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Research Note

Neo-*Jihadist* Prosumers and Al Qaeda Single Narrative: The Case Study of Giuliano Delnevo

MATTEO VERGANI

Monash University
GTReC (Global Terrorism Research Centre)
Department of Politics
School of Social Sciences
Victoria, Australia

Scholars in the field of terrorism and violent extremism often refer to the so-called Al Qaeda single narrative. This article suggests that the Internet challenges the existence of a "single narrative," by arguing that neo-jihadist prosumers may reinterpret Al Qaeda's narrative and create hybrid symbols and identities. The article discusses the case study of an Italian neo-jihadist allegedly killed in Syria, Giuliano Delnevo, presenting research on his YouTube and Facebook production. Delnevo's narrative, which emerges from the diverse messages circulating on the Internet, recasts the Al Qaeda narrative by hybridizing it with other cultural backgrounds and political symbols.

Scholars often use the concept of Al Qaeda single narrative for referring to symbols and ideological frameworks used by the network, its affiliates, militants, supporters, and sympathizers to describe the "clash of civilizations" between the West and Islam in their own view.[1] Kepel and Milelli, for example, state that Al Qaeda propaganda casts an "infinite repetition of a single narrative: the arrival of the Prophet, the rise of Islam, the struggles to extend its dominion, and its expansion throughout the world."[2] Schmidt describes Al Qaeda single narrative as a "unifying framework of explanation that provides vulnerable Muslims with an emotionally satisfying story to make sense of the world in which they live and their role in it."[3] Specific traits of the single narrative are the individual obligation of violent *jihad* for all Muslims, the Manichean worldview (expressed in terms of the clash of civilizations), the absence of distinction between civilian and military targets, and the legitimization of martyrdom as a resistance practice. According to Holtmann, another aspect of Al Qaeda's single narrative is the "far enemy-near enemy" frame, according to which Islam is under

attack at the same time by "corrupted Muslim governments and their collaborators" (the near enemy) and "the zionized Neo-Crusader alliance" (the far enemy).[4] Digital media has become the key tool for the diffusion and propagation of the "single narrative" through the voices of grassroots militants. Ranstorp, for example, states that: "In this virtual battlefield it is clear the militants have mastery of mechanisms to project this 'single narrative' in a way that carries enduring resonance and with a logic that thousands of Muslims finds absolutely compelling."[5]

According to Schmid the "single narrative" plays a key role in preparing the path for Muslim recruits toward terrorism: a path that has been called radicalization, which has been object of numerous scholarships, notably after 9/11.[6]

Al Qaeda single narrative's messages are part of what Lentini defines as neo-*jihadism*: a multifaceted religious and political phenomenon, unique to the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, which consists of a victimization narrative (which depicts Muslims as an oppressed and stigmatized community, and advocates violence as the only means to end it), a movement comprised of Sunni militants who use selectively literal interpretations of Islamic texts to justify violence and who reappropriate Shi'ite martyrdom practices; a subculture that celebrates and shares violent actions through digital media and global narratives; a counterculture that is antagonistic toward the mainstream Islam, the cultures and politics of Muslim-majority states and other countries where Muslims established diaspora communities live.[7] As Lentini points out, neo-*jihadism* is situated at the end of an ideal religious and ideological continuum that departs from Islamists such as Qutb, Farraj, and Azzam (who advocated violence through insurrection against agents of the state, but not terrorism), but at the same time it constitutes a significant departure from their writings. Osama bin Laden and Abu Musab al-Suri reinforced the differences with the traditional *jihadism* of their predecessors in targeting civilians, in the geographical scope (not only local and nationalistic but also global), and in the organization and means of propaganda (self-started cells, also activated through digital media).[8] Lentini's concept of neo-*jihadism* is wider than Al Qaeda single narrative, which is linked to a specific organization; but it rather transcends Al Qaeda, and identifies the organization as part of a broader global movement that draws on this narrative to justify its use of violence, and encourages others to do so.

