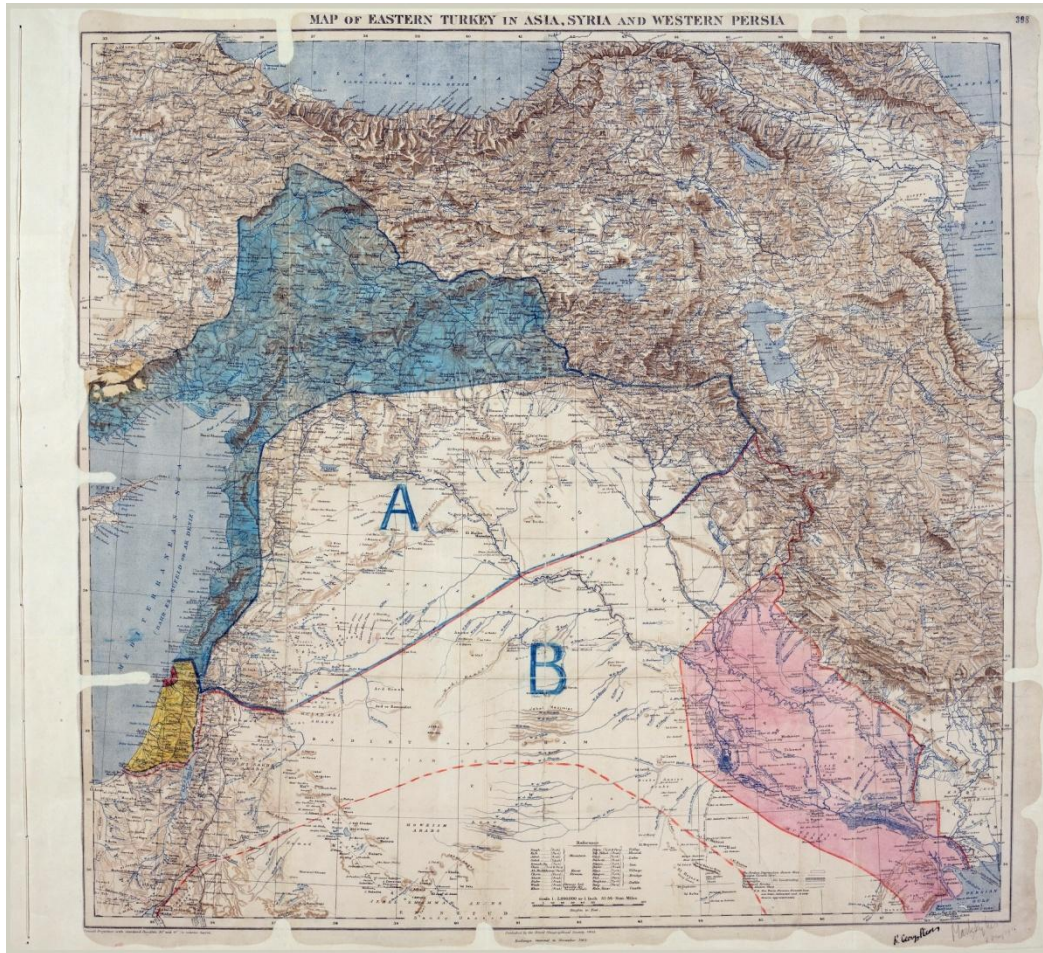# Humiliation and Political Violence: A Different Perspective on Counterterrorism

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MA in International Relations (International Studies)

August 2016

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To Giuseppe Vittorio Lecchi, a silent presence.

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1. INTRODUCTION

'The […] culture of humiliation underlies the attraction of many Muslims to terrorist violence. Without the culture of humiliation, how could fundamentalists manage to push a young educated Muslim Briton to kill fellow Britons in a suicide attack on the London tube? How could young Germans converted to Islam plot murderous attacks on their own country? These self-destructive instincts are brought to life by a combination of psychological, cultural, and socioeconomic conditions that lead from humiliation to violence' (*Moïsi*, 2009, p.76).

