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DABIQ: THE ROLE OF DAESH'S JIHADIST MANIFESTO IN THE VIOLENT RADICALIZATION PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

The threat posed by the jihadist group, Daesh, is not just a military one, but more importantly an ideological one. Deciphering Dabiq- Daesh's programmatic manifesto, understanding the jihadist group ideological worldview and the alternative values it promotes, can help comprehend the attractiveness of the terrorist group and contribute to countering the violent Islamist radicalization phenomenon of young Europeans through the creation of an effective counter-narrative. This paper analyses the writings in Dabiq, presenting the terrorist group's main narratives: the religious and socio-psychological dimensions of the jihadist rhetoric. A great accent will be placed on exposing Daesh's tactics of deconstructing and redefining the cognitive frameworks of young vulnerable, disenchanting and frustrated individuals at times of personal crisis, when they are searching for an identity, for approval and validation, for meaning and purpose, or just for adventure and excitement.

KEYWORDS

- Dabiq
- Daesh
- Jihadist propaganda
- Violent radicalization
- Counter-narrative
- Identity crisis
- Significance quest

1. Introduction

Semiology, often referred to as semiotics, represents the science of studying signs and their meaning, the process of investigation and detection of latent or hidden meanings in the multitude of signs in reality. Semiotics is interested in how meanings are created and consolidated and how they are connected by the interplay of signs with the social constructed reality (Berger: 2005, p. 4).

In the context where “people create and change meanings through signs“ (Johansen: 2002, p. 5), the sign becomes an essential tool that helps to create and establish discriminations in reality. The analysis of signs such as texts, programmatic documents, propaganda magazines is important because it could decline the identity of certain entities and could unravel realities, intentions, ideologies/worldviews, it could understand possible implications and generate efficient counter-measures.

The war against Daesh represents a fight for winning the minds and hearts of those young Europeans, either second generation Muslims or European converts, who, for various reasons end up deciding to join the jihadist group, getting to the point where

they become willing or even eager to engage in cruel inhumane terrorist violence.

In order to react to the violent radicalization phenomenon of young Europeans who adhere to Daesh's jihadi worldview, I believe that a particular importance should be granted to a comprehensive analysis of Daesh's ideological manifesto – Dabiq. In its main programmatic document, we can identify the essential keys for understanding the terrorist jihadist group, this being a vital starting point for fighting against it. Only by deciphering and understanding its ideological precepts and narratives, its worldview and purposes, the identity and alternative values it proposes, we can understand the attractiveness of the terrorist group and build an effective counter-narrative.

The announcement made on June 29th 2014 by the jihadist group, self-proclaimed the Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL/ISIS), regarding the establishment of an Islamic caliphate in Syria and Iraq, represented an unprecedented event in the history of modern fundamentalist jihadist movements. The impressive advance of Daesh's jihadist militants, its military capabilities and the ability to conquer territories in Iraq and Syria, along with the terrible brutality directed against those defined as infidels, stunned the entire international community.

After declaring the establishment of the Islamic caliphate (*Khilafah*), the jihadist group launched a strong offensive strategic communication campaign in order to promote its ideological beliefs, using the media and publishing its first online propaganda magazine, Dabiq, in numerous languages, including English. So far, 15 numbers of Dabiq have been published, each containing up to 100 pages with reports, articles and high impact pictures, thematic design, innovative language of brutality in literary exposure, graphical portrayals of the violence of the jihadist group against those defined as enemies, elements designed to promote its Salafi ideology and attract new recruits.

The name of the magazine itself – Dabiq – has a religious symbolic importance. The jihadist group promoted its millennialist vision of the world by interpreting fragments from Hadith^[1] as well as from the Quran, presenting Dabiq as a village in northwestern Syria where a final great battle is supposed to take place – “*Al-Malhamah al-Kubra*” - between the forces of Islam and those whom Daesh defines as crusaders, a battle believed to bring with it the end of the world (Armageddon). Each number of Dabiq begins with a quote from the founder of Daesh, Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi: “the spark has been lit here in Iraq and its heat will continue to intensify - by Allah's permission - until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq” (Dabiq, Issue 1: 2014, pp. 2-3). Such initial statement is supposed to induce from the outset the idea of a bipolar world thrown into an acute crisis, a world where there is a strong conflict between two camps defined by Daesh as the forces of purity/Muslims and the evil forces/the West (Dabiq, Issue 7: 2015, pp. 54-66).

