter V, Susanna Villani presents the strengthened dialogue and cooperation in the area of security between the EU, Morocco and Tunisia, as framed in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Indeed, while autonomous counter-terrorism and de-radicalization strategies are fundamental, it is also essential to analyse to what extent they have an impact over the other side of the Mediterranean Sea, that is the EU and its Member States. At the same time, the author proposes an evaluation of the EU counter-terrorism strategy that relies both on soft law and hard law instruments of cooperation in order to assess the effective level of interaction between these regions.

Chapter I
RADICALIZATION AMONG TUNISIAN AND MOROCCAN COMMUNITIES IN ITALY

Sara Brzuszkiewicz

Abstract: The present chapter stems from the research carried out within Project Jasmin, realized by the nongovernmental organization CEFA in Tunisia and Je Suis Migrant, realized by ProgettoMondo.mlal in partnership with CEFA. The chapter addresses the patterns of radicalization – regarded as the process of adopting radical values including increasing willingness to support, facilitate or use violence to affect societal change – among Moroccan and Tunisian citizens in Italy. The notion of places of vulnerability to radicalization will be analyzed in depth and the role of prayer venues, prisons, the Internet, and the so-called radicalization hubs will be scrutinized in relation to crucial case studies involving individuals of Moroccan and Tunisian origin who radicalized in Italy.

Keywords: Radicalization – Tunisia – Morocco – Migration – Jihad – Foreign Terrorist Fighters – Prisons – Radicalization Hubs

1. Introduction

The present chapter can be regarded as an updated abstract of the research developed in 2019 during the author's postdoctoral fellowship at the Alma Mater Studiorum University of Bologna in the framework of the project *Jasmin*, realized by the nongovernmental organization CEFA in Tunisia and *Je Suis Migrant*, realized by ProgettoMondo.mlal in partnership with CEFA. By Tunisian and Moroccan communities in Italy we will mean the array of flexible and fluid social networks made of first, second, and third generations of migrants, as well as families in which only one parent comes from Morocco or Tunisia.

The chapter addresses the phenomena that can be included into the notion of radicalization, which is regarded as the process of adopting radical values including increasing willingness to support, facilitate or use violence to affect societal change.[1] Radicalization is a complex, multilayered concept, which made its way into terrorism studies a decade ago.

Through the analysis of peculiar radicalization patterns, the chapter will pursue a twofold goal within the volume. On the one side, it will provide an overview of the Italian scenarios in relation to two specific communities and, on the other, it will open a dialogue with the other contributions in the volume, in order to give the reader the opportunity of identifying analogies, differences and common features between the Moroccan and Tunisia diasporas and other contexts.

The first section is dedicated to the analysis of the most relevant keywords related to the topic and the state of art on radicalization. The second part will provide a historical overview of the jihadi radicalization in Italy, with the purpose of showing how Italy represents a peculiar case among Western European countries and a particularly interesting scene because of the developments that took place within the jihadi galaxy since the Nineties.

Following this overview, we will take a picture of Moroccans and Tunisians demographics in the country, with particular reference to those indicators that proved to be crucial when studying radicalization, such as age, gender, education, existence of plans to return to the homeland or lack thereof. The core of the chapter is centered on the *places of vulnerability* to radicalization, which will be investigated both from a theoretical perspective and through the analysis of several cases studies involving Moroccan and Tunisian radicals in Italy.

The first group of places of vulnerability includes mosques, prayer rooms and, more broadly, the places of worship. The hypothesis suggested here is that it is *next to* the mosque, rather than *inside* it, that the risk of radicalization increases. Prisons are scrutinized with the goal of knowing how and why they are regarded as places of vulnerability to radicalization par excellence and discovering whether reliable indicators to measure prison radicalization exist or not. Internet will be the third (virtual) space, since in the last few years it has gained an absolutely primary role in propaganda, recruiting, and mobilization patterns and dynamics. Further places of vulnerability to radicalization that are worth addressing consist of the so-called *radicalization hubs*, i.e. neighborhoods, towns, and areas in which the number of radicalized individuals per capita is significantly higher than the national average.

[1] Ashour (2009).

As far as Italy is concerned, an interesting case is that of Ravenna, a city with around 160,000 inhabitants, 12% migrants, which had between 9 and 20 foreign terrorist fighters.[2]

At the same time El Fahs, 60 kilometers away from Tunis, had an extremely high number of individuals joining Ansar al-Sharia or the Islamic State controlled territories. The crucial element is that many people belonging to El Fahs radical environment were relatives or close friends of Tunisian migrants in Ravenna.

This scenario suggests the possible presence of a small radicalization hub in the Ravenna area and a sort of radical twinning between the Italian city and El Fahs in Tunisia, and urges experts not to overlook old-school radicalization,[3] characterized by face-to-face interactions, pre-existing relations within the peer group and charismatic leaders who take on the role of radicalizing agents. Old-school radicalization proves that online dynamics on the internet are not always the dominant or the exclusive forms of radicalization.[4]

Lastly, an overview of the most recent counterterrorism legal toolbox will be provided, and the system of preventative deportations will be scrutinized in order to highlight its strengths and weaknesses.

2. Terminological Foreword

Notoriously, the term radicalization is complex, context-bond and often problematic. In the last fifteen years or so, scholars, practitioners, international institutions, and governments have provided interesting definitions of the term, although a universal consensus on its meaning has not been reached yet and probably will never be.

As mentioned before, throughout the present work radicalization will be regarded as the process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use, support or facilitate violence as a method to effect societal change.

In spite of the complexity of the topic, however, it is still possible to provide a number of definitions that allow us to create a conceptual map of these phenomena.

Indeed, contrary to what a big part of the public opinion tends to believe, terms like radicalization, extremism, radicalism and Islamism are not synonyms.[5] The high time and space variability of these terms aroused a big deal of criticism, which used to point at their lack of universal meanings.

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[2] The exact figure remained uncertain.

[3] Brzuszkiewicz (2018).

[4] Anis Amri, Tunisian terrorist who, on December 19, 2016, killed 12 people in the Christmas market in Berlin and a few days later was killed in a shootout with the Italian police in Sesto San Giovanni, spent time in Ravenna, as the anti-terrorism operation Mosaico revealed.

[5] On the complexity of the analysed terms see, for instance, Sedgwick (2010).

At the beginning of the Twentieth century, for instance, the Suffragettes movement was called *radical*. These terms are context-bond as they can change based on the contexts in which they are used and to which they are referred.[6]

At the same time, however, the notion of radicalization now is mainly used in relation to dynamics of political violence. It can be regarded as the process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use, support or facilitate violence as a method to effect societal change.

By radicalism, on the other side, we mean here ideologies and praxes that interpret Islam as a universal and totalitarian system that should be imposed at every level of life through the forceful dismantlement of any institutions and lifestyle that is blamed as un-Islamic. Radical is the individual after being radicalized, who perceives the status quo as unbearable and conceives violence as a legitimate means to change it.[7]

Similarly, it is worth emphasizing that *radicalization* describes a process, whereas *extremism* describes a status quo. Moreover, the term extremism often carries broader meanings, capable of describing values and worldviews on violence, religion, relation with other religions, interfaith dialogue, gender issues, women rights and more, whereas – in the realm of terrorism studies -radicalization and radicalism refers mostly to the individual's views on violence.

The notion of jihad is similarly complex and multilayered. It is often simplified as *holy war*, whereas its first meaning is *effort*, *struggle*, in a plurality of senses.

The first distinction made by the classical Islamic thought is the one between greater – or inner – jihad on the one side, and lesser jihad on the other side. The inner jihad is the spiritual struggle to improve oneself and fight human weaknesses in order to become better Muslims and stronger human beings. The lesser jihad, on the contrary, is external and it can take on – albeit with multiple limitations enshrined throughout centuries[8] – the form of violent fight.

The second crucial distinction is between those who see jihad as *farḍ 'aīn*, 'individual duty' for every Muslim and those who consider it *farḍ kifāya*, 'collective duty' that has to be performed by a selected part of the Umma on behalf of all believers.

A feature shared by most radical Islamists and jihadists is the interpretation of jihad as individual duty, to the point of brining it close to the five *arkān al-Islam*, the pillars of Islam.[9] By jihadism we mean the system of thought and the set of actions

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[6] *Radicalisation Processes Leading to Acts of Terrorism: A Concise Report prepared by the European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation*, 2008, p. 7.

[7] Schmid (2013), p. 7.

[8] Just to mention a couple of restrictions: children, women and disabled people cannot be targeted, and it is mandatory, at any time during the fight, to welcome truce or peace offers from the enemy.

[9] The profession of Faith (*shahada*): the belief that "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God" is central to Islam; The five prayers (*salat*); the alms (*zakat*); fasting (*sawm*) from dawn to sunset during the holy month of Ramadan; the pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca.

developed by non-state actors who elect violence as the primary means to spread their ideology and vision of Islam. Jihadists reject the idea that inner jihad is superior to actual war and usually do not acknowledge the limitations to violence that the classical Islamic thought designed.[10]

If possible, even more multifaceted is the notion of Islamism. It can be regarded as the whole set of political theories and practices that aim at creating an Islamic all-encompassing system, i.e. a State in which principles, institutions and judiciary stem directly from *shari'a*[11] and religion is not limited to private life.

Not all Islamists are violent or support violence as a means to societal change. More complex, however, is their function within environments that could potentially foster radicalization.

Indeed, even when not actively violent, Islamism is characterized by a number of worldviews and narratives that are hardly compatible with human rights and individual freedoms and liberties, at least in the forms sanctioned by contemporary Western political culture(s). This is particularly true when it comes to the status of religious minorities in Muslim-majority countries, the role of religion in politics and judicial systems, gender issues and women rights.

3. State of the Art on Radicalization

As mentioned before, by radicalization we mean the process of gradual adoption of a system of radical values, which includes the willingness to support, facilitate or use violence to affect societal change. Further effective definitions exist, many of whom were provided on a governmental and institutional level.

The Swedish Secret Services (Säpo) stress the role of political goals in the radicalization process, which is described as the process that leads to ideological and religious activism aimed at introducing radical changes into society and that leads an individual or a group to use or promote the need for violence for political goals.[12]

The Scandinavian region is a vanguard in prevention and counter-radicalization initiatives, and it is not by chance that a further definition was provided by the Danish Security and Intelligence Services, which see radicalization as an inherently undemocratic phenomenon that might lead to violence.[13]

[10] On civilians, right motivations to wage jihad, authority to proclaim it, treatment of prisoners, truce, and many other related issues.

[11] Mandaville (2007), p. 57.

[12] Swedish Security Service, *Radikalisering och avradikalisering*, 2009. Si veda anche Ranstorp (2009), p. 2.

[13] Center for Terroranalyse (CTA), Danish Intelligence Services (2009).

Similarly complex is providing a definition of the opposite process, i.e. de-radicalization.

One of the most insightful interpretations was given in 2012 by the U.S. psychologist John Horgan and adopted by the Working Group on Radicalization and Extremism of the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) of the United Nations: "The social and psychological process whereby an individual's commitment to, and involvement in, violent radicalization is reduced to the extent that they are no longer at risk of involvement and engagement in violent activity".[14]

Related to this, a further achievement within the state of the art has been the distinction, now universally accepted, between de-radicalization and disengagement,[15] which implies the abandonment of violence from a behavioral perspective, not necessarily accompanied by an ideological rejection of it.

Often disengagement occurs without de-radicalization. Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan explain that there is no scientific evidence that the former automatically leads to the latter.[16]

Beside the monumental definitional efforts, a great deal of research has been dedicated to the creation of models aiming at explaining how the process works, its stages and patterns. It includes all the efforts of scholars and experts toward the creation of radicalization models aimed at representing fundamental references for different socio-cultural contexts.

One of the most distinguished examples was provided in 2003 by the psychologist and intelligence expert Randy Borum, who created a very incisive model that could be termed *radicalization based on increasingly intense messages*.

According to this model, the process of radicalization can be divided into three phases, which are represented by three distinct messages:

1) "It's not fair"

2) "It's your fault"

3) "You are evil".[17]

In 2005, the expert in counter-radicalization Quintan Wiktorowicz created his own model, introducing the concept of cognitive opening, i.e. the moment when an individual who has been trying to make sense of his or her existence *sees the light*, exchanging an old view of the world for a new one or creating the new view in the first place.

The basis of the process is the exogenous conditions surrounding the individual who enters a guided or self-initiated process of religious seeking. If the criteria for

[14] Horgan, Braddock (2010).

[15] Horgan (2008).

[16] Bjørgo, Horgan (2009).

[17] Borum (2003), pp. 7-10.

the credibility of the message and the messenger are met, he or she will start a process of socialization within the new context, which is likely to lead the subject to the next phase, implying value internalization and joining the group.[18]

In the same year Fathali M. Moghaddam disseminated his Staircase Model,[19] which suggests why out of large numbers of disgruntled people in society, only a very small minority end up committing acts of terrorism. The model involves a metaphorical staircase, where the higher an individual moves up, the fewer alternatives to violence they will see, ultimately resulting in violence.

The ground floor is inhabited by all members of the Umma, the community of believers. All members of society evaluate their living conditions in terms of fairness. Those who perceive injustice move onto the first floor.

On the first floor, people consider their options for improving their situation, and people who are unsatisfied with their available options move onto the second floor.

On the second floor, individuals look for a target to blame for their frustration and resentment. Those who find an enemy toward whom they can direct their aggression, will proceed to the third floor.

On the third floor, people experience close proximity with violence. Here an organization can provide them with the structure and the sense of camaraderie they are looking for and find potential recruits. People who find this appealing will move on to the higher floor.

On the fourth floor, the individual goes deeply into the ideology, the 'us' versus 'them' narratives are promoted, secrecy increases, and the legitimacy of the organization is emphasized. A number of individuals on this floor will get ready for actual violence, thus climbing to the top of the staircase. The fifth floor is where the violent act is carried out.

In 2010, the Danish researcher Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen proposed a model divided into six stages, which correspond to the six fundamental psychological nuclei of violence:

1) Identification of a problem as an injustice
2) Construction of a moral (religious, ideological, political) justification for violence
3) Blaming of the victims
4) De-humanization of the victims
5) Substitution or distribution of responsibility ("God wanted it", "We obeyed the leader")
6) Minimization of the action's negative effects.[20]

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[18] Wiktorowicz (2005).

[19] Moghaddam (2005).

[20] Dalgaard-Nielsen (2010).

In the following years, other models have been designed[21] and show different degrees of innovation.

Inevitably, the most recent models try to keep pace with the evolution of the threat and the big themes of the last decades, such as the so-called homegrown terrorism,[22] the *foreign terrorist fighters* (FTFs),[23] the legacy of the Islamic State and the dilemmas of repatriation and reintegration of women and children from its former territories to their homelands.[24]

4. Brief history of Islamist radicalization in Italy

When it comes to the radical Islamist landscape, the case of Italy owns unique features that make it possible to talk about an *Italian exception* due to the seemingly lower levels of radicalization and the persistent lack of major attacks.

At the same time, however, Italy does have a history of radicalization and jihadism that is worth recalling.

4.1 The Italian exception

The history of Islamist radicalization in Italy is extremely different from those of other Western countries such as France, Belgium or the United Kingdom. It is a shorter history, and its scope has been extremely narrower.

The different situation in Italy can be explained by taking into account a number of circumstances and experts highlighted multiple different factors that likely created it. Among the main factors contributing to it we have the demographic features, first of which is the delay of the migration flows from Muslim-majority countries that Italy witnessed in comparison to other European countries.

As of today, France, Belgium, the United Kingdom – but also Germany with particular reference to the Turkish community – are home for the third and fourth generations of migrants, whereas Italy is witnessing the growth of the second generation just now, with a persistently stronger presence of the first-comers. The generations that follow the first, with their multiple, in-between identities that often generate lack of social recognition both with the Western cultural models and those

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21 Wiktorowicz (2005); McCauley, Moskalenko (2008).

22 The radicalization of individuals born and raised far from the Muslim-majority countries. About homegrown terrorism in Italy see: Vidino (2014); Dambruoso (2018); Guolo (2018).

23 The issue of fighters who went to Syria and Iraq to fight with the Islamic State is addressed by thousands of works. See Tinnes (2018).

24 See Bloom, Horgan, Winter (2016).

of the parents' homeland – seem to be more vulnerable to radicalization compared to the individuals who initiated the migratory project.

Moreover, radicalized individuals often clash with their own family and with their parents, blaming them for not being pious Muslims and for becoming Westernized migrants.

Indeed, we should not take for granted that this kind of criticism always follows the same direction from the parent to the child: on the contrary, the opposite is extremely common.

Multiple stories exist about youngsters who fled Europe for the Islamic State and cut ties with their families for these kinds of cultural clashes.

A second reason why the levels of radicalization in Italy seem to be lower is the limited colonial experience in comparison to other European countries. Starting from the Fifties and Sixties, those countries witnessed huge flows of citizens of the former colonies towards the homeland, often with anti-colonial sentiments.

In addition to this, it should be highlighted that only a small percentage of Muslims in Italy are originally from Libya, Somalia, and Eritrea.

Partly related to this is a further element: the perception of Italians as deploying a better, less invasive and more peaceful presence in the Middle East compared to other Western countries, presence that is believed to come along a sort of resistance to join *boots-on-the-ground* military operations. In other words, in many Muslim-majority countries in general and Arab countries in particular there is a long-lasting narrative based on which Italians are ultimately *nicer* and *more similar to Arabs than to other Europeans.*

In spite of the intangible nature of this factor, the relevance of these kinds of narratives as obstacles against the spread of stronger anti-Italian hate should not be underestimated.

Experts provide many other reasons to the radicalization delay in our country. One is the absence of the so-called ghettos or ghetto neighborhoods[25] in which lack of perspectives, unemployment, and crime provide a fertile ground for radicalization.

Italy seems to have a contained presence of these kinds of areas and small to medium cities and towns appear to foster a stronger social control on radicalization than huge metropolitan areas.[26]

A further element that might represent a bulwark against radicalization is the presence of governmental or semi-governmental organizations from a number of

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[25] For instance, Moelenbeek, the Brussels neighbourhood where the jihadist cell who perpetrated the November 2015 attacks in Paris used to live.

[26] The author had the opportunity to collect opinions and insights from the members of the Commission on Radicalization in Italy created in 2016 by the Ministry of Interior and led by Dr. Lorenzo Vidino.

Muslim-majority countries – such as the Kingdom of Morocco – which play a role in the selection, training and mobilization of religious leaders from a peaceful and ecumenical perspective, aimed at the promotion of moderate Islam.[27]

Doubtlessly, the minor levels of radicalization in Italy compared to other countries have been possible also thanks to the central action of police, intelligence and anti-terrorism bodies, as well as to the cooperation between these actors and the Islamic communities on the ground.

4.2 The first jihadist networks

Although Italy has not witnessed any major jihadist attack and the numbers of radicalized individuals per capita appear to be lower than those of other Western European countries, the presence of jihadist networks and cells linked to international organizations started at the beginning of the Nineties.

Since the inception of this trend, the core was Milan and the Islamic cultural center revolving around the mosque of Viale Jenner, founded in 1988[28] by a group of Egyptians closely linked to al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya, then the major jihadi group active in Egypt.[29]

At the beginning of the Nineties, the Milan network had a primary role in recruiting and coordinating foreign fighters heading to Bosnia and in providing them with financial and logistic support. The then imam of the Islamic Center, Anwar Shaban, was the leader of the foreign mujahedeen in Bosnia.

The Milan network was also behind the first jihadi suicidal attack carried out in Europe, when a car bomb driven by an Egyptian jihadist hit a Croatian police station in Fiume/Rijeka in 1995.[30] The Center in Viale Jenner used to control multiple small and medium businesses in the area, exploiting them to finance the jihad and recruit new radicals and prospective mujahedeen.

Following a historic investigation carried out by the Italian anti-terrorism forces, the United States Department of the Treasury would describe the Center of Viale Jenner as the major al-Qaeda base in Europe.[31]

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[27] Although the adjective *Moderate* is controversial and highly subjective, its use here is useful to describe an approach characterized by efforts towards non-violence, interreligious dialogue, and commitment to broaden the protection of human rights.

[28] Vidino (2014).

[29] For the history of this group see Kepel (1993). For its initiative of de-radicalization and doctrinal revision see Ashour (2009); Brzuszkiewicz (2018).

[30] The perpetrator was the only victim of the attack, carried out in retaliation for the killing of Shaban by the Croatian army.

[31] Hilzenrath, Mintz (2001).

In February 2003, however, the Egyptian imam Abu Omar – who was active in Milan – was kidnapped by the CIA and transferred to Egypt. This event led many radicalized individuals in the city to leave Milan to avoid undesired attention by authorities, and this contributed to the weakening of the Islamic Center and its activities.

During the golden age of Viale Jenner and in the aftermath of its decline, other cities were starting to host jihadist cells.[32] The overwhelming majority of their members were first generation migrants, usually under a leadership that was closely related to jihadist groups in the homeland, mainly North African countries.

Phenomena such as the so-called lone wolves – or lone actors – and the homegrown jihadism, i.e. radicals born and raised in the target country) were not among the features of this first phase.

4.3 Towards homegrown radicalization

The first lone actors appeared a few years later, probably due to the acceleration of the dynamics taking place worldwide in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks.

Between November 2001 and February 2002 four episodes took place in Italy. A camping gas canister exploded in the Valley of the Temples in Agrigento, causing minor damages. Authorities on the site found a sheet with slogans against the U.S. attack on Afghanistan.

A similar sheet was found a few months later in front of the prison of the same city, next to a car containing a gas tank that was ready to explode, which was foiled by firefighters' intervention. A few weeks later, a third gas canister was found in Agrigento in front of the Court.

On May 11, 2002, a gas canister exploded in the Duomo metro station in Milan, without casualties. The sheet found on the site was of the same kind as the previous ones in Sicily.

In July the perpetrator was found. He was Domenico Quaranta, a painter with psychiatric issues who was responsible for all the above-mentioned attacks. The individual had radicalized in jail through the daily interaction with some extremists.[33]

Similar to Domenico Quaranta, the Libyan citizen Mohamed Game can be located in a sort of transitional phase between the beginning of jihadism in Italy and the subsequent homegrown radicalization.

In the morning of October 12, 2009, Game tried to enter the Santa Barbara military headquarters in Milan and detonate a box that he was carrying. The explo-

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[32] Anti-terrorism operations were carried out in Como, Milan, Varese, but also Turin, Bologna, and Naples.

[33] For other radicalized Muslims who acted autonomously see Vidino (2014), pp. 36-38.

sion was weak, but Game lost one hand and was injured in the eyes, whereas two soldiers had minor injuries.[34] His first words to police were: "*You must get out of Afghanistan*".

The event represents an anticipation to the phenomenon of homegrown jihadism in Italy. Indeed, the perpetrator was born in Libya in 1974 and came to Italy in 2003 – and therefore he had spent most of his life in his country but, at the same time, he walked his entire radicalization path in Italy.

According to his accounts, he had a heart attack in 2008 that led him to become more religious, attending the Viale Jenner Islamic Center and accusing relatives and acquaintances of not being good Muslims.

Game's nephew recalled that the uncle used to spend hours on jihadist websites, planning a suicide attack on a bus or a McDonald's restaurant.

According to the result of the investigation, further trigger factors for his radicalization were the invasion of Afghanistan and the agenda of those parties – such as the then Lega Nord – which opposed the building of a mosque in Milan.[35]

Around 2010, the signs of change and the evolution of traditional radical structures became stronger: a new phase was starting in Italy. The major changes were the mobilization of individuals who did not belong to organized groups, the growth in homegrown radicalization, and the increasingly massive use of the Internet as a means to collect and spread jihadist propaganda and to interact among jihadists in Italy and abroad.

The Italian intelligence services started to monitor a fluid, Italian-speaking community regularly active on a number of online platforms. These platforms were managed by the Milanese convert Barbara Aisha Farina, who was committed to the struggle to have the right to wear hijab when taking pictures for identity documents and was a vocal supporter of polygamy.[36] For a while, she also used to publish the radical Islamic magazine *al-Mujahidah*, in which Islamist and jihadist leaders were praised and their writings translated into Italian.

In order to scrutinize the actions of some individuals active on the platforms administrated by Barbara Aisha Farina, in 2009 the DIGOS of Cagliari started Operation Niriya, one of the most famous investigations in the history of extremism in Italy, At the end of Niriya in 2012, the investigation involved jihadist sympathizers born and raised in Italy, many of whom from Italian parents.

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[34] "Paura a Milano, bomba nella caserma. Un libico si fa saltare con 2 chili di esplosivo", *Repubblica*, October 12, 2009.

[35] For a detailed analysis of other episodes that might have contributed to radicalize Mohammed Game see Vidino (2014), pp. 46-47.

[36] She used to declare to be part of a polygamous marriage. See Vidino (2014), p. 50.

One of the people who attracted most attention was Mohammed Jarmoune, born in Morocco in 1991 but raised in Italy. Jarmoune was a young electrician who was leaving with his parents in Brescia without attending any mosque. He was known with the nickname of Mimmo il Timido.[37]

He was the first person to translate into Italian the treaty *44 Ways of Supporting Jihad*, written by Anwar al-Awlaki,[38] one of the major ideologues of contemporary jihadism.

Mohammed Jarmoune also used to post online in Italian manuals concerning ways to make bombs and easy to access tools to hit the unbelievers.

In March 2012 he was arrested after saving a file of a virtual tour of via Guastalla, the street in downtown Milan that hosts the central S\synagogue, and of via Arzaga, where the Jewish school and retirement home are located. In his car, police found two watches connected to threads that are often used as detonators.[39]

He was accused of training an unknown number of individuals, providing information on the preparation of explosives and weapons with terrorist purposes and sentenced to 5 years and 4 months in jail in May 2013.[40]

Undeniably, the multiple reasons of the relative delay in Italian radicalization levels and the different stages that led to the creation of forms of homegrown jihadism make Italy an extremely interesting case.

5. Demographic overview: Moroccans and Tunisians in Italy

In the last few years, Moroccans and Tunisians have always been among the most numerous communities in Italy, with 397,889 regular residents from Morocco[41] and 94,246 from Tunisia.[42]

Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna, and Piedmont are the regions with the highest number of Moroccan citizens, whereas Emilia-Romagna, Lombardy, and Sicily host most of the Tunisian migrants.

Men are more numerous than women in every Italian region, in line with a migratory model that is consistent with that of all Muslim-majority countries. Histori-

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[37] Attianese, "Jihad, Italia. Come si diventa terroristi", *ANSA Magazine*, January 16, 2015.

[38] For the role of this Yemeni-American preacher in contemporary jihadism see the works of Meleagrou-Hitchens, "Voice of Terror", *Foreign Policy*, January 18, 2011; "Why Awlaki Mattered", *The Wall Street Journal*, October 3, 2011.

[39] Vidino (2014), p. 59.

[40] In May 2015 Mohammed Jarmoune finished serving his time and was repatriated to Morocco.

[41] Vidino (2014), p. 5.

[42] Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, *La comunità tunisina in Italia. Rapporto annuale sulla presenza dei migranti*, 2021, p. 5.

cally, the first migration projects are carried out by men, often followed by women only in the framework of processes of family reunification.

The numerical gap between men and women, however, has never overcome 10% in the last fifteen years, and it continues narrowing.[43]

The migrations from Morocco and Tunisia are relatively old in comparison to other communities, and this is reflected by the high numbers of long stay residence permits and an increase in citizenship applications. Therefore, albeit the presences are decreasing, it is important to notice the marked trend of stabilization among the two groups.

When it comes to studying radicalization processes, the fact that more than 40% of Moroccans and Tunisians in Italy are below 30 years old – with a strong presence of underage individuals – is extremely interesting. The high number of underage youths is a common feature for all the communities of African origin.[44]

Radicalization can *happen* at any age, and assessing the risk taking into account exclusively age parameters can be misleading. At the same time, however, it has been documented that young men in their upper twenties and lower thirties represent the dominant component of the phenomenon. For instance, analyzing the profiles of the *foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs)* who left Italy for Syria and Iraq, we notice that the average age was 30[45] and this induces us to hypothesize that radicalization often happens in the few years before.

The high number of NEETs (*Not in Employment, Education and Training*) – a reason of concern among Italians – involves Moroccans and Tunisians in Italy and represents a worrying trend. In 2018, Moroccans between 15 and 29 who neither studied nor worked were 34,354, 14.6% of NEETs of non-EU origin.[46] Similarly, 33.6% of Tunisians in Italy were not active in any way and the unemployment rate was 21.5%.

Obviously, this group is likely one of the best recruiting basins for radicalization. Many of these individuals are inevitably more at risk of doing crime, which is a very common stage in the path of radicalized youth, many of which have criminal record.

In relation to this, it is worth reminding that among the Italian foreign terrorist fighters analyzed in 2018, 34.4% were unemployed.[47]

Unaccompanied minors (Minori Stranieri Non Accompagnati, MSNA) represent another particularly vulnerable category for which international and Italian laws envision specific protection mechanisms such as sheltering them in safe houses.

[43] Italian National Statistics Institute, January 1, 2021.

[44] Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, *La comunità marocchina in Italia*, p. 19.

[45] Marone, Vidino (2018), p. 16.

[46] Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, *La comunità marocchina in Italia*, p. 34.

[47] Marone, Vidino (2018), p. 20.

Quantitatively, Morocco (1.8% of the total) and Tunisia (3.3% of the total)[48] are not at the top of the category, but this profile entered the debate on radicalization due to a number of Moroccan foreign fighters who left Italy to join the Islamic State whose profile will be analyzed shortly.

Overall, Moroccan and Tunisian communities in Italy tend to undertake long term migration projects compared to those of other nationalities.

These projects seem to be quite old – with many individuals arrived three or four decades ago – and future oriented, with a steady increase of long stay residence permits and citizenship applications.

Therefore, a number of positive factors can be underlined, such as the stability of the project, the narrowing of the quantitative gap between men and women, the small number of unaccompanied minors. They describe rather solid communities, largely mastering the use of resources that can help them living a satisfying existence in the country.

On the other side, however, the situation is not entirely rosy, as the high percentages of NEETs, the widespread unemployment and the persistent absence of women from the job market clearly demonstrate.

6. Places of vulnerability: Italian cases

By places of vulnerability to radicalization we mean places – tangible or virtual – with features that make them particularly suitable to host radicalization dynamics and be a breeding ground for Islamist radicalism.

We will scrutinize the role of four *places*: mosques, prisons, internet, and the so-called *radicalization hubs* in the radicalization processes of individuals of Moroccan and Tunisian origin.

As far as mosques and prayer venues are concerned, the hypothesis is that the risk of both collective and individual radicalization is higher *next to* the mosque rather than *inside* it.

An extremely telling case study related to the variability of the relation between local Muslim communities and radicalizing individuals revolves around the path of Mohamed Koraichi – Moroccan grown up in Lombardy – and Alice Brignoli, the convert who married Koraichi and radicalized on a path characterized by rather identifiable stages.

The second case study focuses on prison radicalization and pivots around Moncef el-Mkhyar, young Moroccan who left Milan province in 2015 with a friend after being radicalized in jail before suddenly showing up in 2019.

[48] Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, *La comunità marocchina in Italia*, p. 36.

Internet will represent the third place of vulnerability. It is a virtual space that in the last few years has gained a primary role in propaganda, recruitment and mobilization dynamics of thousands of individuals.

In this section we will not analyze a single case study. Instead, an overview on the role of the Internet will be given, ranging from the case of Mohammed Jarmoune, arrested back in 2012 – to Meriem Rehaly, young Moroccan girl who became a hacker for the Islamic State and then apparently repented.

6.1 Mosques and prayer venues: radicalizing next to the organized Muslim communities

Mohammed Koraichi was in his early thirties. He grew up in Lecco province, Lombardy, in a family of documented migrants from Morocco.

He worked as a welder for a local company. He used to drink alcohol, hanging out in clubs, and follow Western fashion trends, while never going to the mosque.