In opposition to the theory of the "clash of civilisations" put forward by Samuel Huntington (1996), the French political scientist Dominique Moïsi has developed his own approach to the world of international relations, in order to explain the growing complexity of the international system. In his work *The Geopolitics of Emotion: How Cultures of Fear, Humiliation, and Hope are Reshaping the World*, Moïsi divides the world into three big "emotional areas". In each area a certain emotion prevails on the others: US and Europe are characterised by fear (of external threats, economic collapse, etc.), East Asia by hope (given its economic growth), and finally the Middle East by humiliation (Moïsi, 2009). His analysis shows that an understanding of where this humiliation originates from, the way it interacts with political power, and the mechanisms it exacerbates is fundamental in order to comprehend the complexity of some dynamics crossing today's world. In particular, my thesis focuses on the correlation between humiliation and terrorism, in an attempt to answer the following research question: <u>to what extent can humiliation be considered a valid explanation for political violence in the Middle East?</u>

Political violence in the form of jihadist terrorism is a very complex phenomenon which cannot be comprehended only by looking at the external surface; and humiliation is a deep-acting force rooted in the historical background of the Middle East as a community as much as in the individual's personal history. The research therefore examines the correlation between humiliation and political violence on both a universal and individual level. After having established this link, the main goal of the present paper is to investigate some possible political actions aiming at a prevention of an increase in political violence by alleviating the root causes of humiliation.

The analysis develops as follows: the first part defines the state of the art in the field by reviewing the most recent literature on the topic, and by defining the gap in the literature. After that, and

after defining the theoretical background and the methodological approach, the paper delves into the analysis of the main topic.

The first chapter deals with the historical humiliation of the Middle East, starting from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the Sykes-Picot agreement, and the establishment of the state of Israel. Two elements are stressed in this part: the foreign imposition of the current regional order, and the ineptitude and corruption of the leaders of these countries. The combination of these two factors led to – in certain contexts – the rise of transnational jihadism as a possible solution, increasing the instability of the area and political violence.

The second chapter, after giving a brief sociological explanation of humiliation, applies this paradigm in order to understand the logic behind the counterterrorism strategy. Moreover, this section posits itself to analyse whether this strategy has been effective and how it can be improved, especially by focusing on the needs of the individuals involved.

The third chapter, in the form of a case-study, offers an insight into the spiral of humiliation originating in Guantanamo, which acts on the detainees as much as on the US. The humiliation brought about by torture in Guantanamo and, in general, by a merely military response to the terrorist threat, produces further radicalisation of the detainees and of the community they are part of. The stories of two former Guantanamo detainees who returned to the battlefield after their release are paradigmatic in illustrating this process.

Finally, in the conclusion, some closing remarks in the form of policy recommendations are given.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The research on terrorism and counterterrorism strategies can be approached through multiple points of view, disciplines, theories and methodologies. In particular, they can be analysed on two different levels, individual and international. While attempting to answer the research question these two perspectives will be taken into account in order to show how they are, in fact, deeply intertwined. Notwithstanding all the different approaches to the issue, there is a field which is often neglected in the study of terrorism and of international relations in general: the field of emotions. This research will take the work of Dominique Moïsi as a starting point, and particularly the analysis of the Middle East carried out through the lens of a particular emotion: humiliation (2009, p. 56-89). Humiliation is also the *leitmotiv* of this research, and the main aim of the thesis is to show how it can be introduced as a possible pattern to understanding the origins of terrorism on both an individual and an international level. More generally, the research is based on the idea that understanding the real roots of the grievances underlying jihadist terrorism is fundamental in order to individuate possible effective counterterrorism strategies.

Many authors have claimed that the role of emotions in politics is often underestimated (e.g. Crawford, 2000; Saurette, 2007). Therefore a very rich literature dealing with emotions and in particular the concept of humiliation of the Middle East on an international level has not been found. However, after 9/11 and the declaration of the *War on Terror*, there has been a rise in the literature questioning the role of the US in the current world order and the effectiveness of the policies to counter terrorism put into practice (Johnson, 2001; Johnson, 2004). The focus of the first part of the research will not be the US reaction to 9/11. Instead, it will focus on the effect of Western policies on the Middle East, starting from colonial times to the most recent events, in order to identify the causes of the increased feeling of humiliation. As already mentioned, from an international and historical point of view it is necessary to go back to colonialism and to the fall of the Ottoman Empire; as claimed by some authors, these events have contributed to the feeling of loss, and therefore ongoing humiliation, due to the fact that the current international, regional and national order has been artificially constructed by Western powers (Fattah and Fierke, 2009). Moreover, placing peoples with a variety of different religions, cultural backgrounds and tribal and ethnical identities together in the same country was a fragile process that produced crises of identity for the lack of authority, brought instability to the region and also brought a general sense of frustration among people (Esposito & Mogahed, 2007; Esposito & Mogahed, 2007). Authors that explore the historical background of the region generally draw analogous conclusions in

connecting these historical processes with the cause of jihadist terrorism, trying to go beyond the usual "American interpretations" of the Middle East (Hunt, 2002). In doing this, a typical case taken as a paradigm for the whole region is that of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict in Gaza, showing how the experience of humiliation provides a fertile ground for recruitment to terrorist organizations (Lacey, 2011). Besides this, other authors have been focusing on the similar case of post-Saddam Iraq (Fontan, 2006).

