Revolutions
The Archeology of Change

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Understanding Islamic Fundamentalism:
A Matter of Sociology

STEFANO SCARCELLA PRANDSTRALLER [*]

Abstract: Understanding Islamic fundamentalism of today requires the *frame* of a clash not between civilizations, but between different forms of psychological organization. It is therefore a matter of sociology, explainable through the innovative approach of *dynamic sociology*. The term *jihad* is for fundamentalists an armed revolution, both against those regimes of Islamic world guilty of *apostasy*, and against all non-Islamic countries. At the root of nowadays' fundamentalism it is not the opposition between different religions, cultures or civilizations considered on the same level, but something much more radical: the idea of blasphemy of the form of psychological organization of *subjectivity* itself, on which our lifestyle is based. *Subjectivity* is the result of the peculiar western historical path of development, founding the secularized idea of a human being with own civil, political and social rights and thus self-referent in his life choices from the constraints of any religion or traditional community. Something that fundamentalists consider as the premise of the "degrading path" leading to conceive "societies without God". Nowadays, *subjectivity* has penetrated in depth inside most Islamic societies, and they have many of its typical institutions, together with traditional ones. The new Islamic fundamentalist looks often fully integrated in the societies of *subjectivity*, but retains an *ascriptive* or *re-ascriptive* form of psychological organization, which allows him to ignore the values and norms of surrounding society, and freely act through the *taqiya* or "*dissimulation*", a principle justified by an influential Islamic jurisprudential approach. The modern *jihadist*, oriented by a *Wahhabi-salaphite* ideology and *double tied* to his *shayk-master*, operates in a strongly ritualized frame of actions and social behaviours and kills without regret, negating any dignity to his victims. And when the fundamentalist movements take the power, they dissolve the secular western style organization of state, to create a new *ascriptive quasi-state entity* (AQSE), as the Emirate of Talebans or the Caliphate of ISIS.
Keywords: *subjectivity*, *ascription*, *fundamentalism*, *dissimulation*, *double tie*

Introduction: a *Frame* for the Matter of Islamic Fundamentalism

According to Collins English Dictionary, *fundamentalism* is:

1. (Christianity) (especially among certain Protestant sects) the belief that every word of the Bible is divinely inspired and therefore true.

2. (Islam) a movement favouring strict observance of the teachings of the Koran and Islamic law.

3. strict adherence to the fundamental principles of any set of beliefs[1].

The concept behind any form of *fundamentalism* is the one of *absolute*, "from the Latin *absolutus*, it is something independent from any tie, not dependent from any other element in the affirmation of its identity". "The human being" explains the sociologist Prandstraller – "has perhaps the need of an external support to help him/her to overcome his/her absence of direction, and hopes to find it in an uppermost entity able to explain and govern everything"[2].

This it is exactly what Islamic fundamentalism nowadays provides to an increasing number of people, and more, and with more intensity than any other current religion or ideology.

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[1] *Collins English Dictionary* – Complete & Unabridged 2012 Digital Edition © William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd. 1979, 1986 © HarperCollins Publishers 1998, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012.

[2] G.P. Prandstraller, *Relativismo*, CLEUP, Padova, 2017, pp. 13-14.

To understand such a complex social phenomenon, it is useful to resort to a *frame*, which is "a schemata of interpretation"[3] that "helps an individual organize his or her subjective experience in a meaningful way"[4].

Some of the possible *frames* for Islamic fundamentalism are the following:

– the frame of *a clash between different civilizations*, including the one *between different cultures or religions*, used by Samuel P. Huntington to define the next pattern of conflict[5];

– the frame of an exploitation of two basic human needs: the need for cognitive closure and the need for personal significance, proposed by social psychologist Arie Kruglansky;

– the frame of *a clash between different forms of psychological organization*, according to the conceptual categories of *dynamic sociology*[6], an innovative approach to sociology, which studies the effects of social forces on the systems of personality of individuals.

This article will follow the last *frame*, because it provides the very effective interpretive key of the *forms of psychological organization*, which are "entities of the frontier zone between the social system and individual psychological systems. They are the forms of human action and experience, fundamental ways of being, structural prerequisites underlying the system of personality"[7].

Meaning and Ideology of the New Islamic Fundamentalism

"Islam" in Arab means "submission", in the sense of "complete submission to God", in Arab "*Allah*", and the believer is named "*Muslim*". The Muslims believe in one and only God, in the Angels by Him created, in the Prophets, which revealed His word to humankind, in the day of final judgement, and in eternal life after death[8]. Mohammed is the Last Prophet, to whom God revealed the final message to humankind, and thus he has become His messenger, *Rasul Allah*[9].

Allah is always actively omnipresent and personally and directly regulates everything. The centre of Islam is His positive law, the *Shari'a*, literally "the straight way", whose peculiarity is to discipline the whole human activity in the external world[10]. Both the dimensions of *ibhadat*, the human duties of man toward God, and *mu'amalat*, the human duties of men between themselves, are disciplined by the *Shari'a*, and according to a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam, any possible intrusion of rules coming from secular authorities is not tolerable[11].

On this point, the sociologist Pellicani explains that "the idea itself, so typical of liberal democracy, according to which the law is something made by men, may only result in

[3] *Cf.* E. Goffman, *Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order*, Northeastern University Press, Boston, Massachusetts, 1974, 1986.

[4] J. Wakeham, "Bullshit as a Problem of Social Epistemology", *Sociogical Theory*, Vol. 35 (I), American Sociological Association, 2017, pp. 15-38.

[5] S.P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1996.

[6] *Cf.* Italian Association of Dynamic Sociology (AISoD), Statute, Article 2, Vittorio Veneto (TV), 2015. Dynamic sociology is the sociological approach "which studies the effects of social forces present and operating in the social and cultural systems on the systems of personality of individuals, determining the different forms of psychological organization which they assume through cultivation or primary and secondary socialization processes".