Alice Brignoli was a secretary in the same company and, after meeting at the workplace, they fell in love and got married in 2008. She converted to Islam some time before the wedding and demanded to be called Aisha. Around this time some signals of stronger religiosity started to appear both in Mohammed and Aisha: he grew a beard, wore traditional modest clothing and Alice/Aisha, who used to wear a simple hijab, started wearing only black and leaving the house less and less frequently.

The case is particularly interesting for the relation between the couple and the community surrounding them.

They started drifting away from the family of Alice/Aisha and imposed to her mother to start wearing hijab and reading the Koran. In 2009 the couple had their first child, but in the next few years they burnt bridges with the rest of the family and stopped Alice's mother from seeing their grandchildren – who had become three – blaming her for being impure.[49]

Alice/Aisha, who used to be a markedly secular Catholic and did not even want to receive the sacrament of Confirmation, was adopting an increasingly radical lifestyle. At the beginning of their path, they used to spend time with the Muslim communities of Lecco and Costamasnaga. With their gradual radicalization, however, they cut bridges with the fellow Muslims, accusing them of being too moderate.

The closure to the rest of the world proceeded rapidly and both Alice and Mohammed stopped working and started leaving of subsidies.

Between 2014 – the year when the Caliphate was proclaimed – and 2015, the radicalization process speeded up and the couple decided to turn their children into

[49] Dambruoso (2018), p. 38.

mujahedeen. Pictures of those children – who were all below six back then – would be found during the subsequent investigation.

In January 2015 an episode provided people around the couple the measure of the radicalization of Mohammed and Aisha/Alice. Mohammed argued harshly with the few friends left because he praised the action of the Charlie Hebdo attackers, which were commendable because they were targeted against the infidels.

A few weeks later, on March 6, the mother of Alice/Aisha reported the couple missing. Since the interaction between the woman and her daughter were absolutely rare, most likely the couple might have left back in February. The journey was probably similar to that of other jihadists: after reaching the South of Italy, they took a ferry to Turkey and, from the border between Turkey and Syria, they finally reached the territories controlled by the Islamic State.

In May 2015, on a phone call with her mother, Alice/Aisha said to have left and asked them to stop searching for her and her husband.[50]

When searching their house in Bulciago, police found a handmade ISIS flag and an image of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the Caliph of Daesh.

In September Fabienne, Alice/Aisha's mother, received another phone call from her daughter: "We are fine. I cannot tell you where we are. If you want to stay in touch with us, you must convert to Islam. I will never go back". And: "In spite of the situation, we are happy. For us it is important to be here. Here we can live Islam freely and express ourselves. This is the real freedom, not the delusion we use to live in. Here I have many sisters who came from everywhere in the world, French, British, Germans, Indonesians, Dutch, we are very close".[51]

To the narrowing of the broader social relations corresponded the strengthening of the interactions with groups of radicalized peers. At the beginning of 2019, the Court of Cassation confirmed the sentence to 3 years and 4 months in prison for Wafa Koraichi, the sister of Mohammed arrested in 2016, upon charges of international terrorism. Wafa contacted Mohammed to get her *tazkia*, a sort of pass to the Islamic State, for other jihadists.

In the story of the couple there are some points that help understanding a number of radicalization patterns and narratives. First, the relation with the local Muslim communities: many individuals, especially among radicalized converts, start their journey of faith through the contact with other Muslims but soon drift away from them, blaming them for being too moderate, retiring from the rest of the world and searching from similarly radical people. In this way, radicalizing and

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[50] The story of the couple is intertwined with the journey of another Moroccan jihadist with Italian citizenship, Abderrahim Mutaharrik. See Dambruoso (2018), p. 40.

[51] Moroni, "Così l'Isis ha portato via mia figlia: cellula in Italia, il dolore di Fabienne", *Il Giorno*, April 30, 2016.

radicalized individuals create and perpetuate self-reinforcing mechanisms, in which they motivate each other to pursue their jihadi goals with increasing determination and secrecy. This is why it is not hazardous to state that radicalization often happens next to the mosque and on the hedge of the local Muslim communities instead of at their core.

This does not mean that radical preachers or terrorist cells have never existed, but local Muslim communities, with their visible and structured presence, often represent an ensemble from which loose cannons are rejected or auto-eject.

A second fil rouge is the gradual distancing of the subjects from their own families, accused of not being good Muslims or, as in the case of Alice/Aisha's family, because they do not convert to Islam.

A third feature that is common to the overwhelming majority of contemporary jihadists involved with Daesh is the celebration of the daily life in the Islamic State and the cosmopolitism of the Caliphate, under which men and women from any country in the world claimed to live according to their own ideals and gather together only thanks to their faith.[52]

6.2 Radicalization in prison

The latest figures (March 31, 2022) reveal that 31.3% of the inmates' population in Italy is not Italian.[53] Muslims are 6,138 (11,4% of the inmates' population) concentrated mainly in prisons in the North and Center of the country.[54] Moroccans represent 19.9% of foreigners' inmate population, making it the most represented origin, while Tunisians are 10.2%.[55]

The issues related to prison radicalization in Italy partly differ from the problems encountered by other Western European countries, in which radicalism seems to be significantly more widespread.

Nevertheless, Italian prisons have always been places in which individuals are more vulnerable to radicalization. This phenomenon became more apparent at the beginning of the Nineties, when the number of terrorism related incarcerations increased all over Europe.

The rhetoric related to the context is also crucial: the prison experience has always played a primary role in the narratives of any radical movement at any point of

52 The account contained in the notorious *Diary of a Muhajirah* is emblematic. It was a blog on Tumblr that, after its birth in 2015, became a powerful propaganda tool targeting women. See Samsudin, Lokman (2016).

53 Antigone, *XVIII Rapporto sulle Condizioni di Detenzione*, 2022.

54 Martello, "Figli di un dio minore. La libertà di religione in carcere", in Antigone, *XIII Rapporto sulle Condizioni di Detenzione*, 2017.

55 Antigone, XVIII Rapporto sulle Condizioni di Detenzione, 2022

history, ranging from Islamist groups to Marxist movements, militants in and out of jail looked at time in prison as a traumatic turning point in the history of their organizations.

In order to provide a clearer picture of the phenomenon, we can divide the processes of prison radicalization into three fundamental categories.

The first is what could be termed *additional radicalization*, a process in which two or more individuals who are already radical get in touch in jail, thus strengthening each other's ideas and worldviews.

The second category consists of radicalization through contact, which is extremely widespread in prison. The subject, usually a non-practicing Muslim, comes into contact with one or more radicalized inmates and/or with radical propaganda that seem to be capable of providing him or her with the answers they are looking for.

A third case implies the conversion of the inmate: in this case the subject is a non-Muslim who comes close to Islam during the incarceration, either autonomously or through proselytism by other inmates. In this way, he or she abandons worldviews and lifestyles that are deemed as non-Islamic – primarily crime – and undertakes a deep identity transformation.

It is not uncommon that, if occurred in jail, conversions lead to radical interpretations of Islam. Indeed, the journey towards a new faith takes place in a condition of hardship and isolation from society and it is often undertaken *against* something or someone.

Obviously, the reasons for prison radicalization are many. Among them we can list resentment against society and the country, fed by a set of factors such as the difficulty of following Islamic precepts properly[56] and the belief that, even if the subject did crime, it was the country that pushes people to do so. This fosters the spread of victimization narratives, which represent recurring tropes of the radical discourse at any time in history.

Multiple voices highlighted that the violation of Muslim inmates' rights triggers processes of violent radicalization.[57] Although rights violations do not represent the entire set of push factors, they play a crucial role in radicalization dynamics.

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[56] Think for instance of the case in which an activity cannot be interrupted to perform one of the pillars of Islam like the five prayers. Non-Catholic inmates have the right to request the visit of their religious ministers and celebrate their rituals, in accordance with Art. 26, 354 (July 26, 1975): Prisoners and inmates have the freedom to profess their religious faith, to educate themselves in it and to practice it. In the penitentiaries the celebration of the rites of Catholic worship is ensured. At least one chaplain is assigned to each institute. Those belonging to a religion other than Catholic have the right to receive, at their request, the assistance of the ministers of their own cult and to celebrate the rites.

[57] De Galembert, Devresse (2016), pp. 68-69.

Related to this, another feature that is typical of prison radicalization should be mentioned: the *magic reversal of roles*[58] carried out through Islam. Moving from a judicial to a radical moral level, inmates become judges and criminals become lawmen, who claim to represent the sole orthodoxy and orthopraxis of Islam.

Another fundamental point regarding prison radicalization is that the new – radicalizing – environment in jail makes it possible to gain new forms of socialization that can partly replace socialization beyond the prison walls.

Inevitably, the more links to the outside world are cut the more internal socialization, camaraderie and group identity will become crucial for the radicalizing inmate.

Search for identity is a further push to radicalization in prison. Time in jail is by its nature a phase that leads individuals to restructure their identity and previous behaviors. This often brings positive results, but it can also induce the subject to embrace radical interpretations of religion and faith. Through the new identity of believer and pious Muslim it is possible to experience a sort of rebirth as a better person and attribute new meanings to the condition of inmates, which is often interpreted as a challenge given by God to test the renovated spirit of the subject.

From a classificatory perspective, DAP designed three categories of radicalized inmates and three different levels of alert. The first category includes people who have been incarcerated for offences related to Islamic terrorism, with no distinction between sentenced, defendants, and suspected individuals. The second category consists of individuals who are detained for offences unrelated to terrorism but "share an extreme ideology and appear to be charismatic". The third group includes common detainees deemed "easily influenced:" the so-called followers.[59]

The levels of alert can be applied to all the groups mentioned above and are:

1) High – Inmates who have been arrested for terrorism related offences and people who show concerning behaviors such as open forms of proselytism and recruiting efforts.

2) Medium – Inmates displaying behaviors that might signal their proximity to a radical ideology.

3) Low – Inmates whose behavior requires further monitoring in order to decide if they belong to the first or the second group.[60]

Any program dedicated to monitor and prevent prison radicalization is expected to tackle multiple issues, but two of them are particularly important.

First, the distribution of the radicalized prison population and inmates sentenced for terrorism related offences.

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[58] Khosrokhavar (2016).

[59] Paterniti Martello (2018).

[60] Marone (2019).

There is no one-size-fits-all solution, some countries opt for dispersing radicals among the rest of the prison population with the goal of keeping radicals far from each other, whereas other models – such as the Italian one – adopt policies of partial or total concentration, based on which terrorists and radicals are gathered in a small number of maximum security prisons.

The issue becomes even more complex when a system chooses to differentiate the model to be used for ideologues on one side and followers on the other.

A second crucial issue concerns the role of religious leaders in prison. Their action can undoubtedly be very effective as a counter-radicalization and de-radicalization resource.

At the same time, however, the risk of them being counterproductive exists, especially when imams are not properly monitored. In 2015 the Department of Corrections (Dipartimento Amministrazione Penitenziaria, DAP) signed an agreement with the Union of Islamic Communities in Italy (Unione delle Comunità Islamiche d'Italia, UCOII) which envisioned the presence of authorized imams in eight penitentiaries.

The goal was to guarantee more freedom of religion to Muslims, at the same time using *certified* imams to counter the influence of radicalizing agents in prison. The Protocol was meant to be extended to the entire national territory, but this has not happened yet. On the Portal of the Ministry of Justice a statement dated 2018 explained that the Protocol did not envision a relation of exclusivity and that there are authorized imams who do not belong to UCOII.

The scenario is far from being simple. Undeniably, prison radicalization represents a threat; however, we should not fall into the trap of unjustified alarmism. Claudio Paterniti Martello, researcher for Antigone, provides interesting perspectives that move beyond the generic securitization mantra and believes that radicalization in Italian prison, at least from a numerical perspective, might be an overestimated risk.

Unjustified alarmism would reinforce simplistic and probably racist interpretations of the phenomenon, including in it even attitudes and behaviors that are not dangerous and fall into the scope of freedom of religion and personal faith.[61]

To avoid the same risk of simplistic perspectives, any universal checklist of signals proving that an inmate is radicalizing should be used with caution. Nevertheless, in prisons and penitentiaries worldwide there is a growing need for guidelines and effective indicators that could help to understand potential red flags.

If used with a grain of salt and without dangerous stigmatizations, some indicators can actually provide a map of the phenomenon.

[61] Interview with the author, June 14, 2019.

Here are some indicators of radicalization in prison, integrated with some actual examples.

1. Intense reading and writing on extreme ideologies;
2. Creating a group or joining a pre-existing group;
3. Explicit statements concerning the individual worldviews (especially if this behavior is unprecedented) and support of violence in the aftermath of terrorist attacks;
4. Search for isolation;
5. Increased aggressiveness;
6. Stigmatization of other prisoners on ideological bases;
7. Increased time devoted to praying;
8. Diet changes (request for halal meat, rejection of pork if the individual used to eat it, new uncompromising respect for Ramadan if the individual never fasted before, request for more overcooked meat to avoid the presence of blood);
9. Interruption of the interaction with the family outside;
10. Changes in the individual's daily life: listening to music and searching for drugs might stop, the inmate might reject TV and removing pictures and images from the cell's walls, he or she might start avoiding any interaction with the opposite sex, for example by refusing to meet psychiatrists, psychologists or social services operators of the opposite sex or, if avoiding them is impossible – avoiding looking at them directly.
11. Shift towards religiously marked outfits and appearance;
12. Change of name, for example through the adoption of a *laqab* or a *kunya* used as *noms de guerre.*[62]

Prison radicalization deserves consistent attention and monitoring: often based on a superficial knowledge of religion and the Koran, it tends to incorporate violent prison cultures into religious practice.[63]

One of the most representative case studies of prison radicalization in Italy is that of Moncef el-Mkhyar, young Moroccan who radicalized in jail and then left Milan with a friend to join the Islamic State.

Moncef seemed to lean towards extremist and uncompromising worldviews even before the prison experience. However, being incarcerated accelerated his radicalization process. Moncef left with a Moroccan friend, Tariq Abu Ala. They

[62] According to Arabic onomastics, *laqab* is a sort of honorary title halfway between a nickname and a nom de guerre and it often reveals the geographical origin of the person (al-Baghdadi: from Baghdad, al-Zarqawi: from Zarqa, etc). *Kunya* instead, recalls the family origin and the condition of father or mother. In this case the name of the firstborn is used. For instance, Abu Hamid is the *kunya* of a man whose firstborn child's name is Hamid.

[63] Cilluffo et al. (2006), p. 4.

were both hosted at Kayros, a community for minors near Milan. In the words of Don Claudio Burgio[64] the two young men had very different path and backgrounds.

Tariq arrived in Italy when he was around 15 in search for a job, never had disciplinary problems and attended school successfully. He finished his terza media and the his professional training. He had always been very religious, used to wear traditional clothing and to urge friends to pray. In the last few months he also started to avoid any contact with females, which is often a signal of a radicalization process ongoing.

When he turned 18 in 2013 Tariq was authorized by the social service to leave the community and move to an apartment with other Moroccan boys.

Moncef, on the other side, came from a more complex family background. The father was probably a military who decided to send him to Italy to his mother because he believed Moncef was not manageable in Morocco. Once he arrived to Milan, however, he was rejected by his mother and instead spent some time with an aunt.

The young man used to say that he had two parents in the literal meaning of the word, but never a Father and a Mother.

Soon, however, even the aunt, residing in Piedmont, will get rid of him, and Moncef enters the system of communities for minors.

Operators who worked with him tell that he was always reluctant to follow the rules and study and, following many episodes of violence and fights, Moncef is shifted to multiple communities until he reaches Kayros.

Although Moncef was more extrovert and sociable than Tariq, all his social interactions revolved around drug dealing and buzz and he frequently used cannabis, alcohol, cocaine and pills. He was arrested for drug related crimes and spent one month in San Vittore jail, Milan. The time in jail, albeit very short, represented a primary turning point for his radicalization process. When Moncef got out he was different: he stopped smoking cigarettes and getting into fights, started talking about religion more and more often and to browse the Internet in search for more knowledge on Islam.

From his statements it would become clear – as in the case of many other radicalized youngsters – that his knowledge about Islam is rudimental, self-taught, and mixed with confused superstitions and semi-magical beliefs.

In July 2014 he left Milan for around one month with the purpose of experiencing the holy month of Ramadan at its best with his Muslim brothers. The place they chose is not sure, but they probably went somewhere around Bologna.

[64] Interview with the author, July 11, 2019.

The last phase of his radicalization process took place in the last few months he spent in Italy, living with the other Moroccan young men in the Loreto area in Milan, in the same apartment as Tariq Abu Ala.

In this story it is possible to pinpoint multiple crucial mechanisms and red flags that are typical of radicalization processes potentially leading to jihadism. To the untrained eye Tariq, more religious, might seem the person who pushed Moncef towards the Islamic State.

After a deeper look, however, it is possible to state that Moncef – always more charismatic and rebellious – was the real leader over Tariq, the follower. Indeed, Moncef's past – full of alcohol and drugs – does not represent an obstacle to radicalization. On the contrary, as prison radicalization shows, dozens of jihadists had criminal record and did time in jail for offences that were completely unrelated to terrorism.

Moncef radicalized in jail in an extremely short time, further evidence of the fact that the process is often confused, emotional, moved by gut feelings.

As in the case of many other radicals, his religiosity was dark, gloomy, and obsessed by themes related to punishment and death.[65]

In the time frame between his released and the travel to the Islamic State there might have been room for intervening, for doing something. The Kayros community informed the Juvenile Court of the changes that the young man was undergoing, but this was not enough.

In all probability, this was not due to negligence of the actors involved. Instead the problem is the persistent lack of knowledge on these issues and of an effective counter-radicalization program.

In January 2015 Moncef and Tariq flew to Turkey from Bergamo Airport and, from Turkey, they enter Syria. Abou Ala died in battle in April 2016 and Moncef commemorated him on social media as a "*shahid*"[66] of the Islamic State. In March 2015, Procura of Milan issued an arrest warrant for both of them upon charges of association to a terrorist organization and, in the case of Moncef, of proselytism on the Internet. On April 13, 2017, the Assize Court of Milan condemns Moncef in absentia to eight years in jail and to subsequent repatriation On March 9, 2019 el-Mkhyar suddenly reappeared, as he gave an exclusive interview to Reuters.

In custody of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)), he claimed that the Islamic State had let him down and expressed his desire to come back to Italy to build a new life. Don Claudio, previously a figure of reference for Moncef, has never spoken directly with him. Instead, he is in contact with a cousin of Moncef, who told him

[65] Marone, "Dopo il jihad: profilo di un foreign fighter 'disilluso'", Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale (ISPI), Milan, March 28, 2019.

[66] *Martyr.*

that the jihadist felt deep disillusionment towards the Islamic State and a sense of betrayal from its leaders who "fled with the money". In other words, Moncef did not seem to be de-radicalized: during the interview he does not reject the radical ideology. More likely, it was a matter of resentment towards the high ranks of the Islamic State, blamed for abandoning the Islamic values they were supposed to represent.

A less famous – yet interesting case of prison radicalization – is that of Hmidi Saber, a 34-year-old Tunisian who was in jail in Rebibbia penitentiary (Rome) for illegal weapon possession when he received a further sentence, in 2017 because of his activity of recruitment and proselytism in prison.

He was a sympathizer of Ansar al-Sharia, the major radical Islamist movement active in Tunisia.[67] Married with an Italian citizen who converted to Islam, he did time in prison multiple time and, through wiretaps during the investigation, it became clear that even his father was concerned about his behavior. Every time in jail he tried to convert other inmates and to put Muslims against non-Muslims.

The case is interesting because of the duality of prison in the path of the subject. On the one side, Saber radicalized further in prison, strengthening the interreligious hostility. On the other side, in prison he took on the active role as a radicalizing agent, both to convert non-Muslims and to radicalize fellow believers.

An element that is common to the paths of other radicals all over Europe is serving time in different jails.

In 2011, he was arrested in Velletri for drug. After his release, he got in touch with Ansar al-Sharia. In 2014 he was arrested in Rome and, during the search of his house, police found 33 mobile phones, 8 laptops, 2 IPads, 1 external hard disk and one black flag (the year of the proclamation of the Caliphate). At the end of 2014 he was arrested again, while in 2017 he received the sentence mentioned above.

In February 2015, detained in Civitavecchia, he proclaimed himself imam of the jail and started organizing violent. After being moved to a prison in Naples, in May 2016 he attacked other Christian inmates and, a few months later, prison guards.[68]

The ability to keep its radicalizing role in different prison contexts reveals a sort of deviant resilience that is common among radicalized individuals. Since they believe to know the only truth and to have a mission, radicals are often capable of adapting to the context and impose themselves as charismatic figures creating similar dynamics within different groups.

[67] For an overview of the origins and development of the group see Ansar al-Shariah (Tunisia), Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford.

[68] Berti, "Chi è Hmdi Saber, 'alfiere' dell'Isis in Italia", *Agenzia Giornalistica Italia (AGI)*, January 10, 2017.

6.3 Internet: Radicalizing Online

The immense amount of research focused on online radicalization reached universal consensus about a few insights on what the Internet is capable of:

- Fostering radicalization;
- Accelerating an ongoing radicalization process;
- Being an echo-chamber for radical contents and narratives that would not have had the same outreach without the Internet;
- Creating the condition to make radicalization, recruitment, and mobilization happen without physical interactions between individuals.[69]

The explosive force of the Internet is particularly clear in the case of the Islamic State. Daesh took many steps forward in terms of pervasiveness, effectiveness, and quality of its online propaganda.

In particular, the Islamic State has been able to exploit Western and Hollywood-like aesthetic standards to create its own videos, magazines and – more broadly – the propaganda targeted at potential jihadists all over the world.

Many of the videos released in the last few years closely resemble videogame, in which the heroic and adventurous dimension of the Islamic State project is displayed easily and in markedly accessible ways, accompanied by the music of *anashid*[70] or with speeches in multiple different languages in order to highlight the cosmopolitism of the jihadi project.

To the adventurous component of the propaganda, the Islamic State has always added a big deal of attention to the narratives related to the daily life in its territories. In other words, its self-promotion operations have effectively followed a double track, in which the two parts corresponded to two distinct phases of recruitment and aimed at conquering two different targets.

Violent images, fights, and executions were accompanied by peaceful scenes and images of Islamic pietas: jihadists were portrayed killing the unbelievers and saving stray kittens from the street. This attention to the peaceful and daily life component of the project had the goals of showing the Islamic State as possible here and now and attracting families and women, for which specific outlets were also created.

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[69] For an overview of academic research on online radicalization see Meleagrou-Hitchens, Kaderbhai (2017). For the more recent developments in online radicalization, recruitment, and mobilization see the works of Valerio Mazzoni for *European Eye on Radicalization*: "Hearts, Minds, and Jihad Online – A War that the EU Doesn't Understand" (September 24, 2018); "Wilaya Telegram: The Self-Styled ISIS Supporters" (October 24 and 29, 2018), "Jihadi Online Retaliations to the Christchurch Terror Attack" (April 2, 2019).

[70] Chants that can be sung a cappella or with instruments, used by the Islamic State as soundtrack for many of its videos.

With the defeat of the Islamic State, the movement underwent a deep reconfiguration, and it now can no longer attract new people to its territories. Nevertheless, the risk posed by online radicalization did not cease to exist with the loss of territorial control.

Moreover, although Daesh proved to have unprecedented propaganda skills, there are dozens of other jihadist movements active online.

A number of case studies involving Moroccans and Tunisians in Italy help us to understand how online radicalization was not a prerogative of the Islamic State at its peak.[71]

One of the first cases of radicalization involving the Internet was that of Mohammed Jarmoune, analyzed above. Jarmoune's role was revealed during the 2009 Operation Niriya, one of the most famous investigations on Islamist extremism in Italy and the first to involve jihadists and jihadi sympathizers who were born and raised in Italy.

Mohammed Jarmoune could be considered the first case of a homegrown jihadist who was trialed in Italy. Indeed, in spite of being born in Morocco, his socialization and cultural development took place in Italy and in Italian, with no links to radical groups in Morocco.

Another case study that is extremely useful for the study of the relation between radicalization and the Internet is the story of Anas el Abboubi, aka Anas al-Itali and Rawaha al-Itali.

Born in Morocco in 1992, he moved to Vobarno, near Brescia, when he was 7. The family was well integrated and he soon enters the world of rap, a genre in which themes of marginalization and social redemption play a primary role. In 2010 he gets closer to Islam and takes on the stage name Mc Khalif,[72] rapping with increasing rage.

In the following years, however, following his radical interpretation of Islamic rules, he abandons music because he starts to consider it haram, stops wearing Western clothes and avoid his friends. At the same time, he starts spending more and more time on jihadist websites and forums, using different nicknames.

Similar to other profiles of radicalized individuals, the use of internet is twofold: he spends hours acquiring information – mainly on how to make explosives – and at the same time actively produced propaganda, translating jihadist texts and manuals into Italian.

On September 17, 2012, Anas asks to the police in Brescia how to organize a protest against an American movie that he thinks to be against Muslims, *Innocence*

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[71] For a detailed analysis of Daesh communication strategies see Maggioni, Magri (2015).

[72] Anas features in the MTV Italia interview "Nel ritmo di Allah: la storia di Mc Khalif" (March 12, 2012).

of Muslims by Sam Bacile.[73] As a consequence, the Digos of Brescia opens a dossier on Anas and start the operation Screen Shot. During the investigation it became clear that El Abboubi had a wide network of radical contacts, which also included Giuliano Delnevo – first Italian convert who died in Syria – and Anjem Choudary, Islamist founder of Sharia4UK.

Sharia4 was a sort of Islamist franchising in different countries, and it was Anas el-Abboubi who tried to find Sharia4Italy, a platform committed to recruit new fighters and to perform a sort of *on the ground* Islamization, on European streets.

In May 2013 police also discovered a number of alarming searches on Google Maps, in which El Abboubi checked the Brescia train station, Piazza della Loggia, and other sites.

In June he was arrested on charges of training for terrorist objectives, jihadist propaganda and advocating violence for racial, ethnic, and religious reasons. A few days later, however, the Court of Review in Brescia decides his release upon insufficient evidence and the decision was then confirmed by the Court of Cassation. He was released and from that moment on Anas disappeared until October, when he released a video from Syria where he had joined Daesh and was "Free like a bird in the sky", as he wrote on Facebook.

In January 2014 the updates on his accounts stopped. Anas probably died, but the events remain unknown.

The case of Meriam Rehaily, a young woman of Moroccan origin, cannot be excluded from this overview on radicalization and the Internet. She was born in Morocco and arrived to Italy when she was 9, to live in Padova province. At the material time she was 19 and the signs of radicalization are the same as those of many other young individuals: drifting away from the circle of friends, exploiting religion and ideology to justify any opinion, and increasing time spent on Skype, Whatsapp and Twitter.

The first red flags showed in January 2015, when Meriam's parents are informed by the school of the alarming content of her writings: "To face the Zionist enemies we have to respect our religion even if this implies dying [...] we have to raise our children according to the Islamic values and make them ready for the fight".[74]

In May 2015 investigators found out that Meriem wrote a list of people to be killed – with their addresses and phone numbers – mainly belonging to Police and Carabinieri. With the nickname Maryam (Cyber Caliph) she translated the document circulated in 2015 in which Daesh urged its followers to hit Rome, *Lupi solitari, leoni delle città* by Hamel Bochra.

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[73] Dambruoso (2018), p. 65.

[74] Priante, "Undici testimoni contro Meriem 'se mi arrestano me ne vanto'", *Corriere del Veneto*, May 17, 2017.

In July of the same year Meriem leaves to the Islamic State, after confessing to some friends – who would testimony against her at the trial – that she was "*eager to chop some head*".

Thanks to her knowledge of different languages, it seems like Meriem was employed by Daesh in a sort of welcome service for the newcomers. Later, as an expert of social networks, her skills were used for the so-called cyber jihad, a field in which she was known as Sister Rim. Since June 2016 she is officially wanted for joining a terrorist organization[75] and on December 12, 2017, the Court of Venice condemned her in absentia to four years in jail and repatriation to Morocco at the end of her time.

In Spring 2018 Fausto Biloslavo manages to interview her while she is a prisoner of the Kurdish forces in Camp Roj, Syria. Meriem explained that she wanted to go back to Italy, she was not a terrorist and was simply *brainwashed*.

6.4 Radicalization Hubs

The so-called *radicalization hubs* are areas in which the number of radicalized individuals is significantly higher than the national average. In the last few years Europe witnessed the birth of a number of radicalization hubs – think of Moelenbeek in Brussels or Ripoll in Spain.

In Italy, however, the phenomenon looks smaller, and this for multiple reasons, some of which have been analyzed when dealing with the levels of radicalization in Italy and the relative advantage enjoyed by the country compared to other Western European States.

In Italy the most interesting case is the area of Ravenna, a city with about 160,000 inhabitants and 12% migrants. From here, between 9 and 20 foreign terrorist fighters left to Syria and Iraq.[76]

Between 2015 and the beginning of 2019 in Ravenna authorities identified two foreign fighters and six individuals at risk of radicalization: one of the mujahedeen was arrested and sentenced, while the other seven people have been expelled from the country for security reasons.[77]

At the same time El Fahs, 60 kilometers away from Tunis, had an extremely high number of individuals joining Ansar al-Sharia or the Islamic State controlled territories. The crucial element is that many people belonging to El Fahs radical environment were relatives or close friends of Tunisian migrants in Ravenna.

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[75] Some sources claimed that Meriem was charged of adultery and publicly stoned near Raqqa.

[76] 2019 estimates.

[77] "Indagini sui casi di radicalizzazione, il Sap fa i complimenti alla Digos", *Ravenna e Dintorni*, February 5, 2019.

This scenario suggests the possible presence of a small radicalization hub in the Ravenna area and a sort of radical twinning between the Italian city and El Fahs in Tunisia, and urges experts not to overlook old-school radicalization,[78] characterized by face-to-face interactions, pre-existing relations within the peer group and charismatic leaders who take on the role of radicalizing agents.

Between 2014 and 2017, 66% of the attacks perpetrated in Europe was carried out by individuals with extremely loose links – if any – to jihadi groups, and this seems to confirm the persisting relevance of local, in-person dynamics within the so-called *radicalization hubs*.[79]

When comparing old-school and online recruitment dynamics a crucial difference becomes apparent: online radicalization and recruitment clearly win from a quantitative perspective. However, old school, in-person strategies might be winning from a qualitative point of view. In other words, online propaganda is able to reach thousands of individuals worldwide, but only an extremely tiny minority will activate, acquiring the operational skills and knowledge for planning and executing terrorist attacks. Moreover, online radicalization appears to be a largely *atomized* phenomenon: radicalizing agents cannot rely on peer pressure, an extraordinarily effective resource that is exploited within the framework of offline radicalization, in face-to-face interactions among groups with pre-existing relations.

The platform Counter Extremism Project identified 10 areas (neighborhoods, entire cities and, in one case, the State of Minnesota) in which the radical activity, albeit not necessarily violent, is particularly intense.[80]

Ravenna hosted also Anis Amri, the attacker who killed 12 people in the Christmas market of Berlin on December 19, 2016 and was later shot dead by police in Sesto San Giovanni, near Milan. In 2011 Amri arrived to Lampedusa and, pretending to be a minor, applied for asylum. After a number of violent acts, he was sentenced to 4 years in prison, which he served in different cities. The prosecutor of Ravenna opened a file on Amri for violation of immigration laws and counterfeiting of documents.

Ravenna was also the city where the first foreign fighter in Italy was stopped, after the specific law was enforced: once again, the subject was a Tunisian citizen, Noussair Louati.

According to the hypothesis suggested by Francesco Marone – with whom we agree – the beginning of the small hub of Ravenna was largely random,[81] but later more complex network dynamics attracted increasing numbers of radicals.

[78] Brzuszkiewicz (2018).

[79] Brzuszkiewicz (2018).

[80] Counter Extremism Project, Extremist Hubs.

[81] "Ravenna capitale dei 'foreign fighter'. 'Tutto iniziò con alcuni spacciatori'", *Il Resto del Carlino*, January 24, 2019.