Moving to the individual level, other studies intertwine this "historical humiliation" with the individual psychology, trying to delineate a possible link, including also the role of religion (De Zulueta, 2006; Rice, 2009; Jones, 2008). The field of psychology is often advocated as explaining the individual motives for committing terrorism acts, as depicted by the extensive work of Martha Crenshaw (1981). Moreover there has been a recent increase in studies on the mechanisms of humiliation. Some of them are focused mostly on the psychological and criminological perspective (Goldsmith, 2005; Winlow and Hall, 2009; Hartling et al., 2013), others expand it to the field of international relations, putting forward possible counterterrorism strategies (Moghaddam, 2005; Speckhard, 2007).

The role of psychology is also taken into account by many scholars who focus on radicalisation in prison (Cuthbertson, 2004; Hannah et al., 2008; Mulcahy et al., 2013; Dugas and Kruglanski, 2014; Jones, 2014; Spearlt, 2014), arguing that Western prisons are actually a fertile ground for terrorist recruitment, since prisoners might come into contact with jihadism in a context of isolation. Moreover, following the recent terrorist attacks in the West, especially in European cities, and given the background of many of the attackers, authors have been carrying out case-studies analysing causes and consequences of such acts and linking them to the situation of the prisons. In particular, copious amount of literature has been found focusing on: the US (Useem and Clayton, 2009; Ballas, 2010), the UK (Spalek and el-Hassan, 2007; O'Duffy, 2008; Warnes and Hannah, 2008; Awan, 2013), France (Khosrokhavar, 2013), Spain (Warnes and Hannah, 2008; Trujillo et al., 2009) and Italy (Rhazzali, 2011). Finally, as pointed out by Akin Awan (2007) more and more people undergo the process of radicalisation through the Internet, by looking for first hand sources. These include al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's (AQAP) official magazine *Inspire*, or directly through the words of the leaders of such terrorist organizations (e.g. Bin Laden's *Messages to the World*, or al-Zawahiri's *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*). Especially in Bin Laden's statements, the theme of humiliation is a recurring one, referring both to the "historical humiliation" of Islam and the Middle East and to the present humiliation experienced by Muslim people in a variety of contexts.

In particular, Bin Laden makes reference to the *War on Terror*, and to specific events such as the Afghanistan and Iraq invasion, or even to more specific situations and episodes such as Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib prison. When dealing with these two cases the literature have generally been focusing mostly on the legal aspect, arguing whether such conditions should exist and what kind of treatment terrorists should be subjected to (Decker, 2006; Mokhtari, 2006; Benbrika, 2008). More generally, the creation of Guantanamo has revived the debate on torture and on its use in the context of the *War on Terror* (Danchev, 2006; Strange, 2006; Wattad, 2008; Honigsberg, 2009; McClintock, 2009). As already mentioned, given their controversial nature, there is a copious amount of literature on the legitimacy of Guantanamo (Worthington, 2007; Khan, 2008; Denbeaux et al., 2011) and on the events at Abu Ghraib (Philpott, 2005; Laustsen and Ugilt, 2012).

This research will look beyond the general debate on radicalisation and try to fill the gap in the literature by drawing a correlation between the international and individual level according to the feeling of humiliation. As the literature review shows, the two paradigms are often kept separated. However, the main argument of the analysis is that deeper knowledge of the two concepts is in fact needed in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the reasons behind the existence of jihadist terrorist organisations and behind the individual choice to become a terrorist. By juxtaposing the two processes, the research intends to show how the two different levels are mutually reinforcing each other. Therefore these two points cannot be left out of consideration in a truly complete analysis as well as in the formulation of possible counterterrorism strategies, intended here as strategies to prevent terrorism, and not only to counter it. The thesis aims to dealing with possible counterterrorism prevention strategies, by focusing on the human side of the coin, putting forward a general sustainable view of security (Hartling et al., 2013). At the same time, this thesis is intended to promote a more prominent role for emotion as a fundamental force in International Relations.