[7] S. Scarcella Prandstraller, "Dynamic sociology: a social theory in action", in *2ⁿᵈ International Multidisciplinary Conference on Social Sciences & Arts SGEM 2015*, Conference proceedings, Albena, Bulgaria, 2015, pp. 439-450.

[8] N. Ippolito, "Uno sguardo sull'Islam", *Amministrazione Pubblica*, III, 16, 2000, p. 132.

[9] E. Pace, *Sociologia dell'Islam*, Carocci, Firenze, 1999, p. 39.

[10] A. Bausani, *L'Islam*, Garzanti, Milano, 2001, pp. 37-38.

[11] *Ibidem*, pp. 41-42.

blaspheme to the Islamic fundamentalists, who consider the legislative power reserved to God. They consequently see in the law the word of God ("*Kalam Allah*"), in front of which just one attitude is conceivable: the absolute obedience, the submission without reserves, the Islam"[12]

The Arab term "*jihad*" appears several times in the *Qu'ran* and literally means "*fight*", "*effort*". It is present in the double meaning of "great jihad" of the human soul toward transcendence and eternal salvation ("*jihad fi sabil Allah*", "*the effort in the walk of God*"), and "*little jihad*", as holy war of the faithful against the infidels, and as such, against the "*Dar-al-Harb*", "*land of the sword*", to turn it into "*Dar-al-Islam*", "*land of submission*"[13].

Nowadays, the Islamic fundamentalist ideology is based on the *Wahhabite* system of beliefs, the same one officially endorsed in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and several others, politically considered friends of USA and of the West, but, not surprisingly, hosting among their citizens the more rich and generous financial supporters of ISIS and several other fundamentalist organizations[14]. It is not a matter of astonishment that many of the terrorists of September 11th 2001 attacks, as Osama Bin Laden himself, were of Saudi nationality or origins.

The *Wahhabiya* is based both on *Qu'ran* and on *Hadith* as fundamental texts, the latter being a sort of a larger extension of the *Sunnah*. The *Sunnah* identifies with "the way in which Prophet Mohammed lived his life" and is considered the second source of Islamic jurisprudence after the *Qu'ran* by all the *Sunnites*, which are the large majority of Muslims in the world. The *Hadith*, on the contrary, is a plurality of literature sources, containing "a narration on the life of the Prophet", and "an indication of the things He has approved", by "actions, words, acts of silent approval and His *ṣifaat*", or "physical appearance", interpreted by a category of specialists, the *Muhaddithiin*[15].

What's more, the *Wahhabiya* accepts several commentaries, like the *Kitab-al-Tawid*, or "Book of Monotheism" of Mohammed Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab, the founder of *Wahhabiya* itself[16], and the precedent ones of Ibn Taymyya, very significant for the teachings on Jihad. The *Kitab-al-Tawid* is a very complex exegetic text, in 66 chapters, which faces many basic aspects of faith and religious observance, making of every act of religious practice and often of social life a ritualized moment, marked by many outward prescriptions, including many details of external behaviour[17].

The result is an approach to Islam based on a puritan, scrupulous, formal and literal monotheistic observance, called *salaphite*, from the *salaf al-ṣaliḥīn*, "the pious ancestors". It excludes all what they consider as *bidah*, "contemptible innovations"[18], superstitions and heresies, like "the invocation in prayers of prophets, saints and angels", or "the requests for saints' intercession", labelled as "polytheistic in nature". It rejects to acknowledge any right

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[12] L. Pellicani, *Jihad: le radici*, Agorà – Luiss University Press, Roma, 2004, p. 52.

[13] M. Jacobucci, *I nemici del dialogo. Ragioni e perversioni dell'intolleranza*, Armando Editore, Roma, 2005, p. 269.

[14] Stanford University, *Mapping Militant Organizations, The Islamic State* – http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/1 (2017).

[15] S. Scarcella Prandstraller, *Sociologia dell'Islam al tempo della guerra al terrorismo*, Di Virgilio, Roma, 2007, p. 105.

[16] Mohammed Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab around 1744 traveled to Dar'iyya and formed an alliance with the emir Mohammed Ibn Sa'ud, the chief of Sa'ud family, who soon after would have done of the *Wahhabiya* the official religion of the first Saudite State, justifying his jihad against other Muslims not accepting the ideas of Wahhb of "*shirk*" (polytheism) or "*kufr*" (misbelieve).

[17] Mohammed Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab, *The Book of Taweed*, English translation of Sameh Strauch, International Islamic Publishing House, Ryadh, 1998.

[18] For many Wahhbite fundamentalists, the concept of *bidah* comprises all the acquisitions of acculturation processes, like modernity and democracy.

to women. Any kind of mysticism or meditation or any variation in the exterior forms of religious practice are forbidden. *Wahhabiya* considers approaches like *Sh'ia* and *Sufi* not just "heretic", but "not Islamic" at all.

Arguments recurring in an obsessive manner in *Wahhabiya* are *shirk*, "polytheism", *kufr*, "misbelieve", and *tawid*, "purity of monotheism". They are a central element of the system of beliefs, at the origin of a strong intra and extra Islamic aggressiveness. Psychologically it transforms in *acting-out* not simply through a mechanism of refusal of the diversity of the other, but of its radical *disconfirmation* and labelling as "ignorant", "impure", "misbeliever", "infidel", "polytheist", "idolatrous", and thus dangerous and unworthy of any dialogue or consideration. Zamin Zakaria explains that *Saudi-salaphites* "are like programmed to aggress other Muslims on irrelevant matters... If someone dares to challenge them with logical reasoning, he is immediately reduced to the rank of a misleading innovator, lacking the true knowledge of sacred texts"[19].