In the city there was a nucleus of Tunisian migrants, almost entirely coming from the area of El-Fahs and involved in drug dealing. The first wave fostered the arrival of other individuals with similar profiles.

As we saw before, the following shift from crime to radicalization is far from being uncommon.

7. The Italian legal toolbox for countering radicalization

7.1 The legal framework

On April 15, 2015, in reaction to the phenomenon of the foreign terrorist fighters – which occurred before during other wars but has never been this broad and pervasive, Italy approved new crucial legal provisions.

Among the provisions there were the new Urgent Measures for Contrasting Terrorism, the extension of the Army and Police international missions, new international cooperation initiatives. In the framework of the fight against terrorism, the Decree 7/2015 introduced multiple and diverse tools.

First of all, foreign fighters – those who join a terrorist group to fight for it – are sentenced to 5 to 8 years, and so is the case for those who organize, finance, or advertise travels aimed at perpetrating terrorist behaviors. Interestingly, the new Measures include provisions to tackle the phenomenon of the so-called lone wolves – or lone actors.

Those who autonomously gained the instructions on the preparation and use of explosives, firearms, and other weapons, chemical and biological weapons and any other technique to execute acts of violence with terrorist purposes will be sentenced to 5 to 10 years in prison.

The new law also envisions the loss of parental rights for those who are sentenced for these crimes.

Online radicalization, which represents a further challenge in fighting contemporary radicalism, is included in the Measures. The use of the Internet becomes an aggravating circumstance when it is used for perpetrating acts of terrorism, incitement, and apologia for terrorism.

As far as the allocation of competences is concerned, the new law gives the National Anti-Mafia Prosecutor authority for coordinating antiterrorism operations.[82]

[82] Ministry of Interior.

7.2 Thoughts on deportations and counter-radicalization

The current law authorizes the Ministry of Interior[83] to decide the deportation of an individual as a measure to counter terrorism.[84]

Following the expulsion from the Italian territory, through the Schengen Information System, the person will be banned from entering the European Union for a minimum of 5 years, which often become 10.

In the last few years, the number of deportations increased significantly. In 2015 and 2016 they were 66; 105 in 2017 and 118 in 2018. In this time frame, Tunisians and Moroccans have always alternated at the top of the nationalities by numbers of people deported for preventative purposes.

The two major strengths of this measure consist of its rapidity and its effectiveness in a context – the Italian one – in which a high number of radicalized individuals does not possess the Italian citizenship. *Yet.*

The tool of deportation is rapid because it can be used for preventative purposes and to protect national security before a crime is committed. Therefore, it is obviously much faster than a standard court trial. From these premises, it becomes apparent that the system can be effective in the *current* circumstances.

It is interesting to notice that the weaknesses of this system are a mirror-image of its strengths, the other side of the coin.

First, the rapidity of this measure compared to the slow pace of a trial seems positive. At the same time, however, it might jeopardize the protection of the expelled individuals' rights, as they must leave the country because they are considered a threat without a decision of a tribunal. Moreover, in a number of cases the deportation might result in human rights abuses in the country of destination.[85]

In this respect, the European Court of Human Rights, dealing with an Italian case, reaffirmed that it is forbidden to send people to countries in which there is a tangible risk of torture and inhumane and degrading treatment.[86]

The effectiveness on individuals who do not have Italian citizenship is undeniable, but this is temporary: society is changing rapidly, second and third generations

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[83] Under Minister's delegation prefects and judges can be authorized.

[84] Servizio Centrale Antiterrorismo, "La normativa antiterrorismo. Nuove figure di reato e armonizzazione della legislazione", *Polizia Moderna*, October 2016.

[85] Marone (2017).

[86] The case was *Saadi v Italy* (2008). In 2002 Nassim Saadi, a Tunisian citizen regularly residing in Italy, was arrested as a suspect of international terrorism. In 2006 he was declared innocent and released but, meantime, the Court of Tunis had condemned him in absentia to 20 years in prison for belonging to a terrorist organization and incitement to terrorism. Before being deported from Italy, he applied for asylum as he feared the treatment in Tunisia. The application was rejected for national security reasons but, thanks to the intervention of the European Court of Human Rights and a number of nongovernmental organizations, the deportation was revoked.

are growing, and so are the applications for citizenship. Moreover, the provision obviously cannot be used for Italian citizens who converted and later radicalized.

In this respect, the so-called 'Decreto Sicurezza' enforced in 2018 by the Interior Minister Matteo Salvini attempted to fix the flaws of this system, using the mechanism of citizenship revocation. Art.14 of the Decree enabled the Ministry to revoke the citizenship of a subject sentenced for terrorism related crimes. This measure, however, is applicable only to those who *became* Italian citizens, and not to those who are born Italian.[87] Obviously, this distinction creates a clear disparity between those who are Italian by bloodline and those who acquired the citizenship later, and at the same time it cannot be applied to those individuals whose *blood* is Italian, according to the view underlying the decree.

A further problem is that in some cases the citizenship revocation might create stateless persons. Indeed, if acquiring the Italian citizenship caused the loss of the first nationality, losing the Italian one inevitably results in not having any citizenship.

To avoid this risk some Western European countries, such as France, envision citizenship revocation only if the subjects have more than one nationality.[88]

Overall, the set of counterterrorism measures in Italy shows remarkable strengths, such as the new provisions introduced in 2015 against foreign terrorist fighters and online radicalization and the commendable expertise and action of the Intelligence. At the same time, however, some issues are more complex to assess, such as the system of deportations. Halfway between prevention and repression,[89] it has been effective and contributed to the *Italian exceptionalism*[90] of being one of the very few Western European countries not experiencing any major jihadist attack.

However, deportations seem to be working in the current social scenario and, without further enhancements, are unlikely to remain effective in the medium-term future, when society, migrations, and radicalization patterns will be different.

8. Conclusions

The present chapter attempted to shed a light on the radicalization problem among Moroccan and Tunisian citizens in Italy and to know whether this issue represents an actual threat.

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[87] Vedaschi, Graziani (2019).

[88] The United Kingdom is an important exception: the Immigration Act (2014) authorizes the loss of citizenship for naturalized citizens even when they do not have another citizenship, as long as there are *reasonable prospects* that they can become citizens of another country.

[89] Marone (2017).

[90] Groppi (2017) and Scremin (2018).

To answer this question, we scrutinized the complex meanings of notions like radicalization, extremism, Islamism, and de-radicalization. The context-bond nature of these terms have been highlighted to show that what is considered radical or extreme today might not have been considered radical or extreme in other times and places.

This makes the challenge undertaken by terrorism experts and actors on the ground even harder and more delicate.

From these premises, in the second section the chapter provided an overview of the history of Islamist radicalization in Italy and its most important stages, explaining why the Italian situation is unique among Western countries. More recent and smaller migrations, the commendable action of the intelligence services, a better reputation enjoyed by Italy in Muslim-majority countries, the absence of the so-called ghetto neighborhoods, the positive role taken on by institutions from countries like Morocco, and many other factors contributed to create and maintain the relative advantage compared to other Western countries.

The demographic picture of Moroccans and Tunisians in Italy shows numerous and well-integrated communities, mostly involved in long term migratory projects. They are characterized by a number of positive trends, such as the stabilization in the country, the continuous rise of education levels, and the narrowing of the gap between male and female presence. At the same time, however, a few problematic and unsettled trends are worth monitoring further, such as the high unemployment rates and the persistent gender gap on the job market.

From these starting points we deepened the notion of *places of vulnerability* to radicalization, analyzing the stories of a number of Moroccan and Tunisians individuals who radicalized in Italy and became violent. Social networks forming on the edge of the local Muslim communities, prisons, the Internet, and the so-called radicalization hubs have been investigated for their complex nature of places that host – and often foster – the birth and growth of dangerous radicalization dynamics.

Through the stories of Mohammed Koraichi and Aisha/Alice Brignoli, Moncef el-Makhiar and Tariq Abu Ala, Hmidi Saber, Mohammed Jarmoune, Anas el-Abboubi, Meriem Rehaili and Anis Amri these dynamics have been analyzed with the goal of acquiring better knowledge of the threat.

Moroccan and Tunisian communities in Italy represent an essential part of the Italian social fabric.

Does radicalization among Tunisians and Moroccans in Italy exist? The answer is yes.

Does radicalization exist only among Tunisians and Moroccans? It certainly does not. It is a complex, multilayered and extremely dynamic phenomenon, and any simplistic interpretation would turn out to be misleading, when not stigmatizing.

The fact that Italy has not experienced any major attack yet should neither lead us to focus only on specific communities nor to let our guard down.

For these reasons, taking into account the evolving nature of radicalization and merging new soft preventative measures with Italian time-tested hard measures will be increasingly essential.

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Chapter II
VULNERABILITY TO CLIMATE CHANGE: A COMMON DRIVER OF (IM)MOBILITY AND RADICALIZATION IN NORTH AFRICA?

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Abstract: The interconnections among climate change, (im)mobility and radicalization have been mostly overlooked by the literature so far. In particular, few studies have investigated the role of vulnerability as explanatory variable of radicalization as well as of (im)mobility in the context of climate change. In the attempt to contribute to the academic debate on these dynamics, this Chapter aims to explore whether vulnerability to climate change may constitute a common factor influencing the decision (not) to leave an adverse environment and to join violent extremist groups in the particular context of North Africa. Although there is no clear-cut causal link among climate change, (im)mobility and radicalization, identifying recurring triggering factors in the sub-region may guide policy and legal actions to address related challenges.

Keywords: Vulnerability – Mobility – Immobility – North Africa – Radicalization – Climate Change

1. Introduction

Climate-related disasters and conflicts are the two major drivers of forced movements globally, together responsible for the internal displacement of 38 million people solely in 2021.[1] Climate change and conflicts are undoubtedly at the top of the political agenda at all levels, while solutions to tackle their devastating repercussions are steadily at the core of global and local negotiations. Whereas the causes, impacts, and dynamics of conflicts are widely known, including the interplay with

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[1] IDMC (2022).

radicalization and violent extremism, those of climate change need to be further investigated. Traditionally, research studies have dealt alternatively with the climate change-migration nexus, the climate change-conflict nexus, or the migration-conflict nexus. Very few contributions explore the interconnections among these three elements, and even less focus on the specific phenomenon of radicalization. The following lines summarize the main findings of strands of literature on such nexuses to then dive into the core topics of the present contribution.

Beginning with the most intuitive, conflicts are considered to be a major driver of forced mobility. Solely in 2021, more than 14 million internal displacements occurred worldwide due to armed conflicts and violence, an increase of almost 50% compared to 2020, while a total of 89.3 million people globally have fled because of war and persecution.[2] Conflicts can take many forms (high or low hostility levels), involve different actors and States, and outbreak due to a wide set of reasons, including of economic, social, political, and religious nature. What conflicts have in common is a great rise in forced migration and displacement both into internal safer areas of the country at stake and cross-borders. Although challenged, several studies have examined the impact that migration can have on conflicts. For instance, Docquier, Ruyssen and Schiff found a positive correlation between South-North and South-South migration on the occurrence of interstate conflicts occurred between 1960-2000, which was deemed to have exacerbated existing ethnic, social, and political tensions.[3]

Second, a relevant strand of security studies deals with the role of climate change as potential trigger or exacerbating factor of violence, conflicts, and radicalization, with widely divergent results according to the case-studies at stake, the underlining premises and methodology applied. Back in 2009, the UN Secretary-General produced a comprehensive report on climate change and its possible security implications, where climate change was defined as a "threat-multiplier" with the potential to intensify existing threats against international peace and security.[4] The fourth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the most authoritative source of scientific climate evidence, also stressed the relationship between climate change and conflict, especially in contexts with scant natural resources.[5] Although challenged, the result of several studies seems to confirm that the rise of violent extremism (and of conflict) may coincide with an increase in environmental degradation and competition over natural resources.[6] In this regard, the Lake Chad Basin is usually cited as an emblematic case, where extreme poverty

[2] *Ibid*.

[3] Docquier, Ruyssen, Schiff (2017).

[4] UNGA (2009).

[5] IPCC (2007).

[6] Frimpong (2020).

combined with environmental degradation are providing a fertile ground for non-state armed groups such as Boko Haram to recruit vulnerable people, accelerating massive internal and cross-border migration.[7]

Third, scholars have been particularly interested in exploring the nexus between climate change and human mobility options, traditionally including migration, displacement, and planned relocation.[8] Since the '80s, climate change and environmental factors emerged as threats to human rights and, consequently, as potential drivers of migration movements.[9] Building upon the increasing accuracy of scientific evidence, which estimates the devastating effects of a worsening climate and emphasizes its dramatic impacts on exacerbating vulnerabilities propelling mixed migration movements, climate change has emerged as a direct and indirect threat to the enjoyment of all human rights recognized under the 1966 International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, thus notably widening the number of potential causes of human mobility in the context of climate change. On this point, the UN Framework Convention of Climate Change (UNFCCC) recognizes eight slow-onset effects of climate change (desertification, glacial retreat, increasing temperatures, land and forest degradation, loss of biodiversity, ocean acidification, salinization and sea level rise) that gravely impact on people's livelihood, access and enjoyment of human rights as well as to related services, facilities and opportunities. An emblematic example concerns poverty associated with environmental risks that can propel human mobility. Currently, approximately 80% of the world's poorest populations live in degraded rural areas affected by drought and desertification, which have been officially recognized as drivers of forced migration, while more than 2 billion people are estimated to be currently living in countries with high water stress, which could affect almost twice as many by 2050.[10] The academic enquiry in the field has over time reached import-

[7] UNDP (2020).

[8] This contribution generally refers to mobility and immobility. However, when a specific term is used by the literature, the concepts of 'migration', 'displacement', or 'relocation' will be used. Although there is no legal definition of migrant in international law, IOM defines migration as the movement of persons away from their place of usual residence, either across an international border or within a State. See, IOM 2019. Conversely, displacement describes "the movement of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of [...] natural or human-made disasters". See Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement 1998. Planned relocation is a form of planned, organized movement of people typically supervised and carried out by the State. UNHCR describes it as a "planned process in which persons or groups of persons move or are assisted to move away from their homes or places of temporary residence, are settled in a new location, and provided with the conditions for rebuilding their lives". For references, please see UNHCR (2018).

[9] Among many others, OHCHR (2018), IOM (2014), Foresight (2011), Villani (2021).

[10] IOM, UNCCD (2019). See also, UN-Water (2018).

ant breakthroughs that led scholars to consider climate change not only as a driver of human mobility, but also of *immobility*. In particular, a few studies suggest that social, financial and political factors can act as barriers to migration, 'trapping' people in precarious environments despite their aspiration to move or influencing their final decision to remain in dangerous sites in order to preserve emotional bonds with their home, family and community.[11]

These studies constitute the starting point of the present analysis, whereby factors enabling or hindering human mobility options as well as inducing people to join political violence are considered as neither fixed nor predetermined. Rather, they inextricably depend on the single individual and on the specific social, cultural, political, economic, and environmental context in which the individual is situated. As a result, the impact of climate change on each person's decision (not) to move varies according to personal and contextual characteristics. Likewise, the likelihood to join violent extremism changes from individual to individual and is strongly context-specific. This assumption is key to the ethics and feminist philosophy on vulnerability, at the core of this contribution. In order to explore whether vulnerability to climate change might figure as common driver of (im)mobility and radicalization, it is crucial to understand what vulnerability means and how it interacts with the individual decision (not) to move or join political violence.

According to ethics and feminist philosophy, while personal characteristics deal with the individual status or identity – such as sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, sex characteristics, age, or disability –, contextual factors have to do with the particular social, cultural, economic, environmental, and political context in which a person is situated.

Vulnerability is a flexible, adaptable concept according to the subject at stake. Although different disciplines study vulnerability, the definitions they give of vulnerability often merge and borrow key elements one from another. From philosophical to development studies, from law to climate science, the notion commonly refers to the corporal fragility of the humankind, meaning the individual's organic propensity to disease and disability, and their inability to avoid an inescapable death.[12] Part of the ethics and feminist philosophy scholarship reflects upon the inherent dimension of vulnerability, which is common to each human being "whose autonomy or dignity or integrity are capable of being threatened".[13] In particular, Fineman pioneered the ontological dimension of vulnerability, positing that all human beings, can be labelled as vulnerable as we are all subject to physical, psychological and emotional harm, despite our efforts to avoid pain. Vulnerability is

[11] Black et al. (2013), p. 36. See also, Zickgraf (2019), Black, Collyer (2014).
[12] Turner (2006), p. 29. See also, Scissa (2021).
[13] Rogers (2014).

therefore ontological in all human beings, regardless their socio-economic, cultural and political background.[14] An alternative strand discourages the universal application of vulnerability, as it risks universalizing some targeted individual factors of vulnerability at the expense of other less detected drivers, ultimately making them invisible. The taxonomy elaborated by McKenzie, Rogers and Dodds attempts to overcome these opposing scholarships by providing three different yet interconnected forms of (inherent, situational and pathologic) vulnerability affecting the individual, where both internal and external factors of vulnerability coexist.[15] The authors posit that inherent vulnerability would be exacerbated by personal, social, political, economic or environmental circumstances in which single individuals or entire communities are situated. They bring the case of natural hazards, whose effects certainly affect large segments of the population, but in different ways. Some groups will be more affected than others due to weaker socio-economic conditions or precarious housing. The institutional support that will be given to the victims, in terms of benefits, relocation, recovery of their belongings, will necessarily be determined by the human and financial resources of the country at stake, thus determining macro-level forms of vulnerability among States. In light of the foregoing, this contribution endorses the definition of "situational vulnerability" advanced by McKenzie, Rogers and Dodds to describe how vulnerability can be produced and/or exacerbated by the interplay of personal, social, cultural, political, economic and environmental factors rendering some people at heightened risk of (im)mobility.[16]

The disaster research seems to transpose the concept of situational vulnerability into disaster settings. Cutter defines vulnerability as the "potential for loss", which is to a certain extent similar to the philosophical study carried out by Hoffmaster, whereby vulnerability means loss of opportunities to live better, loss of abilities to live well, and loss of living.[17] From a development studies perspective, Cannon argues that vulnerability is the ultimate product of social inequality, where certain groups are vulnerable because they are disproportionately exposed to risks. The sociologist Turner reaches a similar conclusion in arguing that individuals are subject to "institutional precariousness", stressing the role of the State in producing or exacerbating vulnerability.[18]

Within the migration context, vulnerability has been described as "the diminished capacity of an individual or group to resist, cope with, or recover from violence, exploitation, abuse, and violation(s) of their rights".[19] Migrants in vulnerable

[14] Scissa (2022).

[15] Mackenzie, Rogers, Dodds (2014), pp. 1-29.

[16] *Ibid*.

[17] Cutter (1996), p. 529. See also, Hoffmaster (2006), p. 43.

[18] Cannon (2006).

[19] IOM (2017), p. 3.

situations are thus persons who are unable to effectively enjoy their human rights, are at increased risk of violations and abuse. The level of vulnerability of each migrant "is determined by the presence, absence, and interaction of factors and circumstances that (a) increase the risk of, and exposure to, or (b) protect against, violence, exploitation, abuse and rights violations".[20] The factors that influence the level of vulnerability of each person intervene at various levels: individual, household/family or community level, or can be structural or linked to specific situations in which migrants find themselves at different points in time during the movement.[21]

When it comes to vulnerability to climate change, the IPCC defines vulnerability as "the propensity or predisposition to be adversely affected. Vulnerability encompasses a variety of concepts and elements including sensitivity or susceptibility to harm and lack of capacity to cope and adapt".[22] It therefore highlights three components of vulnerability in the context of climate change: exposure, susceptibility and adaptive capacity. In other words, vulnerability means to be exposed and sensitive to the effects of climate change and at the same time to have only limited capacity to adapt. According to the IPCC, "people who are socially, economically, culturally, politically, institutionally or otherwise marginalized are especially vulnerable to climate change and also to some adaptation and mitigation responses".[23] These different kinds of marginalization mentioned also correspond to concrete factors of situational vulnerability that may act as a barrier to mobility. These include, but are not limited to, socio-economic deprivation, geography, gender and sexual orientation, age, disability, indigenous or minority status, national or social origin, birth or other statuses.[24]

Vulnerability tends, indeed, to limit migration opportunities, to move safely and through regular pathways.[25] In fact, migration requires financial, social and political assets that some people simply do not have.[26] Zickgraf notes that several studies in the '90s point out the role played by poverty in limiting mobility options in the aftermath of disasters.[27] For instance, it has been argued that the poor are twice as likely to work in sectors highly susceptible to climate impacts, live in fragile housing in risk-prone areas, and tend to receive less recovery support after disasters.[28] Along these lines, Herren finds that the poorest are the worst hit by droughts occurred in

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[20] Id.

[21] *Ibid*., pp. 5-6.

[22] IOM (2015), p. 128.

[23] Field et al. (2014), p. 50.

[24] Human Rights Council (2021).

[25] Warner et al. (2013).

[26] Zickgraf et al. (2016).

[27] *Ibid*.

[28] Hallegatte et al. (2017). See also, Smit, Wandel (2006).

Kenya in the '80s precisely because they had no option other than to remain, while Carling shows that poverty acts an essential barrier to migration in Cape Verde, despite people's aspiration to do so.[29] Additionally, people in Indonesia identify the unavailability of financial capital as the main barrier to migration from environmental hazard-prone areas: "I really want to move, but don't have the financial capability" to do so.[30] People vulnerable to climate change, therefore, are likely to being trapped in increasingly precarious rural or urban environments, despite their willingness to leave. The 2011 Foresight report calls "trapped populations" those who cannot, or are unwilling to, move away from precarious rural or urban environments and who may be amongst the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.[31]

Immobility can therefore be involuntary or voluntary, where the former stresses the inability of people to move because of a lack of resources, while the latter sheds light on the desire of people to remain where they are, trying to cope with the sources of harm.[32]

The 2022 report by the IPCC confirmed that climate change is contributing to humanitarian crises where climate hazards interact with high vulnerability, which encompasses poverty, weak governance and limited access to basic services and resources. Exacerbating factors of vulnerability include, according to the report, inequity and marginalization linked to gender, ethnicity, low income, colonialism, or combinations thereof.[33] Climate change is expected to affect from 3.3 to 3.6 billion people who live in such contexts of high vulnerability. Most importantly for our purposes, the 2022 IPCC report concludes that climate change and extreme weather events have not only caused human death already, but also flood- and drought-related acute food insecurity and malnutrition, escalation of violence, and heightened displacement and forced migration, generating and perpetuating vulnerability. These findings pave the way for further reflections upon the role of vulnerability to climate change as common driver of (im)mobility and political violence.

However, vulnerability in the context of climate change may turn mobility into a precarious and unsafe strategy. People in Ethiopia are fleeing progressive environmental degradation and drought, usually with limited information regarding the life-threatening risks correlated to irregular migration. According to an interviewee, "My son tried to migrate because he lost hope when drought ravaged his farm; he could not take it anymore. He is very hard working and determined but perennial crop failure caused by drought pushed him to the brink".[34] When not planned and

[29] Carling (2002).
[30] Sierra, Gonzales (2019), p. 9.
[31] UNICEF (2015), p. 6. See also OHCHR (2021), Keogh, Gonzalez (2020), Betts (2010).
[32] Foresight (2011), p. 12.
[33] IPCC (2022).
[34] Lim Ah Ken, Mabaso (2022).

necessary resources to move lack, mobility in the context of climate change may worsen the situation of already vulnerable people, trapping them in webs of exploitation, abuse, and trafficking.[35] In such circumstances, some may also be receptive to violent extremism.

In light of the foregoing, the aim of this Chapter is to explore whether, in principle, situational vulnerability to climate change might be considered as a common driver of (im)mobility and radicalization. In this context, North Africa – a sub-region highly vulnerable to climate change, susceptible to attacks by violent extremist groups, and characterized by great migration in- and out-flows – provides a perfect case-study. To this end, this contribution is organized as follows. Section 2 portrays a climate and migration profile of North Africa. Section 3 provides an overview of the key features of radicalization and violent extremism, questioning whether migration could represent a factor triggering such phenomena. Section 4 deepens these topics in the context of North Africa, while Section 5 explores whether situational vulnerability exacerbated by climate change could constitute a factor triggering (im)mobility as well as radicalization. The Chapter concludes that there is not a deterministic or causal link among climate change, (im)mobility, and radicalization, with a focus on North Africa. Rather, the relationship is complex and highly context-dependent, occurring when climate change interacts with a wide set of social, economic, political, cultural factors that exacerbate vulnerability, which can contribute to shaping migration flows and conflicts. In this perspective, situational vulnerability might be considered as influencing mobility options as well as radicalization choices. Not only such vulnerabilities may act as a barrier to mobility, trapping people in increasingly precarious rural or urban environments; but in certain fragile or conflict-prone contexts, trapped populations might constitute a fertile ground for traffickers and violent extremists' recruitment, where their involvement in political violence is traded for economic gains, ultimately to survive. In other cases, vulnerability could push people who do not possess the resources to move towards illegal or exploitative migration options. This might trigger those feelings of loss, desperation, and injustice that part of the scholarship considers contributing factors of radicalization. Conversely, and if adequately planned, regular migration could serve both as adaptation strategy to reduce the negative impacts of climate change and to improve individuals' socio-economic status, with greater access to employment, services, and other opportunities in the country of destination.[36]

[35] Borraccetti (2019).
[36] Gemenne, Blocher (2017).

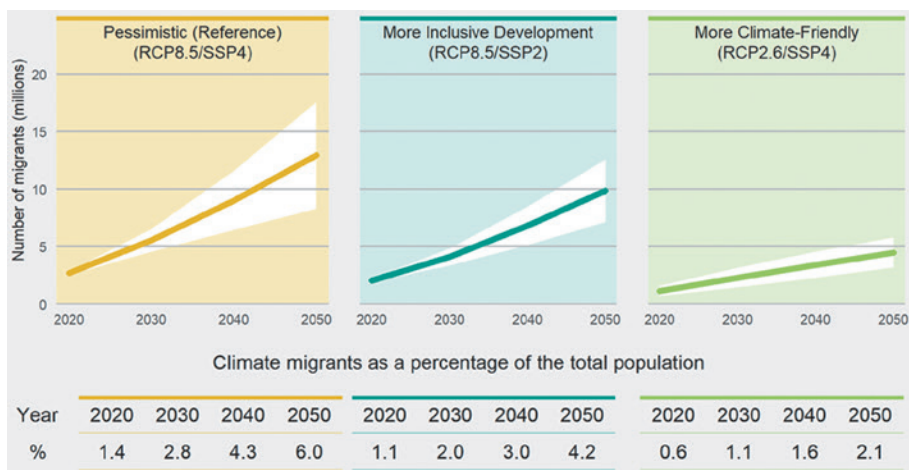
2. North Africa: A climate and migration profile

Traditionally, North African countries are hubs of emigration, immigration, and transit both within and among them. In 2021, the sub-region hosted more than 3 million international migrants, while more than 12 million North Africans left their country.[37] In 2021, roughly 3 million people left Morocco and headed to high-income countries in Europe, especially France and Spain, while around 900 thousand Tunisians migrated to France and the United States of America.[38]

The main drivers of emigration are economic in nature, as emigrants mostly aspire to improve their quality of life and look for better job opportunities. Most immigrants in these countries are internal migrants, who move from rural to urban areas, as well as international migrants coming from Sub-Saharan Africa for job or protection purposes. Although North Africa has a long history of internal and cross-border economic migration, climate change and environmental degradation are projected to play a role in future migration movements, especially in Morocco, where the increasing occurrence and severity of sudden- and slow-onset events will diminish economic opportunities.[39] In the study conducted for the World Bank, Wodon et al. reached the same conclusion, arguing that, although socio-economic and demographic factors are still the predominant causes of migration in North Africa, "it is legitimate to suggest that climatic events may well account for about 10–20 percent of current levels of migration, which is still large. And the role that weather patterns play could well increase in the future as climatic conditions deteriorate further".[40] North Africa is a highly vulnerable sub-region to slow-onset events. In particular, it is expected to face increasing temperatures as well as heatwaves, with downturns in agricultural production and supply. As a result of deteriorating rural livelihoods, rural-to-urban migration is projected to further increase.[41] On the one hand, water scarcity is deemed to be an additional major concern, as diminishing freshwater resources would intensify droughts and crop failures, with implications across all key North African economic sectors. On the other hand, sea-level rise along the Nile Delta could lead to salinization, threatening access to freshwater. Sudden-onset events and climate-related disasters have already caused severe damages in this area. A total of 115 climate-related disasters were recorded in North Africa between 1995 and 2016, primarily extreme weather events, such as floods and storms. Droughts took place less frequently, representing only 5% of disasters

[37] UNDESA (2020).
[38] *Ibid*.
[39] Lahlou (2009). See also, World Bank (2021), p. 3.
[40] Wodon et al. (2014), p. 160.
[41] Waha et al. (2017).

in the period at stake, however, with serious repercussions. In Morocco, the 1999 drought affected 275.000 people and generated losses of about USD 900 million, while the combined 21 floods occurred from 1995 to 2016 caused less economic damage (USD 295 million) and affected less people (230.000) in total.[42] According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 233.000 disaster displacements were recorded in North Africa and Middle East in 2021, mainly due to floods, earthquakes and storms.[43] The latest Groundswell report by the World Bank projects that over 216 million people worldwide may move within their own countries by 2050 due to environmental degradation, and indicates North Africa as one of the most hard-hit sub-regions. In such a dramatic scenario, North Africa would have the largest proportion of internal migration in the context of climate change, ramping up to 19.3 million or 9% of its total projected population.



Year	2020	2030	2040	2050	2020	2030	2040	2050	2020	2030	2040	2050
%	1.4	2.8	4.3	6.0	1.1	2.0	3.0	4.2	0.6	1.1	1.6	2.1

Figure 1: Projected number of internal climate migrants in North Africa in three scenarios, 2020-2050.
Source: World Bank, *Groundswell Policy Note n. 4: Internal Climate Migration in the Middle East and North Africa*, p. 4.

To complete the picture, it is important to stress the role of climate change in aggravating social tensions and violence in fragile contexts. It is not by chance that around 34% of people displaced by disasters and 58% of disaster-related deaths between 2004 and 2014 occurred in the top 30 countries listed in the Fragile States Index.[44] These data stress a key fact, namely that weak governance and fragile in-

[42] EM-DAT (2016).
[43] IDMC (2022).
[44] Peters, Budimir (2016).

stitutions impact on people's vulnerability, influencing their mobility options and responses to grievances.[45] The next Section offers an overview of key terms linked to radicalization and violent extremism, which is essential to then assess whether a nexus might exist among climate change, (im)mobility, and radicalization.