This paper will argue that the terrorist group Daesh has promoted its violent-Salafi ideology using some essential narratives: a strong Manichean worldview and the constant demonization of *the Significant Other*/the enemy (the West), a *superior cause* - portraying the possibility of individuals to become heroes who fight for regaining the

1 Hadith represents the record of the words, traditions or habits of the Prophet Muhammad, being a major source of religious law and moral guidance that cumulated with the Quran can offer a comprehensive understanding of the religion of Islam.

lost honor of the *Ummah*, the religious narrative of the compulsory debt of violent jihad and the socio-psychological narrative – promoting an *alternative social identity*.

An important part of this paper will approach the impact of Daesh's propaganda on the violent radicalization processes of some disenchanted and frustrated European young individuals, presenting the way the jihadist group has manipulated essential needs for belonging, for personal significance, for adventure or even revenge. Daesh has constructed through language and rhetoric a new type of social identity which it has promoted to young disenchanted individuals as an alternative and in direct opposition to all Western liberal values. Daesh's proposed alternative identity was portrayed by jihadist leaders as a superior and distinct identity – as the only one that could offer meaning and purpose in a changing world. This is where Daesh's attractiveness comes from and here can we identify the basic elements for creating an efficient counter-narrative.

2. Dabiq – Jihadist Narratives

2.1 Manichean Worldview – Demonizing the Enemy

Daesh as an Islamist fundamentalist group portrays the world in a strong Manichean manner (Almond et al: 1995, pp. 399-424) as being divided into "light and darkness, those outside the group being contaminated, sinners, damned, while those inside the group are pure" (Almond et al: 1995, pp. 399-424). In order to justify its existence and attract support, the terrorist group needs to shape an enemy, a significant threatening *Other* of which is dependent on its existence – the *Outgroup* -to which it opposes and against which can present itself as an alternative.

From the jihadist group's perspective, as it emerges from Dabiq, the world is divided into two opposing realms that exist in a state of constant conflict: "the camp of Islam and faith and the camp of kufr² (disbelief) and hypocrisy; the camp of the Muslims and the mujahidin and the camp of the jews, the crusaders, their allies, and with them the rest of the nations and religions of kufr, all being led by America and Russia and being mobilized by the jews" (Dabiq, Issue 1: 2014, p. 10).

In Dabiq, the jihadist group promoted a *us versus them* rhetoric through which heavily demonized the West, portrayed as the far enemy (Al-Zawahiri: 2006, p. 201) - the modern Crusaders, the infidels who occupied and colonized Muslim lands, subjugating Muslims. Daesh also criticizes local Muslim regimes, blaming what they call *the near enemies* as *apostates* for not implementing and following Daesh's rigid and radical interpretation of Sharia. The dehumanization and demonization of those who are not Sunni or Muslims loyal to Daesh can be identified in Dabiq through the use of strong socio-cultural terms and expressions such as: "*takefir*", the practice of excommunication that occurs when a Muslim declares another one as a "*Kafir/Kufir*" (unfaithful) in order to legitimize the sinless killing of Muslims, "*safawi*" (derogatory term for Shia), *murtaddin* (apostates- Muslims who abandon Islam). Through these strong ideological statements, Daesh seeks to emphasize the importance of its selective and literal interpretation of the Quran and to denigrate all other beliefs not only as illegitimate or insignificant but also to designate their followers as direct targets of military jihad.

2 Kafir/Kufr is a highly derogatory Arabic term used to refer to non-Muslims, meaning "the unbeliever", "the disbeliever", "infidel" – the people that don't believe in Islam and the rule of Sharia.

Daesh defined its self-image as a group by opposing the image of the West which it constantly portrayed as an existential threat. *Dabiq 15 Magazine* was symbolically titled “*Destroy the Cross*”, the jihadists trying to discredit Christianity by questioning the authenticity of the Bible, the concept of the Trinity, the history of the crucifixion and the concept of the divinity of Jesus (Azman: 2016, p. 4). In this last number of *Dabiq*, there is a chapter titled “*Why we hate you and why we fight you*” in which it explains the aversion and total opposition of the jihadist group against the West determined, according to them, by the Western rejection of Islam, by the secular and liberal nature of Western civilization, by what they portray as intense Western hatred and crimes against Muslims, the invasion of Muslim lands, the manner in which Westerners treat “the Qur`an as a book of chanting and recitation rather than a book of governance, legislation and enforcement” (*Dabiq*, Issue 1: 2014, p. 24).