It is no wonder that *Wahhabiya*, with its myths of purity of monotheism and link to ancestors and traditions, has been successful in giving to many Islamic fundamentalist organizations, such as Al-Quaeda and ISIS, most of its system of symbols, beliefs and representations. They include the *shaykh*, "the revered wise man", which embodies authoritarianism of religious matrix, a traditional or charismatic figure, who is both a political and religious leader, supported by a restricted group of *ulema*. These organizations have also taken from *Wahhabiya* relevant traits like *ritualism* and *disconfirmation of other's identity*, which allow the joint and integrated activation of powerful psychological mechanisms to structure behaviours in a compulsive way[20]. Even if it would not be correct to identify *Wahhabiya* with *fundamentalism* itself, it is possible to speak, as a common trait of many Islamic fundamentalist movements, of a *Wahhabi-salaphite* ideology.

Jihad as an Armed Revolution against *Subjectivity*

Jihad, the "holy war", is nowadays, according to Islamic *fundamentalists*, intended as an armed revolution, founded on the physical elimination of the adversaries[21], against:

– the political regimes accused of *jahilliyya, "paganism" or "apostasy"*, considered corrupted, renegade and western-friendly in Islamic world; those considered as the first targets are their governments and military and police forces;

– all not Muslims, as Jews, Christians or Buddhists or other religious minorities present in Islamic territories, and all those Muslims not considered Muslims as well, like the followers of *Sh'ia*; this aspect of Jihad of course includes the need for a total destruction of cultural and historical heritage of not-Muslims, also belonging to civilizations of past eras;

– all the "atheistic", national or secular parties or movements, like the Kurdish PKK;

– all the governments and the peoples of not-Islamic countries, especially if accused of imperialistic aggression against true Islam, like USA and Russia, or oppression of the resident Muslims, like United Kingdom and France.

The journalist Jessica Carter writes: "we are bewildered and disoriented by the brutality: headlines warn of systematic beheadings of Muslims and non-Muslims alike, evidence of Christian genocide, men being burned alive, mass executions on the beaches of the Mediterranean – a sea that touches the West. These are acts far from the reality of most people living in the 21st century, and more like something out of a Hollywood movie portraying horror plots or times long past. Yet ISIS is very real and those of us who spend a

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[19] Z. Zakaria, *La casa dei Saud e I Saudi-salafiti*, article published in Italian with the permission of Jihad Unspun on http://www.kelebekler.com (July 2004).

[20] S. Scarcella Prandstraller, *Sociologia dell'Islam...*, ed. cit., pp. 121-123.

[21] G. Cucchi, "Grazie Califfo! Grazie Califfato!", *Limes, rivista italiana di geopolitica* – http://www.limesonline.com/grazie-califfato-grazie-califfo (October 1st 2014).

lot of time in front of those headlines are becoming hostage to a very heavy question: how will it be stopped?". Shortly after, the co-creator and former Managing Editor of Aspenia online touches the core of the question: "While no one knows the answer quite yet, we need to understand what triggered this phenomenon and how our world has changed in a way to permit the existence of a movement like ISIS"[22].

The one evidenced by Jessica Carter in ISIS militants is an existential condition such as to find absolutely normal to lack any form of understanding of diversity and to commit acts of violence and devastation well beyond the allowance of our western standards of culture and civilization. An existential condition for which the idea itself of human rights looks odd, abstract and without any concrete meaning.

On the other hand, *subjectivity*, on which our lifestyle is based, as demonstrated by Luhmann[23] and Foucault[24], is not an absolute, but just a relatively new *social technology*, the form of psychological organization of the individual that makes possible our *acquisitive societies*, since the Enlightenment and bourgeois revolutions. The idea of a man who is self-referent, self-determined, aimed to self-achievement and apparently free and equal to any other, controlled by society only through the inventions of discipline and social roles. Typical of the peculiar historical, social, economic and political path of development of the western modernity, subjectivity does not need "cultivation" as traditional cultures, but is handed down through primary and secondary socialization processes, in which the *subject* is "trained" to interpret different social roles, achieved through *selections* and *performances*[25]. The subject builds him/herself as an individual, titular of civil, political and social rights, recognized as such by a law entirely made by men, and completely immunized by any social link with traditional groups, as families or clans, and any religious entity overseeing his/her life[26]. What's more, the state is laical and secularized, founded on institutions based on discipline and social roles, like companies, bureaucracies, services, armies and political parties, potentially open to all those having certain requisites and passing certain *selections*. Religion itself, from inherited and undisputable principle, capable to explain the sense of life and universe and the destiny of humankind, in the societies of *subjectivity* becomes a free and private choice of each individual, as such mostly irrelevant in orienting social action.

Many modern Islamic countries, at least in the surface, are organized as modern states, and to do it they have necessarily endorsed *subjectivity* as main form of psychological organization. Subjectivity is thus compatible to a certain degree with Islam, at least for those accepting to be citizens not less than Muslims, who observe the law of their countries, obey to civil and military authorities and respect the human rights of both men and women. But it remains a blaspheme form of psychological organization for any traditional Muslim. Mark Jurgensmeyer explains that for Al-Quaeda and any other fundamentalist group, the governments of Islamic countries organized as laical states are "satanized", as something which assumed the shape of devil, because "they have taken the degrading path of imitation of the forms of life of the societies without God"[27], which are the *acquisitive* societies, those

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[22] J. Carter, "The horrors of ISIS: How did we get to this point?", *Aspenia online*, Aspen Institute Italia – https://www.aspeninstitute.it/aspenia-online/contributors/jessica-carter (April 8th 2015).

[23] *Cf.* N. Luhmann, J. Habermas: *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie – Was leistet die Systemforschung?*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1971 (Italian translation: *Teoria della società o tecnologia sociale?*, Etas Libri, Milano, 1973).

[24] M. Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, Gallimard, Paris, 1975 (Italian translation: *Sorvegliare e punire*, Einaudi, Torino, 1993).