3. Radicalization and violent extremism: An overview

Terms like radicalization and violent extremism have proliferated in recent years, especially after the terrorist attack occurred in New York on September 11, 2001.[46] To date, there is no agreed definition of either concept, and one good reason for it is that they are both context-specific. Scholars agree, in fact, that radicalization and extremism are flexible and fluid concepts that "depend on what it is seen as "mainstream" in any given society, section of society, or period of time".[47] The fact that "different political, cultural and historical contexts in societies can produce different notions" means that what is considered as radical and extremist in one country can be not so elsewhere. Although vague and highly political, both terms have a clear core. Radicalization, at the most basic level, can be defined as the process whereby people become extremists.[48] In other words, it describes a complex progression towards extremism triggered by a number of particular experiences and circumstances, whose weight and tipping point vary from person to person.[49] Thus, the concept of extremism is key to radicalization, which may describe political ideas or politically violent methods that diametrically oppose a society's core values, for instance aspirations of racial or religious supremacy in liberal democracies, as well as ideologies that undermine basic human rights or democratic principles, such as racial segregation. No causal link has ever been established between one or more dynamics and radicalization. However, scholars have over time identified recurring factors that might contribute to creating a fertile ground for extremism. Neumann, for instance, points out five potential drivers of radicalization: 1) the existence of grievances, namely societal tensions, discriminations, or injustice that may cause conflicts of identity, feelings of revenge, marginalization and exclusion; 2) the satisfaction of emotional needs of belonging, power, or glory, among others; 3) the endorsement of a radical ideology that offers political solutions to perceived grievances, and justifies the use of violence to that scope; 4) the presence of radical-

[45] McAdam, Weerasinghe (2022), p. 28.
[46] Polese, Russo, Strazzari (2019).
[47] Neumann (2017), p.16.
[48] *Ibid*.
[49] Neumann (2013).

izing agents and charismatic leaders that generate unity in purpose; 5) the use of violence.[50] These potential factors of radicalization can occur at different levels, involving single individuals (micro-level), entire communities (meso-level) or whole States (macro-level).[51] According to Schneckener, violent extremist groups can include different actors, ranging from youth and street gangs, to organized criminal groups as well as highly structured terrorist organizations.[52] There is a wide difference among violent extremist groups according to their composition, structural organization, mandate and how they operate. However, they also share a number of similar patterns, such as the use of violence for a specific political purpose, the involvement in illicit activities such as human, drug and arms trafficking, and the making of cross-border migration flows.[53] Although violent extremist groups primarily share a radical and political ideology, "the importance of economic motives is not to disguise the fact that financial incentives for Non-State Armed Groups always interact with long-standing socio-economic and political grievances, as well as poor and unaccountable governance systems".[54] The importance of illicit economic activities is not, therefore, to underestimate. Likewise, it is relevant to note that radicalization and violent extremism do not necessarily imply conflict, nevertheless, they are similarly directed against the State and the civilian population. Nett and Rüttinger developed a taxonomy in order to classify violent extremist groups according to five variables, these being: 1) Patterns of violence, ranging from the traditional interstate conflict to non-conflict settings; 2) the type of territorial claims; 3) the predominance of political or economic interests; 4) the kind of conflictual relationship with the State and community; 5) elements of transnationality.[55] Finally, although these phenomena particularly concern fragile States or governments with poor governance, inefficient institutions, and lack of capacity to respond to political violence, it has been argued that stable States can also be overwhelmed by the combined pressures of climate change, population growth, urbanization, environmental degradation and rising socio-economic inequalities.[56]

3.1 Is migration a factor of radicalization?

In recent years, many politicians have publicly argued that migrants are prone to terrorism, inasmuch as they are believed to be often involved in terrorist attacks

[50] Neumann (2017), p.16.
[51] Schmid (2013).
[52] Schneckener (2010), Cantor (2014).
[53] UNSSC (2015).
[54] Nett, Rüttinger (2016), p. 8. See also, Carius, Tänzler, Maas (2008), Rüttinger et al. (2015).
[55] Id., pp. 6-7.
[56] Nett, Rüttinger (2016), p. 5.

or in violent extremist groups, and constitute therefore a severe threat to national sovereignty and public order.[57] The nexus between migration and radicalization has received great attention not only by policymakers, but also by academics. The findings of their research notably vary according to the group of migrants taken into account, the circumstances in which migration takes place, and the kind of terrorism analyzed. For instance, the case of "fake migrants" is often cited to support the claim that more migration means more terrorism in the country of destination. However, as these are actual terrorists who have been radicalized in their countries of origin and before entering a foreign country, this group says little about such an alleged connection. What can be said is that terrorist cells may exploit migration routes as a way of entering another country, thus posing serious security threats to both national and foreign communities in the State of destination.

On the other hand, "true" migrants arriving in a foreign country may become vulnerable to radicalization as a result of their migration experience. It has been argued that traumas and abuses often inflicted during the journey combined with a sense of abandonment, and socio-economic frustration might induce (a very small percentage of) migrants towards extremist views.[58]

Finally, people with a migration background, namely descendants of migrants who have embraced the culture of the country in which they were born, are believed to experience crises of identity and of belonging, disoriented between the culture of their parents or grandparents that they have inherited and the one in which they have grown up. According to some authors, this sense of alienation, and sometimes discrimination, could ignite the participation in violence.[59]

It is however crucial to note that no empirical evidence has ever been found to corroborate the claim that migration as such causes terrorism.[60] Moreover, as Neumann puts it, "it is important to keep in mind that only a miniscule percentage of migrants will ever turn to terrorism. Just like all other populations that are thought to be "at risk", the vast majority will remain peaceful".[61]

4. North Africa: A radicalization profile

In their study, El-Said and Barrett portrayed the typical profile of foreign fighters who travelled to Syria and Iraq between 2012 and 2016 as

[57] Neumann (2017).

[58] *Ibid*.

[59] Leiken (2005). See also, Roy (2004), Sageman (2008).

[60] Hoffman et al. (2007).

[61] Neumann (2017).

> most likely to be male, young and disadvantaged economically, educationally, and in terms of the labour market. [They are] also more likely to come from a marginalized background, both socially and politically. Most were unemployed, or underemployed, and/or said that their life lacked meaning.[62]

Similarly, Moser and Rodgers found that State fragility combined with unemployment and livelihood insecurity often gives rise to gang violence, identity conflict, or gender-based violence perpetrated by "alienated, frustrated, or excluded populations, particularly associated with younger men".[63]

These similar descriptions might fit well with Neumann's theory on the five drivers of radicalization and seems to reflect the demographic and economic profile of North Africa, where half of the population is below 24 years old. Currently, 27% of young North Africans is unemployed, representing the highest rate of youth unemployment in 2020, economically excluded, and poorly educated.[64] A study by the World Bank seems to corroborate the above, showing that interconnected processes of social, economic and political marginalization can push youths to join violent extremist groups.[65] However, we must be careful in affirming that poverty and low education are predictors of violent extremism. On this point, Bourekba assessed whether such believed political and socioeconomic drivers of radicalization, pertaining to authoritarianism and poverty, were indeed recurring in countries highly exposed to radicalization and terrorist attacks as are Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. He found that all these countries have long experienced authoritarianism, where repression of civil and political liberties, indiscriminate use of force and systematic human rights abuses outburst different forms of violent extremism, ranging from transnational terrorist organizations (such as Al Qaeda and IS) to domestic terrorism against national governments, such as the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group or the Ansar al Sharia in Tunisia. Foreign fighters, whereby individuals move to other North African countries to join violent extremist groups, significantly affect the region. According to Bourekba, roughly 8 thousand people joining foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq came from North Africa. Several studies find a positive correlation between State instability and the frequency of terrorist attacks. For instance, it has been demonstrated that out of 23 conflict-torn countries in the world, 17 States (or 88%) experience violent extremism and have been affected by terrorist attacks.[66] Beyond authoritarianism and conflict, other factors potentially inducing to radicalization are transitional

[62] El-Said, Barrett (2017), p. 40.
[63] Moser, Rodgers (2005), p. v.
[64] UN News (2022).
[65] World Bank (2016b).
[66] World Bank (2011).

changes in the political system, skepticism about government's commitment to the whole population, political marginalization and underrepresentation, institutional corruption, and weak governance.[67] In one key study, UNDP finds that, in most cases, a tipping point must be reached for a person to join a violent extremist group. The tip of the iceberg usually coincides with government actions, including the killing/arrest of a family member or friend.[68] The same study finds that religion seems to be one determining factor informing the decision to join violent extremist groups in Africa, "where violent extremist groups largely define themselves in religious terms, invoking distorted interpretations of Islam". Violent extremist leaders exploit religious ideology and indoctrination to manipulate the recruits' perception of their religion being under threat with the ultimate aim to justify the use of violence and inflaming their "willingness to die" for their religion.[69] However, it also stresses that the level of religious literacy is low among those most vulnerable to recruitment, while those who have received at least six years of religious education are less likely by far to join a violent extremist group.[70] According to these findings, political drivers may therefore play a significant, although varying, role in radicalization movements in North Africa, especially when it comes to authoritarianism, religion supremacy, the presence of civil or international conflicts and foreign interventions.

The other set of drivers believed to lead to radicalization is related to socio-economic conditions. Part of the scholarship argues that poverty and unemployment, especially among the youngsters, can increase the likelihood of joining violent extremist groups.[71] In Morocco, there is evidence that marginalization and socio-economic deprivation have contributed to the development of jihadist terrorism.[72] Some studies seem to demonstrate that, in Tunisia, those living in marginalized neighborhoods in urban areas and in poor regions could be more receptive to violent extremism.[73] Unemployment is considered an important factor in this context: "employment is the single most frequently cited "immediate need" faced at the time of joining".[74] Yet, part of the scholarship challenges generalized assumptions about this causal relationship. For instance, there are studies that critically argue that violent extremists are often neither poor nor poorly educated. Rather, they find that a significant proportion of violent extremists tend to come

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[67] Strazzari, Zanoletti (2019).
[68] UNDP (2017).
[69] Id., pp. 45-48.
[70] *Ibidem*. See also Raineri, Strazzari (2017).
[71] Sandler, Enders, (2004).
[72] Alonso, Rey (2007).
[73] Marks (2013). See also, Torelli, Merone, Cavatorta (2012).
[74] UNDP (2017), p. 36.

from middle- or high-income families and to be well educated.[75] For instance, the World Bank has excluded poverty as a driver of radicalization into violent extremism, however it finds that unemployment among the educated may lead to a greater probability to hold radical ideas.[76] As middle ground, Gurr advanced his theory on relative deprivation, which may provide an explanation for the links among poverty, education and violent extremism in part of the youth in Middle East and North Africa. According to the author, "relative deprivation" refers to the gap between expectations and reality, which can trigger the process whereby some young people become violent extremists.[77] Finally, the UNDP report concludes that, for some, the journey towards violent extremism in Africa begins in their early childhood, especially when living in marginalized and remote regions with low exposure to people of other religions and ethnicities, and lacking parental care. More than poverty alone, it seems that childhood unhappiness together with economic deprivation, especially when linked to religious or ethnic identity seem to inflame extremism. This overview shows that a complex set of personal, cultural, political and socio-economic circumstances of vulnerability could stimulate a sense of (relative) deprivation, which can make some individuals prone to embrace violent extremism.

5. Vulnerability to climate change: A common driver of (im)mobility and radicalization?

This last Section explores whether climate change could be considered as a common, underlying factor influencing human mobility options, including immobility, and radicalization from a theoretical point of view. This will be done by indicating what impacts of climate change commonly exacerbate pre-existing vulnerability, which in principle may make people receptive to radicalization, and prone to (im) mobility options.

A consistent trend emerged in political debates and security studies explore the link between climate change and political violence with widely divergent results.[78] In most cases, climate change is considered as a threat-multiplier that could exacerbate pre-existing vulnerabilities, aggravate social tensions, increase radicalization, and ultimately escalate conflicts. Salehyan and Hendrix identify two arguments underscoring such a nexus: first, climate change would cause

[75] Gambetta, Hertog (2016). See also, Bhatia, Ghanem (2017).
[76] World Bank (2016a), p. 18.
[77] Gurr (1970).
[78] Fjelde, von Uexkull (2012).

violent extremism inasmuch as the scarcity of land, food or water could generate grievances and competition over natural resources among opponent groups; and second, the fact that climate change exacerbates poverty and loss of livelihood (crop failures, land and water losses, market shocks, higher prizes for essential goods etc.) could increase the likelihood of individuals turning into extremists either as a form of strong opposition to the current government or as a way to survive and gain economic incentives.[79] The latter consideration particularly depends on the coping capacity of the society concerned as well as the ability of the State to address and support people in adapting to climate change. Some authors highlight other ways in which climate insecurity can lead to radicalization and conflict, which include rising inequalities, volatile food prices, and the "unintended impacts" of national climate policies.[80] An interesting strand of behavioral and psychological studies considers the negative impacts of rising temperature on human behaviors, arguing that drought and heat waves could make individuals more violent.[81] Furthermore, some scholars shed light on the impacts of climate-related disasters on the functioning of the State. Wischnath and Buhaug, for instance, argue that the consequences of an economic crisis hitting a State in the aftermath of a disaster may affect conflict dynamics by increasing the opportunities for recruitment in violent extremist groups, and by exacerbating existing grievances.[82] Although these studies mention neither migration nor immobility as significant factors in the climate change-conflict nexus, in some analyses migration plays a key role, while immobility does not seem to be addressed. In particular, Reuveny argues that climate-related disasters may also increase migration, which would lead to rising competition over already scarce resources, in turn fueling social tensions between the host population and the newcomers.[83] Moreover, a 2015 report commissioned by the G7 Member States identified seven compound factors of climate-fragility that may also pose a serious risk to the stability of States. Among others, the report expressly includes livelihood insecurity and migration triggered by climate change and resource scarcity, transboundary water management, which is deemed to be a frequent source of tension and a cause of competition among parties, and sea-level rise and coastal degradation, where the relocation of entire populations from sinking islands to neighboring countries may produce severe social tensions between the natives and the relocated.[84]

[79] Edward, Satyanath, Sergenti (2004). See also, Brancati (2007), Nillesen, Verwimp (2010).
[80] Desmidt (2021), p. 6. See also, Detges et al. (2020), Brown (2020).
[81] Hsiang, Burke, Miguel (2013).
[82] Wischnath, Buhaug (2014). See also, Eastin (2016), Collier, Hoeffler (2001).
[83] Reuveny (2007).
[84] Rüttinger et al. (2015).

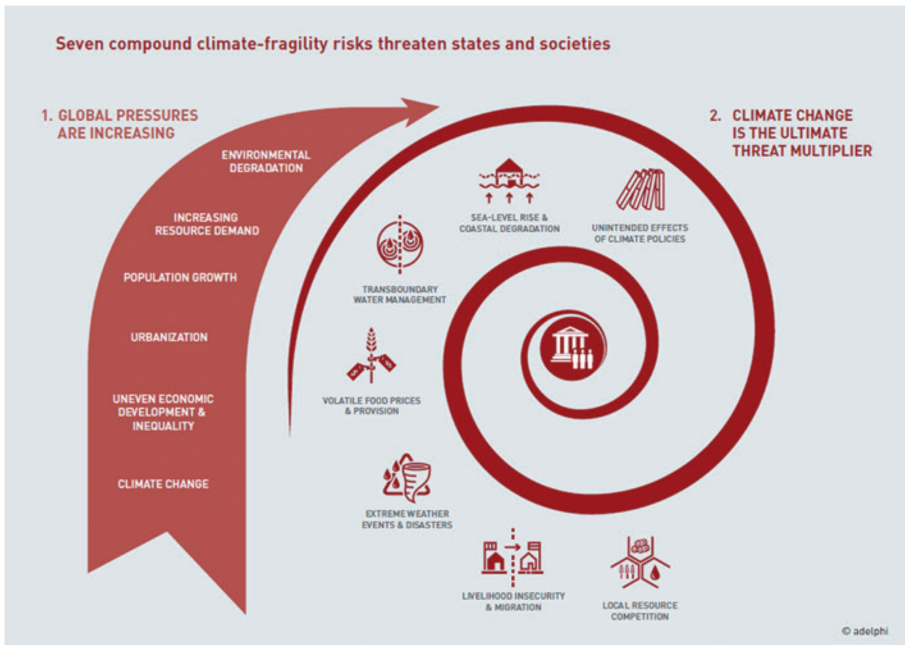

Figure 2: Seven compound climate-fragility risks threaten states and societies
Source: K. Nett, L. Rüttinger, *Insurgency, Terrorism and Organised Crime in a Warming Climate. Analysing the Links Between Climate Change and Non-State Armed Groups*, 2016, p. 9.

Yet, other studies suggest that climate-related disasters may actually complicate the recruitment process of violent extremist groups. In the Philippines, Walch found that two typhoons decreased the recruitment capacity of rebel groups, as they weakened their logistics and supply lines. Additionally, the provision of government aid and collaboration with international humanitarian actors can reduce the territorial control of extremist groups.[85] As middle ground, Nett and Rüttinger argue that there is no direct link between climate change and participation in violent extremism.[86] Instead, climate change impacts could exacerbate fragile, conflict-torn countries and create space for violent extremist groups to infiltrate. According to the authors, climate change first exacerbates existing tensions and insecurity that, in the absence of State authority, allow violent extremist groups to operate. Second, climate change can cause severe livelihood loss and poverty, which they could exploit to recruit affiliates in exchange of economic incentives. Third, natural resources can be exploited as a weapon, contributing to perpetuate conflicts, as occurred in Syria.[87]

[85] Walch (2018).
[86] Nett, Rüttinger (2016).
[87] DuBois King (2015). See also, Telford (2020).

In his 2015 speech, US President Barack Obama made a clear connection, whereby climate change was deemed to be the common trigger of refugee movements, radicalization and armed conflicts.

> Rising seas are already swallowing low-lying islands, from Bangladesh to Pacific islands. Globally, we could see a rise in climate refugees. And I guarantee you the coastguard will have to respond. Elsewhere, more intense droughts will exacerbate shortages of water and food, increase competition for resources, and create the potential for mass migrations and new tensions. All of which is why the Pentagon calls climate change a "threat multiplier." Understand, climate change did not cause the conflicts we see around the world. Yet what we also know is that severe drought helped to create the instability in Nigeria that was exploited by the terrorist group Boko Haram. It's now believed that drought and crop failures and high food prices helped fuel the early unrest in Syria, which descended into civil war in the heart of the Middle East.[88]

Such strong declarations echo the conclusion of several studies, whereby migration is deemed to represent both a consequence of worsening climate conditions and outbroken conflicts as well as a cause of further tensions that, in certain circumstances, might escalate to conflicts. On this point, a recent US report on climate change and migration acknowledges a strong relationship between climate change and migration on the one hand, and between climate change and conflicts on the other hand. Interestingly, it emphasizes that migration in the context of climate change could influence political instability as well as radicalization. In particular, it recognizes a strong correlation between countries most vulnerable to climate change and those fragile or conflict-torn, which may give rise to migration and displacement.[89] Moreover, it argues that resource scarcity may both drive conflict directly and induce mass migration movements. The encounter between natives and newcomers may cause further resource scarcity and bring to new tensions.[90] These are already circumstances under which migration in the context of climate change may facilitate political instability in countries with weak governance or fragile institutions. Furthermore, the US report considers that mass migration movements in the context of climate change may pose a significant pressure on low- and middle-income countries of immigration in terms of draining the economic infrastructure, and decreasing the availability of services and facilities that could increase tensions with their own citizens and lead to political instability. Finally, according to the White House, violent extremist organizations exploit a

[88] Obama (2015).
[89] The White House (2021), p. 7.
[90] In 2008, Germany set forth similar arguments in its Strategy for Adaptation to Climate Change. See IOM (2018), p. 12.

number of State flaws, such as weak governance, marginalization, and societal conflict to spread their radical ideology. These groups "may respond to resource scarcity driven by acute environmental shocks (e.g., floods and droughts) by forcibly gaining access to resources such as cropland to maintain food security, exacerbating drivers of migration".[91] Involved in trafficking in human beings and other criminal activities, violent extremist groups could exploit vulnerable migrants in the context of climate change as both a source of income and recruitment.

At this point, it is relevant to recall that no causal link between migration, in general terms or specifically in the context of climate change, and radicalization has ever been established. Likewise, what stems from this picture is that there is no clear-cut relationship among climate change, (im)mobility and radicalization. However, it seems clear that most of the triggering factors cited by the literature are closely linked to political and socio-economic drivers, including the unavailability of natural resources, employment, and livelihoods, that might influence mobility options and radicalization choices. Situational vulnerabilities – including the level of education and socio-economic deprivation among other political, financial and social assets – may influence, to different extents and levels, (im)mobility and radicalization choices, as suggested in the case of North Africa. Four scenarios are therefore envisaged, where situational vulnerability is considered to shape 1) immobility, 2) irregular mobility, 3) radicalization, and 4) regular mobility.

In the first scenario, situational vulnerability can act as a barrier to mobility, leaving people with no other option but to stay where they are. Climate change exacerbates these vulnerabilities, trapping people in increasingly precarious rural or urban environments, and leaving them exposed to serious security and livelihood threats. In certain regions of Morocco, such as Tinghir, social inequalities, the lack of transnational network, and of social capital prevent land-owners and farmers to migrate. Here, "the connection between environmental change and migration appears to have been lost across generations. This is particularly true for those without transnational social capital as they are more vulnerable to environmental changes, due to the lack of remittances and an increased focus on agricultural activities as a way to complement the family income".[92] In fragile or conflict-prone contexts, trapped populations might constitute a fertile ground for traffickers and violent extremists' recruitment, where their involvement in political violence is traded for economic gains, ultimately to survive. This may not be the case of North African countries, which are equipped with a stable State apparatus and strong capacity to respond to high level of political violence. However, it is still relevant to keep in mind that vulnerability, exacerbated by climate change, if not managed may act as a

[91] Idem, p. 9.
[92] Van Praag et al. (2021), p. 143.

strong barrier to migration, trapping people in life threatening environmental situations they cannot escape.

As for the second scenario, when migration out of climate-affected areas is not adequately planned, it may lead to irregularity, unsafety, and traumas. In fact, when people who do not possess the assets to move eventually do so, they are likely to end up in very vulnerable situations where they are exposed to social and financial exploitation.[93] As seen, when vulnerable people move out of environmental harm with limited or no resources, their migration is often only for survival and can even erode resilience.[94] For instance, the lack of adequate humanitarian aid and relief in the aftermath of disasters, such as floods or storms, socio-economic inequalities, and marginalized housing in dry and poor mountainous regions of Morocco have been cited as factors that make neglected inhabitants the most likely to take the risk and cross the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe.[95]

Building on the first two scenarios, vulnerability could be exacerbated in the countries of transit and of destination, where degrading reception conditions, different treatment and access to rights and services, a precarious legal status, and lack of language skills could create a position of entrenched disadvantage. This might trigger those feelings of loss, desperation, and injustice that part of the scholarship considers contributing factors of radicalization. On this point, there is evidence that drought and food security led to escalating social instability in Morocco. In particular, two main studies showed that persistent food losses due to prolonged droughts contributed to spur social grievances and riots in 2008.[96]

Finally, situational vulnerabilities worsened by climate change may drive people, who do possess the necessary resources, to move elsewhere. If adequately planned, migration could help individuals to move out of, and recover from, environmental harm as well as to satisfy basic needs and secure livelihoods despite adverse environmental conditions.[97] Migration can also lead to improved socio-economic status, with greater access to employment, services, and other opportunities in the country of destination.[98] Therefore, migration can be an exercise of agency, where migrants can support their families and communities of origin through remittances and transfer of skills and knowledge.[99] These financial and social transfers related to migration support climate change adaptation in at least two main ways. First, beyond fulfilling basic needs, remittances can support existing businesses in agricultural or non-agricultural

[93] *Ibid*. As a case-study, please refer to Black *et al.* (2013).
[94] Warner, Afifi (2014). For further reference, please see Martin, Bergmann (2017).
[95] Hut, Zickgraf (2021), p. 164. See also, OECD (2017).
[96] Esper et al. (2007); Schilling et al. (2012).
[97] Farbotko (2020).
[98] Gemenne, Blocher (2017).
[99] Banerjee et al. (2018).

sectors, by making them more resilient, and are instrumental in the diversification of rural economies.[100] Second, remittances are extremely relevant in the aftermath of climate-related disasters.[101] An example of successful migration concerns internal and cross-border migration of young Tunisians, where "a decline in agricultural productivity and increasing land fragmentation" are mentioned as one reason to move elsewhere. In this case, "Migration seems to be rewarding for both internal and international migrants in terms of occupational outcomes: while between 65 and 75 percent of migrants were found in employment at the time of the survey, this was the case for only 22 to 30 percent of non-migrants".[102] Furthermore, the study carried out by Sobczak-Szelc and Fekih revealed that the inhabitants of El Faouar in Tunisia tried to cope with crop destruction in years of drought by migrating in search of additional sources of income.[103] They also showed that those possessing sufficient financial capital or remittances tried to increase their resistance to climate change, environmental limitations, and permanent migration by developing their agricultural capacity.

We have seen that climate change limits the availability of natural resource and employment opportunities, thus undermining livelihoods and social well-being. When States fail to address these dynamics, they leave the door open for political discontent and social tensions, especially in fragile contexts. Identifying climate change as driver of both (im)mobility and radicalization is important from at least two perspectives. From a policy point of view, policy solutions would need to focus primarily on interventions that address personal and contextual factors of situational vulnerability, thus improving State capacity to respond to political violence as well as enhancing livelihoods and resilience to environmental threats, natural resource management, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, among others. From a legal viewpoint, understanding to what extent climate change could shape (im)mobility and radicalization in a given context would be of utmost importance for hard- and soft-law instruments to be receptive and responsive to current challenges. These arguments are explored here below.

6. Conclusion

In times of more frequent and severe climate-related disasters and processes of environmental degradation, the weight of climate change as explanatory variable of (im)mobility and radicalization within and between countries becomes more

[100] Barnett, Webber (2010).
[101] Foresight (2011).
[102] Zuccotti et al. (2018).
[103] Sobczak-Szelc, Fekih (2020).

significant. In the attempt to contribute expanding the literature on the matter, this Chapter revolved around the complex interplay among climate change, (im)mobility and radicalization in North Africa and aimed to explore whether, in principle, situational vulnerability, as defined by McKenzie, Rogers and Dodds, to climate change might be considered as a common driver of (im)mobility and of radicalization in the sub-region.

What stems from this analysis is that there is no direct relationship among climate change, (im)mobility and radicalization. However, situational vulnerability, characterized by a complex set of socio-cultural, economic, political and environmental factors, could exacerbate drivers of (im)mobility and radicalization in certain contexts.

In North Africa as well as elsewhere, it is therefore essential to alleviate these sources of vulnerabilities that, according to Mackenzie, correspond to social injustice that the State must address. The author argues that there are social justice obligations arising from vulnerability, insofar as the State has an obligation to develop social, political, and legal institutions that foster autonomy, for instance, by providing access to resources, services, and opportunities to mitigate vulnerability and enhance resilience.

Under international human rights law, the core responsibilities of States encompass, at least, the protection of people within their territories subject to their jurisdiction. Thus, States shall aim to respect and ensure the wide arrow of internationally recognized human rights. The progressive achievement of economic, social and cultural rights as well as the full enjoyment of civil and political rights may contribute to fighting against socio-economic, cultural, political, and environmental grievances at the core of situational vulnerability. In particular, this could be done by promoting equality, non-discrimination and access to rights to promote people's empowerment. This echoes what the UN Secretary-General Antònio Guterres once said:

> I am convinced that the creation of open, equitable, inclusive and pluralist societies, based on the full respect of human rights and with economic opportunities for all, represents the most tangible and meaningful alternative to violent extremism.[104]

In the specific context of climate change in North Africa, States have particular human rights obligations that should inform their obligations under international environmental law. These would also contribute to alleviating situational vulnerabilities stemming from adverse environmental conditions, as they include the protection of the environment as well as protection from environmental harm and disasters where

[104] UNGA (2015).

the risk is known.[105] North African States should therefore not only invest in mitigation and adaptation strategies, early warning mechanisms and disaster risk reduction, but also in disaster risk awareness and preparedness with and for local populations, especially the most vulnerable to climate risks. States should also integrate climate change and migration considerations in relevant national policy and legal frameworks so to ensure full inclusion and participation of climate-affected populations.

If planned, temporary and long-term migration can not only serve as climate adaptation and poverty reduction strategy, but it can also contribute to reducing the risks of recruitment into violent extremist groups. According to Nett and Rüttinger, if job and livelihood opportunities are available in the places of destination, rural-to-urban migration can help to reduce competition for jobs and the risk of social tensions in the place of origin.[106] All policies should comprehensively address the cross-cutting effects of climate change in order to respond and neutralize its damaging effects on households and communities. Adequate measures should be put in place to address personal and contextual factors of vulnerability to climate change. This could be done by promoting coordination across policies to enhance resilience, mitigation and adaptation to climate change. Education and labour migration programs, free movement agreements, and regional cooperation among others can foster regular and planned migration as a way to respond to climate change. Related actions should aim to enhance migrants' well-being, while fostering host-migrant relations, with initiatives oriented to extend shared and equitable access to resources, opportunities and services. At the same time, specific actions should be put in place to manage the increasing competition over diminishing natural resources, to build or reinforce institutional capacity to respond to environmental, social and security threats, including political violence, radicalization and violent extremism. Specific attention should be devoted to those segments of the population that cannot, or are unwilling to, move out of precarious living conditions. Immobility in unsafe areas, such as disaster-prone or politically unstable zones, increases the risk of harm, violence and exploitation. The institutional response to immobility – in terms of disaster-risk reduction and relief policies, economic support, social services among others – should be expressly embedded in relevant legal and policy frameworks.

Finally, more importance should be attributed to climate change in inducing complex phenomena, such as migration, immobility and radicalization. In doing so, the role of State institutions and policies in both exacerbating potential risks and promoting resilience should be further explored both by researchers and policymakers in North Africa.

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[105] Human Rights Committee (2004), para. 12.

[106] Nett, Rüttinger (2016), p. 52.

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Chapter III
ISLAMIC ACTIVISM AND DYNAMICS OF RADICALIZATION BEYOND RELIGION IN TUNISIA

Ester Sigillò

Abstract: Tunisia was the only country in the Arab world to undertake a serious attempt at democratic transition in the aftermath of the 2010-2011 uprisings, in contrast to the geopolitical upheavals experienced throughout the region. However, since 2014 it was also the birthplace of a vast jihadist movement, which led thousands of young people to enlist as foreign fighters for the Islamic State. While several academic works have linked the phenomenon of radicalization to the political resurgence of Islamism, this contribution goes beyond the Islamism-radicalization nexus, exploring alternative explanations for the rise of radical registers and repertoires of action in the country. The revolutionary protests that first erupted in December 2010, but have reignited cyclically over the years, have advanced socio-economic demands on employment and social justice among the most disadvantaged segments of the population. The grievances have been expressed mainly by young people from the most marginalized areas of the interior and the south and, in general, by those social groups excluded from the clientelist networks of the old regime. In contrast to the rhetoric of 'Tunisian exception', instead of resolving the country's socio-economic divide, the transition process has led to the exacerbation of non-inclusive growth and growing frustration of disenfranchised groups. While initially the discontent and sense of alienation were channeled by the Salafist-jihadist movements, more recently the 'forgotten of the revolution' have been represented by non-religious entrepreneurs.

Keywords: Islamism – Salafism – Jihadism – Radicalization – Marginalization

1. Introduction

The fall of Ben Ali's regime in January 2011 led to the revival of Islamic activism, in the form of party politics and social movements, after decades of repression. At leg-

islative elections in October 2011, Ennnahda obtained 37% of the votes, emerging as the first mass religious party in the country. By 2012-2013, the ideological spectrum of the Islamic landscape had crystallized into four main trends: traditional Islamists (represented by Ennahda), Salafi political parties (the most important of which was *Jabhat al-Islah*), religious associations of various ideological affiliations, and Salafi-jihadis (represented by the socio-political movement *Ansar al-Sharia*). This scenario lasted until a critical moment in 2013 when a jihadist commando assassinated two leftist political leaders triggering a severe political crisis that culminated in criticism of Ennahda's alleged indulgence of the Salafists and eventually led the Islamist party to cede power in favor of a technocratic government. As a result, the Salafist socio-political landscape was reshuffled: the Salafist-jihadi group Ansar al-Sharia was banned and declared a terrorist organization, and Salafist associations suspected of having links to terrorist groups were shut down.[1]

The Jomaa government, which took office in January 2014, launched a securitization campaign against religious associations suspected of having links with Salafist-jihadi movements inside and outside the country. In October 2014, after the legislative elections, Ennahda reached a compromise with the secular neo-Bourghibist party *Nidaa Tounès* (Call for Tunisia), which counts among its members some remnants of Ben Ali's regime. This new alliance marked the rupture of the Islamist party's relationship with the Salafist constellation and, in general terms, with the most radical, though not necessarily violent, actors. After the criminalization of Ansar al-Sharia, the Salafists who survived the securitization campaign found themselves without a symbolic and material reference. Indeed, following 2014's securitization campaign, violent extremism has paradoxically increased in the country.

Drawing on the Tunisian case, this contribution explores the drivers of Tunisian radicalization having as a background the literature on *post-Islamism*,[2] the *Islamization of radicalism*,[3] and on the socio-economic dimensions of radicalization.[4] Therefore, by analysing the evolution of Tunisian Islamic activism and the

[1] Merone, Blanc, Sigillò (2021).