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. POSTCOLONIAL THEORY

Postcolonial theory will be used as the main theoretical lens for carrying out the analysis. By keeping the postcolonial paradigm in the background, this paper aims to engage with an approach that goes beyond 'a static, ahistorical definition of the state based on exclusively European values' (Hill, 2005, p.139). In particular, in the first chapter the role played by historical events even far away in time will be given central importance, since they represent deep rooted dynamics still active today. Moreover, postcolonialism allows to go beyond the usual "us" against "them" rhetoric too often applied in these cases, following the logic of the "Western rationalism" opposed to the "Muslim irrationalism". According to Edward Said: '[…] Muslims today react only because it is historically and perhaps genetically, determined that they should do so; what they react to are not policies or actions […]. What they are fighting on behalf of is an irrational hatred of the secular present which […] is 'ours' and ours alone. […] 'They' are as doomed to rage and irrationalism as 'we' are to the enjoyment of our rationalism and cultural supremacy' (2008, p.33).

Postcolonial theory allows to go beyond these mechanisms because it:

- questions the centrality of Europe as the only legitimate source of history and of the international order;
- questions Eurocentrism as the universal frame for principles and for the reflection and reproduction of power relations;
- does not replicate these criticised power relations by claiming their superiority;
- is sensitive and attentive to the role of knowledge and of history.

The research applies the postcolonial paradigm, firstly, by looking at the historical events that have contributed to fuelling the feeling of humiliation of the region, from the point of view of those who have experienced, and often been victims, of such events. According to these principles, the historical section will highlight how the colonial legacy and foreign interference have contributed to create deep vulnerabilities, which have left these countries unable to function properly. The Sykes-Picot agreement, the establishment of Israel and the ineptitude of the local leaders backed by Western powers, are only few of the factors that contributed to the development of this feeling of humiliation, inadequacy, and above all lack of self-confidence. Moreover, the analysis is enriched by the voices of individuals involved in jihadist terrorism. For instance, Osama bin Laden's statements, which are a source of inspiration for members of al-

Qaeda, will be taken into account to demonstrate the importance of the rhetoric of humiliation. In addition, the report of two former detainees of al-Qaeda about their reasons for joining and subsequently rejoining the *jihad* will give a different perspective on issues that often are analysed only through a Western-centric lens.

One last point should be made about the terminology and definitions employed. Despite applying the postcolonial logic and, therefore, opposing the "us" vs. "them" rhetoric, some generalisations have to be made in order to simplify the description. As a result, the oft-used terms "Middle East" and "Arab world" refer to the Middle Eastern Arab and Muslim people – living in Middle Eastern countries or abroad – as a community but not as a whole. In particular, the assumptions made in the paper apply only to some part of the population and to some contexts in which, due to existing or perceived inequalities, the rhetoric of humiliation finds a fertile ground to develop.

3.2. THE METHOD OF CASE-STUDY

When dealing with theoretical concepts such as humiliation, and applying them to a historical background, quantitative methods are difficult to employ and they require a more extensive analysis, which is not possible in this context. However, in order to have a relevant research question and substantial results, such concepts need to be linked to the real world. As a consequence, the case-study method seems to be the most suitable. In spite of that, the case-study method has its own pitfalls and weaknesses which are encapsulated, for example, in the small number of cases taken into account and in the selection bias, which do not allow for broad generalisations. Nonetheless, this method allows one to focus on details, thus providing a deeper understanding of complex causal relations, which render the research unique. As stated by Klotz, referring to the method of case-study: 'No correlation will offer anything as compelling in terms of causal inference' (2009, p.58). Indeed, this method allows to look at the causal correlations within or between specific cases and to trace a process that is useful in theory-testing, and resulting in a particularly detailed description, which would be impossible with any other method. Thus, here lies the uniqueness and peculiarity of a case-study based research. In this thesis the case of Guantanamo is taken as a paradigm for showing the mechanisms underlying the logic of humiliation, and the process leading to the spiral of violence is analysed step-by-step.

Moreover, while a small number of cases does not allow broad generalisations, a larger number of cases results in a quantitative research, which does not apply to the goals of this study. As already mentioned, this thesis intends to focus on the human side of political violence by analysing the

dynamics of humiliation. This approach would not be possible by employing a large-n case-study since the human-oriented perspective would be lost. In addition this method plays an important role in conceptualising abstract notions and in linking the theoretical world to reality. In the present research the single case of Guantanamo – chosen also for its being very current – allows to make this correlation, by offering a "practical" perspective on humiliation. The main aims of the thesis will be pursued through the case-study, which permits to draw a link between the universal and individual level of analysis, by looking at personal histories of individual detainees.