This article will not test the effects of Al Qaeda single narrative on general audiences or on potential terrorist recruits. Moreover, this article will not challenge the absolute idea of the existence of Al Qaeda single narrative: there are recurring communication patterns that prove the reality of a coherent worldview, which is used to understand the world and to promote action, support, and mobilization. Rather, this article argues that the Internet, notably social media and the so-called web 2.0, challenges the existence of a 'single narrative', because grassroots neo-*jihadist* prosumers[9] may reinterpret Al Qaeda's narrative and create (and propagate) new hybrid meanings, and may inspire people who share the same symbols and the same search for a new identity. This article answers the following question: is Al Qaeda single narrative always interpreted and re-casted consistently with the original message by neo-*jihadist* prosumers in the digital media? The single case study of an Italian neo-*jihadist*, Giuliano Delnevo, shows that his production reflects Al Qaeda single narrative by hybridizing it with other cultural backgrounds and political symbols. This work has methodological limitations: it is in fact not possible to establish a new theory based on a single case study. More simply, this article aims at suggesting new hypotheses for further and future research. Before presenting the case study, the relevant literature about the role of Internet and social media in the field of terrorism and violent extremism will be discussed, focusing on the concept of grassroots narratives.

Neo-*Jihadism,* the Internet, and Grassroots Narratives

Significant scholarships addressed the issue of terrorism, violent extremism and radicalization in the Internet,[10] focusing not only on propaganda and recruitment but also on activities such as cyber-attacks, fund-raising, exchanging of operative information and money laundering.[11] One of the early most complete reports of the so-called electronic *jihad* from a neojihadist point of view (which comprises all the activities that Al Qaeda supporters are encouraged to conduct in the digital media) is Mohammad Bin Ahmad As-Sālim's book titled *39 Ways to Serve and Participate in Jihâd*, first appeared online in 2003.[12] Among the different neo-*jihadist* activities that can be developed in and through the Internet, propaganda (in its various forms) is the most accessible and achievable by grassroots activists without any particular technological skill. For example, the author of the "39 ways" suggests militants to register to forums, to post messages strategically in order to keep *jihadist* topics always at the top of the forum, and to support *jihadist* views. This type of molecular grassroots propaganda is particularly appropriate for the networked communication structure of the Internet, notably the social media, where messages are effectively communicated through grassroots opinion leaders and prosumers to their networks, instead of a central broadcasting transmitter as in the traditional telecommunication schema. Scholars demonstrated that Al Qaeda network and affiliates have been at the vanguard in the use of digital media, and their Internet presence has been more sophisticated than government websites, particularly when it comes to technologies allowing interaction and feedback.[13]

The Internet alone is hardly the only radicalization and recruitment environment: rather, online experiences are usually combined with offline actions and social ties.[14] Yet according to academic literature, the so-called participatory culture and participatory architecture of the Internet (which enables users to easily connect, produce, and distribute content) can potentially create new opportunities for the propagation of terrorist messages, recruitment, and new radicalization pathways for groups, cells, and lonely wolves.[15] Physical proximity between the recruiter and the recruits is no longer necessary: a radical cleric in an overseas mosque can build relations with Western residents, becoming a "virtual spiritual sanctioner" in committing violent acts, as what happened in the infamous case of Major Nidal Hasan and al-Awlaki.[16] Moreover, the Internet allows a vast availability of information: anyone can disseminate unfiltered news and traditional propaganda materials (such as videotapes, books, and leaflets) that, previously, had been difficult (and sometimes expensive) to share.[17] Furthermore, so-called communities of practice of like-minded people can arise and potentially connect people across large distances.[18] Within virtual communities people create groups in which social dynamics may accelerate radicalization, in a specific way that is different from the social groups in the offline environment. For example, the experimentation of different selves and the role-play of new identities (projecting traits people aspire but do not possess) is easier and unique online, because of the "gamification" of cyberspace (involving not only social networks and forums but also multiplayers, role-playing games, and virtual life simulators like Second Life),[19] and because of the (potential and perceived) anonymity of the cyberspace. The Internet not only allows a significant sociocultural experience but it can also let violent radical activists believe that they can hide identities and avoid responsibilities for their virtual actions, and create the effect of "online disinhibition" "which leads groups becoming more hostile and polarized."[20]