[2] Proposed initially by Asef Bayat about the changing face of Islamism in Iran in the 1990s, the notion of post-Islamism refers to the "exhaustion of Islamism as a symbol and source of legitimacy, the trend towards secularization of religion and the appeal to limit the political role of religion" (Bayat, 1996: 46). The thesis of post-Islamism is later taken up by Olivier Roy, according to whom the Islamists' move to formal politics entails the failure of the original political project – of transformation of state and society according to Islamic principles – and its evolution towards a conservative democratic agenda (Roy, 1992; 1999). In other words, according to the Islamic perspective, Islamism has intellectually and politically failed as a societal and political change process.

[3] According to the theory of Islamization of radicalism, religion is just a conjunctural variable of an already present phenomenon: radicalism. Roy (2021).

[4] Richards (2003); Fahmi, Meddeb (2015); Angus (2016); Groppi (2017); Tanoli, Jaffry, Ali (2018).

dynamics of radicalization as two not necessarily parallel trajectories, this chapter overcomes the Islamism-radicalization nexus. In doing so, it explores in depth the driving factors of radicalization in the country from 2011 until the last legislative elections in 2019.[5]

2. Unpacking the debate on Islamism, radicalization, and socio-economic inequalities

French scholars have largely debated the drivers of radicalization in its relation to Islamic actors. On the one hand, in his analysis of radicalization in Europe, Olivier Roy describes the origins of radicalization as the effect of a generational, cultural, and political schism of young people fascinated by violence and in search of a cause for their personal revolt.[6] On the other hand Gilles Kepel contrasted Roy's argument by emphasizing the importance of understanding jihadism through an analysis taking Islam as the starting point. In this regard, according to Kepel, the logic of jihadist terrorism should be reframed in terms of a Salafi dynamic that has its roots in the "schism of values".[7]

Besides the French debate on radicalization, several scholars focused on the socioeconomic dimension as a relevant driver of radicalization, including works focusing on the MENA region.[8] Some authors differentiated between causal factors at the macro-level, such as poverty, and at the micro or meso-level, like relative deprivation or groups' identity dynamics. In this regard, it is stated that "problems of marginalization and social exclusion can act as a catalyst for radicalization and, potentially, violent extremism".[9]

Recently, organizations working in development assistance, such as the World Bank, the EU, USAID and UNDP, have also started to take up this link and have worked out development responses for addressing radicalization and violent extrem-

[5] President Kais Saied (2019-) decided to freeze parliamentary activities on 25 July 2021 and to definitively dissolve the parliament led by Ghannouchi on 22 March 2022. On July 25, 2022, Tunisians voted for a referendum on a new constitution that significantly expands the powers of a president who has sidelined the other branches of government to rule alone. The referendum passed 92% of the "yes" vote. The turnout was around 27%, but it matters little as there was no quorum. With the official start of the third republic, the measures taken by President Kais Saied precisely one year earlier to centralize power in his own hands, weakening parliament and other controls over the president and giving the head of state the ultimate authority to form a government, appoint judges and propose laws, were definitively institutionalized.

[6] Roy (2015).

[7] Kepel (2002).

[8] Richards (2003); Fahmi, Meddeb (2015); Angus (2016); Groppi (2017); Tanoli, Jaffry, Ali (2018).

[9] Angus (2016).

ism.[10] Thus, poverty, social exclusion, and unemployment constitute the most frequently mentioned links between socioeconomic grievances and radicalization that have been widely debated in the context of research on terrorism and counterterrorism.

The notion that poverty is "a root cause of terrorist violence is widely asserted, particularly in the Western world".[11] This assertion fits at first glance with basic liberal economic theory, which presupposes that individuals are motivated primarily by material well-being: "Those who have opportunities to sustain and better themselves will likely accept the system in which they live and behave peacefully. By contrast, those confronting socioeconomic distress and deprivation are more likely to be drawn to radical and possibly violent movements, including terrorist movements".[12]

After 9/11, the poverty-terrorism nexus was further bolstered and was also famously linked to violent extremism by former US president George W. Bush in March 2002.[13] Several academic works legitimated this argument by comparing macro data, such as GDP per capita and the number of terrorist attacks in a country.

If, on the one hand, socioeconomic aspects of terrorism should not be underestimated, approaches aimed at analyzing and identifying direct links between poverty, radicalization, and terrorism fall short, possibly because they remain in the field of rational choice theory and primarily rely on quantitative methods and, as a result, often exclude both constructivist perspectives and qualitative methods. Recent studies on terrorism emphasize indirect links between economic insecurity and terrorism. Academic research often presents conceptual thoughts and general mechanisms instead of analyzing explicit cases or briefly examining different cases without a thorough analysis. Lieven adds, "the link between poverty and radicalization in the Muslim world is clear, but not straightforward. [...] Rather than absolute poverty, such groups, and especially young men among them, tend to be radicalized by considerations of jobs and status".[14]

Against this theoretical background, Colombo (2016) argued that radicalization in Tunisia is the consequence of multiple layers of *marginalization*, including political, social, and religious marginalization.[15] In the following pages I will systematically analyse the evolution of Islamic activism and the dynamics of radicalization in the country. The results show that the two dimensions are not intertwined, neither they do not follow a parallel direction, but intersect with the other dimensions, thus contributing to a multi-layered explanatory pattern of violent extremism in the country.

[10] Süß, Noor Baheige Aakhunzzada (2019).
[11] Gottlieb (2010), p. 34.
[12] *Ibid.*
[13] Maskaliūnaitė (2015), p. 14.
[14] Lieven (2008), p. 20.
[15] Colombo (2016).

3. The origins of Islamic activism in Tunisia

Tunisian Islamism developed in the 1970s as an Islamic grassroots community (*jama'a*) inspired by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhoods (*jama'a al-Islamyya*) and conceived the religion and politics as 'two parts of a whole' (*shumuliyya*). In other words, Islam was intended as a global practice that does not differentiate religious from social or political activity. With the partial liberalization of the 1980s, the religious group transformed itself into a political movement called 'the Movement of the Islamic Tendency' (*harakat Ittijah al-Islami*) (MIT). Over time the Movement has undertaken a transformation that evolved into a 'specialization' in a political party. In 1989, the president, Ben Ali, who initially seemed favorable to a policy of inclusion, allowed the party's creation. To comply with Tunisian laws banning religious parties, Rached Ghannouchi, the party leader, changed the organization's name from the Movement of Islamic Tendency (MIT) into Movement Ennahda (*Harakat Ennahdha)*, meaning 'rebirth,' thus abandoning any Islamic reference. The Movement's religious reference was, however, kept alive thanks to some movement members engaging in grassroots activities (such as charity coupled with da'wa) in secretive conditions.[16]

The party's ideological transformation remained the fundamental concept of Ennahda's public discourse from early 2011 onwards.[17] At the IX Congress held in June 2012, Ennahda's leadership prompted a debate on the division in the party's activities between 'preaching' (*da'wa*, which means 'call') and 'politics,' proposing that the group's more conservative members participate in civil society independently from party politics.[18]

As described in the following pages, the party has transformed over the years in a context characterized by high pressure given by the opposition, especially the remnants of the old regime gathered in the new party, Nidaa Tounès, whose initial objective was to thwart the rising power of Political Islam in the country.[19]

3.1 Origins of Tunisian Salafism

Salafism refers to a literal version of Islam that claims to follow the path of Islamic ancestors (*salaf al-salih*). In the literature, apolitical/quietist Salafism is the scripturalist form (*al-salafiyya al'ilmiyya*), while the Salafi jihadi (*al-salafiyya aljihadiyya*)

[16] Author's interviews with activists engaged with the charitable sector in Tunisia.
[17] Cavatorta, Merone (2013); Cavatorta, Merone (2015).
[18] McCarthy (2015).
[19] Cavatorta, Merone (2015).

believes in an armed struggle to establish an Islamic state.[20] In the 1990s, the Ben Ali regime had initially permitted Salafism as an apolitical alternative to the Ennahda party's political project. However, following a keenly fought election in 1989, he proceeded to clamp down on many religious actors. These policies inadvertently contributed to a jihadist movement taking root in Tunisia. Salafism grew through the proliferation of private meetings, books and audio-visual materials, and religious satellite television channels that attracted many Tunisians striving for religious knowledge. Salafism and Salafi jihadism further gained influence within Tunisian society through preaching and charitable activities. In the post-revolution era, jihadists also exploited the weak security environment in poor locales by engaging in vigilantism, social mediation, and conflict resolution, purportedly on behalf of locals. Through these efforts, they were able to establish good relationships and influence not only local communities but also establish smuggling networks that were used to procure weapons and other resources. Although not all Salafi jihadists are violent, their call for the implementation of a strict Islamic system of governance, and willingness to wage an armed struggle to achieve their aims, is innately violent in nature, as some have argued.

Tunisian Salafism, in both its quietist and jihadist versions, has its roots in the dissatisfaction of some Islamists with the actions of the old MIT, which had made democratic compromises to govern. Therefore, several Islamists left the movement before it became a party, to clandestinely create the Tunisian Islamic Front (TIF) in 1986. Many Tif militants left Tunisia for Pakistan and Bosnia, where they took part in jihads; others went into exile, while still others remained in their homeland, marginalized, or imprisoned. After the fall of Ben Ali, many Salafists returned home or were released, while young people who had adopted Salafism clandestinely came out of the closet. The impetus for the revival of 'indigenous' Salafism, however limited, came from the contamination by Tunisians who had engaged in jihad abroad. The quietists set up several charitable organisations and schools, while the newly established Salafist political parties increased their pressure on the new government to try to carve out a more prominent role for themselves. But it was the jihadists who profited the most from the political transition. Post-2011 Tunisia created a unique situation in the Arab world, in which jihadist ideologies and democratic experience mixed for the first time. Several analysts and observers welcomed the legalization of Salafist parties in Tunisia, arguing that the Salafist actors who participated in democratic life served as a counterbalance to the presence of the jihadist current. The marginalization of the quietist Salafists and their oppression would instead favor a radicalization of the movement.

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[20] Wiktorowicz (2005).

4. Socio-economic marginalization and jihad in Tunisia

Although Tunisia turned from a highly rigid dictatorship to a representative democracy in 2011, the demands for secure employment and local development of the most marginal regions remained unchanged. In fact, while the Revolution conquered a level of civil and political rights never seen before in the country, it was clearly unable to set it on a more socially inclusive developmental pathway. Political instability aggravated the economic downturn, leading to a worse living for most Tunisians, especially young people. A report, published in 2014 by the World Bank, about young people in Tunisia analyzed the main dimensions of their exclusion: economic, political, social, and cultural exclusion. Moreover, it highlights that "young people who are not in education, employment or training may be simultaneously disengaged from community life, originate from a poor household, and lack social networks, which in turn precludes their access to opportunities in the labor market. These may be the most marginalized and disempowered youth".[21]

Scarce attention, however, has been paid to the analysis of the structural conditions that not only restrict the possibilities for young people's social realization but also contribute to defining the notion of youth. It is determined not only by local conceptions about the passage to adulthood but also by the structural conditions that restrict or favor it. Especially for males, adult status is attained only when an individual can buy a house, marry a woman, and have children. In a situation of economic and social crisis like that experienced in the post-revolutionary context, young people's life paths have become more subject to the condition of *waithood*.[22]

As underlined by scholars, *Ansar al-Sharia* (AS) ('The Defenders of the Sharia') quickly gained ground among a part of the population sidelined by the state in areas suffering from high poverty and low levels of education. AS was mainly dedicated to religious proselytism, political activism, and social welfare activities. Indeed, the group proposed to advance a social alternative to the population "excluded" from the transition process.[23] In the outskirts of large urban centres and depressed areas in the centre and south of the country, the parallel welfare network built by the organisation ensured the survival and availability of basic needs to hundreds of thousands of people. If on the one hand young, disenfranchised Tunisians who joined in 2011 were quite unfamiliar with Salafist doctrine at the time of their recruitment,[24] on

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21 World Bank Group (2014), p. 5.

22 A survey conducted in the regions of SidiBouzid and Kasserine on the social and demographic factors that triggered the uprising showed that 62% of young graduates believed their socioeconomic situation to be worse than that of their parents. See also: Pontiggia (2021); Bonci, Cavatorta (2021).

23 Merone (2015).

24 Marks (2013); Merone (2015).

the other hand, in the three years 2011-2013, the movement controlled over 400 places of worship and cultural associations throughout the country, from the outskirts of Tunis, such as the neighborhoods of Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen, to the desert villages in the hinterland and the South.[25] As posited by an expert working at the Institute of Strategic Studies: "The success of the movement can be explained by the marginalization experienced by the social bloc of those who participated in the Revolution but then felt betrayed by the new political forces unable to represent them. This anger and the inability to integrate into the economic fabric led them to seek their own identity and expression in anti-system movements".[26]

4.1 Marginalization and jihad at the borders

Resource-poor and sandwiched between two giant states-rentier, Tunisia has always been permeable to informal trade activated on its borders with Algeria and Libya. The cross-border economy developed in the 1990s in parallel with trade liberalization that followed the implementation of the structural adjustment plan in 1986. However, the austerity policy that emerged from international commitments contributed to increasing socio-economic inequality between inland and coastal areas. In the face of the distortions of the neo-liberal development model, public authorities tolerated and controlled the development of heterodox border economy practices by actors co-opted by the RCD (Democratic Constitutional Regrouping), the quasi-one-party in power during the Ben Ali regime. The marginalization of border regions and the lack of development policies thus transformed smuggling activities into a true "economy of necessity," embodying an alternative form of local development to the state.[27] Whereas before the revolution, exchange activities at the borders were controlled by the hegemonic party RCD, after the collapse of the Ben Ali regime, there was a lack of central regulation. Therefore, the porosity of the borders has brought to light a scenario of reconfiguration of new networks located beyond the old smuggling activities, uncoordinated with each other and disengaged from government control. Indeed, since 2011, the political context in which this economy is embedded, the hierarchy of its actors, and its political significance have changed. Despite the emergence of a class of large-scale entrepreneurs in the informal economy, most smuggling activities increasingly express the marginalization and subordination suffered by borderland populations. In a context where the state is almost totally absent, the actors who invest in the informal economy are young graduates without jobs, local government officials looking for a supplementary sala-

[25] Torelli, Merone, Cavatorta (2012); Merone (2015).
[26] Dacrema (2014).
[27] Meddeb (2016).

ry, and artisans converted back to fuel sellers, who secure their livelihoods through illegal cross-border activities.[28]

The porousness of the border between Tunisia and Algeria is due both to the peculiar geography-a steppe-like terrain that facilitates the smuggling of goods-and to an artificial border division that occurred in colonial times, which divided a vital social and economic space of many tribal groups, such as the Ouled Sidi Abid, the Ouled Sidi Tlil, and the Frechich.[29] Therefore, the entrenched nature of smuggling in the Kasserine region is also a product of kinship and solidarity relations on both sides. Thus, smuggling has become a way to "use" the border and make it productive in this peripheral and long-marginalized region, which in the aftermath of the Revolution was constituted as a "victim region" at the Truth and Dignity Instance, the commission in charge of advancing the transitional justice process after the collapse of the authoritarian regime.

Under Ben Ali's regime, tolerance of smuggling activities was part of a low-cost administrative approach in the border areas: if customs and police authorities had prevented smuggling, these areas would have been completely abandoned by their inhabitants due to the lack of government development policies in the region. Therefore, the security services saw smuggling as a safety valve that could keep rural exodus, unemployment, poverty, and crime.[30] However, tolerance was accompanied by patronage policy, without which it would have been impossible to maintain control. Small-scale assistance in the form of food, livestock, and water tanks increased the power of local officials who selected beneficiaries based on their loyalty to the RCD. In addition to their political and patronage character, the aid packages had a role from a security standpoint as they were a vital reference point in recruiting and involving the local community in border supervision. The work of the security services was mainly based on intelligence activities involving the recruitment of informants from among forest guards and smugglers. This mechanism was mostly based on intimidation, fear of reprisals, and bribery.[31] Although it increased the porosity of the border, this approach helped regulate the border space, reinforcing the state's dominance over smugglers under an unwritten agreement characterized by the guarantee of economic protection in exchange for loyalty to the regime.

In the post-Ben Ali period, the delegitimization of the security forces by the local population led to the disintegration of those networks of informants that were essential to the surveillance of the border region. After 2011, intensified acts of terrorism in the Chaambi Mountains area, led to greater stigmatization of smugglers. However, the post-2011 political vacuum provided opportunities for insertion for

[28] Meddeb (2015).
[29] Meddeb (2016).
[30] *Ibid*.
[31] *Ibid*.

new actors, such as criminal networks linked to drug and arms trafficking, and jihadist groups linked to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI), who penetrated Tunisia from Algeria via the Sahel.

Populations in the southeast of the country, and particularly in the Médenine region, are more closely associated with Libya than with Tunisia, for reasons of shared geography, economy, and cross-border family networks. As in the case of Kasserine, Médenine governorate has always lived off the informal economy linked to smuggling, as a socially accepted practice tolerated by the government in the absence of state development plans. Ben Guerdane, a border town located about thirty kilometers from the Libyan border supplies the entire region with products from Asia via Libya. This has always benefited the entire country. As Tunisia's second largest economic partner, Libya has been the main source of informal cross-border trade, accounting for about 40 percent of the country's gross domestic product.[32] Precisely because of this interdependence, since 2011, Tunisian civil society activists, cross-border traders, and merchants have protested the closure of the border crossing between the two countries, Ras Jadir, accusing the government of jeopardizing the very survival of the people in the southeast of the country.

During Ben Ali's regime, the practices of mediation and protection of smuggling by the RCD-linked security services were the preferred avenues of building a local notability dominated by the Twazine, Ben Guerdane's main tribe very close to Gaddafi, which controlled the trade route linking the Tunisian city to Zuwara and Tripoli, Libya.[33] The vacuum left by the collapse of the Ben Ali and Qaddafi regimes disrupted the Libyan-Tunisian borders, and new political actors found themselves renegotiating the terms of the informal economy with Ben Guerdane's notables.

With the outbreak of the Libyan civil war, Tunisia welcomed the capital flight of Libyan businessmen. Despite the occasional closure of the Ras Jadir border crossing, hundreds of thousands of refugees have also crossed the border to escape the ongoing conflict. However, while Tunisia has been a refuge for many Libyans, Libya has also taken in thousands of young Tunisians linked to jihadist networks, particularly since 2013.

5. Securitization of the religious field and the intensification of violent extremism

Summer 2013 represented a watershed for the country's political stability. The assassination of two secular activists, Chokri Belaid and Muhammad Brahmi by a Jihadi commando allegedly linked to Ansar al-Sharia, and the military coup in Egypt

[32] Cherif (2015).
[33] Meddeb (2018).

that removed the Muslim Brotherhood from power in July 2013, triggered a severe political crisis characterized by strong protests of the country's secular forces against the Ennahda's led government.[34] On August 27, 2013, Prime Minister Ali Larayedh (Ennahdha) listed Ansar al-Sharia as a terrorist organization before the Islamist party was forced to relinquish power to a technocratic government to preserve the stability of the country.[35]

The new government led by Mehdi Jomaa, established in January 2014, started a campaign of securitization vis-à-vis religious associations and mosques suspected of having ties with Salafi-jihadist movements inside and outside the country.[36] In June 2014, the Ministry of Religious Affairs declared that 90 mosques out of 5,100 still escaped the control of the government and later proceeded to dismiss 'radical' imams. The government also clamped down on Salafi associations and schools under charges of illicit foreign funding and/or terrorism in the framework of a 'normalization' campaign.[37] This political phase culminated in October 2014. At the legislative elections Ennahda, defeated at the ballot, made a historical compromise with secular forces, making a coalition government with Nidaa Tounès. This new alliance signed the cut of the Islamist party relationships with the Salafi constellation.

After the criminalization of AS and the pragmatic turn of the Ennahada party, Salafis who survived the securitization campaign found themselves without a symbolic and material reference. This led to an increasing escalation of violent extremism in the country. Indeed, the crackdown led to an outflow of fighters to Syria, coinciding with the creation of the Islamic State.[38] While several militants of the movement have been arrested, many others have fled the country and joined Ansar al-Sharia in Libya,[39] and some have joined terrorist groups in the Sahel such as al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade Oqba Ibn Nafa Brigade, while others have adapted to the new context.[40]

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[34] Ansar al-Sharia did not claim responsibility for the attack and most analysts agree that it was unlikely ordered by its leadership. The two assassinations were later claimed by ISIS and attributed to Abu Bakr al-Hakim aka Abu Mouqatil, a French Tunisian who joined ISIS after the attack. See Merone et al. (2021).

[35] *Ibid*.

[36] Sigillò (2020).

[37] Merone et al. (2021).

[38] Merone (2015); Zelin (2020).

[39] In addition, a short-lived integration between militant networks in the two countries occurred through the creation of Shabab al-Tawhid (The Youth of Pure Monotheism), an organization composed of former Tunisian and Libyan militants from Ansar al-Sharia, which proclaimed its support for the Islamic State in Libya.

[40] One adaptive strategy of Salafi activists was the shift from a religious to a societal commitment in a context where claiming a Salafi identity implies being tagged as an individual linked to violent extremism. Social work in charitable or (social and human) development associations thus became the new legitimate form of engagement in a context where local authorities viewed any religious

In March 2015, gunmen stormed the Bardo National Museum in Tunis, killing 20 people. That summer, in Sousse, a lone gunman killed 38 people, mostly tourists, at a beach resort. In November 2015, a suicide bomber killed 12 members of the presidential guard, capping a year that was a tough test for Tunisia's transition to democracy.[41] As of October 2015, almost 6,000 people, in a total population of 11 million inhabitants, have left the country to fight for the Islamic State.[42] In march 2016 armed groups of militants from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in Libya and Ansar al-Sharia attacked the city of Ben Guerdane, in the governorate of Medenine.

Overall, the suburbs of Tunis and the most marginalized regions of the country have been the main departure points to Libya, Syria, and Iraq for many young Tunisians looking for work and a cause to believe in.[43] Furthermore, Tunisia experienced, more than any other country in the region, the recruitment of young women, mainly in the jihad al-nikah business, and according to Tunisian Minister of Family Samira Meraï, 700 Tunisian women left the country to join the Islamic State or other jihadi organizations.[44]

6. The post-Islamist agenda and new trajectories of radicalization beyond religion

After the terrorist attacks in Tunis and Sousse, the government officially announced a 'war against terrorism'.[45] Consequently, harsh security policies came hand in hand with the state promotion of a moderate religious discourse seeking to marginalize radical religious expressions.[46] In this scenario, Ennahda's discourse revolved around its full detachment from the Islamist project of transformation of politics and society, which to be sure was already initiated with the decision to not include any mention to the sharia in the Constitution issued in January 2014. At the the10th party Congress held in May 2016, the party leader declared: "There is no longer any justification for political Islam in Tunisia".[47] This statement was followed by the decision of the par-

orientation with suspicion. Associations that before 2013 presenting themselves as Salafi-inspired organizations, since 2014 have started to relinquish their religious references and changed their names and logos. See Sigillò 2021 for an analysis of post-Salafist trajectories.

41 Colombo (2016).

42 Soufan Group (2015).

43 Lamloum, Ben Zina (2015).

44 Jelassi (2015).

45 Strasser (2017).

46 Merone et al. (2021).

47 https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2016/05/19/rached-ghannouchi-il-n-y-a-plus-de-justification-a-l-islam-politique-en-tunisie_4921904_3210.html.

ty's leadership to engage in a process of specialization (*taḫaṣṣus*), aiming to separate politics from religion.[48] This measure was perceived as unnatural by several currents within the Islamist community as it envisages a distinction between two dimensions – religion and politics – which are intertwined. Thus, from being representative of the overall Islamist constellation, the specialization created a split between those who refuse such a change in the name of the original Islamist ideal and those who think that the new historical juncture demands a separation of politics and preaching activities. For several local analysts, the discontent of popular groups has grown further due to the Ennahda's self-proclaimed transformation from an Islamist party to a "Muslim Democracy",[49] interpreted as an attempt to move towards the centre of the political spectrum. According to these analyses, the exit from political Islam would create a vacuum that would favour the emergence of more radical groups capable of providing a new political representation to conservative voters who felt abandoned by Ennahda or simply excluded from the democratisation process.

New radicalisms

At the 2019 legislative elections, Itilaf al-Karama (Dignity Coalition), positioned as the fourth political force in the country, emerged as an anti-establishment force wishing to fight against the "corrupt caste".[50] The Coalition has been depicted by media and secular forces in the country as embodying a new radical *Islamist challenger*. However, the political group is *not* a religious party but a heterogeneous coalition where Salafis, and Islamist activists feeling betrayed by the party, met also other actors, including independent preachers, remnants of the dissolved Leagues for the Protection of the Revolution (LPR), human right activists, independent journalists, and bloggers.[51]

The Coalition presented itself as "a revolutionary force" seeking to fulfill the unaccomplished goals of the revolution and to defend the socio-economic rights of those "excluded" by the democratic transition. As a matter of fact, according to its secretary-general Seifeddine Makhlouf, the coalition's purpose is "the unification of the revolutionary camp, of those marginalized, excluded by the democratization process".[52] In a Facebook-spread communication, the coalition clearly states that its "relationship with the rest of the elements of the current [socio-political] scene is based on a very strict and clear separation between the national forces that have an interest in the continuation of the revolution and the success of its project, and the

[48] Sigillò (2022).
[49] Ghannouchi (2016).
[50] Author's interview with a member of Itilaf Karama, Tunis, July 2019.
[51] Blanc, Sigillò (2019).
[52] https://www.facebook.com/323675788266292/photos/a.3248967248. Translated from Arabic.

forces of reaction, backwardness, and lackeys of dictatorship and external domination" and that it intends to "form a complete national network of actors known for their loyalty to the revolution and their deep affiliation with the concerns of its people and the defense of its identity, its values, and its aspirations".[53] Thus, the Coalition relies on sovereigntist rhetoric denouncing the interference of Western powers in Tunisian politics, the imposition of a Western model of governance, and the spoliation of the natural wealth of the country. According to the coalition's voters at the last elections: "Itilaf al-Karma is the new political force bringing back dignity to Tunisian people, it will implement all the revolutionary changes that Ennahda was not able to do because it was too submissive vis-à-vis the old regime's people and the diktat of the international community, France in particular".[54] Indeed, Itilaf Karama's revolutionary narratives, underpinned by radical registers, are mostly identitarian: the goal advertised by the coalition is to represent the "general willingness of the people by defending the Tunisian identity and its values freed from the material and cultural French hegemony over the politics and the economy".[55] Overall, rather than the criticism against the Ennahda's abandonment of the Islamist agenda, the main grievances of the movement revolved around the lack of transparency in elite politics (including Ennahda), the "rotten compromise" of the Islamist party with the forces of the old regime, the controversial economic reconciliation law voted in September 2017 that gave amnesty from criminal prosecution to state officials and businessmen accused of corruption and embezzlement during the Ben Ali regime. During the Covid-19 crisis, al-Karama has likewise sought to identify itself with the pure, marginalized people ruled by an uncaring and "corrupt elite".

7. Conclusion: rethinking counter-terrorism measures

The counterterrorism measures implemented in the country since 2011 have mainly linked de-radicalization strategies to the securitization campaign against religious actors and the "war on terror". As shown in this chapter, what fueled radicalization and the growth of violent extremism was instead the combination of social, political, and economic marginalization. Since the inception of the Islamic State in 2014, and in parallel with domestic political changes, several feelings of exclusion and marginalization of several young Tunisians, and the sense of not belonging to humanity have been replaced by a stronger sense of belonging to an ideal community, that of the Islamic state.

[53] Blanc, Sigillò (2019).
[54] Blanc, Sigillò (2019).
[55] Blanc, Sigillò (2019).

Despite the launch of the "war against terrorism" and the government's crackdown on religious actors, violent extremism is not over in the country and radical registers still pervade the political field. In June 2019 two suicide bombers killed one policeman and were injured in front of the French embassy in Tunis. In March 2020 two suicide bombers killed a police officer and injured five others plus a civilian near the American embassy in Tunis. In September 2020 a national guard officer has been killed and another wounded in a knife attack in the centre of Sousse. Finally, In February 2021, a landmine blast killed four Tunisian soldiers during a counter-terrorism operation in Mount Mghila, near the border with Algeria, adjacent to Mount Chaambi.

This chapter shed light on the notion of *radicalism* and the process of radicalization. Combining the analysis of post-Islamism and socio-economic marginality against the backdrop of the political changes that took place in the country from 2011 until 2019, it showed the evolution of Tunisian Islamic activism and radicalization as two trajectories that are not necessarily parallel. In this way, it broke the Islamism-radicalization nexus, presenting radicalism as a multifaceted notion and radicalization as a multidimensional process. Future counter-terrorism measures should address the issue of violent extremism with this complexity in mind.

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Chapter IV

FROM COUNTER-TERRORISM TO PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM: SECURITY PRACTICES AND APPROACHES IN POST-REVOLUTIONARY TUNISIA

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Abstract: International security policy and research agendas have increasingly emphasized terrorism as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Thus, the need to expand the toolkit to relate to it beyond the exclusively force-based approaches typical of counter-terrorism. Prevention of violent extremism and radicalization are examples of this. A newly democratized polity grappling with unprecedented terrorist challenges, Tunisia has since 2015-2016 featured a paradigmatic shift from a state-centric perspective, contingency-based approach mainly focused on counter-terrorism to a more inclusive, long-term strategy involving society at large in counter-radicalization efforts. This chapter thus accounts for the gradual diversification of the country's security strategies, focusing mainly on the prevention dimension. Reviewing pivotal terrorist attacks in the first post-revolution decade, it argues that this change of pace in security approaches and practices results from the interplay of international and national orientations. By illustrating the main initiatives that both local and foreign actors have carried out, the chapter also claims that preventing violent extremism has failed to replace counter-terrorism, but meritoriously complements the latter's predominant military focus with new, more comprehensive measures.

Keywords: Counter-Terrorism – Preventing Violent Extremism – Terrorism – Radicalization – Tunisia

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1. Introduction

In the first decade after the 2011 Arab uprisings, Tunisia stood out as an outlier in terms of its democratic political process, then stalled if not in setback as President Kais Saïed moved forward with his constitutional reform plan. Along the way, serious and prolonged security threats also marked the post-authoritarian trajectory with the country becoming a target of terrorist attacks, carried out by local and regional actors. Whilst terrorism is by no means a new phenomenon in Tunisia as it pre-dates the 2010-2011 uprisings, hyper-localized surveillance under the Ben Ali regime made terrorism not a persistent threat. In the new democratic setting, however, the country experienced unparalleled violence against foreigners and security forces. Indeed, security conditions have increasingly deteriorated in the county, escalating from targeted threats to the assassinations of two left-wing politicians by Salafists in 2013 to large-scale attacks on foreign tourists in 2015 to the siege of the town of Ben Guerdane on the south-eastern border with Libya in 2016. Meanwhile, attacks on security forces remained constant, mainly clustered in the area of the Chaambi Mountains on the western border with Algeria. Furthermore, Tunisia has exported thousands of jihadists to Syria and Iraq. Regardless of conflicting estimates, it is widely acknowledged that it remains one of the main exporters of foreign fighters worldwide. According to government's data, around 3,000 Tunisians have left the country to join the ranks of the Islamic Caliphate for training or fighting in Syria, Iraq, Libya or Mali, while international statistics assume that up to 7,000 Tunisian jihadist foreign fighters exist.[2] Other numbers suggest that about 800 Tunisian foreign fighters have returned to Tunisia.[3] As the Islamic Caliphate continued to lose territory and fighters were forced to return home, dealing with individuals coming back from conflict zones had become a pressing issue, sparking debate on whether to deny their entry or, more realistically, on where and how to detain them.[4] With regard to this, an ad-hoc parliamentary committee was created at the beginning of 2017 to investigate the phenomenon of foreign fighters and the networks behind them with poor results. This committee in fact rarely gathered and had no real follow-up, pointing to the limited role that parliament had played in security and defense matters.[5]

In a decade, the overarching strategic security paradigm has repeatedly shifted, embedding new priorities and approaches. Undoubtedly, a major conceptual change was the transition from regime security to state security, namely from serving the physical and political survival of the ruling elites as it was under Zine el-Abidine

[2] Barrett (2017); Renard (2019).
[3] Barrett (2017).
[4] Institut Tunisien des Études Stratégiques (2018).
[5] Marsad Majles (2019).