[25] *Cf.* H. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization. A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, The Beacon Press, Boston, Massachusetts, 1955 (Italian translation: *Eros e civiltà*, Einaudi, Torino, 1964).

[26] M. Bortolini, *L'immunità necessaria. Talcott Parsons e la sociologia della modernità*, Meltemi, Roma, 2005.

[27] M. Jurgensmeyer, *Terroristi in nome di Dio*, Laterza, Bari, 2003, p. 201.

founded on *subjectivity*. The sociologist Pellicani states that this "satanization" of all what is founded on *subjectivity* "not only legitimates the terroristic use of violence: it makes it became sacred, transforming in divine commandment; in addition, it connects it in the *frame* of an eschatologic war of planetary dimensions and of cosmic-historical meaning"[28].

For all these reasons, we can state without doubt that the Jihad of Islamic fundamentalists is not against different cultures, religions or civilizations, considered as "enemies at the same level", but against a form of psychological organization, the one of modern *subjectivity*, which is blasphemous and contemptible because it makes possible the existence of "societies without God".

Western Understanding: the Heritage of START Program

The only serious attempt to understand the Islamic fundamentalism with the joint knowledge and resources of social sciences after the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001 in USA has been the National Consortium for the Study on Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, or the Center START. The initiative of the US Government was announced by the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Tom Ridge in January 2005. It involved a 12 million dollars financed social and behavioral research program with its seat at the College Park University of Maryland, with the partnership of Colorado-Boulder, Los Angeles, Pennsylvania and South Carolina Universities and of the Institute for International Studies of Monterrey.

The program START was supervised by the sociologist Gary La Free, professor of criminology at College Park University of Maryland, and articulated three main research lines:

– under the direction of Arie Kruglansky, professor of social psychology at the College Park University of Maryland, for the study of origins, recruitment and training of terrorist groups (organized in 14 research groups);

– under the direction of Clark McCauley, professor of social psychology at the Bryn Mawr College, for the study of persistence and internal dynamics of terrorist groups (organized in 12 research groups);

– under the direction of Kathleen Tierney, professor of sociology and director of the Center of Information and Applied Research on the Risks of Natural Disasters of Colorado Boulder University, to study the possible responses of societies to terrorist menaces and attacks and how to develop appropriate *resilience* (organized in 12 research groups)[29].

Arie Kruglansky, interviewed in November 2005 by the journalist David C. Walsh, explained that, in order to identify the possible targets of future terrorist attacks "it is necessary to enter into the mind of terrorists and become able to represent what they are thinking and how they establish priorities between their objectives". This means to succeed in "understanding what makes sense for them, which may be very different from what makes sense for us". "This is the task of a social scientist", because "terrorism in its entirety it is a social phenomenon", a "form of psychological war, a propaganda done by facts"[30].

It is impossible here to summarize all the important achievements of START Program.

Here I will only discuss a relevant result of a research directed in 2005-2006 by Arie Kruglansky, with the collaboration of Shira Fishman, Edward Orehek, Xiao Yen Chen and Mark Dechesne. Even without using the *dynamic sociology's* categories of *subjectivity* and *ascription*, the result of the research on a sample of 1042 Muslims from different countries (Arab States, Pakistan and Indonesia) has shown that those considering collective goals (of

[28] L. Pellicani, *Jihad: le radici*, ed. cit., p. 88.

[29] University of Mariland, *START Centre* – http://www.start.umd.edu/research (2007).

[30] D.C. Walsh, "Sociologist led Homeland Security Center is unveiled", *Footnotes, Organ of American Sociological Association*, 33, 8, November 2005, p. 10.

religion, nation, community, tribe, clan, family, etc.) more important than individual ones are more inclined to support or justify terrorism. What's more, between those foremost identifying themselves with the religion or with the religious group, the percentage is much higher than among those identifying with the national group or any other kind of community. The proposal of the researchers, because the contrast of terrorism in societies who adhere to collective goals (which are usually based on a widespread *ascriptive* form of psychological organization) looks more difficult, is to provide as much as possible individual goals[31]. Which, in the terms of *dynamic sociology*, sounds as "setting up the conditions to develop *subjectivity* as dominant form of psychological organization and overcome *ascription*", a process already attempted in past decades several countries, including Iran, not simple, full of obstacles and of uncertain outcome[32].

Arie Kruglansky is surely the author carrying nowadays most of the heritage of the unique multidisciplinary experience of START Program in understanding Islamic fundamentalism.

In a 2014 article he speaks about ISIS and states that "ISIS' recruitment strategy may work through its *psychology*, not its *theology*". He explains that "from a psychological perspective, the appeal of violent extremism derives from a clever exploitation of two basic human needs: the *need for cognitive closure* and the *need for personal significance*". And it is successful: "there is no doubt that ISIS' recruitment strategy has been strikingly effective. Whereas only months ago the number of its fighters was estimated at 10,000, an early September update by the CIA had it at 31,500, a staggering increase. 12,000 of these are foreign fighters, with 3,000 of those from the West"[33].

The *need for closure* "amounts to the quest for certainty, and the eschewal of ambiguity; it is the desire to feel assured about the future, to know what to do and where to go. It is the quest for structure and coherence in one's outlook and beliefs"[34].

According to Kruglansky, in the current historical period, unprecedented factors of uncertainty, such as economic recession and worldwide waves of immigration, "engender unsettling, anxiety-inducing uncertainties, which prompt cravings for coherence and closure" and "fundamentalist ideologies are quintessentially fit to satisfy just such cravings". They do so "by painting a Manichean worldview characterized by sharp dichotomies and clear choices; a world of good versus evil, saints versus sinners, order versus chaos; a pure universe in black and white admitting no shades of gray. A fundamentalist ideology establishes clear contingencies between actions and consequences; it offers a future that is predictable and controllable. Such a perspective holds particular fascination for confused youths in transitional stages of their lives, who drift like rudderless ships and find themselves torn by conflicting cultural demands"[35].