According to the literature, digital narratives (notably disseminated through YouTube videos and gruesome images) play an important role in the radicalization process, particularly by creating a strong sense of identification with oppressed and victimized

communities.[21] The concept of narrative has been fruitful in understanding the power of terrorist and violent extremist propaganda: since 2007 a number of scholars and official reports dealing with terrorism, violent extremism and radicalization have been started to refer to the narrative being developed by radical Islamic actors in order to increase support and recruits.[22] A narrative is generally intended as a "spoken or written account of connected events," which consists in culturally embedded and consistent stories that serve to gain consensus and mobilize support.[23] A narrative is also a frame of understanding, which—if accepted by people belonging to the potential constituency of a violent extremist group—can create identification, support, and mobilization among diverse audiences.[24]

This article focuses on grassroots activists' narratives circulating in the Internet, as opposed to narratives communicated by higher-level political actors such as organizations, political groups and leaders. Relevant scholarships addressed the relations between top-down and grassroots messages in the digital media, notably in the field of electoral campaigns and social movements. Researches in this area suggest a contradictory and complex set of power relations between grassroots and top-down actors and processes in the digital media.[25] There is no single or easy explanation to the participation of online grassroots actors, to their etiology, scope, and aims, as well as to the ambiguous relations between networked activism and both mainstream powers and autonomous countercultures.[26] While some authors agree that the Internet helped to level traditional power relations in the communication process by democratizing the postmodern public sphere,[27] others are far more critical and state that the access to global information flows is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few nodes of the network (such as media outlets, multinational corporations and information hubs).[28] In the field of terrorism studies there is still the need of substantial empirical research about the relations between the propaganda of groups such as Al Qaeda and the grassroots interpretation and production of neo-*jihadist* prosumers. This article aims at filling this gap, although further research is needed in order to understand the phenomenon in its complexity.

Case Study and Research Methods

Giuliano Delnevo is a 23-year-old Italian convert to Islam who died on 12 June 2013 in al-Qasayr, Syria, while fighting with a group of Chechen Islamic extremists against Asad forces.[29] Delnevo's story has become popular in the Italian public sphere because he has been the first Italian convert to Islam who decided to join a neo-*jihadist* group abroad, dying as a martyr in a foreign country. Delnevo's extensive use of the Internet (not only as a consumer, but also as a producer of neo-*jihadist* material) allows a significant availability of material to analyze. Moreover, as this article will discuss, the case is consistent with other studies about the culture of European converts and neo-*jihadist*, which suggests that it is not a unique case.

The following pages study Delnevo's narrative by analyzing both secondary data (such as online newspapers articles and interviews with friends and relatives, which tell anecdotes and stories about him) and primary data (Delnevo's production available on the Internet, notably his Facebook and YouTube pages, which express the neo-*jihadist* ideology in his own words), including author's interviews with friends and high school classmates. Both Delnevo's messages and mainstream stories about him in fact contribute to create a digital narrative, available for Internet users who look for his story, which in turn can be commented, manipulated, and incorporated in other stories in a potentially infinite process. Media studies outline that there is no distinction in the users' (and prosumers') experience between the two realms of grassroots and corporate mainstream production:

digital narratives recast, reframe and remix messages and symbols to create an original story as medley, pastiche, patchwork, mash-up. As Gibson pointed out "remix is the very nature of digital."[30] This is the reason why this article took the methodological stance to focus not only on Delnevo's production but also on the stories about him that circulate in the Internet.