Daesh`s jihadists put a particular accent on shaping the image of a serious state of ignorance – “*jahiliyyah*”³ – among Western Muslims and on underlining the numerous problems with which in their opinion, Sunni Muslims are confronted in Western societies: “the Muslim is a stranger amongst Christians and liberals; he is a stranger amongst fornicators and sodomites; he is a stranger amongst drunkards and druggies; he is a stranger in his faith and deeds, as his sincerity and submission is towards Allah alone, whereas the kuffar of the West worship and obey clergy, legislatures, media and both their animalistic and deviant desires” (*Dabiq*, Issue 12: 2015, pp. 29-30). In *Dabiq*, from the point of view of values and principles, the West is constantly defined as strongly immoral and inferior to Daesh, because in the jihadist group`s perception, the West has legalized “marijuana, bestiality, transgenderism, sodomy, pornography, feminism and other evils” (*Dabiq*, Issue 15: 2016, p. 21).

These ideological concepts of Daesh have sometimes found resonance among certain frustrated young Europeans, either second generation Muslims or European converts. Passing through different identity, personal crisis, being in an uncertain stage of their personal significance quest, some young individuals chose to express their criticism and frustrations against Western societies, by embracing the violent Salafi ideology of Daesh. Some young people decided to join Daesh because they were manipulated into believing that only within the jihadist group they could share their experiences of alienation and find relief.

In *Dabiq*, the jihadist group defines itself as the single alternative against the decay of humanity, the savior of morality, describing itself as an unseen entity in the history of humanity, special, different: “in every book authored by the historians, the muwahhid would not find mention of any state similar to the Islamic State, particularly as it exists following the revival under the wing of Amirul-Mu`minin Abu Bakr” (*Dabiq*, Issue 3: 2014, p. 5).

2.2 Saving the Ummah – The so-called “Islamic State”

According to Daesh, all elements of Western modern world have humiliated Muslims:

3 An Islamic concept that translates as “*Age of Ignorance*” and refers to the period of time and state of affairs in which the Arabs lived before the revelation of Islam by the Prophet Mohammad in the VII century BC. Radical Islamists use this term for criticizing secular modernity, justifying armed struggle against secular regimes as a jihad against jahiliyyah;

“the modern day slavery of employment, work hours, wages, is one that leaves the Muslim in a constant feeling of subjugation to a kafir master; he does not live the might and honor that every Muslim should live and experience” (Dabiq, Issue 3: 2014, p. 29). The first number of Dabiq opens with a material about the so-called Caliphate proclaimed by Daesh which is described as a decisive factor for restoring Ummah’s (Transnational Muslim Community) pride, force and rights (Dabiq, Issue 1: 2014, p. 4).

According to Daesh, the governmental collapse of regional Islamic authorities allowed mujahideen to create the Islamic state under the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, event appreciated as “monumental in the history of the Ummah” (Dabiq, Issue 1: 2014, p. 38), this being portrayed as the first state in modern times set up exclusively by the mujahidin in the heart of the Muslim world (Dabiq, Issue 1: 2014, p. 38). Daesh’s leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi has described the establishment of the new caliphate as a new era that will allow Muslims across the world to live without fear, humiliation, “as a master, being revered, with his head raised high and his dignity preserved; anyone who dares to offend a Muslim will be disciplined, any hand that reaches out to harm him will be cut off” (Dabiq, Issue 1: 2014, p. 8).