About the *quest for significance*, "a pre-eminent human motive, long recognized by psychological theorists", which "denotes the supreme importance to humans of being noticed, mattering, and deserving honor and esteem"[36], Kruglansky states: "beyond closure and coherence, the ISIS ideology offers its adherents an invaluable psychological reward, a

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[31] START Research Brief, published on http://www.start.umdedu (October 2006).

[32] S. Scarcella Prandstraller, *Sociologia dell'Islam...*, ed. cit., p. 198.

[33] A.W. Kruglansky, *Psychology Not Theology: Overcoming ISIS' Secret Appeal*, in E-International Relations – http://www.e-ir.info/2014/10/28/psychology-not-theology-overcoming-isis-secret-appeal (October 28 2014).

[34] *Cf.* A.W. Kruglanski, *Lay Epistemics and Human Knowledge: Cognitive and Motivational Bases*, Springer, New York, 1989; and A.W. Kruglanski, *The Psychology of Closed Mindedness*, Psychology Press, New York, 2004.

[35] A.W. Kruglansky, *Psychology Not Theology...*, qtd. internet review.

[36] *Cf.* S.T. Fiske, *Social Beings: Core Motives in Social Psychology*, Wiley, New York, 2004.

prize like no other. It is the sense that, by joining the fight against infidels, they earn the status of heroes and martyrs, thus gaining a larger-than-life significance and earning a spot in history". Later he adds that "frustrated youths without coherent purpose, uncertain prospects, and on the receiving end of rejection are particularly prone to resonate to loss of significance of Muslims as a group"[37].

In an interview with Lauren Sagl, released in the same period, Kruglansky adds that "extremists want to regain their status by showing how powerful they are by causing harm to the victims and inducing fear in others. This violence is a more primitive and direct (in their opinion) way of gaining significance, as compared to playing by what they consider unfavorable rules"[38].

Ascription

The term *ascription* is sociological and comes from Talcott Parsons, in the *dichotomy achievement* vs. *ascription.* Parsons uses these terms as a structural variable concerning alternative ways of considering the individual object of an interaction process. *Achievement* means considering the individual on the basis of *general criteria of performance*, including educational qualifications and capabilities, achieved through instruction, experience and personal commitment. *Ascription* on the contrary means basing consideration of the individual on ascribed qualities, a *combination of features* that he or she cannot modify in any way, such as lineage, sex, age, race, cast, tribe, religious group and social class of origin[39].

In the *dynamic approach*, ascription is both a simple and very old *social technology* and a *form of psychological organization.* It has characterized traditional societies and cultures, from those of ancient and medieval civilizations in Europe and elsewhere to those of the Middle-East, Asia, Africa and large parts of the world up to the present day. *Ascriptive* societies differ widely from each other, from tribal and primitive to highly sophisticated, and at present day, after the acculturation processes of the colonial and postcolonial age, are very rarely pure, because they could not be compatible as such with secular western style organization of state.

China, India and many Eastern and Islamic societies are hybrid types, where *subjects* and *ascriptive* people live side by side, and both forms have their strongholds in different roles, organizations and institutions, often giving rise to contradictions and conflicts. It is common in societies of the Islamic world to assist to an endemic struggle, which often becomes armed, between traditional institutions, such as sects, tribes, clans and religious schools and authorities, against state's institutions as armies and bureaucracies, and other creations of *subjectivity,* such as companies and political parties.

These are, according to *dynamic sociology* approach[40], the pattern variables of *ascription*:

1) *Hetero-reference*: it is an external element that directs decision-making in the community as a whole and is also an absolute precondition for the processing of experience by individuals; it is a religious/metaphysical or traditional entity or concept, in any case unquestionable and taken for granted.

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[37] A.W. Kruglansky, *Psychology Not Theology…*, qtd. internet review.

[38] L. Sagl, *Dr. Arie Kruglanski Discusses Psychology Behind Terrorist Recruitment* – http://www.start.umd.edu/news/dr-arie-kruglanski-discusses-psychology-behind-terrorist-recruitment (October 26th 2014).

[39] T. Parsons, *The Social System*, Glencoe, Illinois, 1951 (Italian translation: *Il Sistema sociale*, Edizioni di Comunità, Milano, 1996, pp. 211-219).

[40] S. Scarcella Prandstraller, "Dynamic sociology: a social theory in action", in *2nd International Multidisciplinary Conference on Social Sciences & Arts SGEM 2015*, Conference proceedings, Albena, Bulgaria, 2015, pp. 439-450.

2) *Necessary sharing*: hetero-reference is also something which "represents the ultimate reason for the order of human coexistence"[41], and so expresses the essence of the "community as necessary sharing" and as the "irrevocable basis of the social bond"[42]. The individual feels deeply bound to his/her community, which may be religious and as such potentially universal (such as the *Umma* for Muslims), or more narrow: a race, for example, a family, a village or a tribe, which in any case represents a sort of *chosen people.*

3) *Inequality*: human beings are not equal and their differences are due to ascribed attributes (birth, inherited religion, lineage, race, caste, sex, age). Anyone who is part of the chosen people deserves respect and solidarity, while others are enemies, unbelievers or aliens and deserve hate, contempt or indifference; in the community, there are "procedures of *ascending* individualization"[43], from the lowest subordinates to the chiefs, where everyone has a rigid status.

4) *Imperative of tradition*: there are no written and changeable norms from human legislators but rather only rules directly derived from sacred texts or oral tradition, which must be accepted and cannot be changed (the *Shari'a* for Muslims). These rules regulate in a complete and integral way both the duties toward the hetero-reference and every segment of social life; the community has a group of experts (Mullah, Brahmins, etc.) with a monopoly on the interpretation of these texts or rules, while power is vested in a unique authority, both political and religious at same time.