Delnevo and Al Qaeda Single Narrative

All violent extremist narratives—including Al Qaeda single narrative—call for disruption, destruction, and overturn of the political, social, and cultural norms,[31] and divide the world in Good and Evil: in the middle, there is nothing.[32] These traits clearly appear in Delnevo's messages: for example, in his first YouTube video, published on 29 April 2012, Delnevo calls on the Italian government (and notably Italian Prime Minister Mario Monti) to withdraw soldiers from Afghanistan.[33] In the video Delnevo tells that his duty as a believer is to "prevent the Evil and to ask for the Good." Moreover, he argues that the Italian democracy is "false and hypocrite," that the economic crisis has been generated by the war against Muslim countries, and that the Italian cities are nothing more than "conglomerates of brothels and gaming rooms." By describing Italian society in this manner, Delnevo not only communicates that the political institutions are not legitimate, but also that the Western society of *kuffar* (unbelievers) is decadent and should be radically reformed. Islam on the other side represents the absolute Good for him. In a video published on 24 September 2012, Delnevo accuses the *kuffar* for the invasion of Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and Syria, considering all of them the results of the same "war against Islam"[34] and recasting the "clash of civilizations" in his own words. Consistently with the single narrative, Delnevo also threatens the authors of the drawings of the Prophet Muhammad, wishing them to die, and calling them criminals who insulted the Prophet. Within the single narrative the extremists' enemies are always violently attacked by using various motives (qualifications, past associations, alleged values, personality, looks, mental health) as a diversion from the issues under consideration.[35] The depiction of the enemy as a de-humanized evil in the public communication, as explained by Bandura's concept of moral disengagement, tends to displace responsibility, disregard or minimize the effects of violent radicals' actions.[36] By the same token, in the single narrative the Hero is called to avenge the suffering of a community, through redemption and sacrifice (as a cathartic immolation).[37] This message strongly emerges not in Delnevo's production, but rather in the interviews to Delnevo's family and friends: in journalistic reportages Delnevo appears as the main character of his own narrative. As a friend said in an interview published in a mainstream newspaper, "Giuliano was a fighter who sacrificed his life for defending an oppressed and tormented population from a dictator."[38] Also, Delnevo incarnates the narrative of sacrifice because he has been reported to "die for a friend": as his father told a journalist, "Giuliano died to save a Somali friend who has been shot by the enemies; he tried to bring the friend into a shelter, and was shot himself as well."[39] This is again a typical trait of Al Qaeda single narrative: militants present themselves as a close and selfless group, where brotherhood gives as much meaning to their actions as the political aim does.[40] Martyrs who die in the battlefield know that they will be praised and honored as heroes after their death. Delnevo, as reported by his friend to an online newspaper, was used to say that "in Syria martyrs smell nice."[41]

Within Al Qaeda single narrative, violent extremists fight because there is a higher call to be answered.[42] The fact that the calling comes from a superior authority, it often brings as a consequence that a supernatural intervention (in the form of a miraculous superpower)

will help the militants' side.[43] Consistent with this trait, when Delnevo was fighting in Syria, he wrote to a friend "here miracles happen: the airplanes fall down with prayers."[44] Also, within the single narrative violent radicals manifest anger against individuals with similar life experiences, and religious, ideological or social origins: they are deemed to be incorrectly or inadequately answering the call, which should be clearly seen given the same background of the violent extremists. Similarly, some of the most angry words of Delnevo's production were for the "fake Muslims": in a YouTube video he threatened an Imam who did not call for *jihad* in Somalia for helping Al-Shabaab's *mujahideen*.[45] In another video he told a Facebook group called "Young Moroccans" who published "indecent pictures" that they "have to stop with this shit" and that they "risk their life . . . in the afterlife."[46]

Last but not least, Delnevo strongly linked his radical narrative with neo-*jihadist* symbols and behaviors: he published videos about religious teachings citing extremist Islamic literature such as for example Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Salafi Islamic scholar of the XVIII Century[47]; he was reported to be proud for "having niqabbed" his wife[48] and for asking a pastry shop in Genova for removing sweets made with alcohol from the window[49]; he has been in touch with the Islamist global network Sharia4 for being trained into the "street dawa"[50]; he showed in his Facebook page[51] a number of neo-*jihadist* symbols such as the KavkazCenter logo (the Chechen website calling for the Caucasian Emirate), the photos of Abu Hamza al-Masri (the Egyptian Imam charged of supporting Al Qaeda), and Abdullah Yusuf Azzam (the Palestinian Islamic scholar who preached in favor of the *jihad* to help the Afghan *mujahideen* against the Soviet invaders), and many others, notably Chechen fighters.[52]