According to Dabiq, the jihadist group perceives and presents itself as the only divinely legitimated actor capable of stopping what it defines as the subjugation of Muslims by Western forces. Daesh promotes the idea that under its governance, all Muslims will “have a loud thundering statement and heavy boots; the world will hear and understand the meaning of terrorism; our boots will trample the idol of nationalism, destroy the idol of democracy, and uncover its deviant nature” (Dabiq, Issue 1: 2014, p. 8). Daesh promises in Dabiq to restore the dignity of all Muslims, shaping the group’s self-image as the only entity able to reduce the uncertainty and fears of Muslims and lead the modern revival of Islam towards the non-Muslim world, bringing back the glorious past of the Islamic Ummah (Qutb: 2006, p. 249): “oh, soldiers of the Islamic state, today we are upon the doorstep for a new era, a turning point for the map of the region, rather the world; today we witness the end of the lie called western civilization and the rise of the Islamic giant” (Dabiq, Issue 4: 2014, p. 4; Dabiq, Issue 5: 2014, p. 3).

In all this context, in order to attract new recruits, in Dabiq there were praised the victories of the terrorist group from 2014 against the Iraqi security forces, the liberation of certain provinces/districts, an example being the occupation of Mosul. All these actions of the jihadist group were presented in Dabiq’s propaganda as new victories in the construction of the Islamic State and the expansion of its territory, “the demolition of the Sykes-Picot borders, thus opening the way between Iraq and Sham and much more” (Dabiq, Issue 1: 2014, p. 13).

Another important aspect highlighted in Dabiq is the desire of Daesh’s leaders to induce the idea that the new Islamic Caliphate can be equated with a real state. For this propaganda purpose, they have listed various actions taken in the occupied areas: military actions, economic activities (Dabiq, Issue 6: 2014, pp. 18-19), infrastructure development, running social welfare programs (Dabiq, Issue 2: 2014 p. 38), health programs (Dabiq, Issue 9: 2015, pp. 24-26), beating own coin (Dabiq, Issue 6: 2014, p. 59), all portrayed in a frame of “total attention and respect” for their “citizens”: “in the midst of a raging war with multiple fronts and numerous enemies, life goes on

in the Islamic State; the soldiers of Allah do not liberate a village, town or city, only to abandon its residents and ignore their needs” (Dabiq, Issue 4: 2014, p. 27). In the speeches exposed in Dabiq, Daesh’s leaders claimed through their propaganda that inside the Islamic caliphate everyone’s rights will be respected in a climate of full security and stability on the basis of “flourishing relations between the Islamic State and its citizens” (Dabiq, Issue 1: 2014, p. 13).

In Dabiq, jihadists launched a call for *hijrah*⁴¹ (*emigration*) towards the so-called Islamic Caliphate, action described as an individual religious obligation of all Muslims (Dabiq, Issue 1: 2014, p. 11). In the article, “*From hypocrisy to apostasy*”, Daesh postulated the obligation of Muslims to choose between the religion of those whom jihadists define as unbelievers or the immediate realization of the *hijrah* (Dabiq, Issue 2: 2014, pp. 18-19) to the Islamic state (Dabiq, Issue 7: 2015). The jihadist group tried through this kind of rethoric to induce the idea of a vital need that Muslims, but also citizens of Western states who feel alienated by their societies, to leave *dar al-Kufr* (the house of sinners) and go to *dar al-Islam* (house of Islam) (Dabiq, Issue 2: 2014, p. 3). For those who are unable to accomplish *hijrah*, Daesh asked them to “carry Jihad behind enemy lines” against “crusader nations” and their citizens, thus encouraging its followers to fulfill terrorist attacks in Western states.

2.3 The Legitimacy of Violent Jihad

In Dabiq, Daesh’s leaders selectively choose and literally interpret certain verses of the Quran (especially the *verse of the sword*), stories from Hadith and examples from Islamic history, in the process of enhancing their attractiveness and recruiting new followers. The appeal to traditional Islamic jurisprudence presented in Dabiq is used for giving credibility to the arguments of the jihadist group, in the process of creating the appearance of divine authorization and legitimacy for their violent terrorist acts. In Dabiq, jihadist leaders tried to promote and induce the idea of accepting Daesh’s founder, Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi and the main leader of the group, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as descendants of the prophet, both political and religious leaders, again trying to create a divine bond that would allow defining Daesh as the sole chosen entity by Allah to free the Muslim world.

Daesh’s spokesperson, Muhammad al Adnani strengthened this rhetoric and urged all Muslims to use violent military actions, to wage jihad in the name of the superior cause of protecting the Ummah: “the era of lamenting and moaning has gone and the dawn of honor has emerged anew; the sun of jihad has risen; triumph looms on the horizon” (Dabiq, Issue 1: 2014, p. 9).