5) *Cultivation*: under ascription, social life is in large part the "fulfilment of previously established ultimate goals"; socialization processes have no reason to exist; the new-born is simply cultivated, introduced by the elders to the culture, the "cosmic order" or "ultimate interpretations of the world"[44] of the chosen people's community. There are no choices about what to believe, to be or to become: almost everything is already decided by ascribed attributes and rigid status.

6) *Functional unity of Self*: the ascriptive man/woman is complete and has no concept of changeable social roles like the *subject*. He/she does not know the rift between duty and pleasure; the ascriptive individual simply does what he/she does because of a recognition that it is right; it is part of an order of things that cannot be changed and it is not up to him/her to modify or judge.

7) *Oral communication*: communication and transmission of knowledge are mainly oral, and every relationship is direct and personal, not mediated by social roles; the essential dimension is the empirical one; great importance is bestowed on learning sacred texts and teachings from memory; this does not impede a wide utilization of the new media, with images and oral messages.

8) *Intensity and visibility of punishment*: little freedom of action is left to the individual and rules are harshly enforced; disagreement is not admitted; deterrence is not assured by the certainty of the sanction, as for the *subject*, but by its intensity, its public and exemplary nature[45].

Re-ascription

Romano Bettini states that "in countries well expert of colonialism and postcolonialism the phenomenon of migration paints up of Islamic fundamentalism specially in those generations which should be well integrated in a multiculturalism well absent in their countries of origin". They "should have learned in the western countries the sense of

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[41] N. Luhmann, J. Habermas, *Theorie der Gesellschaft*..., ed. cit., p. 7.
[42] *Cf.* M. Bortolini, *L'immunità necessaria*..., ed. cit.
[43] M. Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, ed. cit., pp. 210-212.
[44] N. Luhmann, J. Habermas, *Theorie der Gesellschaft*..., ed. cit., p. 2.
[45] M. Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, ed. cit., p. 7.

incompatibility with political-religious doctrines, devourers and overpowering other cultures"[46].

Many of nowadays Islamic fundamentalists are people already living from two or sometimes three generations in Western Countries (like many among the authors of recent terrorist attacks in London, Paris, Nice, Brussels and Barcelona), or with a certain social status in the Arab countries (like Osama Bin Laden himself). This fact makes a supposition that they were already well socialized to the psychological organization form of *subjectivity* before becoming fundamentalist terrorists.

Re-ascription is in fact a condition of relapse into *ascription*, a way out of *subjectivity* in favour of a new kind of hetero-reference, due to a strong existential crisis, a "conversion" to a new faith, more often to the beliefs of a sect or a fundamentalist group, probably due both to the *need for closure* and the *quest for significance*. This in order to seek refuge in some kind of hetero-reference, which may drive the former subject into a new, reassuring community dimension, in order to reach "salvation".

The pattern variables of *re-ascription*, according to *dynamic sociology* approach, are very similar to those of *ascription*:

1) *Hetero-reference*: this place is filled by a sect, a social movement, an entity, a new cult or religion, or a particular interpretation of a traditional one, as in the case of fundamentalist groups, whose doctrine and vision of the world become an "unquestionable truth" orienting every life and relationship choice, and also giving precise meaning to new currents of experience.

2) *Necessary sharing*: once joined, the group cannot easily be left; it appears to be the only reality able to satisfy the relational and emotional needs of the former subject; every resource is shared with or belongs to the whole group.

3) *Inequality*: human beings are not equal: the members of the group are the new chosen people, and its leaders deserve obedience because they have undergone some kind of investiture by the hetero-reference and have charismatic powers.

4) *Imperative of rules*: the rules of the group are essential for its survival, and so, respect for them is emphasized and connected with elements of sacredness.

5) *Cultivation*: socialization of the former subject is blocked or destroyed, because previous social and often even family links are interrupted in a sort of cognitive and emotive restructuring, with a reduction in the social structure of the group.

6) *Functional unity of Self*: the former subject can no longer properly cope with social roles because the membership of the group becomes central and essential, requiring his/her primary or total allegiance.

7) *Oral or neo-oral communication*: within the group, communication is mostly oral or through the new media, including the transmission of information and relevant knowledge, which often passes through the mediation of charismatic leaders who may be cyber enhanced by blogs, social media or other devices.

8) *Intensity and visibility of punishment*: dissent is usually forbidden; anyone who transgresses the strict rules of the group, invariably harshly enforced, must be punished, publicly executed or expelled through a public sanction, visible to everybody[47].

The Great Geo-political New: Ascriptive Quasi-State Entities (A.Q.S.E.)

One of the Islamic fundamentalists is Jihad, a war in a full sense, more than a simple revolution, in Arab *al-thawra*, because they do not attack just the political regimes of some

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[46] R. Bettini, "Islam: l'anomia migrante e le politiche del contrasto occidentale", in St. Scarcella Prandstraller, *Sociologia dell'Islam…*, ed. cit., p. 14.

[47] S. Scarcella Prandstraller, *La soggettività come tecnologia sociale. Un orientamento per le politiche*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 2008, pp. 183-194.

states, eastern or western, to replace them with other regimes, but aim to destroy the idea of modern state itself.

Until the last decades of the twentieth century, the concept of the modern state was undisputed. All the territories of the globe were enclosed inside the boundaries of state entities. The end of the colonial period was followed by the creation of new state entities in Africa, Asia, Middle East, Oceania and Americas, all on the western model, not all with ethnic and religious homogeneity, but each with a name, a flag, a government, a civil service and a regular army and police forces. The principles of subjectivity were shared as well by liberal-democratic-capitalist and collectivist-socialist-communist ideologies, requiring in both cases a superior secular state authority over any traditional entity, like religions, ethnicities, tribes or clans. The states had more or less democratic regimes, but these were almost invariably lined up to the interests of USA and western allies, URSS or China, and any inner civil war was aimed, or rather exploited, to pass from one field of influence to another. This situation, from the end of the Cold War between Western and Eastern blocks in 1989, faced an increasing destabilization.