Heterodoxies in Delnevo's Narrative

As yet, the article presented Delnevo's narrative as consistent with Al Qaeda single narrative. However, Delnevo also casted other symbols within his narrative, which come from different cultural backgrounds, and transformed the neo-*jihadist* narrative in something different: an original hybrid story.

First, not only neo-*jihadist* figures but also leftist symbols circulate in Delnevo's pantheon. The Facebook page of Delnevo shows, in the timeline, that he used a graffiti of Osama bin Laden and Che Guevara as a cover photo for his profile (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Delnevo's cover photo.

The picture shows that both the symbolic figures are included in Delnevo's pantheon, despite the sharp ideological discrepancies between Guevara's atheism and bin Laden religious ideology (and despite Guevara's overt condemn of terrorism and killing civilians). The graffiti displays in the background a bald eagle, symbol of the United States, over a skyline that is perhaps representative of a city like New York. This can signify how Che Guevara and bin Laden are unified through a common enemy: the United States. Moreover, Guevara appears again in Delnevo's narrative when his mother has been reported by mainstream journalists to tell that his son, the day before leaving Italy for Syria, watched a movie about the Argentinian revolutionary.[53] Leftist symbols appears again in Delnevo's narrative when the journalists of an Italian mainstream newspaper compare Delnevo's mother with the mother of Carlo Giuliani (and indirectly compare the two sons). Giuliani was the protester who was killed by the Carabinieri in Genova in 2001 during the mass demonstrations against the G8.[54]

Second, Delnevo's digital narrative include items that are part of the "rebel" imagery of Italian teenagers, but contradicts what is (or what should be) allowed by Al Qaeda single narrative. Although Delnevo harshly criticized in a YouTube video three young Moroccan guys who posted some pictures of them together with girls in t-shirt,[55] he "liked" on Facebook movies such as *Trainspotting*, *La Banda della Magliana*, *Vallanzaska*, *Mala Leche*, and *Scarface*, which are far more pornographic (from a neo-*jihadist* point of view) than the Moroccan Facebook page and which tell non-religious criminals and drug addicts as heroes, openly showing sex scenes. Even more interestingly, he "liked" these movies no more than a year before the publishing of the YouTube video against the Moroccan guys (Delnevo's Facebook page has been created on October 2011). Delnevo's production incarnates a contradictory fascination for the Western, European and Italian cultural motives of criminality and adventure as a form of youth rebellion from the society, which (despite the apparent ideological discrepancies) can even constitute a source of alternative inspiration to political radicalization for young European converts and second generation migrants.[56] The appeal of a non-ordinary life, the existential seduction of terrorism, the excitement of violence (even in its most extreme forms, such as the "Columbine syndrome"), danger, risk, can be all listed among the emotional factors which contribute to lead people to terrorism.[57] As Cottee and Hayward argue, there is an emotional, sensual attraction with doing violence, and there is an excitement in taking on an insurgent identity and the way of life associated with it.[58] These are not only drivers for activities related to terrorism, but also to criminal gangs, which share with them the danger, the risk, the adventure, the pleasure of the forbidden.[59] This is obviously not to say that all the people who watch these movies become neo-*jihadists*; rather, this shows how Delnevo's narrative is far from being an orthodox single narrative, but it rather mixes symbols coming from different and contradictory cultural backgrounds.

Third, Delnevo ended his first video about the Afghan war by asking the Prime Minister Mario Monti to withdraw Italian soldiers from Afghanistan in order to restore the "old glory of Italian country."[60] This statement is significant because it recalls the frequent narrative of the Golden Age of Islam that should be restored, often promoted by neo-*jihadist* groups. However, Delnevo casted it in the Italian context: his Golden Age is not the Muslim one, but rather a non-specified Italian period of glory of the country in the past. The neo-*jihadist* narrative is again heterodox, and mixed with Italian nationalist motives.