Ben Ali's presidency (1987-2011) to protecting government institutions, territory and the population as a whole. Also, understandings closer to notions of societal security have gradually emerged to enhance community resilience and make it an integral part of the fight against extremism. Revised local and international security practices associated with Security Force Assistance have come along with these conceptual changes.[6]

As the security situation worsened from 2011 to 2015, early demands for reforming security forces – and police above all – focusing on democratic accountability and human rights gave way to a more technical and pragmatic agenda aimed at improving the effectiveness of the security sector in fighting terrorist threats. This emergency counter-terrorism approach was then expanded to embrace counter-radicalization, placing greater emphasis on preventing terrorism and, more generally, violent extremism.

Hence, in this chapter we aim to illustrate how the approach to security in post-revolutionary Tunisia has gradually diversified beyond the purely hard security dimension to involve more of the social dimension. Crucially, preventing violent extremism (PVE) fails to replace the counter-terrorism (CT) approach, but complements the latter's predominant military focus with new, more comprehensive measures. As elsewhere, a multiplicity of actors in Tunisia have thus recognized that eliminating terrorists or preventing their attacks with intelligence is not enough, fitting into a much broader debate on terrorism as a complex phenomenon.

This chapter will proceed as follows. It first provides an overview of the concepts that are often mistakenly used as synonyms but on which it is difficult to find unanimous agreement. By tracing the major terrorist events that hit the country pioneering the so-called "Arab Spring", it then goes on to better contextualize the example of Tunisia and describes the evolution of securitarian approaches and practices that moved away from counter-terrorism alone. Finally, it zooms in on the most significant initiatives in terms of prevention by international and local actors as well as on state counter-narratives and awareness campaigns.

2. An unfinished theoretical debate: the broad spectrum of terrorism and violent extremism

In this chapter we thus argue that the counter-terrorism approach in Tunisia, after an initial emergency phase, has expanded to increasingly include the notion of prevention with a focus on its social dimension and violent extremism more broadly. In doing so, Tunisia is in line with a general trend worldwide. As observed in other

[6] Cimini, Hanau Santini (2021).

contexts, the paradigmatic shift from counter-terrorism (CT) to counter violent extremism (CVE) and preventing violent extremism (PVE) resulted in a reconfiguration of institutions, strategies, policies and partnering agencies.[7] What is meant, however, when these terms are used?

For the sake of clarity, it is worth beginning with a quick overview of the different definitions of counter-terrorism and violent extremism and its prevention. Also, of the related notions of radicalization, counter-radicalization and de-radicalization.

Broadly speaking, counter-terrorism (CT) is often defined as the set of measures, methods and strategies – especially of a military nature – designed to limit and halt the activity of terrorist groups or individuals. It therefore varies greatly in terms of approaches ranging, for example, from a coercive posture, to a proactive approach, persuasive or defensive one.[8] Whatever the approach, CT has long been based primarily on the use of force, at different levels and with various intensities. War, targeted assassinations, the use of drones, border control, and intelligence activities are all examples of force-based measures. There are also measures of different nature such as the freezing of assets, extraordinary renditions, extraditions, special legislation and extraordinary temporary powers. Whereas CT has long been a national concern, especially after the attacks of 9/11, it became "global". Remarkably, CT measures have progressively hardened to the detriment of respect for fundamental rights, creating tension between the guarantee of security and the right of individual freedoms.[9] While the voices of human rights defenders have been raised all over the world denouncing the abuses committed in the name of security, numerous studies have also confirmed the problematic nature of heavy-handed CT measures in different contexts, their lack of success and even the risk that they are counterproductive.[10] Some explore the extent to which harsh responses undermine the legitimacy of state counter-terrorism,[11] more likely stimulating rather than suppressing terrorist violence, insofar as they contribute to a greater sense of grievance toward central authorities and increase support for terrorist groups.[12] Similarly, public authorities' abuse of physical integrity through torture would lead to nurture terrorism instead of countering it.[13] Not least, coercion often leads to unsatisfactory or even misleading information.[14] Because of all

[7] Kundnani, Hayes (2018).
[8] Crelinsten (2009).
[9] Jackson (2005); Donohue (2008).
[10] Cole (2005), (2007); English (2009); Jackson et al. (2011).
[11] English (2009).
[12] Jackson et al. (2011).
[13] Walsh, Piazza (2010).
[14] Rejali (2007); Jackson et al. (2011).

these above-mentioned factors, the largely dominant force-based CT approach has been gradually questioned[15] and began to lose legitimacy in the mid-2000s.[16]

In parallel, new concepts emerged in the international context to explain and respond to political violence. “Violent extremism” and “radicalization” gradually imposed themselves in the international arena by acknowledging that terrorism is a problem that can be investigated through its origins, analysed in its manifestations and addressed through policy solutions beyond the use of physical force.[17] To be sure, the term “violent extremism” is as deeply contested as the notion of “terrorism”[18] and the two are sometimes employed interchangeably.[19] But even if it lacks a universally recognised definition, the former is considered a broader phenomenon than that of terrorism.[20] The concept of violent extremism has established itself in the scholarly literature and among practitioners to indicate the process of ideological transformation that anticipates the terrorist drift or, more generally, to explain the relationship between ideology and terrorism.[21] In that regard, preventing violent extremism (PVE) has been defined as the use of non-coercive methods to dissuade individuals or groups from mobilizing toward violence and to mitigate recruitment in ideologically motivated terrorism.[22] In this new vision, security measures alone would not be sufficient to provide an effective response to terrorism.[23] The PVE turn comes across as a holistic approach based on the assumption that social cohesion, stability and resilience are crucial drivers for preventing radicalization. In this same vein, marginalization, social exclusion, and socio-economic grievances are all factors potentially leading to the adoption of violent ideologies, behaviours and thus conducive to terrorism.[24]

Violent extremism is also related to the notion of radicalization, another contested term that refers to the adoption of extremist ideas and/or behaviors that would or could lead to embracing political violence. This is a gradual process and predates the decision of an individual to commit a terrorist attack. Peter Neumann describes the idea of “radicalisation” as “what goes on before the bomb goes off”.[25] After the 9/11 attacks and those taking place in Madrid and London between 2004

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15 Kundnani, Hayes (2018).
16 Martini (2020).
17 Kundnani (2012).
18 Nì Aoulain (2018).
19 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2018).
20 United Nations (2015).
21 Heath-Kelly (2013).
22 Khan in United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2018).
23 United Nations General Assembly (2015).
24 Nasser Eddine et al. (2011); Nash, Nesterova (2017).
25 Neumann in Kundnani (2012).

and 2005, its use has spread exponentially in the last twenty years.[26] Nevertheless, a considerable number of scholars have denounced the ambiguity of this concept and the difficulties in translating it into effective public policies being often over concentrated on the psychological-religious-individual dimension to the detriment of the socio-political realm. The concept of radicalization has in fact often been oversimplified in public opinion and policies but it has been theorised in the field of social movements as a highly complex process with intricate roots, "driven by the interactions of various political actors within long-lasting processes".[27] McCauley and Moskalenko define radicalization as a "change in beliefs, feelings, and behaviors in directions that increasingly justify intergroup violence and demand sacrifice in defense of the group".[28] Nevertheless, as della Porta and LaFree point out, radical attitudes do not always precede or lead to violent acts, so there remains the need to consider actions (behaviour) and attitudes (aims and perceptions) separately as they are not necessarily dependent or correspond to each other. In light of the above, "de-radicalization" should be thought of as "the reversal of radicalization processes".[29] More often, however, when it comes to public policies, it is understood as the prevention or the disruption of radicalization rather than its reversal. As a result, the measures taken with the aim of de-radicalize individuals and groups suffer from a general superficiality.

In sum, as with the very concept of "terrorism" and "violent extremism", there is no international consensus regarding what exactly constitutes "preventing" or "countering" these phenomena.[30] Common denominator, PVE policies – as well as counter-radicalization ones – have been designed to broaden the spectrum of counter-terrorism towards new sectors such as education, socio-economic development and communication with the aim of avoiding the spread of violence and extremism that can lead to terrorism. Basic goal remains to avoid the spread and escalation of violence in a holistic way, or at least from different angles.

3. A fledgling democracy hostage to terrorist attacks

Before zooming in on concrete examples of how counter-terrorism and preventing violent extremism unfolded in post-2011 Tunisia, it is worth remembering that counter-terrorism was instrumental to repress and tame Islamist groups and oppo-

[26] Sedgwick (2010); Richards (2011), (2015); Kundnani (2012).

[27] della Porta, Haupt (2012), p. 317.

[28] McCauley and Moskalenko (2008), p. 416.

[29] della Porta, LaFree (2012), p. 7.

[30] Nasser-Eddine et al. (2011); McCants, Watts (2012).

nents during Ben Ali's authoritarian regime. In April 2002, the bomb attack on a synagogue on the island of Djerba, one of Tunisia's foremost touristic destinations, put the country on the track of the post-9/11 "global war on terror". Initially dismissed as an accident by state authorities, the attack that killed 19 people including 14 Germans, three Tunisians, and two Frenchmen and left 30 others injured,[31] was later traced back to the Al Qaeda network. It brought to the adoption of the controversial 2003 Anti-Terrorism Act which provided ample leeway to control dissent at home. Indeed, approved in a favorable international conjuncture that had diverted attention to Islamic terrorism as the primary source of terrorist threats, this bill has been strongly criticized by human rights organizations for its instrumental use against political dissidents. Under the spotlight it was mainly its broad definition of terrorists and terrorism, as well as other ambiguous clauses. Remarkably, the 2003 bill significantly expanded the scope of the definition of terrorism from the 1993 Penal Code to include acts of "disturbing public order" and "influencing state policy". A joint report by Tunisia's Association against torture and the Committee for the respect of freedoms and human rights, denounces that the bill was in fact used to sentence regime opponents, allow draconian measures in prisons and gloss over torture as a systematic practice.[32] After all, Ben Ali's Tunisia was renowned for being a *mukhabarat* state, that is a regime largely dependent on intelligence and one of "the most heavily policed states in the world".[33] Under Ben Ali, the security sector had indeed developed increasingly authoritarian practices in its modus operandi. Specifically, not only was the police a tool of the president's authoritarian rule,[34] but it also became a symbol of corruption, repression and nepotism: in other words, a symbol of the regime itself. Notably, the iconic self-immolation of street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi after police confiscated his merchandise was the perfect example of something familiar to many Tunisians and Arab citizens that resonated region wide triggering the 2010-2011 uprisings: arbitrary and humiliating treatment by the state, personified by police officers.[35] It comes as no surprise that police stations were a major target of the demonstrators' anger during the riots.

After 2011, apart from a few hundred purges of the most compromised officers and the dismantling of the Directorate for State Security which had been accused of the majority of torture allegations, reforms were rather unsystematic and little change was made in the immediate post-revolutionary period.[36] What was most

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[31] Zelin (2017).

[32] Association de lutte contre la torture en Tunisie, Comité pour le respect des libertés et des droits de l'homme en Tunisie (2008).

[33] Lutterbeck (2015), p. 1.

[34] Camau and Geisser (2003); Hibou (2011).

[35] Cimini (2022).

[36] Hanau Santini, Cimini (2019).

striking was the inadequacy of the security forces to prevent and respond to acts of terrorism of various kinds.

Over the years, attacks labelled as terrorist evolved in their nature, targets and also lethality. In 2012, during the Islamist-led Troika government (2011-2013), Salafi groups attacked on the headquarter of Nessma TV, a private channel belonging to media tycoon Nabil Karoui, for broadcasting the animated film Persepolis, considered offensive to Islam. Also, they masterminded the attack on the US embassy in Tunis in September that year.

In 2013, the murders of two prominent leftist politicians – Choukri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi – at the hands of Salafi groups shocked public opinion. Moreover, by increasing domestic political polarization and mistrust towards the Islamist party Ennahda, held politically responsible for what happened to the leftist leaders, these events threatened to derail the country's democratization. Indeed, for several months, Ennahda's leadership hesitated to ban Ansar al-Sharia (AST), a Salafi movement which remained out of the political fray while challenging "official" political Islam from the margins of society, mostly through proselytizing activities. It was only in May 2013, after violent clashes erupted between AST supporters and security forces in various areas of the country, that Ennahda Prime Minister Ali Laarayedh labelled Ansar al-Sharia a terrorist network.

The terrorist threat, however, became existential only in 2015 when targeted political violence morphed into mass shooting against foreign tourists. First came the attack on the Bardo national museum in Tunis on March 18, and then the one on a beach resort in Sousse on June 26. At the Bardo, 22 people, the great majority of them European citizens, lost their lives at the hands of two militants. Likewise, an ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) gunman killed 38 people – out of whom thirty were British citizens. These attacks revealed the elephant in the room, by exposing the existing security vacuum and the disarray of the Tunisian security forces. The failure to respond effectively demonstrated gaps in institutional capacity, from situational awareness, command and control to coordination between security forces and senior government officials. Furthermore, with the state of emergency already in place, a third bloody attack on a bus of the Presidential Guard hit downtown Tunis again on November 24, killing 12 officers and wounding 20 others, including four civilians.

Equally striking, the insurgent attacks on the border town of Ben Guerdane in March 2016 when a commando of jihadists entering from Libya attempted to seize the town and made it a stronghold of the Islamic Caliphate in Tunisia. In the early morning of March 7, an armed group of about 70 people, mostly Tunisians affiliated to the so-called Islamic State, penetrated across the Libyan border and attacked different strategic locations in the town. They also rounded up and executed targeted chiefs of security forces and collaborationists house by house, thus showing

considerable local knowledge. These deaths add to the number of those who died accidentally in the course of the shootings. Interestingly, the assailants called local inhabitants to rise up against the central Tunisian state with the hopes of capitalizing on a widespread feeling of abandonment and neglect locally. Contrary to expectations, with a death toll of 14 security officers, seven civilians and 46 insurgents, the attack failed thanks to both the unexpectedly prompt reaction of security forces and ordinary people's resistance. The battle turned in public opinion and in political discourse into an "epic" and the town of Ben Guerdane became the city symbol of resistance to terrorism in Tunisia.[37] At a time of great political, economic and social crisis, this episode became a fetish of national union in the face of terrorism and an example of harmony between law enforcement and citizens.

All these events deeply impacted upon security practices. As anticipated, the main consequence was that bigger and more coordinated international efforts prioritized a greater efficiency of the security forces over issues of transparency and democratic accountability which should have broken with the past authoritarian legacy. The high number of Western casualties in the 2015 attacks led in fact European countries – and shortly after also the US and additional countries – to pledge technical rather than normatively driven forms of security assistance to the country. In retrospect, the performance of Tunisia's security forces improved. Unlike other contexts, post-interventionist security assistance strengthened central security forces and the coercive manifestation of state power.[38] The flipside was the dilution of democratic reforms. While 2015 has put the security machine back on track, it is also true that counter-terrorism has been the overall concern for some time. By contrast, the insurgent attack on Ben Guerdane prompted the need to more vocally address the issue of violent extremism and radicalization, not only at the individual level but in terms of societal resilience.

4. Shifting trends: from counter-terrorism to preventing violent extremism

In Tunisia's post-revolutionary era, border integrity and the monopoly of force have been overarching concerns of the prevailing state-centered approach to security. Against this backdrop, the focus on counter-terrorism went hand in hand with foreign programmes of technical assistance aimed to improve the operational capacity of national security forces. Yet, Tunisia lacked a proper counter-terrorism strategy until 2015-2016 insofar as mostly chaotic and, in some ways shortsighted, measures

[37] Simoncini (2021).
[38] Hanau Santini, Tholens (2018).

have been taken prioritizing repression and leading to severe consequences. Furthermore, the delay with which certain initiatives have been taken to stem the problem of political violence inside and outside the country has unfortunately marked the increasingly intricate evolution of violent movements. Thereafter, Tunisian counter-terrorism has been characterized by a systematic recourse to the regime of exception.[39]

On 4 July 2015, following the aforementioned bloody attack on Port el-Kantaoui beach at 10 kilometers away from Sousse, the President of the Republic Béji Caid Essebsi announced the beginning of a "war on terror" and declared the state of emergency. To be fair, Tunisian citizens were not new to this "exceptional" measure. From 2011 onward, such status had in fact always been in effect except for only 18 months. Importantly, the state of emergency has proven to be a fertile ground for the perpetration of human rights violations.[40] To add to that, the new antiterrorist legislation of 2015, quickly adopted after the events in Bardo and Sousse, has failed to provide a legal framework fully respectful of fundamental rights at the level of investigation, procedure and punishment.[41] Despite the amendments made in 2019, the CT law continues to be inherently problematic. Indeed, it has been considered by a part of civil society to be "a copy of the 2003 law and therefore subject to the same criticisms, particularly in terms of guarantees for a fair trial".[42]

Many observers agree in saying that counter-terrorism in Tunisia has been essentially based on control and repression.[43] Among the most discussed procedures applied in the post-revolutionary period there are administrative extrajudicial measures such as house search and arrest, travel restrictions and bans on leaving the country.[44] In the context of the national plan to combat terrorism and the state of emergency, these measures have been often applied without a judicial order and without any right of appeal. The most glaring example is undoubtedly the Directive No. 17 of 2013, better known as the "S17" from the French word "signalisation" (signaling), originally put into effect by the Tunisian Ministry of Interior to prevent young people under 30 to travel to hotbeds of conflict. S17 was motivated by the crisis caused by the high numbers of Tunisian foreign fighters traveling to the Islamic State and other jihadist organizations causing national and international concern. Nevertheless, this measure got "out of hand" of public institutions,[45] restricting and

[39] Mullin, Rouabah (2016); Alzubairi (2019).
[40] Amnesty International (2017).
[41] Bras (2016).
[42] Réseau d'Observation de la Justice Tunisienne (2016), p. 7.
[43] Aliaga, O'Farrell (2017); Ben Mustapha Ben Arab (2018); Chirchi et al. (2020).
[44] Organisation mondiale contre la torture (2019); United Nations Development Program et al. (2021a).
[45] Cotteret (2020).

violating the freedom of movement. According to official figures, 29,450 Tunisians have been prevented from traveling out of the country on the basis of S17 measures from 2013 to 2018.[46] Their use has thus appeared as disproportionate and discriminatory. Such restriction on the right to freedom of movement, moreover without prior notification except at the time of travel and without the possibility of knowing the reasons and appealing, and other extrajudicial measures has had serious social consequences. Right defenders have in fact pointed out implications such as the loss of employment, social isolation, divorce, and different kinds of traumas for those people affected and their families.[47]

A part of Tunisian civil society has repeatedly denounced the abuses committed in the name of security and in the framework of counter-terrorism, and have done so also leveraging on the spread of prevention discourse, as detailed below in this chapter. Here, it suffices to recall that the full respect for fundamental rights and freedoms is a key asset of the new "preventing violent extremism" approach that will complement more canonical counterterrorism measures.[48] Notoriously, 46 major Tunisian civil society organizations (CSOs), signed and addressed an open letter to the state authorities against the adoption of the new anti-terrorist legislation, namely Organic Law No. 26 of 2015. These also included the quartet awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2015 made up of the Tunisian General Labour Union, the Employers' Union, the Human Rights League and the Order of Lawyers. The letter clearly gives voice to human rights defenders worried about "a dangerous path in the name of striking back against terrorists".[49] Along with the letter, an awareness campaign was also carried out under the coordination of Human Rights Watch and involving some Tunisian celebrities to affirm that human rights abuses should not be allowed in CT operations.[50] Whereas ad hoc emergency measures such as the 2015 counter-terrorism law were pivotal in facing the emergency linked to terrorism, a more diversified approach has been gradually emerging around prevention and deradicalization. This approach, based on a long-term perspective and greater inclusiveness, involved society more closely into state security activities. To be sure, society became both a security actor and a security target to be protected.

The joint civilian-military effort that derailed the terrorist plan of creating a jihadi stronghold in Ben Guerdane in 2016 played a major role in this further twist. Not only the improved coordination between the security forces, but the active role of the local community was decisive in thwarting the terrorist assault. In the com-

[46] Jelassi (2021).
[47] Organisation mondiale contre la torture (2019).
[48] Observatory to Prevent Extremist Violence (2020).
[49] Human Rights Watch (2016a).
[50] Human Rights Watch (2016b).

mon vulgate, a marginalized and often stigmatized community, chose to react to terrorism by somehow cleaning its reputation and proving its allegiance to the central state. Linking security to the wellbeing of the community, that is to societal security – intended here as the capability of a society to preserve its essential character under changed circumstances and despite possible or real threats[51] – represent what we might compare to the "local turn" of peace studies and peacebuilding. These latter have in fact emphasized complexity, local capacities, and human agency.[52] Unlike in previous approaches to security, local actors acquire a proactive and transformative role. In other words, bottom-up input and local ownership become an unavoidable condition for the long-term success of security strategies. That said, three remarks are necessary.

Firstly, the myth of the "epopee" Ben Guerdane has to be more critically analyzed. Although the main narrative on the battle insisted on the courageous help of the citizens to the security forces while proving the resilience of the Tunisian people to terrorism coming from abroad, a non-negligible group of locals was colluded with the assailants. On March 6, 2022, the criminal chamber specialized in terrorism cases at the Court of First Instance of Tunis rendered severe judgments about the events of Ben Guerdane.[53] Of the 96 defendants involved, 16 were sentenced to capital punishment,[54] 15 to life imprisonment and two were sentenced to 30 years. Imprisonment sentences between 20 and 27 years were pronounced against 9 people, and others ranging from 4 to 15 years against the 51 remaining defendants. An unspecified number of indictees were also dismissed. When one also considers that of the 46 dead assailants, most were Tunisian nationals, the rhetoric of terrorism as an imported phenomenon from outside loses ground. The participation of a nourished group of local citizens at several levels in planning the Ben Guerdane attack has been systematically silenced by a political and mediatic discourse that insisted on the positive involvement of civilians in the clashes alongside the army and other security forces, though, it contributes to showing the potential for mobilization by violent extremist groups at both national and local levels.[55]

Secondly, although the events in Ben Guerdane paved the way for a more inclusive understanding of security involving society at large, more traditional security measures have certainly not disappeared. New approaches have thus come alongside traditional approaches, especially border security. The battle, in fact, also contributed

51 Wæver et al. (1993).

52 Juncos, Joseph (2020).

53 Anadolu Agency (2022).

54 Despite Tunisia has continued to issue death penalty sentences and has never suppressed capital punishment from the penal code, a *de facto* moratorium has been observed in the country for almost 30 years.

55 Boukhars (2017).

to the ongoing further militarization of the Tunisian-Libyan border. Stricter controls were enforced, aggravating the economic difficulties of the border community, traditionally reliant on cross-border trade and smuggling activities in the absence of other viable alternatives, and already on its knees as the result of the Libyan crisis first and the Tunisian economic recession that had disrupted conventional flows.[56]

Thirdly, this shift from a state-centric perspective, contingency-based approach mainly focused on counter-terrorism and border management that prioritized result-oriented technical and training assistance, to a more inclusive, long-term strategy involving society at large in counter-radicalization efforts, did not come from out of the blue with Ben Guerdane. Indeed, it traces back to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's agenda on preventing violent extremism. If locally the battle of Ben Guerdane has induced public institutions to rethink their approach beyond strictly securitarian measures by showing how important societal resistance and resilience can be in defeating terrorism, it is also true that this domestic shift also coincided with a paradigm turn at the international level. As a matter of fact, the United Nations spearheaded the adoption of the so-called prevention of violent extremism (PVE). More specifically, the UN Security Council played a central role in the internationalization of the discourse on violent extremism, especially through Resolution 2178 of 2014 along with the 2015 Action Plan of the UN Secretary for the Prevention of Violent Extremism.[57] In sum, we might say that Tunisia's move from a narrower counter-terrorism approach to a broader preventing dimension, albeit mainly linked domestically to what happened in Ben Guerdane, is part of a broader international paradigm shift. This latter was not merely transposed in the Maghreb country, but was rather the result of the interplay of international and national orientations. On closer inspection, a domestic debate had been going on for some time, and undoubtedly Ben Guerdane showed how a renewed approach to terrorism was the right way forward. Especially since 2015, increasing attention has been paid to the root causes of terrorism, as shown by the parliamentary discussion for the adoption of the abovementioned Organic Law No. 26 of 2015. Political discourse from multiple sides, once heavily concentrated on the military dimension of counterterrorism, began recognizing the need of implementing public policies capable of addressing socio-economic development[58], disrupting extremist religious views[59] and involving local civil society and international organisations.[60] In parliamentary debates, different deputies stressed the need of adopting a comprehensive

[56] Mullin, Rouabah (2018); Boukhars (2017); Meddeb (2017).

[57] Martini (2020).

[58] Yakoubi (Member of Parliament from the Union Patriotique Libre - UPL party) in Marsad Majles (2015a).

[59] Madhioub (Member of Parliament from Ennahda party) in Marsad Majles (2015a).

[60] Belhaj Hmida (Member of Parliament, Nidaa Tounes party) in Marsad Majles (2015b).

view on terrorism by tackling poverty,[61] regional unequal development and youth unemployment,[62] all considered as risk factors for developing extremist and violent behaviours, or push factors for the adhesion to violent extremism.

5. Uncovering Tunisia's violent extremism prevention projects

In Tunisia, PVE has featured a new integrated approach bringing along a number of important novelties and challenges. Not only it broadened the domains of intervention compared with CT, but also involved a plethora of both state and non-actors at multiple levels, from the local to the national to the international one.

On the domestic front, by way of illustration, the holistic nature of PVE led to a more active participation of different Ministries breaking somehow the monopoly over counter-terrorism and security of the Ministry of Interior and, to a lesser extent, of the Ministry of National Defense. Moreover, the "Whole-of-Society Approach"[63] of PVE also opened a space for civil society and international organizations. As greater coordination became necessary, a new institution was specifically set up to carry out this task, namely the National Committee for Countering Terrorism and Extremism, commonly referred to with the French acronym CNLCT (*Commission Nationale de Lutte Contre le Terrorisme*). Established by the Organic Law No. 26 of 2015, this Committee is composed by the representatives of 15 ministries, a judge specialized in counter-terrorism and several experts in charge of holding strategic, coordinative, regulatory, advisory and awareness-raising missions.[64] Prevention thus increasingly turned out to be an essential aspect of CNLCT activities. Among others, these latter include the issuance of guiding principles to prevent and fight against terrorism and support the international efforts made in this sense. In tune with the new international PVE approach, it was the CNLCT to draw up the 2016 National Strategy to Fight Terrorism and Extremism. This latter, indeed, saw the light in a context of international mobilization for the harmonization of domestic anti-terrorist practices to international standards and was largely affected by the UN Global Strategy Against Terrorism and by the EU Anti-Terrorist Strategy. Adopted in November 2016 but released in full only years later, Tunisia's National Strategy paved the way for several ministerial action plans in 2018 that, unlike the first one, have not yet been made public. The strategy, currently under revision, bears on four key pillars as its western equivalents: prevention, protection,

[61] Hamdi (Member of Parliament from Nidaa Tounes party) in Marsad Majles (2015a).
[62] Madhioub (Member of Parliament from Ennahda party) in Marsad Majles (2015a).
[63] United Nations General Assembly (2015).
[64] Presidency of the Tunisian Government (2019).

pursuit and response. Also, it features 59 general objectives that enshrine a multidisciplinary perspective.[65] More specifically, the prevention pillar, counting 18 articles, includes a series of guidelines ranging from addressing "the social, economic, political and intellectual factors conducive to the spread of terrorism"[66] to strengthening international cooperation in CT and PVE. It aims to prevent online recruitment and address the phenomenon of foreign fighters "directing them to de-radicalization and reintegration programs".[67]

Besides the efforts made by state institutions in expanding the counter-terrorism activity towards a more comprehensive and multidimensional approach, several studies have highlighted the extent to which international actors are largely involved in this sector.[68] Starting from 2016, most of the funds for implementing these programs have been actually allocated by international donors as part of multilateral or bilateral development cooperation. By contrast, Tunisian governments have provided very scarce funds through the various ministries (Letsch, 2019).

Coming to international players, among the 17 UN agencies based in Tunisia, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) is one of the most committed to the PVE. In 2016-2017, the *Tamkeen* (Arabic for "empowerment") project, more broadly devoted to the promotion of active citizenship, integrated for the first time a PVE perspective to strengthen social cohesion. *Tamkeen*'s main activities were related to capacity building of Tunisian CSOs but also financed third-party projects carried out by small associations scattered across different regions of Tunisia. In 2018, for example, the Southern region of Medenine hosted a number of developing projects through local associations specifically targeting rural women and aimed to build community resilience against violent extremism. Furthermore, the UNDP launched a new project with a strong PVE mission in 2020: "*Tarabot* - Inclusive development to prevent violence". Designed in partnership with the CNLCT, it aims to help strengthen the resilience of the Tunisian state and society concerning violent extremism by making PVE efforts more effective. The project covers a wide range of activities including research. As a matter of fact, in the framework of the *Tarabot* project (wich means "connections" in Arabic), several studies have been carried out to inform public policies on PVE, by providing data on the most pressing issues, offering a fresh outlook and specific recommendations for the revision of the 2016 National Strategy scheduled in 2021 and yet to be released. Among these studies, there is an analytical review of the factors that drive people to involve themselves in extremism in post-revolu-

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[65] Commission Nationale de Lutte Contre le Terrorisme (2016).

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

[67] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

[68] Aliaga, O'Farrell (2017); Letsch (2019); Simoncini (2020).

tionary Tunisia[69] and an analysis of the economic impact of violent extremism in the country.[70]

The UNDP is also a major sponsor of projects on "Community policing" (*Police de proximité*), born with the double aim of recovering the bottom-up reputation of the police and value local communities in preventing violent extremism. In other words, they aimed at boosting more socially ingrained security mechanisms premised on the cooperation between societal and security forces, that Ben Guerdane's example had shown to be a working model. Community policing projects have relied on local security committees (*Comités Locaux de Sécurité*, CLS) in charge of elaborating local security plans through bottom-up efforts, making police officers, civil society and local authorities work together.[71] Through this micro-level approach, these community activities have mainly addressed low-politics issues, such as drugs, women and crime prevention. Interestingly, the CLSs are currently dispersed across Tunisia, but mostly located in the south and interior regions, long considered to be more vulnerable to terrorism in the common vernacular. Unfortunately, the Minister of Interior that was supposed to set up new CLSs on its own following the good practice inaugurated by the UNDP, has lagged behind.

In addition to UN agencies, the European Union (EU) is certainly one of the main donors in the PVE field. From 2017 to 2020, through its Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), the European Commission allocated approximately three million euros to local civil society organizations to implement PVE projects.[72] These former covered a number of issues, including improving the conditions of the inhabitants of marginalized regions, understanding the factors that lead to violent extremism, accompanying the reintegration of young detainees, advocating for the respect of fundamental rights in the fight against terrorism, promoting the social and political participation of unemployed young people and building capacity for the protagonists of social and cultural life.[73]

This European line of funding may seem small when compared with the 36.25 million dollars from the U.S. Agency for International Development allocated from 2018 to 2022 in the framework of the initiative "TRACE: Tunisia Resilience and Community Empowerment".[74] Designed to promote social cohesion, reduce communities' risk of instability and increase resilience to violent extremism, it gave birth to the *Ma3an* (meaning "together" in Arabic) project, implemented in 30 Tunisian communities in partnership with international and

[69] United Nations Development Program et al. (2021a).
[70] United Nations Development Program et al. (2021b).
[71] United Nations (2017b).
[72] European Commission (2020).
[73] *Ibid.*
[74] Government of the United States (2022).