Where the western style political organization of state, based on the secular principles of *subjectivity*, was overthrown by internal struggle, the traditional forms of social organization built around *ascription* supported by local or "imported" fundamentalists, tended to endure, gain new stamina and seize the power over large areas, being much more resilient in the face of any possible kind of opposition. These forms of social organization, being *ascriptive*, were neither able, nor interested to re-build a state-like organization again, so whole territories have been reduced to wreckage, exposed to the action of fanatics, bandits, criminals, warlords and rogue armed groups. This is the present situation in large part of Africa, but also of the Middle East and several other areas of the world.

The Islamic fundamentalism has begun to show up as a global phenomenon well before the spectacular terroristic attack on the Twin Towers in New York on September 11th 2001 by Al-Quaeda, but even after that, the USA and the rest of the western world have lacked capacity to stop, or even to understand it. The USA and their Allies' political and military reaction caused even more disorder and mayhem to an already unstable situation in the Middle East and in North Africa, overthrowing the consolidated dictatorial regimes of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and of Muhammar Geddafi in Lybia. They were in fact both capable of controlling wide territories inhabited by many and mutually hostile tribal, religious and ethnic groups through national entities inspired by ideologies founded on *subjectivity*, the one of Bath Party in Iraq and of Socialist Jamairya in Lybia.

Where one traditional group was enough ethnically (thanks to the dominance of Pashtun ethnicity) and religiously cohesive (the teachings of Taliban Koranic School) to seize the undisputed power on a wide area, the first quasi-state entity based on ascription emerged in history: the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan of the Taleban regime of Mullah Mohammed Omar (1996-2001).

Of course, the proclamation of the Calyphate on June 29th 2014 by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (in Arab الدولـة الإسلامية, al-Dawla al-Islāmiyya), the jihadist salaphite organization of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, controlling an area of territory in North-Eastern Syria and Western Iraq is just the culminating event of an apparently unstoppable political rise. It is the most successful attempt of fundamentalists to rebuild a "society around God" and affirms the triumph of an *ascriptive* human being, completely referent. Alberto Negri writes: "The IS has tried to establish a new Taliban Afghanistan in the heart of the basin of Mesopotamia, bordering the shores of the Mediterranean, creating what is already a mini-economic power. Its brutality is now legendary, just as that of the medieval sect of the *hasisiyyun*, Alamut's 'assassins'. Beheadings and crucifixions are needed to encourage entire

cities to surrender without fighting. And yet, there is a level of sophistication never seen before in a jihadist movement"[48].

Another case of a less organized *ascriptive* quasi-state entity are the wide territories in Nigeria, Ciad and Camerun controlled by Boko Aram[49], a *jihadist Wahhbi-salaphite* organization allied from 2015 of ISIS, whose ferocity is not less legendary, as responsible of 450 murders only in 2011[50].

All these entities, larger or smaller, have some recurrent common traits: a strong common religious reference, an authoritarian ruler, both a political and religious leader, and the complete abolition of state-like institutions. This happens because these institutions are the expression of the principles of *subjectivity* and require the acknowledgement of *social roles*, outside the direct and personal legitimation of a religious or traditional authority. Civil service is substituted by appointed traditional organs (the Talebans had a Council of six members and a *Shura*; the ISIS is headed by three Councils: the *Shura Council*, the *Military Council*, and the *Security and Intelligence Council*, all overseen by the Caliph[51]). The regular army is replaced by irregular armed forces of sacred warriors of Islam, under direct religious control (the *Mujahideen* of Talebans and the *Jihadists* of ISIS).

Some Traits of Islamic Fundamentalist: Taqiya, Ritualism and Double Tie

How does it work the mind of today Islamic fundamentalist?

Great part of the answer to this question given by *dynamic sociology* is that the nowadays Islamic fundamentalist has an *ascriptive* (if living in a traditional society or community) or, in several cases, *re-ascriptive* (if previously socialized to *subjectivity*) form of psychological organization. As such, it ignores or disregards the norms and values of western societies.

But this alone cannot explain how well this faithful fundamentalist can disguise himself in the societies of the subject, behaving most of the time as a *subject*, and also how he can act so ferociously, setting aside any possible social, psychological or even religious restrain, in an *acting-out* of performances of extreme violence and brutality.

According to Christian Tămaș, many of these behaviours are easily explainable taking in account the text of commentaries of Ibn Taymyya, authorizing the *Jihadists* even to kill by accident some good Muslims as collateral damage of a justified act of Jihad[52].

In any way, the first question is explainable through the principle of *taqiya*, or "dissimulation". Certain Islamic doctrines, like the one of *Deobandi* of Pakistan, considered an important articulation of *Wahhbya* outside Saudi Arabia, just referring to *Hanafite* and not *Hanbalite* juridical school, admits *taqiya*, which allows to the jihadist to declare to be contrary to extremist positions and simulate to fully embrace western values and social roles, to earn more freedom of action. Many fundamentalist organizations of *Wahhbi-salaphite* ideology, as Al-Quaeda and ISIS, eagerly endorse this position. This is the reason why they so many times make use of unsuspected residents, such as second and third generation immigrates, disguised through *taqiya*, to perform terroristic attacks inside the boundaries of Russia, Turkey or western countries, as USA, France, United Kingdom, Belgium, Germany, Spain or Italy. The ISIS-linked terrorists of Paris, Nice or Brussels were

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[48] A. Negri, "The Islamic State Analysed in Depth", *Limes, rivista italiana di geopolitica* – http://www.limesonline.com/en/the-islamic-state-analysed-in-depth (26 settembre 2014).

[49] Boko Aram in Hausa language means "the western teachings are forbidden".

[50] Al-Jazeera, *Scores Killed in Nigeria Clashes* – http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa (December 2011).

[51] Stanford University, *Mapping Militant Organizations, The Islamic State*, qtd. internet site.