Discussion

Further researches should assess if (and to what extent) these three heterodoxies in Delnevo's narrative may become a driver to radicalization for other Italian people who experience a similar personal and political path as the one followed by Delnevo. According to sociological literature, narratives are in fact able to mobilize people when they resonate both with familiar narratives and with individual circumstances.[61] Moreover, as communication theories teach, people more easily identify with fictional characters when they recognize them as familiar because they are part of their culture, and/or because they lived similar personal experiences in the past. The identification happens when audiences adopt the character's goals, and comprehend that "plot events reference to these goals, and experiences the feelings that result from the interaction of these goals and the events that take place," finally adopting the whole character's identity.[62] To fully comprehend the plot and identify into the other's life it is necessary to perceive the story as familiar. This is confirmed also by Polletta, when she argues that "Events in a story seem coherent, true and normatively salient because they conform to stories we have heard before. Narratives depend on plot, and plot depends on previous plots, on a common, conventional, stock of plots."[63]

The hybrid patterns of Delnevo's narrative such as the recasting of far-leftist antimperialism into Islamic terms, the fascination for adventure and rebellion driven from popular culture, and the use of nationalistic Italian motives, may inspire people who share the same symbols and the same search for a new identity. Again, further researches should scientifically test this hypothesis with a rigorous research methodology.

Delnevo's identity, as the one of many converts, is a hybrid identity. As it emerges from journalistic reportages and from interviews with his high-school friends, he started his radicalization path as a "seeker"[64] in search of a new identity. Delnevo had family issues and relational problems during his teenage years before conversion. The conversion to Islam provided him a new identity that he fully embraced, finding in the ummah meaningful relations and aspirations. Yet, he did not completely abandon his Italian identity: this study demonstrates that Delnevo simultaneously belonged to two cultures that often clash in the mainstream public sphere: the Islamic one (in its neo-*jihadist* version) and the Western, European, Italian one. This clash of cultures and imageries has been witnessed in mainstream articles in multiple forms: the contrasts between Delnevo's long beard and Islamic dress and his father's Italian style,[65] or the atmosphere of the streets of Genova and the Middle Eastern landscapes where Delnevo died.[66] This tension is also present in the comments to Delnevo's YouTube videos, where most of the people label him either as a "terrorist" or as "dumb," while a few users call him a "hero" who died for high ideals. Delnevo's strategy of resistance to this widespread conflict of cultures (and culture of conflict) has been hybridity: a condition experienced by other social groups, such as for example the second generation of migrants, notably on the Internet.[67]

The Internet allowed Delnevo new forms of experimentation of the identity. This is clearly visible in his Facebook page, where Delnevo posted an image saying: "Hello, my name is Ibrahim." Delnevo did not use his first name, Giuliano: he used the name he chose after the conversion, Ibrahim, which symbolizes his search for a new identity. An identity that was easier to experiment with on the Internet, where Giuliano-Ibrahim also found a wife belonging to its new imagined "community of belonging": a Moroccan girl coming from a traditional family of shepherds. This process of experimentation of a new identity is consistent with other studies on the use of the Internet by neo-*jihadist* converts: for example, the case of Colleen LaRose and her construction of a corporeal and visual virtual alter-ego ("JihadJane") is a significant and documented example of a creation of a new

social identity during the radicalization process which eventually gave rise to a violent plot to kill Lars Vilks.[68] These findings are also consistent with studies about the use of the Internet by diaspora communities, which outline the increasing availability of connections (and information) and the possibilities of the anonymity, which can gave a sense of self renewal, and allowed excogitating new identities.[69]