Daesh manipulates the meaning of the religious concept of *jihad* to justify its violent actions and to establish its legitimacy. In Dabiq, it is repeatedly claimed that jihad, interpreted as an armed, violent struggle is necessary and compulsory to be undertaken against those deemed infidels, in order to achieve the ultimate fulfillment of the restoration of Allah’s reign: “to succeed, a “vanguard” of “true Muslims” has to build itself up mentally and physically (militarily) to be able to launch an all-out war

4 Hijrah represents the migration or the journey of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina, made in order to escape persecution. This moment (622) is considered the beginning of the Muslim era.

on the kuffar” (Nesser: 2004, p. 22). According to Daesh’s jihadist propaganda, Allah created Islam not as a religion of peace, but of the sword (Dabiq, Issue 7: 2015, p. 20) to be used for defeating the “antichrist”, the infidels (Dabiq, Issue 7: 2015, pp. 23-24).

Daesh promotes a distorted interpretation of Islam, a mystical, apocalyptic view on reality, propagating terrorist indiscriminate violence: “Muslims should get out of their house, find a crusader and kill him without delay, by any means... we promise you (crusaders) by Allah’s permission that this campaign will be your final campaign; we will conquer your Rome, break your crosses and enslave your women; the war will only end with the black flag of Tawhid⁵ fluttering over Constantinople and Rome” (Dabiq, Issue 4: 2014, p. 5; Dabiq, Issue 15: 2016, p. 7).

The millennialist vision on history is an essential characteristic of fundamentalist movements in general and, in this case, of Daesh’s Islamist fundamentalism, the terrorist group waiting for Allah to strengthen his reign over the world in a future time, some even considering that “can hasten the arrival of this glorious event by fighting, literally or spiritually, on God’s behalf” (Herriot: 2009, p. 2). The image of a mythical, final battle with apocalyptic nuances (AIVD: 2005, p. 33) strongly promoted through Daesh’s propaganda, “motivates and inspires the faithful and provides a structure and significance to their lives” (Herriot, 2009, p. 2).

Daesh promoted in Dabiq martyrdom as the ultimate proof of respect for Allah: “to be killed is a victory; this is where the secret lies; you fight a people who can never be defeated” (Dabiq, Issue 4: 2014, p. 7). The call to jihad includes missions of martyrdom, suicide missions – the activity of defending Islam is presented as a religious debt that can make certain individuals eligible for God’s generosity: “do not think that those killed in the name of God are dead; They live and are cared for by their God; God will not deny them the reward of their faith” (Quran: 2015). For some, the myth of being rewarded in the garden of Paradise and becoming a martyr is strongly motivating, some European citizens embracing Daesh’s radical ideology in order to project the blame for their personal sufferings on the mainstream society – joining jihad offers them a false perceived escape from “the personal sense of grievance and humiliation” (Bizina, Gray: 2014, p. 73).

2.4 Significance Quest Narrative – The False Jihadist Identity Alternative

It is vital to understand that the violent radicalization phenomenon in Europe should not be perceived as a radicalization of Islam (idea promoted by those who believe in the civilizational conflict thesis, in the incompatibility of Islam with Christianity), but rather that we are confronted, as Roy Olivier said, with the *Islamization of Radicalism* (Roy: 2015, pp. 4-5). The violent radicalization phenomenon has falsely been attributed exclusively to Muslim immigrants in Western societies. In Europe we can talk about the radicalization of some second generation Muslims but also about the violent radicalization of converts, of “*homegrown*” Europeans – here we talk not about a revolt of Islam or of Muslims but of a revolt of the youth in a general framework of a generational revolt against their parents values and their societies.

European *homegrown* terrorists are a sociological phenomenon in which aspects

5 Represents the symbol of monotheism in Islam, declaring the oneness and uniqueness of God as creator.

related to identity, membership/belonging and relationships within small social universes are essential in the process of the radical transformation of an individual's beliefs and values. The most vulnerable individuals, potential recruits for Daesh, are those who are in a stage of their life looking for an identity, while seeking approval and validation.