[52] C. Tămaș, "The Arabic Term al-thawra in Islam. Modern political implications", in *PHSS Conference*, 4th Edition: Revolutions. The Archeology of Change, Iași, May 26-27 2017.

apparently normal people, according to the standards of *subjectivity*, behaving as ordinary students or workers, and instead committing many sins according to Muslim standards, like drinking beer or making sex. In any case, they were feeling pure warriors of Islam, adopting *taqiya*, in order to move absolutely undetected.

A second trait common to *Wahhbya* and all fundamentalist organizations is *ritualism* – in the sense of a mode of social behaviour consisting in a formal practice of religion, in which ritual elements become the more relevant ones, not the consequence, and the prerequisite of every substantial element. The sharing of these rites among the group are the main vehicle of perception of identity of its members. Social behaviours of Al-Quaeda and ISIS are always strongly ritualized, especially when they prepare acts of extreme violence, like attacks or public executions. The socio psychologist Clark Mc Cauley explains, when commenting the instructions contained in a manual of Al-Quaeda, that it is neither in hate, nor in religion itself that lays the strength of terrorists, but in the moments of ritualism, which make up the true inner matrix of their system of beliefs[53]. About the goals of rituals, the anthropologist Geertz explains that "rituals are useful to strengthen inner condition and motivations, and the general interpretations of the world and of life represented in mythic and religious narrations"[54]. Another significant purpose of rituals is underlined by the anthropologist Lévi-Strauss: to overcome anxiety in decisive and extreme moments, attempting to establish, through the repetition of gestures and expression of symbolic meanings, a sort of automatism and continuity of experience[55].

A third trait coming from *Waahbya* and carried to the extreme consequences by many fundamentalist organizations is the *disconfirmation of other's identity*. It is the substantial denial of the other, of the different, of the deviant who ignores or refuses to submit to the formal prescriptions of religion. It is a decisive step in the process of the neutralization of the victim: the target of the attack or of the execution is an "ignorant", "impure", "misbeliever", "infidel", "sinner", as such, dangerous and impossible to convert; so he/she is negative, irrelevant, or in any case not worth of any respect or consideration as a human being. His/her physical elimination becomes a necessity and a service both to God and to the community of true believers[56].

A last trait, functioning at a psychological level, typical of fundamentalist organizations practicing extreme violence, is the *double tie*. Murdering unarmed people, bystanders or civilians would be something not acceptable even according to *Qu'ran* and Islamic jurisprudence principles. For this reason, the fundamentalist organization uses to link the *acting-out* of brutal violence to the formal respect of ritual acts prescribed by sacred texts, technically concreting a *paradoxical injunction*. Clark Mc Cauley explains that in the manual of Al-Quaeda "there are repeated injunctions to recite specific invocations or devotion statements" and "the prayers are interpolated in any line of the manual" to injunctions of operational nature[57].

The mechanism of the *double tie* operates as follows:

– a relation between a *shayk-master*, leader of a group, and a *jihadist* is well established;

– the *shayk-master* gives to the *jihadist* an order which asserts something ("kill unarmed people!"), asserts something on the same assertion ("behave as a good Muslim!") and the two statements exclude each other (a good Muslim in normal conditions would never kill unarmed people); the injunction must be disobeyed to be obeyed;

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[53] C. McCauley, "Understanding the 9/11 perpetrators: crazy, lost in hate, or martyred?", in *History behind the Headlines*, Thomson Gale, Detroit, vol. 5, 2002, p. 274.

[54] C. Geertz, *Interpretazione di culture*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1987, p. 187.

[55] C. Lévy-Strauss, *L'uomo nudo*, Il Saggiatore, Milano, 1974, p. 608.

[56] S. Scarcella Prandstraller, *Sociologia dell'Islam...*, ed. cit., p. 122.

[57] C. McCauley, "Understanding the 9/11 perpetrators...", in *op. cit.*, p. 278.

– to make comments or *meta-communicate* on the order is strictly forbidden and the *jihadist* feels probably guilty for having had correct perceptions, but would be accused by all the group to be foul or evil in case of an insinuation of inconsistency;

– once the model is sprang into action, the behaviour will repeat, in a vicious circle, because the *shayk-master* becomes the only one capable to relieve the *jihadist* for his sense of guilt and confirm him to be rightful and in good faith. The effect of this situation is to create a *double tie* between the *shayk-master* and the *jihadist*, which has the effect to produce the *paradoxical behaviour* more times, and it will be this behaviour to *double tie* the two[58].

Very often a *paradoxical injunction* operates together with a mechanism of neutralization of the victims. It is the case of the militants of Boko Haram, where both the good reason for murder and the neutralization of the victim comes, for instance, when someone is not able to recite certain verses of *Qu'ran,* the only essential book according to the founders of the organization.

Conclusions

The Islamic fundamentalism is a very complex social phenomenon, whose study needs the active contribution of all social and human sciences in an interdisciplinary approach, from sociology, to anthropology, to psychology, as it was in the research groups of START Program at the University of Maryland in 2005-2008.

Sociology, by the approach of *dynamic sociology*, may bring an important contribution, through the interpretive *frame* of different *forms of psychological organization.*

This *frame* explains well how the Jihad of the Islamic fundamentalists of today-is not just a revolution to overthrow some governments and replace them with others, but a war against the idea of the modern state itself, the *acquisitive* society, and against the form of psychological organization which makes both possible: *subjectivity.*

This *frame* can also help to explain, at a *macro* level, the rise of the great geo-political novelty of our age: the *ascriptive quasi-state entities* (AQSE), opposed to the secular western style organization form of state, built around the principles of *subjectivity.*

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[58] *Cf.* P. Watzlawick, J. Beavin Helmick, D.D. Jackson, *Pragmatica della comunicazione umana*, Casa Editrice Astrolabio, Roma, 1997, pp. 202-204.

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