Hybridity (as opposed to essentialism and authenticity) is a strategy used by vernacular subjectivities in the digital realm to deconstruct the boundaries of given-for-granted social classifications and norms. Hybridity also allows one to imagine "the other" differently,[70] especially through the diffusion, manipulation, and discussion of cultural products on the Internet, which contribute to the creation, re-creation, and hybridization of social identities along the borders between mainstream and grassroots production. Delnevo's search for a synthesis of the two conflicting Western and Islamic cultures emerges in his Facebook and YouTube production, and in the participation with Facebook groups of converts coming from Latin culture, such as the LADO group (Latin American Dawah Organization). Delnevo's hybridity has been casted in the narrative described in this article, where Al Qaeda single narrative and heterodox hybrid symbols were remixed together for constructing the borders between the self and the others. It is a narrative that remains available on the Internet in the form of the grassroots traces that Delnevo's short life left behind (such as the YouTube videos and Facebook page), in the comments that a large number of users still continue to post on his messages, and in the form of the mainstream discourses about him, which populated the pages of Italian online newspapers for about a week.

Final Remarks: Limitations and Future Research Directions

This article suggests, through the analysis of Delnevo's case, that the Internet, notably the social media and the so-called Web 2.0, challenges the existence of a "single narrative." Delnevo's narrative, which emerges from the diverse messages circulating on the Internet, originally reflects Al Qaeda narrative by hybridizing it with other cultural backgrounds and political symbols. Delnevo's case is not unique: rather, it seems to be consistent with other European researches. As Roy argues, one of the keys to understand the fascination of Al Qaeda in the EU is its consistency with a far-leftist anti-imperialism into Islamic terms, targeting U.S. globalization and its symbols.[71] Also, Khosrokhavar pointed out that "Islamic terrorism partially feeds on the exhaustion of leftist ideologies which mobilised part of the youth in Europe and which is not anymore convincing to the eyes of people in this part of the world."[72] This does not suggest that the European leftist political movements and organization are a favorite recruitment area for neo-*jihadist* groups. Rather, this means that European neo-*jihadist* narratives, notably for converts, embed a symbolic heritage of the 1960s and 1970s leftist movements. By the same token, this article also has clear limitations: a single case study does not allow one to assess to what extent neo-*jihadist* prosumers challenge the single narrative, and to fully understand the differences among the EU, United States, and other countries. Further research should analyze and compare different cases in order to elaborate more general conclusions.

Last but not least, this article also provides relevant insights for the debate about how violent extremists' narratives should be countered, notably in the digital media. As Schmid argues, "modern Muslims in Western diasporas are arguably the best social carriers to counter Al Qaeda's single narrative" because they "incorporate the best elements of both worlds—Islam and the West—and create a new meaningful and credible narrative."[73] This article suggests that grassroots opinion leaders such as modern Muslims may produce a hybrid narrative, personal and culturally situated, even contradictory and not always

consistent with official institutional counternarratives. Yet, this is probably the only way to incorporate civil actors into the effort, stimulating the "production of plural oppositions, or heterogeneous counter-narrative."[74] As Holtmann encouraged: "First listen to the intended audience and seek dialogue with those deemed receptive to Al Qaeda's Single narrative!"[75]

This is the aim of this article: to listen to the narrative of a European neo-*jihadist*, in order to understand it. Further empirical researches will have to assess what is the effect and the impact of narratives such as Delnevo's one on Western audiences, notably European and (in this case) Italian.

Notes

1. Michael Jacobson, "Learning Counter-Narrative Lessons from Cases of Terrorist Dropouts," in Erik Akerboom, ed., *Countering Violent Extremist Narratives* (The Hague: National Coordinator for Counterterrorism (NCTb), 2010); Alex P. Schmid, "The Importance of Countering Al-Qaeda's 'Single Narrative'," ibid.

2. Gilles Kepel and Jean-Pierre Milelli, *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words* (Harvard: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2008), p. 6.

3. Schmid, "The Importance of Countering Al-Qaeda's 'Single Narrative'," 47.

4. Philipp Holtmann, "Countering Al-Qaeda's Single Narrative," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 7 (2) (2013), p. 145.