Young Europeans perceptions of discriminating, unequal, unfair societies can contribute to their disenfranchisement and search for identity alternatives. An important change intervenes in the process of personal transformation when young Europeans, second generation Muslims, or converts, feeling an acute lack of belonging to the society in which they were born and perceiving themselves as constantly discriminated and without a cause in life, come to reflect upon these powerful inner crises, ending up questioning their identity. Quintan Wiktorowicz underlined that the road to Islamic-violent radicalization that begins with reconsidering various alternative ideologies often involves a search for identity at a time of crisis (Wiktorowicz: 2004, p. 20). Faced with experiences incongruent with their own understanding system and perceptions, in order to solve the internal conflict, young individuals may enter the pathway towards transforming their cognitive framework.

Daesh tried to build its self-image as a jihadist group with a clear structure, strong leadership, distinctively, unambiguously defined and rigorously shared rules of behavior and a powerful exclusionist ideology. Such an approach was thought by the jihadist leaders as a way of shaping the perception of its moral, spiritual superiority, of its psychological preeminence in front of the West.

Young Europeans who enter the radicalization pathway are strongly confused, insecure, looking for “meaning that Islamist groups, like Daesh, offer in the form of ideology and superior narrative” (Institute for Strategic Dialogue: 2012, p. 3). Joining Daesh is possible to have been perceived by many young individuals as essential for obtaining a long-awaited personal restructuring framework, “a substitute identity and a vehicle for regaining the right to self-definition and dignity” (Daugaard-Nielsen: 2010, p. 801).

Daesh uses emotional expressions that skillfully manipulate perceptions and feelings and create a fake image of a fraternity and unity in the self-proclaimed caliphate, this proving to be an extremely useful recruitment tactic. In Return of the Caliphate, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi stressed that the new Islamic caliphate in Iraq and Syria belongs to the transnational Muslim community – Ummah - a state „where the Arab and non-Arab, the white man and the black man, the easterner and the westerner are all brothers; it is a Khilafah that gathered Caucasian, Indian, Chinese, Shami, Iraqi, Yemeni, Egyptian, Maghribi, American, French, German, Australian – their blood mixed and became one, under a single flag and goal, enjoying this blessing of faithful brotherhood” (Dabiq, Issue 1: 2014, p. 7). Daesh tried to promote the idea of belonging to a community, of acquiring feelings of camaraderie, brotherhood in what is portrayed as a state for all Muslims and non-Muslims who adhere to the ideology of the jihadist group. The jihadist group promised individuals in various phases of an identity crisis that embracing Daesh's radical interpretation of Islam will diminish and even eliminate the uncertainties and fears felt as long as they will have “trust in Allah's promise” (Dabiq, Issue 1: 2014, p. 4).

Individuals in the process of radicalization end up embracing Daesh's jihadist Islamist worldview because they are manipulated, brainwashed into perceiving the group as the only entity capable of elevating their self-esteem, self-confidence and of supporting their need for regaining or obtaining personal significance, respect and meaning (Bartlett, Miller: 2012, p. 17).

Others joined Daesh because they perceived the group as an entity that could help with their desires for revenge, for expressing their personal frustrations (Roy: 2016), some for what they perceived as a superior goal of repairing imagined injustices - saving the *Ummah*, some for love, friendship and camaraderie, some for the enthusiasm of the anti-establishment heroic fight, for trying new adventures (Precht: 2007, p. 7), for the adrenaline or the excitement of activism (Nesser: 2006, p. 329).

These individuals develop strong narcissistic fantasies that become internal representations of their selves as heroes, omnipotent, grandiose and violent warriors, worthy in their mind of the respect and admiration of their significant peers.

The dynamic of total cancellation of moral guarantees is accomplished by jihadist groups through semantics and rhetoric (Kruglanski et.al: 2014, p. 77). Semantics represents the use of a certain language that allows: "delegitimizing the targets of violence and categorizing them in ways that preclude them from the standards of normative and acceptable behavior" (Bandura: 1999, p. 193-209). Through rhetoric, violent radical groups determine that violence is necessary against a specific target. Daesh's violent fundamentalism determines certain individuals to overcome any inhibitions, to morally disengage in killing innocent people, redefining the killer behavior and justifying indiscriminate terrorist violence against those portrayed as enemies/ unbelievers as legitimate and even moral (Meloy, Yakeley: 2014, p. 352), removing any perceived personal responsibility.