Tunisian partners under the coordination of Fhi360, an international nonprofit international organization.

As far as international actors are concerned, the enhanced importance of prevention is evidenced by the creation of an ad-hoc working group within the G7plus platform and thus the need for greater coordination. After the 2015 attacks, a new security assistance format was devised for Tunisia through an enlarged G7 which included the European Union, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. In Tunisia, the G7plus acted as a coordination mechanism to avoid duplication and promote sharing of information among Western countries about their respective security assistance to the North African country. It practically operated through working groups, each co-led by a third country and a Tunisian ministry. At a later stage, a fifth operational working group specifically devoted to counter-radicalization was set up, co-led by the Netherlands and the EU. On the Tunisian side, the leader was the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), at least before the working groups were consolidated from five to three with the US presidency to the G7: the group on Border Integrity and Transport and Security; that on Counter-Terrorism; and the one on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism. All underscore the growing importance of prevention, but also how its perception changes over time.

6. Campaigning against terrorism and violent extremism: propaganda, awareness raising, and counter-narratives

As mentioned above, the new paradigm enabled the possibility of new policies and strategies to combat extremism and prevent terrorist drifts. Remarkably, the discursive dimension gradually acquired a strong importance in recent years in the fight against violent extremist recruitment in Tunisia. This corresponds to a growing interest of the international community in disrupting the extremely accurate and professional propaganda developed by the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). In Resolution 2354, the United Nations[75] called on member states to develop measures to counter extremist propaganda, indicating guidelines for the implementation of counter-narrative initiatives. Tunisia has been the fifth most targeted country by ISIS communication campaigns[76] with a tailored messaging often embodied by Tunisian foreign fighters sharing their experience in the Caliphate and motivating Tunisians to join the organization.[77] The impact of such messaging has

[75] United Nations (2017a).
[76] World Leadership Alliance - Club de Madrid (2017).
[77] Zelin (2020).

worried the authorities and civil society, giving the impetus for the development of audiovisual campaigns aiming at challenging the extremist discourse. In fact, Tunisian state authorities have gone beyond the mere counter-narrative, insisting on the necessity of building grassroot alternative narratives, not only being capable of countering the extremist message, but able to offer an alternative option, a Tunisian-specific positive narrative.

To this end, a governmental inter-ministerial PVE Strategic Communications Unit was created in 2015 under the supervision of the Ministry in charge of relations with constitutional bodies, civil society and human rights and assigned coordination tasks. This Unit particularly focuses on online extremist recruitment, and in doing so it addresses the priority of implementing "a national approach that will prevent the recruitment, via the Internet, of new elements by terrorist groups, by reducing the effect of extremist propaganda on young people while respecting freedom of access to the Internet" listed in the 2016 National Security Strategy.[78] More specifically, the PVE Strategic Communications Unit launched the Alternative Narrative Platform in 2016. Interestingly, the very initial aim was to build real alternative discourses, context-tailored and characterized by positivity and inclusiveness instead of producing a simple opposite narrative. The Platform supports the works done by third parties as private and civil society actors and coordinates the efforts of institutional and non-institutional actors. However, it must be said that, to date, no significant project came into being.

Some awareness campaigns have nonetheless been developed by various Tunisian ministries, such as the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Education. In 2015, the Ministry of the Interior produced and released several videos. The very first one was entitled "Do not make yourself vulnerable to terrorists in the virtual world, there are new victims every day".[79] It opens with the image of a female Facebook user scrolling through her bulletin board and receiving a friendship request from an unknown person with the ISIS flag on his profile picture. When she accepts the request and starts to discover the profile of her new "friend", pictures of weapons and the calligraphic image of a white *šahāda* (an Islamic oath declaring belief in the oneness of God and in the prophet Mohammad as his messenger) on a black background pop out of the page. Meanwhile, the girl receives a message inviting her to reach the Islamic State, promising her paradise in exchange for her sacrifices. At this point, counter-messages come in. For example "They will tell you: sacrifice yourself with us for a just cause […] But in reality, you will discover hell on this earth and you will die alone, far from your Nation, from your mother, your brothers and your father

[78] Commission Nationale de Lutte Contre le Terrorisme (2016), p. 6.
[79] Tunisian Ministry of Interior (2015a).

[...]".[80] Indeed, the video was aimed to sensitize a mainly young audience to the dangers of the jihadist propaganda online, but increasing attention has also been devoted to their parents. A famous awareness campaign devoted to them reads: "When we do not pay attention to our sons, terrorism can be among us".[81] The video shows blurred images of a woman sitting in a police car speaking by radio to her son who is involved in a terrorist attack. The desperate woman addresses her son messages of disapproval, crying and shouting, while trying to make him desist from the violence to no avail. In the end, the video states: "If you had told us what you saw, we would have protected him" inviting parents to speak out when detecting suspicious behaviors.[82]

At the end of this overview of key initiatives in the field of PVE, some reflection is necessary. Unsurprisingly, a large part of these projects, though heterogeneous, are mainly aimed at young people. After the 2010-2011 uprisings, Tunisian "youth", who have emerged powerfully on the scene claiming their own agency,[83] as complex as that category is, have been affected by so many development projects aimed at reinforcing their participation in the transitional process and molding their active citizenship. Starting from 2015, this wide variety of youth-tailored programmes have gradually begun to integrate a securitarian dimension through the inclusion of PVE. During the post-revolutionary period, some argue, major transformations took place at the level of youth policy in the country: from being a State monopoly it has in fact turned into "a field of competition with international stakeholders".[84] PVE injection on youth policies does not happen smoothly. Among other authors, Sukarieh and Tannock problematize the theoretical basis and the practical results of PVE policies addressing youth in the Arab contexts.[85] Analyzing several institutional initiatives taken by various actors on the wave of UN Resolution 2250 on Youth Peace and Security (YPS) of 2015, they argue that the YPS agenda overestimates the role of young people as security subjects and actors. According to Murphy, instead of continuing to see youth as "a source of insecurity" or major actors of security, the approach to be taken would rather be to investigate the forms of insecurity experienced by youth in South and East Mediterranean countries.[86]

Indeed, Tunisian civil society has developed some youth-centered programs that privileged the experience of marginalized youth, seeing them neither as risks nor as security actors, but as protagonists in their own lives and that of the community. A

[80] *Ibid.*
[81] Tunisian Ministry of Interior (2015b).
[82] *Ibid.*
[83] Pepicelli (2018).
[84] Somi (2016), p. 3.
[85] Sukarieh, Tannock (2018).
[86] Murphy (2018).

virtuous example is the project "Strengthening youth participation in Ettadhamen" by International Alert Tunisia. Ettadhamen is one of the working-class neighborhoods of the Tunis suburban belt, most affected by the extremism phenomenon. The project resulted in the publication of the book "Les jeunes de Douar Hicher et d'Ettadhamen. Une enquête sociologique".[87] Deconstructing the dominant media narrative that has reduced the Ettadhamen neighborhood to a site of Salafist violence, the book offers a different perspective on these young people, highlighting the complexity of their lives and the social, political and religious mechanisms that mark these sensitive territories, conducting in some cases to extremism.

However, despite the dynamism and the large number of projects that starting from 2015-2017 have been implemented in Tunisia through partnerships between local and international actors for PVE, the sector is not exempt from critical issues. Aliaga and O'Farrell point out the "lack of coherence and long-term vision" as well as the risk of "reinforcing the problems they most need to address".[88] The work of Lydia Letsch confirms that the high dependence of civil society actors on external financing translates into a strong influence exerted by international actors on the way in which preventive activities are designed and implemented as well as on the beneficiaries to be involved.[89] The international donors' discourse based on superficial understandings of cohesion and peace risks further alienating the beneficiaries of these (mostly) short-term programs.[90] Indeed, many observers agree on the need to propose effective structural changes to prevent violent extremism rather than limited initiatives. However, the situation of the serious economic and political crisis that Tunisia has been going through in the post-2011 decade does not allow for the possibility of implementing the reform plans necessary to end up with the unequal development of the regions and bring new perspectives to the socio-economic problems of the country. These problems risk jeopardizing the success of the PVE programs developed so far in Tunisia.

7. Conclusion

This chapter has traced the paradigmatic shift of Tunisia's security practices from a narrower counter-terrorism approach to a more comprehensive prevention of violent extremism. The latter entails not only the inclusion of more security recipients but also those who provide security, more vocally involving society. In addition, it

[87] Lamloum, Ben Zina (2017).
[88] Aliaga, O'Farrell (2017), p.19.
[89] Letsch (2019).
[90] Simoncini (2020).

provides for a broadening to other areas beyond the purely military, so as to encompass socio-economic, socio-cultural and even psychological dimensions. In our analysis prevention played a key role as a distinguishing feature. However, it should be pointed out that this is not an aspect that is absent in counter-terrorism, but is more understood in the sense of anticipating a possible attack. After all, it was one of the four pillars of the 2016 Tunisian National Strategy along the lines of the European one. The fault lines between one approach and the other are obviously not always clearly demarcated. Not even from a time perspective. As illustrated, the shifting focus from preventing terrorist attacks as part of the country's counter-terrorism approach to preventing the process of individuals' radicalization typical of PVE strategies is hardly traceable to a single moment. Undoubtedly, Tunisia's domestic political environment became more receptive after Ben Guerdane. In a way, domestic terrorist attacks have set the stage well for this change, also in line with an international trend.

Tunisia has been hit hard by terrorism in its first post-uprising decade, with significant implications in terms of economic and even political stability. In this sense, it has been an interesting "laboratory" of counter-terrorism practices and prevention. In contrast to other contexts, it should be acknowledged that in Tunisia, the debate on how best to address the issue has been posed. The large number of projects in favor of preventing violent extremism and radicalization testify to this vitality and willingness. What is no small thing, actors traditionally regarded as a black box such as the Ministry of Interior have shown an openness, albeit still minimal, to cooperation with civil society and international actors. Yet, there remain mainly implementation problems, not least because of political will, and an underlying issue that is anything but minor, such as the question of de-radicalization in prisons. In this regard, the constant changes in power and the perennial political crisis have been detrimental.

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Chapter V
EU COUNTER-TERRORISM AND RADICALIZATION MEASURES IN MOROCCO AND TUNISIA IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY

Susanna Villani

Abstract: The European Union and its Member States, especially those overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, have always had strong relations with the countries of North Africa but, starting from the new millennium, security and counter-terrorism have represented an area of great concern that has become increasingly important in terms of policies to be set with respect to this region. The chapter intends to present the strengthened dialogue and cooperation in the area of security between the EU on the one hand, and Morocco and Tunisia, on the other one, as framed in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Indeed, the latter represents the evolutive framework for the adoption of legal instruments based on the EU internal security strategy and external relations law for countering terroristic activities and radicalism. The novelties introduced by the Lisbon Treaty have then allowed to manage the EU cooperation strategy in the security sector on the basis of soft and hard law mechanisms resulting in a sort of 'cross-pillarization' of anti-terrorism objectives aimed at improving security from multiple and combined perspectives.

Keywords: European Neighbourhood Policy – EU counter-terrorism strategy – AFSJ – CFSP – Human Rights – Association Agreements

1. Introduction

The revolutionary wave that spread out through most of the North African countries during the Arab Spring in 2010 and 2011 marked the beginning of change and uncertainties in the region. Still, while some North African countries are undergoing an arguably successful transition, others remain unstable and continue to struggle with deeply rooted socio-economic, political and ide-

ological differences. Inevitably, this has an impact over the other side of the Mediterranean Sea.

The European Union (EU) and its Member States, especially those overlooking the Mediterranean, have always had strong relations with the countries of North Africa. When the Treaty of Rome attributed to the European Economic Community (EEC) the competence to propose, negotiate and enforce all aspects of trade relations with non-member States, North African countries started to negotiate agreements with the EEC at the same time as they gained national independence from European colonial rule. Notwithstanding the changed nature of the relationship, after the end of the Cold War, the process of enlargement the EU embarked on shifted the balance away from the Mediterranean exactly when issues such as economic stagnation, irregular migration and radicalization in North Africa were gaining the attention of policy-makers in Southern Europe.

Currently, the EU is still on the way to define a coherent set of policies towards that region which may successfully combine geopolitical interests with a thorough understanding of the complex local dynamics and demands. In the last decade, the migration crisis has acquired centrality in the EU political agenda thus calling for a closer collaboration between the Union and North Africa but the room for improvement is still large in this domain.

Starting from the new millennium, security and counter-terrorism have represented an area of great concern that has become increasingly important in terms of policies to be set with respect to North Africa. Obviously, this trend reflects growing EU concern about the influence of the Islamic State group (ISIS) and other terrorist organisations in the region, the large number of foreign fighters from North African countries, and the North African connections of terrorists who have carried out attacks within Europe since 2004. For this reason, the EU Member States, as well as the EU institutions, have often demonstrated a strong interest in understanding security threats that come from North Africa and in working with North African countries, including the Kingdom of Morocco and the Republic of Tunisia, to address the potential sources of threat. It goes without saying that both the countries on which the present work is focused on benefit from an advanced status in their relations with the EU.[1]

The EU-Moroccan relations date back to the 1960s, when the former European Community signed a first economic agreement with the Kingdom. Since then, bilateral relations have been solid, but some significant episodes of political tension, mainly due to issues of territorial integrity like the question of Western Sahara,[2]

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[1] Bicchi (2010); Khader (2013); Dworkin (2016); Zigin (2019).

[2] The EU's trade agreements with Morocco have come under the scrutiny of the EU Court of Justice for challenging their *de facto* application to Western Sahara, disputed between Morocco and the Polisario Front which invokes the right to self-determination in relation to the territory. In 2016, in *Front*

have been registered. Since 2000, the entry into force of the EU-Morocco Association Agreement[3] establishing the first free trade area has marked the multifaceted relations between the EU and Morocco which have later benefited from an advanced status with the EU neighbourhood policy. On 27 June 2019, the EU and Morocco confirmed this intense relationship by releasing a joint statement after the Association Council outlining priorities and themes for a closer cooperation in the years ahead.[4]

The Republic of Tunisia represents a strategic partner for the EU given the long-lasting and close political, economic, social, and cultural ties, firstly institutionalized in the 1976 Cooperation Agreement,[5] in which the EU granted unilateral tariff preferences for most Tunisian industrial products. Later, it was the first Southern Mediterranean country to sign a Euro-Mediterranean Agreement, establishing an association with the EU.[6] In the immediate aftermath of the 2011 Revolution, the EU pledged to support the Tunisian people's transition towards greater democracy, freedom and social justice thus establishing a privileged partnership and an ambitious action plan for its implementation. The EU-Tunisia political dialogue has increased significantly since the Revolution, with regular high-level exchanges and visits as well as thematic dialogues, the signature of a mobility partnership in 2014[7]

Polisario, the EU Court of Justice concluded that the EU-Morocco Association and Liberalization Agreements did not extend to the territory of Western Sahara (Court of Justice, judgment of 21 December 2016, case C-104/16 P, *Council of the European Union v. Front Polisario*). In 2018, the Court found that also the Fisheries Partnership Agreement as well as the 2013 Fisheries Protocol did not cover the territory of and waters adjacent to Western Sahara (Court of Justice, judgment of 27 February 2018, case C-266/16, *The Queen on the application of Western Sahara Campaign UK v. Commissioners for Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, Secretary of State for food and Rural Affairs*). More recently, in an order delivered on 30 November 2018, the Court followed the approach adopted in *Front Polisario* and in *Western Sahara Campaign UK* and held that the territorial scope of the EU-Morocco Aviation Agreement does not include the territory in question (General Court, order of 30 November 2018, case T-275/18, *Front Polisario v. Council of the European Union*). For comments on the dispute according to an international and EU law perspectives, see Kassoti (2019); Van der Loo (2019); Odermatt (2020).

[3] Euro-Mediterranean Agreement establishing an association between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Kingdom of Morocco, on the other, OJ L 70, 18.03.2000.

[4] Press Release, Joint declaration by the European Union and Morocco for the fourteenth meeting of the Association Council, 27.06.2019.

[5] Cooperation Agreement between the European Economic Community and the Republic of Tunisia, OJ L 256, 25.04.1976.

[6] Euro-Mediterranean Agreement establishing an association between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Tunisia, on the other, OJ L 97, 30.03.1998.

[7] European Commission, Déclaration conjointe pour le Partenariat de Mobilité entre la Tunisie, l'Union Européenne et ses Etats membres participants, 03.03.2014, available at https://home-

and the negotiations for a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) launched in 2015.[8] Tunisia is also one of the countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean which has benefitted most from its participation in European research programmes since 1 January 2016. It is also the only country in the Southern Neighbourhood and Africa which is associated with the Horizon 2020 European Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. In effect, the Tunisian bodies have participated 87 times in 68 grants funded under Horizon 2020, receiving EUR 11.2 million in direct EU contributions to support highly advanced collaboration with European research centres.[9]

Against this background, this chapter intends to present the strengthened dialogue and cooperation between the EU on the one hand, and Morocco and Tunisia, on the other one, in the area of security, by focusing on the legal instruments the Union has elaborated according to its internal security strategy and external relations law for countering terroristic activities and radicalism. To this end, the EU-Southern neighbouring countries relations will be framed in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) as the evolutive framework for the adoption of legal instruments setting bilateral cooperation in security matters (Section 2). Being the latter a peculiar sector of intervention, the work will propose a reflection on the evolution of the EU counter-terrorism strategy with a view to the novelties introduced by the Lisbon Treaty and the main elements of interaction between the legal instruments belonging to the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice, and to the Common Foreign and Security Policy (Section 3). The EU strategy of cooperation in the fight against terrorism in Morocco and Tunisia will be based on the joint reading of these two areas, by critically analysing the use of soft and hard law mechanisms in order to verify to what extent they reflect the 'cross-pillarization' of anti-terrorism objectives aimed at improving security from multiple and combined perspectives (section 4). Finally, some concluding remarks will follow (Section 5).

2. The EU approach to North Africa under the lens of the European Neighbourhood Policy

The EU external relations are generally considered to cover all relations between the European Union and third States or other international organisations, thus

affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2016-12/declaration_conjointe_tunisia_eu_mobility_fr.pdf (accessed: 14.09.2022). For comments, Lilam, Del Sarto (2015).

[8] For a comment, see Zardo (2017).

[9] European Council, Press release, EU-Tunisia relations: For a renewed partnership, 04.06.2021, available at https://www.consilium.europa.eu/it/press/press-releases/2021/06/04/communique-conjoint-a-la-presse-relations-ue-tunisie-pour-un-partenariat-renouvele/ (accessed: 01.09.2022).

concerning competences and procedures, as well as norms and rules laid down in agreements concluded with third parties. After the qualification in 1963 of the Community as constituting a new legal order of international law,[10] one year later the Court confirmed the Community's own legal capacity and capacity of representation at the international level,[11] as now set in Article 47 TEU. This has allowed the Union to start interacting with the wider world in a more effective way by acting according to the objectives and principles set in Articles 3 and 21 TEU, respectively. Moreover, the Lisbon Treaty has definitely expanded the role of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy – figure created under the Treaty of Amsterdam – adding significant new responsibilities for coordinating and carrying out the EU foreign and security policy.[12] The Treaties also draw a peculiar distinction: on one hand there is the general Union competence to engage in 'external action' on the basis of the principle of parallelism of competences;[13] on the other, there is the distinctive competence to conduct a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), which is 'subject to specific rules and procedures'.[14] However, the distinction is not always clear-cut, especially in those areas of intervention which may potentially affect both general topics (e.g. trade, development cooperation and environmental issues) and security and political concerns (e.g. peace, democracy, protection of human rights and prevention of conflicts). The result is that, sometimes, different areas of intervention are prone to be intertwined, albeit with different degrees of interaction according to the final goal of the action. Such a complexity is also evident when the EU has to deal with specific partner countries or areas of interest, like the neighbouring ones to which the Treaties now dedicate an *ad hoc* set of instruments under the so-called European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).[15]

The first official document dealing with the relationship with neighbouring countries was the Communication entitled *Wider Europe – Neighbourhood* adopted by the European Commission in 2003 and whose main objective was the strengthening of the stability and security in the neighbour area.[16] By engaging neighbour-

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[10] Court of Justice, judgment of 5 February 1963, case 26-62, *NV Algemene Transport- en Expeditie Onderneming van Gend & Loos v Netherlands Inland Revenue Administration*.

[11] Court of Justice, judgment of 15 July 1964, case 6-64, *Flaminio Costa v E.N.E.L.*

[12] See, Article 18 TEU.

[13] Court of Justice, judgment of 31 March 1971, case 22/70, *Commission of the European Communities v Council of the European Communities (ERTA)*. For comments, Schütze (2014); Cremona (2018).

[14] For comments on the CFSP, see Wessel (2021); Cardwell (2015); Cremona (2018a); Blockmans (2018).

[15] For comments on the evolution of the European Neighbourhood Policy, see Dannreuther (2004); Blockmans, Van Vooren (2012); Comelli (2013); Casolari (2013).

[16] Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, Wider Europe-Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours, COM

ing countries and putting in place soft methods of coordination, it represented the first sophisticated policy expected to contribute to the strategic goal of creating a ring of friends and a zone of stability. Indeed, the strategic document of the European Commission emphasised that the ENP could offer a means for an enhanced and more focused policy approach of the EU towards its neighbours, bringing together the principal instruments at the disposal of the Union and its Member States. However, lacking initially a specific Treaty basis and relying essentially on informal meetings, for years, the ENP has been criticized for its half-hearted promises as well as weak institutional and legal frameworks, as also confirmed by the European Commission itself in several of its following strategy papers.[17] These shortcomings have been partially overcome by the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon that has allowed the EU to strengthen the ENP by introducing a formal legal basis (Article 8 TFEU) for the EU to develop "a special relationship" with its neighbours aimed at establishing "an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness, founded on the values of the Union and characterised by close and peaceful relations based on cooperation".

Article 8(1) TEU prescribes (i) the establishment of an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness, (ii) founded on the values of the Union, (iii) characterised by close and peaceful relations based on cooperation. In effect, this provision formally integrates the EU neighbourhood policy in the EU constitutional framework,[18] being it included within the Common Provisions in Title 1 of the TEU, so in the same place of Article 2 TEU which lists the respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights as fundamental values of the EU. Hence, Article 8 TEU not only sets a specific provision on relations with neighbouring countries, but reflects a general provision in the TEU, which gives the Union a mandate to seek to develop relations and build partnerships with third countries that share its principles and values. Besides be-

(2003) 104 final, 11.03.2003. The framework was formalized in 2004 by the Communication from the Commission, European Neighbourhood Policy, Strategy Paper, COM (2004) 373 final, 12.05.2004. For comments, see Emerson (2004); Kelley (2006); Cremona, Hillion (2006); Blockmans, Łazowski (2006); Balfour, Missiroli (2007); Cremona (2008); Edwards (2008); Van Vooren (2011).

[17] Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, On strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy, COM (2006) 726 final, 04.12.2006; Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, A Strong European Neighbourhood Policy, COM (2007) 774 final, 05.12.2007.

[18] Article 8 TEU stipulates the following: "1. The Union shall develop a special relationship with neighbouring countries,
aiming to establish an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness, founded on the values of the Union and characterised by close and peaceful relations based on cooperation. 2. For the purposes of paragraph 1, the Union may conclude specific agreements with the countries concerned. These agreements may contain reciprocal rights and obligations as well as the possibility of undertaking activities jointly. Their implementation shall be the subject of periodic consultation". For an elaborate and insightful discussion on this point, see Blockmans (2011), p. 113.

ing based on the claim of (already) existing shared values, a noticeable element of the ENP is the EU's encouragement of the partner countries to embrace international norms and standards, notably by concluding international and regional human rights agreements. This notwithstanding, Article 8 does not reflect a formal approach based on conditionality as for the compliance with these values; rather, it points towards the development of an active policy of reform and transformation of the neighbouring States, in line with but not compelled by its own values and interests. In principle, this is also justified by the fact that, despite this strong reference to the EU values, the ENP is not oriented to promote necessarily the accession process to the EU of neighbour countries. It is, instead, a special instrument of foreign policy that remains multi-pillar in nature and intended for building communication and shared objectives related to issues such as security, democracy, human rights, political freedom, and trade liberalization. Accordingly, the policy has been designed to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbours and to offer them the chance to participate in various EU activities to be developed with each neighbour individually, on the basis of its needs, capacities and reform objectives. In this regard, it is interesting to be noted that the ENP initiatives continue to be implemented for the most part by means of tailored soft-law instruments. As a way of example, joint Action Plans[19] generally set out an agenda of political and economic reforms with short and medium-term priorities of three to five years covering a number of key areas for specific action, such as political dialogue and reform; trade and measures preparing partners for gradually entering the EU commercial sector; justice and home affairs; energy, transport, information society, environment and research and innovation; and social policy and people-to-people contacts. In addition, the EU and the neighbouring countries may share mutual commitments to common values, principally within the fields of the rule of law, good governance, the respect for human and minority rights, the promotion of good relations, and the principles of market economy and sustainable development. The EU also expects the partners to abide by international law and collaborate in conflict resolution, the fight against terrorism and Weapon of Mass Destruction (WMD) proliferation. As a matter of the fact, all of these remain expectations and general political commitments without the opportunity to set effective monitoring instruments and enforcing provisions.

Despite this policy has been traditionally envisaged as incremental and flexible, thanks notably to the fact that it was forged outside the Treaty framework and carried out on the basis of soft law instruments, the "constitutionalisation"

[19] For a list of the ENP Actions Plans see https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/enp-action-plans_en (accessed:05.09.2022).

of the neighbourhood competence has introduced new constraints. In the first place, the inclusion of this provision in the Common Provisions of the TEU implies that the objective of the EU's special relationship with its neighbours shall be mainstreamed into other policies of the EU. In practical terms, it entails that the EU institutions shall take account of neighbourhood policy aims when exercising Union competences, for instance in elaborating the Union's transport, energy, environment policies, in the development of the internal market. At the same time, the instruments through which the ENP can be implemented have to be borrowed from other parts of the Treaties, thus making Article 8 TEU a container concept which needs other legal bases in the TFEU to survive in the changing environment of the neighborhood. In the second place, it is remarkable that Article 8(2) TEU prescribes that ENP objectives should be reached not only through soft law instruments, but also the conclusion of "specific agreements", ranging from partnership and cooperation agreements to association agreements. While the former are based mainly on development cooperation objectives as of in Article 208 TFEU and concluded on the basis of Article 212 TFEU, the latter are negotiated in order to promote economic growth and political stability in third countries and to create a security zone around the borders of the Union on the basis of reciprocity. Indeed, the ENP is also supported by Article 217 TFEU that provides for the specific legal base for concluding association agreements that, in line with the EU Court of Justice judgment in *Demirel* case,[20] involve reciprocal rights and obligations, common action and a special procedure.

Thus, apart from development cooperation, the increasingly frequent negotiation of association agreements is due to the intention of establishing privileged links with third States, whose content diversifies and transcends the purely economic or commercial dimension, being able to pursue a plurality of purposes. In short, one may argue that the choice of the legal basis, the content and the procedure of adoption of bilateral agreements between the EU and the ENP countries depends on the objectives, the depth of political and economic cooperation, and the extent to which national legislation is harmonized to the EU *acquis*. Exactly for the variety of potential legal bases for the negotiation of external agreements, which can be now found in different places in the Treaties, however, some scholars argue whether the agreements with the neighbours are to be "seen as part of Union foreign policy or as something different".[21] Indeed, while the EU is used to negotiating comprehensive agreements with third countries, those to be concluded with the neighbouring ones should be formally based and oriented to reach the objectives set in Article 8 TEU

[20] Court of Justice, judgment of 30 September 1987, Case 12/86, *Meryem Demirel v Stadt Schwäbisch Gmünd*.

[21] Dashwood, Maresceau (2008), p. 50.

in order to mark the "special relationship". Accordingly, in the opinion of the writer, the ENP should be conceived as a sub-category of the whole EU external action according to a cross-cutting approach which justifies the adoption of legal instruments regulating with both CFSP and non-CFSP issues.

As a confirmation of this reading, in 2011, the EU reviewed the ENP and strengthened its focus on promoting deep and sustainable democracy and inclusive economic development. The EU also stressed the role that civil society plays in the democratic process and introduced the 'more for more' principle, under which the EU shall develop stronger partnerships with those neighbours that make greater progress towards democratic reform. In order to achieve these objectives, in 2014 the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) was established as the key EU financing instrument for bilateral cooperation with neighbouring countries.[22] In March 2015, the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) launched a consultation process for a further review of the ENP, then supported by the European Parliament which adopted a resolution on 9 July 2015 underlining the need for a more strategic, focused, flexible and coherent ENP.[23] Along these lines and based on the results of the consultation, on 11 November 2015, the EEAS and the Commission presented a communication concerning the ENP review.[24] For the purposes of the present work, suffice it to say that the revised ENP aims, *inter alia*, to major engagement with partners in the security sector, broadly intended, by offering a tailor-made cooperative approach in accordance with the progress made in the EU strategy against terrorism that has inevitably crossed paths with the EU external action.

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[22] Regulation (EU) No 232/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 establishing a European Neighbourhood Instrument, OJ L 77/27, 15.03.2014. In 2021, the ENI was replaced by the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – Global Europe – which now frames the EU's cooperation with neighbouring countries for the 2021-2027 period. Under the new Global Europe NDICI, an increased emphasis on blending EU grants with loans from European and international financing institutions will allow partner counties to unlock substantial levels of concessional funding for investments. The new system of guarantees provided for under the Global Europe NDICI will give access to additional funds from the crowding-in of both public and private investors. See, Regulation (EU) 2021/947 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 June 2021 establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe, amending and repealing Decision No 466/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Regulation (EU) 2017/1601 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 480/2009, PE/41/2021/INIT, OJ L 209, 14.6.2021.

[23] European Parliament resolution of 9 July 2015 on the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (2015/2002(INI)).

[24] Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy, JOIN(2015) 50 final, 18.11.2015.

3. The evolving EU (external) counter-terrorism strategy

The beginning of the modern era of the EU counter-terrorism strategy can be located in the 1970s when it slowly entered the realm of the integration process thus requiring major cooperation at the supranational level. In 1976 the first organized platform on Terrorism, Radicalism, Extremism, and International Violence (the so-called TREVI group) was established by the ministers of justice and interior/home affairs of the Member States.[25] It consisted of high-level gatherings of ministerial representatives and top national security officials in order to exchange information and provide mutual assistance on terrorism and related international crimes. In action until 1992, this represented a revolutionary stage in a context where the fight against terrorism was traditionally perceived just as a domestic security concern. The integration process then moved forward very substantially, leading to the establishment of a supranational organisation with much more extensive ambitions, competences and structures than that that of the European Community of the 1970s. In particular, since the Treaty of Amsterdam, the EU was assigned with relevant actions on internal security matters and had even been given an explicit mandate to provide EU citizens with enhanced internal security in the context of the Union's area of freedom, security and justice (AFSJ). Indeed, while the Union was preparing to be an area of free circulation, the delicate balance between internal freedom of movement and external openness on the one hand, and freedom and security on the other hand, has proved to be crucial for the future.[26]

The terrorist attacks in the United States and the EU in the early 2000s inaugurated a new and unprecedented climate of cooperation between the EU Member States and the EU institutions in that field, alongside the development of the AFSJ.[27] Indeed, the post-9/11 period confronted the Member States both with the opportunity and the need for a more substantial common response to the 'new' terrorist threat that occurred in Europe with the Madrid attacks in 2004 and those in London in 2005. The general reticence to abandon control over terrorist threats at the national level gave way to an increased desire for a common strategy for overcoming the weaknesses in national and supranational emergency preparation and response. Such an enhanced political focus on terrorism also made it possible to accelerate decision-making processes on specific dimensions of intervention, including law enforcement and judicial cooperation, intelligence cooperation, border controls and the adoption of measures for combating the fi-

[25] Coolsaet (2010); Bures (2012).
[26] Marhold (2016).
[27] Bendiek (2006); Cardwell (2009); Argomaniz (2011).

nancing of terrorism.[28] The EU as a whole has thus acquired an increasingly important role as an actor in counter-terrorism practices based on the four strategic 'pillars' covering prevention, preparedness, response and recovery to be built alongside the Member States' action.