5. Magnus Ranstorp, "The Virtual Sanctuary of Al-Qaeda and Terrorism in the Age of Globalization," in Johan Eriksson and Giampiero Giacomello, eds., *International Relations and Security in the Digital Age* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), p. 31.

6. Schmid, "The Importance of Countering Al-Qaeda's 'Single Narrative'," p. 48.

7. Pete Lentini, *Neojihadism: Towards a New Understanding of Terrorism and Extremism?* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013).

8. Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of Al Qaeda Strategist Abu Mus'ab Al-Suri* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 2008).

9. Prosumers are Internet users who not only consume contents but also produce original messages: they are the users who share, manipulate, and build up contents and dynamic relationships, participate, sometimes even generating so-called communities of practice: a social space where the individuals participate, socialize, and define social norms. Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice. Learning, Meaning and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: NYU Press, 2006).

10. Peter R. Neumann, "Countering Online Radicalization in America," in National Security Program, ed., *Homeland Security Project* (Washington, DC: Bipartisan Policy Center, 2012); Peter R. Neumann and Tim Stevens, "Countering Online Radicalization: A Strategy for Action," International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, ed. (London: Kings College, 2009).

11. Notable examples are the 3,000 cyber-attacks against Danish websites related to the publication of the cartoons satirizing Prophet Muhammad in 2006, or the attack to Internet Haganah's website because of its efforts to close down terrorist-related websites by reporting them to service providers. Thomas J. Holt and Bernadette Hlubik Schell, *Corporate Hacking and Technology-Driven Crime: Social Dynamics and Implications* (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2010).

12. George Kassimeris and John Buckley, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Modern Warfare* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

13. Jialun Qin et al., "Analyzing Terror Campaigns on the Internet: Technical Sophistication, Content Richness, and Web Interactivity," *Journal of International Journal of Human-Computer Studies* 65, no. 1 (2007).

14. "Countering Online Radicalization in America"; Neumann and Stevens, "Countering Online Radicalization: A Strategy for Action."

15. ISD, "Radicalisation: The Role of the Internet," in *Working Paper of the PPN*, Policy Planners Network, ed. (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2011); Catherine A. Theohary and

John Rollins, "Terrorist Use of the Internet: Information Operations in Cyberspace," in Congressional Research Service, ed.,*CRS Report for Congress. Prepared for Members and Committees of Congress* (Washington, DC: US Library of Congress, 2011); Gabriel Weimann, "Lone Wolves in Cyberspace," *Journal of Terrorism Research* 3(2) (2012).

16. United States Army Major Nidal Malik Hasan is responsible for the 5 November 2009 Fort Hood shooting, where he killed 13 and injured over 30 people. Hasan exchanged about 20 e-mails with al-Awlaki between December 2008 and June 2009. Anwar al-Awlaki is an American and Yemeni imam who specialized in the communication strategy of Al Qaeda in the digital media. Neumann, "Countering Online Radicalization in America"; al-Awlaki was described as a "virtual spiritual sanctioner" in the U.S. Senate Homeland Security Committee's report of the shooting; Joseph I. Lieberman and Susan M. Collins, "A Ticking Time Bomb: Counterterrorism Lessons from the U.S. Government's Failure to Prevent the Fort Hood Attack," U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, ed. (Washington, DC: U.S. Senate, 2011).

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54. Another significant (but more peripheral) parallel that recalls the tradition of the global left is the one between the Chechen group in which Delnevo fought in Syria and the International Brigades that fought for the Second Spanish Republic during the Spanish Civil War. The comparison has been made by Delnevo's mother during an interview to an online newspaper; Calandri, "'Tre Mesi Di Odissea a Un Passo Dal Fronte. Volevo Salvare Mio Figlio, Ma Ho Fallito.'"

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65. Persiano and Valli, "Una Vita Nei Caruggi Dalle Scuole Alle Moschee."

66. Persiano, "'Mio Figlio È Morto Da Eroe E Oggi Sono Orgoglioso Di Lui.'"

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