Part of the Europeans who decide to adhere to Daesh's violent jihadist ideology chose this radical worldview because it allows the direct demonization of a significant Other, which can be blamed for all the perceived injustices. Images of cruelty and brutality so vividly transmitted on the Internet are sought by Daesh's leaders as a way of offering young individuals a taste of the experience of being on the war field, trying to attract young alienated individuals to join and "benefit" from the authentic experience of being part of a "superior cause".

According to Roy Olivier, the systematic association with death is one of the main keys of understanding radicalization: "the nihilist dimension is central; what seduces and fascinates is the idea of pure revolt; violence is not a means, it is a goal" (Roy: 2017).

Roy Olivier believes that these young nihilists have become conscious of their newly acquired omnipotence that gives them the will to kill and fascinates them with their own death "the violence to which they adhere is a modern violence; they kill coldly and tranquilly; nihilism and pride are profoundly connected; some turn their frustration into narcissistic vengeance" (Roy: 2016). Marc Sageman talked in 2008 about the concept of "jihadi cool" trying to present the attraction of jihadism amongst young people, combining Western popular culture with jihadist ideology in a bigger framework of building a new identity as heroes or simply having a violent, full of adrenaline, near-death experience (Picart: 2015, pp. 362-363).

3. Conclusions

The terrorist group Daesh has built and promoted through Dabiq an extremely rigorous, multi-layered propaganda strategy. Daesh's jihadists promote a dichotomous worldview, constantly demonizing the West portrayed as the threatening *Other*, the danger against they invite all Muslims and believers to unite. Simultaneously it presents itself as the only restorer of the dignity of Muslims and the savior of all individuals that do not/ can not integrate in Western societies. For attracting new recruits, the group has emphasized in Dabiq the narrative of violent armed jihad against those it has defined as infidels, trying through the use of various verses and by manipulating Islamic teachings to present their indiscriminate use of violence as divinely sanctioned. The approach promoted by Daesh in Dabiq has the ultimate goal of modifying, deconstructing and redefining or even totally replacing the understanding systems and cognitive frameworks of young individuals found in different identity crisis, the terrorist group providing a false source of psychological security. Daesh aptly identified the audience's needs of belonging to a group, of positive personal significance, and of following a "*bigger cause*" in life. Thus, it has portrayed itself as the only entity that can deliver feelings of belonging, or the promise of vengeance, or adventurous real life war experience.

Daesh's brutal terrorist actions must be fought, but there can be no compelling counter-narrative until the jihadist group's multi-faceted narrative is understood. A critical and comprehensive understanding of the complexity of the jihadist group's propaganda is essential for creating an efficient multi-dimensional and fully integrated counter-narrative for undermining Daesh's aura of legitimacy and in the end diminishing its attractiveness among young vulnerable individuals.

A concerted responsible effort is required for framing the population's perception of Daesh more objectively, by illustrating the weakness and falsehood of its main narratives. A strong and efficient counter-narrative to the utopian propaganda of Daesh must be a result of a collective effort that should include community and civil society voices, governmental strategic policy actions, mass media outlets and contributions from legitimate voices in Muslim communities willing to counter Daesh's jihadist propaganda.

Correcting the false information disseminated by Daesh is vital. Daesh's narrative relies on its ability to project an image of strength, momentum, but if the jihadist group cannot maintain this image, the exposure of the use of inhumane unjustified brutality can become the beginning of its end. Exposing the tragic reality of life under Daesh and hearing stories from disillusioned fighters can undermine the jihadist group's perceived legitimacy and thus discourage would-be radicals from supporting the violent radical group or adhering to what it portrays as an alternative identity.

Elaborating a counter-narrative for fighting the jihadist precepts promoted by Daesh should uphold the values and principles liberal democracies are built on. Avoiding divisions and fractures within societies and promoting social cohesion and unity, understanding, respect and solidarity based on a common cause, are key values in the fight against violent radicalization. Simultaneously, it is essential to address the negative perceptions that feed violent extremism and that lead young vulnerable

individuals on the violent radicalization path: exclusion, discrimination, racism, lack of social solidarity and social integration.

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