Against this background, in 2002 the Council adopted the first substantial legislative act in the fight against terrorism, the Council Framework Decision 2002/475 on Combating Terrorism,[29] notably coupled with the Framework Decision 2002/584 establishing the European Arrest Warrant.[30] Decision 2002/475 started with a clear identification of terrorism as "one of the most serious violations" of the "universal values" – i.e. human dignity, liberty, equality, solidarity, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms – and "principles" – i.e. rule of law and democracy – on which the EU is founded.[31] An additional emphasis was put on the definition of terrorism as a threat to the fundamental political, constitutional and socio-economic foundations of the EU and its Member States, as then formally claimed in the *European Security Strategy* which was adopted the following year by the European Council.[32]

The Security Strategy emphasized that terrorism not only endangers lives and causes huge costs but also "seeks to undermine the openness and tolerance of our societies".[33] The reference was, especially, to the global hierarchical Al-Qaeda network and its logistical bases and cells in the UK, Italy, Germany, Spain and Belgium, that had been uncovered and dismantled. This notwithstanding, the wave of terrorism affecting the EU territory was not only described as being "linked to violent religious extremism" but also as arising out of complex causes that "include the pressures of modernization, cultural, social and political crises, and the alienation of young people living in foreign societies".[34] Hence, the Strategy was not limited to tackle the religious extremism but marked a clear step towards the recognition of the complexity of the threat and the resulting need for a multidimensional response beyond the repressive and military measures. Indeed, the act listed terrorism as the first of the key threats the Union was facing in the security domain and described it as a threat having both an internal and an external dimension. Aware that "Europe

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[28] A selection of relevant contributions include: den Boer, Monar (2002); Keohane (2007); Bossong (2008); O'Neill (2011); Argomaniz (2011); Eckes (2011); Murphy (2019).

[29] Council Framework Decision 2002/475 of 13 June 2002 on combating terrorism, OJ L 164, 22.06.2002.

[30] Council Framework Decision 2002/584 of 13 June 2002 on the European arrest warrant and the surrender procedures between Member States, OJ L 190/1, 18.07.2002.

[31] Decision 2002/475, Preamble, para. 1-2.

[32] European Council, A secure Europe in a better world - European security strategy, 12.12.2003 [Not published in the Official Journal].

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

[34] Ivi.

is both a target and a base for such terrorism",[35] the Strategy linked terrorism with other international threats including, in particular, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, as well as State failure and organized crime, thus making it part of a set of interrelated security threats rather than an individual and isolated one. This perspective represented the central argument for a multi-layered response to the terrorist challenge that required an extensive common action providing "a mixture of intelligence, police, judicial, military and other means".[36]

The content of the first European Security Strategy provided a quite substantial conceptual basis for the following *EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy* that was adopted by the European Council in December 2005.[37] The new Strategy broadly reaffirmed the earlier threat assessment but placed a particular emphasis on the threat posed by home-grown terrorism through radicalization and terrorist recruitment within the EU Member States. For this purpose, the Strategy defined the strategic objectives of EU actions and the main measures under four stages: prevention of radicalization and recruitment, protection of citizens and infrastructure, pursuing of terrorists across borders and response to the consequences of terrorist attacks.[38] Accordingly, the adoption of the first European Union Strategy for Combating Radicalization and Recruitment to Terrorism as an integral part of the Counter-Terrorism Strategy was also agreed. The strategy and the accompanying classified Action Plan contained both joint standards and new measures: while recognising the primacy of the Member States in the field of radicalization and recruitment, the strategy proposed a set of specific measures for implementation at EU level. In particular, the terroristic activities perpetrated by Al-Qaeda and extremists inspired by it required a strong intervention for disrupting the activities of networks and individuals drawing people into terrorism, ensuring that mainstream opinion prevails over extremism and promoting more vigorously security, justice and democracy. In this regard, the strategy against radicalization was marked by a strong emphasis on improving long-term integration and the dialogue, especially, with Muslim communities and religious authorities. Scarred by the attacks to the hearth of EU cities, in comparison to the 2003 European Security Strategy, these designed instruments preferred to focus on the internal dimension and on the Member States' capacity to cope with radicalization within the EU borders.

The Lisbon revision partially changed the context with the introduction of specific provisions for EU action in the area of counter-terrorism, thereby widening

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[35] Ivi.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

[37] Ekengren (2007); Bosson (2008); Keohane (2008).

[38] Council of the European Union, The EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy, 30.12.2005, available at https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST%2014469%202005%20REV%204/EN/pdf (accessed: 25.08.2022).

the EU's competences and upholding the institutional framework.[39] In particular, Article 83 TFEU now lists terrorism among the serious crimes with a cross-border dimension, thus allowing the possibility to establish common minimum rules. However, the Union's competence is not aimed at a full harmonisation in areas like the fight against terrorism. From an EU constitutional point of view, this is also confirmed by the so-called 'national identity clause' enshrined in Article 4(2) TEU, which states that "national security remains the sole responsibility of each Member State"[40] and by Article 72 TFEU, which recognises national prerogatives over maintaining law and order and safeguarding internal security. Thus, most of the powers and capabilities in the field of counter-terrorism still remain with the Member States: in this way, they are subject to national threat perceptions and political discourses and are protected against any form of "Europeanisation" by strong, persisting, notions of national sovereignty and the principle of territoriality of law enforcement.[41] The area of counter terrorism does not form an ordinary shared competence, but rather one in which the joint action depends heavily on the willingness of Member States that remain the principal actors in this domain. This notwithstanding, from a legislative point of view, the adoption of the EU Directive 2017/541 on combating terrorism[42] in March 2017 has profoundly changed the landscape of EU counter-terrorism law. Proposed less than three weeks after the terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015, it has introduced a first common list of terrorist conducts to be criminalised and made punishable by the Member States as criminal offences.[43] At the same time, such a list serves as a benchmark for further improving cooperation and information exchange between national authorities, especially when dealing with the prevention of radicalism. In this regard, Directive 2017/541 also provides for the most recent definition of radicalization as a phased or complex process in which an individual embraces a radical ideology of belief that accepts, uses, or condones violence.

The changes occurred over the last years have intensified the combination of AFSJ legislative and operational measures in the internal fight against terrorism.[44] On the one hand, the adoption of legislative acts has provided for a common

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[39] For a comment, see Eckes (2011).

[40] For a deeper analysis of the implications of Article 4(2) TEU, see Cloots (2015); Di Federico (2017); Schnettger (2019);

[41] Monar (2007).

[42] Directive (EU) 2017/541 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2017 on combating terrorism and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA and amending Council Decision 2005/671/JHA, OJ L 88 of 31.3.2017. For a recent comment on the opportunity to revise the directive, see Gherbaoui, Scheinin (2022).

[43] Directive (EU) 2017/541, Article 2.

[44] Herlin Karnell, Matera (2014); Poli (2016).

minimum definition of terrorist acts while leaving the Member States a wide margin of discretion concerning penalties. On the other one, a considerable number of instruments have been adopted to enhance cross-border counter-terrorism capabilities within the EU, although no complete operational powers have been transferred to EU structures as such. In this regard, since 9/2001, the mandate and actual role of Europol[45] and Eurojust[46] has been strengthened several times as of both analysis functions and the support of cross-border investigations and prosecutions. This confirms that the counter-terrorism objectives and legislation have served on more than one occasion as a political catalyst to integrate and develop the AFSJ. Thus, while some instruments adopted by the Union were primarily concerned with countering terrorism, others pertained to EU criminal law and policing competences and only indirectly served counter-terrorism purposes. Moreover, it is noteworthy the creation of the Office of the EU's Anti-Terrorism Coordinator, a completely new senior office with supporting staff to monitor and help coordinating EU and national counter-terrorism efforts.[47] All this is clearly aimed at equipping the Union with a minimum of common response capacity – in addition to coordinated national capacities – to the defined common terrorist threat.[48] This corresponds not only to the internal security dimension of the EU's common threat definition within the AFSJ, but also to the understanding that a variety of instruments are needed and that the EU is particularly vulnerable because of the abolition of internal borders.

The emerging threat of international terrorism has also served as a catalyst for constitutional and institutional reforms as well as substantive innovations also in the external dimension of the EU action as an extension of the AFSJ.[49] Actually, already at the time of the response to 9/11 attacks the EU emphasised the complementarity of internal and external action to counter-terrorism (and other security threats). However, the development of the EU's external dimension of its counter-terrorism policy has been at the heart of numerous legal disputes and contro-

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[45] Regulation (EU) 2016/794 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2016 on the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) and replacing and repealing Council Decisions 2009/371/JHA, 2009/934/JHA, 2009/935/JHA, 2009/936/JHA and 2009/968/JHA, OJ L 135, 24.5.2016.

[46] Regulation (EU) 2018/1727 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 November 2018 on the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust), and replacing and repealing Council Decision 2002/187/JHA, OJ L 295, 21.11.2018.

[47] See the press release document concerning the appointment of the first EU Counter-terrorism Coordinator, available at http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/Transcript.pdf (accessed: 03.09.2022).

[48] Coolsaet (2010).

[49] Wessel, Marin, Matera (2011).

versies pertaining especially to the institutional dimension. Indeed, the main concern was linked to issues of competence and the balance of powers between the institutions and between the EU and its Member States in a topic where, at the time of the Amsterdam Treaty, the extension of the external dimension of countering terrorism was not clear. Hence, besides giving way to a supranational approach to the fight against terrorism as already set up in the AFSJ domain, the Lisbon Treaty has also formally conferred new and proper powers in this domain. Indeed, Article 43 TEU establishes an express competence to combat terrorism through CFSP, and more precisely the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), whereas Article 215 TFEU confers a competence on the Union to adopt sanctions against non-State organisations and individuals, implicitly on the grounds of their association with terrorism.[50] Hence, as argued by Hillion, both Article 43 TEU and 215 TFEU establish competences that are potentially more constraining on EU institutions and Member States and more constrained in their exercise than pre-Lisbon CFSP competences, given the increased integration of the old 'second pillar' with the EU constitutional order.[51] The Lisbon Treaty has thus given substance to the ambition to develop a comprehensive policy pertaining to the security of the Union that is linked with the AFSJ and the external relations of the EU, including the CFSP and CSDP facets.[52] However, such an ambition requires a set of efforts for delivering a comprehensive security policy to be read under the specific constitutional requirement of ensuring consistency between the different areas of external action and between external action and other policies of the Union under Article 21 TEU.

As a result of this, alongside its Member States, the EU has an active role in the UN context by participating in the UN Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED)[53] and has adhered to a number of international initiatives such as the Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF),[54] the Global Coalition against

[50] As well known, counter-terrorist sanctions against individual have been deeply criticized for breaching fundamental rights, in particular, the right to judicial review as demonstrated in the Khadi saga (Court of First Instance, T-315/01, Kadi v. Council and Commission, [2005] ECR II-3649, and the Court of Justice (COJ), C-402/05 P and C-415/05 P, Kadi I [2008] ECR I-6351). For comments on individual sanctions regime, see Eckes (2012); Erlbacher (2019).

[51] Hillion (2014), p. 14.

[52] Matera (2014).

[53] The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate is a Special Political Mission which was established by UN Security Council resolution 1535 (2004) to assist the work of the CTC and coordinate the process of monitoring the implementation of resolution 1373 (2001). CTED's mandate was extended until the end of 2025 by Security Council resolution 2617 (2021).

[54] The Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) is an informal, apolitical, multilateral counterterrorism platform now chaired by Canada and Morocco. Further information are available at https://www.thegctf.org/.

ISIL/Daesh[55] and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF)[56] to promote a strategic long-term approach to counter-terrorism and the violent extremist ideologies that underpin it. Parallel to this, the EU cooperates bilaterally with third countries in the field of counter-terrorism on the basis of different instruments, including the systematic use of 'political dialogues' and assessment missions to third countries or groups of third countries. Besides, it provides certain countries with technical assistance and training, including the support for counter-terrorism capacity-building and countering violent extremism initiatives.

The external dimension of the EU's fight against terrorism confirms the increasing importance of AFSJ agencies such as Europol and Eurojust as key actors in this area. Indeed, these bodies have been conferred the powers to conclude international agreements with third countries, so as to enhance police and judicial cooperation. However, while the main structure of the agreements concluded by Europol is generally the same, the scope of each agreement, the intensity of the cooperation that each agreement establishes depend on the type of agreement that the Agency has concluded. In this regard, it should be stressed that Europol can conclude two types of agreements with third countries: strategic agreements to establish stable mechanisms for working together with external partners, and operational agreements which include mechanisms to share personal data between the parties and/or that foresee concrete operational cooperation.[57] In addition to these 'traditional' instruments, since 2000s the EU has also been systematically inserting clauses on cooperation against terrorism and terrorist financing in stabilisation and association agreements and partnership and cooperation agreements.[58] In this way, there has been a sort of 'cross-pillarization' of anti-terrorism objectives and instruments belonging to the AFSJ, which have spread also to external relations by becoming ancillary to and integrated in other policy sectors.

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[55] The Global Coalition against Daesh was formed in September 2014 and is now composed of 85 members committed to tackling Daesh on all fronts. Beyond the military campaign in Iraq and Syria, the Coalition is committed to: tackling Daesh's financing and economic infrastructure; preventing the flow of foreign terrorist fighters across borders; supporting stabilisation and the restoration of essential public services to areas liberated from Daesh; and countering the group's propaganda. Further information are available at https://theglobalcoalition.org/en/.

[56] The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is the global money laundering and terrorist financing monitoring body established in July 1989 by a Group of Seven (G-7) Summit in Paris. Further information are available at https://www.fatf-gafi.org/about/historyofthefatf/.

[57] For insights, see Matera (2014), p. 29 et seq.

[58] Despite the different scope of the agreements, provisions on countering terrorism are similar and include the following three main features: i) reference to UN Security Council Resolution 1373(2001)42 on combating terrorism and other relevant UN resolutions, ii) reference to the exchange information on terrorist groups and iii) reference to the exchange best practices on countering terrorism. Moreover, some agreements also contain an express reference to cooperation on combating money laundering, some with a particular emphasis on combating the financing of terrorism.

In light of the constantly evolving nature of the threats from international terrorism, the Council decided to further update its previous evaluations and adopted, on 15 June 2020, the *Conclusions on EU External Action on Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism.*[59] In the path of this, on 24 July 2020 the European Commission set out the updated *EU Security Union Strategy*,[60] covering the period from 2020 to 2025 and still focusing on specific priority areas that comprise also terrorist threats. In addition, on 9 December 2020 the European Commission adopted the updated *EU Counter-Terrorism Agenda* as new and comprehensive document focusing on the entire chain and various aspects of counter-terrorism to boost the EU's resilience to this kind of threats.[61] As was the 2005 Strategy, such an Agenda is based on four main pillars that aim to support Member States in better anticipating, preventing, protecting and responding to terrorism. In particular, it stresses the need to prevent attacks by addressing radicalization and supporting local actors and building more resilient communities. In comparison to previous documents, the new Agenda now explicitly addresses and requires major intervention at the external level by improving cooperation with partner countries outside of the EU, both within its direct neighbours, but also beyond. As such, alongside the cooperation with other international organisations, the Commission and the High Representative are asked to set up cooperation with Western Balkan partners in the area of firearms, negotiate international agreements with Southern Neighbourhood countries to exchange personal data with Europol, and enhance strategic and operational cooperation with other regions such as the Sahel region, the Horn of Africa, other African countries and key regions in Asia.[62]

Ultimately, it seems that counter-terrorism objectives are sought and attained not only by the adoption of specific instruments belonging both to the CFSP/CSDP and the AFSJ, but also with the set up of initiatives that have a strong link with the broader ENP area. In the wake of this overall approach, the next section will be devoted to illustrating the specific instruments of cooperation and the strategies the EU has developed in North Africa, and especially in Morocco and Tunisia, for combating terrorism and radicalization.

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[59] Council of the European Union, Council Conclusions on EU External Action on Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism, 16.06.2020.

[60] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the EU Security Union Strategy, COM/2020/605 final, 24.07.2020.

[61] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, A Counter-Terrorism Agenda for the EU: Anticipate, Prevent, Protect, Respond, COM/2020/795 final, 09.12.2020.

[62] For comments, see Farinpour (2021).

4. EU instruments for countering terrorism in Morocco and Tunisia

The EU has been present in North Africa since 1979 as a result of colonial legacies, geographic proximity, deep-seated inter-cultural and religious ties, economic, political and security-related relations of individual EU Member States with countries and stakeholders in the region. However, the attempt to establish legal and institutional instruments able to encourage the positive connections between the EU and North Africa have met a number of challenges. The end of the Cold War brought a wind of optimism that resulted in the 1995 Euro-Mediterranean partnership – based on bilateral association agreements[63] – for making the Mediterranean basin an area of dialogue, exchange and cooperation, ensuring "peace, stability and prosperity".[64]

Unfortunately, the expectations carried out by the so-called Barcelona Process were distanced from reality[65] and the conflicting views and priorities of the EU Member States had a negative impact on security-related matters in the region. In the post-Arab Spring, the attainment of effective results of major cooperation has been outclassed by the perception of insecurity due to the presence of terroristic groups which have increasingly diversified their sources of income over the last decade, have gained better access to illicit resources, terrorism and transnational organised crime have become increasingly interconnected. Indeed, the strengthening of Daesh groups has been supported by theft and extortion from the territories under their control, kidnapping for ransom, illicit trafficking, fundraising through modern communication networks, and material support from foreign terrorist fighters. Likewise, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb has closely cooperated with some of the organised crime networks that are active in the Sahel and the Maghreb. Against this background, the countries of the region have shaped their approaches to the fight against violent extremism according to their distinct

[63] The list of Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements is available at https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:r14104. For an analysis of these model of integration with Mediterranean countries see Pieters, 2010.

[64] Euro-Mediterranean partnership: Barcelona Declaration. Work programme. Euro-Mediterranean conference. Barcelona, 27-28 November 1995. The Declaration was signed by Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey.

[65] See the evaluations proposed in the Joint Declaration of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean, adopted under the co-presidency of the President of the French Republic and the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, in the presence of, inter alia, the EU, the UN, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arab League, the African Union, the Arab Maghreb Union, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, and the World Bank, Paris, 13 July 2008. The Joint declaration is based on the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean, COM (2008) 319 final, 20.05.2008.

histories and capabilities, and also the EU has indicated specific options in working with them for purposes of stabilisation.[66]

Recently, within the ENP framework, on February 2021, the EU institutions adopted the Joint Communication entitled *Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood – A new Agenda for the Mediterranean*[67] and the *Accompanying Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbours.*[68] The Agenda has the aim of relaunching and strengthening the strategic partnership between the EU and its Southern Neighbourhood partners. Indeed, it draws for the first time on the full and comprehensive EU toolbox and the groundbreaking opportunities of the twin green and digital transitions, in order to relaunch cooperation in tackling governance, socio-economic, climate, environmental and security challenges. Among the different sources of major insecurity, a special place is reserved to challenges like terrorism, hybrid threats as well as cybercrime and organised crime, including the trade of illegal firearms, drug trafficking and money laundering, which – despite some positive outcomes – continue to feed instability and stifle prosperity.

Over the last decades, in the counter-terrorism domain, the Union has acted through the ENP mechanisms of cooperation with the authorities of the North African countries by primarily relying on soft law (even though significant) mechanisms. In the first place, some specific lines of action have been performed for suppressing the financing of terrorism via appropriate anti-money laundering frameworks. In particular, the EU has encouraged Member States to provide technical assistance to third countries to help them comply with international Anti-Money Laundering and Countering Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) regime, including commitments to monitor, disrupt, and deny the financing of terrorism and funds associated with terrorist activity.[69] In this regard, it is noteworthy that, in February 2018, Tunisia was included on the list prepared by the European Commission about third countries' strategic deficiencies in their legal frameworks for anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing measures. Given the progress achieved and the efforts made, in 2019 the FATF – and later also the European Commission – decided

[66] For a deeper analysis, see Cimini, Simoncini, Chapter I of this volume.

[67] Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood. A new Agenda for the Mediterranean, JOIN(2021) 2 final, 09.02.2021.

[68] Joint Staff Working Document, Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood Economic and Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbours Accompanying the document Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions, Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood A new Agenda for the Mediterranean, SWD/2021/23 final, 09.02.2021.

[69] Money laundering and terrorist financing is managed at the international level by the regulatory strategy, a set of soft rules associated with international financial regulation to address or pre-empt potential damage to the stability of the international financial system. For comments, see Beekarry (2011).

to remove Tunisia from the blacklist.[70] In 2021, also Morocco was included in the high risk third country jurisdictions to be monitored by the Task Force. Since then, Morocco has adopted several internal legislative measures in order to strengthen its capacities in the anti-money laundering/countering the financing of terrorism area and still continues to develop its institutional framework. However, the European Commission still argues that more progress is necessary to address effectively money laundering investigation and prosecution in Morocco. In order to facilitate this process, the Commission is providing targeted technical assistance to national authorities in order to help address the limits identified by the FATF.[71]

Furthermore, the EU has encouraged Member States to cooperate with third countries' national authorities for improving the culture and professionalism of the security forces. In particular, Morocco has developed close bilateral counter-terrorism cooperation, especially with Belgium, Spain and France and regularly deals with terrorist networks being also the co-chair of the Global Counter Terrorism Forum and a member of the Global Coalition against Daesh. Moreover, Rabat hosts one of the EU-funded regional CBRN Centres of Excellence (CoE) for the improvement of regional cooperation in the CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear) domain, which represents one of the major challenges of the current times.[72]

As of Tunisia, it has made significant advances in its security and counter-terrorism policies through also the impetus of some closest EU Member States in terms of engagement in security issues. In particular, France, with its historic ties to Tunisia, has led direct work with the country's security services, including the provision of intelligence assistance and equipement to the Tunisian special forces. In effect, European officials generally agree that since 2015 Tunisia's security services have considerably improved their capacity to prevent and respond to terrorist threats. However, in comparison to Morocco, Tunisia's internal security and counter-terrorism strategy and structures are still weak and so far, have failed to effectively resolve consolidated security problems. Accordingly, the EU institutions have focused on security sector reform, including assistance in drawing up and implementing a pro-

[70] Supporting Tunisia's efforts in the fight against money laundering and terrorism financing, Parliamentary question - E-000271/2020, 17.01.2020.

[71] Answer given by Ms McGuinness on behalf of the European Commission to the Parliamentary question - E-000682/2022, 12.04.2022.

[72] The origins of the so-called CBRN CoE initiative can be found in the Instrument for Stability and it now fits within the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) set in Regulation (EU) No 230/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 establishing an instrument contributing to stability and peace, OJ L 77/1 of 15.3.2014. The CBRN COE network currently involves 54 partner countries across 8 regions. Morocco hosts the Secretariat of the African Atlantic Façade composed of Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Liberia, Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal and Togo. For comments, Sabol et al, 2015; Sc, 2015.

gramme to provide independent oversight of the police, and developing the investigative capacity of security services under the rule of law.

As previously pointed out, the relevance acquired by security issues in the ENP, combined with the CFSP and AFSJ facets, has highlighted the need to combine both soft and hard law instruments; however, the EU strategy *vis-à-vis* Morocco and Tunisia is still far from relying also on hard law instruments. In the first place, it is noteworthy that, in comparison to the association agreements concluded with other countries of the area (e.g. Algeria and Egypt),[73] no clauses dealing with counter-terrorism are present in those concluded with Tunisia and Morocco. Indeed, while the term 'terrorism' is completely absent in the whole content of these agreements, the unique reference to security-related matters is included in the Title dedicated to the political dialogues that, despite relevant in institutional terms, cannot establish coercive measures neither provide for enforcement mechanisms thus remarking the cooperative nature of the relationship. Such a choice suggests the necessity to remain within the context of the soft law instruments and, in case, of *ad hoc* and compartmentalised instruments, such as the AML/CFT regime, without a comprehensive vision. In broader terms, the absence of specific provisions on security and terrorism suggests the limitedness of the reciprocal nature of the committments by, instead, underlining the persistent imbalance in setting rights, duties and interests and confirming the role of the EU as a donor more than as a real partner in the fight against terrorism.

A second significant shortcoming concerns the bilateral cooperation in the exchange of personal data, a needed step to address the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters and effectively detect, prevent and prosecute terrorism travel, terrorist misuse of the Internet, terrorism financing as well as the nexus with organised crime. Indeed, as Wolff pointed out, Euro-Mediterranean partners should be asked to "put in place the necessary institutions" if the EU is to effectively externalize its investigative activities under the AFSJ external dimension.[74] Originally, when the AFSJ-related issues and agencies were not clearly embarked in the external fight against terrorism, the EU had taken great care to ensure the Mediterranean countries adopted and implemented laws in line with the Euro-Mediterranean Code of Conduct on Countering Terrorism adopted in 2005.[75] However, the code just required members to "exchange information on a *voluntary basis* on terrorists and their support networks" [emphasis

[73] See, Euro-Mediterranean Agreement establishing an Association between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, of the other part, OJ L 265, 10.10.2005, Article 90; Euro-Mediterranean Agreement establishing an Association between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Arab Republic of Egypt, of the other part, OJ L 304/39, 30.09.2004, Article 59.

[74] Wolff (2012), p. 196.

[75] Euro-Mediterranean Code of Conduct on Countering Terrorism, 2005, available at https://ec.europa.eu/environment/archives/enlarg/med/pdf/terrorism.pdf (accessed: 03.09.2022).

added], requiring members to work bilaterally to develop effective and operational cooperation as well as the sharing of best practices and expertise. In addition, the Euro-Med Code of Conduct generally emphasized the need to, *inter alia*, promote good governance and human rights, and to foster respect for all religions and intercultural understanding in line with the EU's own anti-radicalization programmes.

After the Lisbon revision and the introduction of a legal basis for concluding agreements pertaining to the exchange of classified information for counter-terrorism purposes, the Commission has put forward recommendations to the Council to authorise the opening of negotiations for an agreement between the EU and Morocco,[76] as well as another one with Tunisia[77] to allow the exchange of personal data with Europol. At the time of writing, however, the two agreements have not been concluded thus confirming the complexity, if not reticence, to negotiate about so sensitive issues which affect fundamental rights of individuals, including privacy and personal data protection under Articles 7 and 8 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.[78] Goes without saying that the lack of adequate data protection measures has already proven to be an obstacle in the development of bilateral relations. Indeed, given that terrorism tends to be more prevalent in States characterised by low human rights standards, combating terrorism effectively and protecting fundamental human rights are not simple to be combined.

As stressed by the European Parliament in its resolution concerning the opening of negotiations for an EU-Morocco Agreement on the exchange of personal data,[79] the transfer of personal sensitive data is extremely sensitive and gives rise to profound concerns given the different legal framework, societal characteristics and cultural background of these States compared with the Union. But, if one reads

[76] Recommendation for a Council Decision authorising the opening of negotiations for an agreement between the European Union and the Kingdom of Morocco on the exchange of personal data between the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) and the Moroccan competent authorities for fighting serious crime and terrorism, COM/2017/0808 final, 20.12.2017.

[77] Recommendation for a Council Decision authorising the opening of negotiations for an agreement between the European Union and Tunisia on the exchange of personal data between the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) and the Tunisian competent authorities for fighting serious crime and terrorism COM/2017/0807 final, 20.12.2017.

[78] Article 7: "Everyone has the right to respect for his or her private and family life, home and communications"; Article 8: "1. Everyone has the right to the protection of personal data concerning him or her. 2. Such data must be processed fairly for specified purposes and on the basis of the consent of the person concerned or some other legitimate basis laid down by law. Everyone has the right of access to data which has been collected concerning him or her, and the right to have it rectified. 3. Compliance with these rules shall be subject to control by an independent authority".

[79] European Parliament resolution of 4 July 2018 on the Commission recommendation for a Council decision authorising the opening of negotiations for an agreement between the European Union and the Kingdom of Morocco on the exchange of personal data between the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) and the Moroccan competent authorities for fighting serious crime and terrorism (COM(2017)0808 – 2018/2064(INI)).

these measures of cooperation within the broader context of the ENP, the political and security partnership cannot ignore the values set in Article 2 TEU, including the respect of human rights and dignity, and the principles set in Article 21 TEU. As pointed out by Wolff, this leads to a dilemma for the EU: how to pursue a strategy "in which it seeks cooperation in the fight against terrorism with law enforcement agencies that do not enjoy full independent from executive power, and do not apply basic principles of justice".[80] Accordingly, it would be necessary to define specific standards to be respected as regards fundamental rights and freedoms also in the fight against terrorism through the elaboration of an effective and rule-of-law compatible investigation and criminal justice system.

5. Conclusive remarks

This contribution sought to provide the reader of this volume with an overview of the main ways in which the EU exercises its external powers to combat terrorism with partner countries in North Africa by moving from the ENP as a general context. The latter represents, indeed, the area of competence which, especially after the Lisbon revision, has marked the framework for developing specific interventions and setting measures of cooperation with Southern neighbour countries.

Being a comprehensive and articulated area of competence based on legal instruments that are precise in their *ratione loci* scope of application, it naturally deals with counter-terrorism actions that have been progressively regulated beyond the EU internal borders. In effect, the EU counter-terrorism strategy is composed of a variety of instruments that pertain the external dimension of the AFSJ and the pure CFSP-related provisions. Moreover, it has emerged the increasing EU consideration of counter-terrorism cooperation in specific instruments provided also in the establishment of closer means of cooperation such as association and partnership agreements. The opportunity to rely on a plurality of legal and binding instruments represents a significant legal leap forward that has reinforced the EU approach towards the complexity of mechanisms that can be functional to the attainment of security objectives, including counter-terrorism and radicalization. This has confirmed the opportunity to read the positive interaction between, on the one hand, the ENP when pursuing security objectives, and, on the other one, the CFSP and AFSJ-related provisions concerning terrorism. Yet, the different instruments taken into consideration in this paper reveal that the EU's strategy on counter-terrorism is firmly anchored to the exchange of (classified) information, the exchange of other personal data and the exchange of data to tackle money laundering. However, it has been also evidenced that the EU counter-terrorism strategy in the targeted countries, i.e. Morocco and Tunisia, albeit

[80] Wolff (2012), p. 150.

quite efficient in the results performed, is far from being supported by a strong combination of soft and hard law instruments. On the contrary, it is still based on a pragmatic, project-centred approach typical of the pre-Lisbon era, and characterised by a multi-layered institutional framework which requires political and legal efforts to maintain major coherence.

As pointed out by Cardwell, the EU's engagement with the neighbouring countries has a "double-edged nature" with the drive to secure cooperation on crime and terrorism without, however, a strong emphasis on encouraging reform. Indeed, while the EU is formally engaged in multiple and different actions, at the same time it has not sufficiently pushed for the introduction of clear obligations on counter-terrorism for the parties of bilateral agreements. At the same time, it cannot be neglected that the EU must act according to the principles set in Article 21 TEU and, as stressed in Article 8 TFEU, its ENP must be inspired by the EU values set in Article 2 TEU. As a consequence, even though the such a policy is not formally based on a sort of conditionality – in comparison to the accession procedure set in Article 49 TEU – the pre-condition of sharing the Union's values may be perceived as a sign of an indirect conditionality that underpins the "special relationship" with the neighbours.[81] Where minimum standards are not met, the Union is still reluctant to deeply cooperate and conclude specific agreements that could undermine fundamental rights safeguards. Ultimately, one of the biggest challenges for the future of the EU's external action in counter-terrorism will probably be linked to ensure coherence and consistency of the different dimensions in which it is executed in the full respect of its own legal order, comprising human rights and democratic legitimacy.

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[81] Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, A new response to a changing Neighbourhood, COM (2011) 303 final, 25.05.2011, p. 5: "Commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms through multilateral treaties and bilateral agreements is essential. But these commitments are not always matched by action. Ratification of all the relevant international and regional instruments and full compliance with their provisions, should underpin our partnership".

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