In the third chapter of the paper, the case of the humiliation brought about by the detention in Guantanamo is analysed by looking at two specific sub-cases of former detainees who have returned to the battlefield immediately after their release. The two cases taken into account are relevant to the goals of the research since they show the ineffectiveness of the counterterrorism measures so far undertaken by the US. Given the secrecy and lack of information often surrounding what happens in Guantanamo and about the destiny of the detainees, they enrich the research by offering a first-hand insight on the issue. On the other hand, the first and second chapters offer the set-up for the case-study not only by dealing with the historical motives behind the perceived humiliation, but also with today's humiliation experienced especially with the counterterrorism measures enforced after 9/11. The two cases show how the feelings of humiliation are articulated in real life, and how starting from a general, universal level they influence the life of an individual.

4. HISTORICAL HUMILIATION

4.1. INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the outcomes of humiliation in the current world and its correlation with political violence carried out in the name of Islam, it is necessary to look at the historical roots of this widespread feeling. First of all, the concept of humiliation has to be defined. According to Moïsi: '[h]umiliation is impotence, an emotion that stems above all from the feeling that you are no longer in control of your life either collectively, as a people, a nation, or a religious community, or individually, as a single person. Humiliation peaks when you are convinced that the Other has intruded into the private realm of your own life and made you utterly dependent. Humiliation encapsulates a sense of dispossession toward the present and even more so toward the future, a future in utter contrast with an idealized, glorified past, a future in which your political, economic, social, cultural conditions are dictated by the Other' (2009, p.56-57). This definition is particularly relevant because it underlines the similarities between the concept of humiliation on an individual level and on an international/historical basis. The last point, referred to the comparison between the glorious past and the decadence of the present is specifically relevant for the aims of this section, which will try to depict the historical processes and events that have contributed to enhancing the current feeling of humiliation.

4.2. HUMILIATION IN THE IMPOSED ORDER: FROM SYKES-PICOT TO THE SIX DAYS WAR

As often pointed out by different scholars, the Middle East and Europe have always had a sort of complementary relation: the time of major flourishing of the Middle East corresponded to the darkest period of the Middle Age in Europe (Shyrock, 2011; Ali, 2016). On the other hand, the fifteen century marked the beginning of the decline of the Middle East, and the world's political, economic and cultural focus moved to Europe, in the phase of Enlightenment and of scientific and technological discovery (Ali, 2016, p.6)
In addition, this shift, which started with the initial decline of the Ottoman Empire in favour of the European powers from the sixteenth century, advanced steadily and only occasionally interrupted. As a result, by the end of the nineteenth century, almost the entire Islamic Middle East had fallen under the European colonial rule (Ali, 2016, p.6). The end of the Ottoman Empire was in fact the crucial point and the culmination of this process started centuries before. The Ottoman Empire was, at that time, a peculiar one since it enclosed in itself many different peoples who were never

forced to integrate culturally; this characteristic was therefore easily exploited by the colonial powers when the Empire started to be on the edge of collapse (Ahmad, 1984, p.18). The Sublime Porte was eventually a 'casualty of the First World War' (Fulton, 1984, p.157), but its partition had been already defined in 1916 in the Sykes-Picot agreement between France and Britain. This secret agreement can be considered the first instance of international humiliation, since these ethnically delicate areas were artificially and unilaterally divided and put under the "protection" of the two colonial powers. As a result, part of today's instability in the region can be traced back to this deal (Fattah & Fierke, 2009, p.75). Sykes-Picot as a turning point in the Middle East history is also recurrent in the jihadist rhetoric; for example in 2003 Bin Laden stated: '[…] [O]ur wounds have yet to heal from the Crusader wars of the last century against the Islamic world, or from the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 […] which brought about the dissection of the Islamic world into fragments' (Lawrence, 2005, p.187).

The end of the Second World War was welcome with a wave of optimism and high expectations in the Middle East by governments and elites, which tried to shape their countries on the Western model (Esposito & Mogahed, 2007, p.37). However, this unnatural super-imposition of totally alien structures and institutions was destined to fail. As reported by Esposito and Mogahed: ' … nation building in the Muslim world, where borders were often artificially drawn by European colonial powers, placed peoples with diverse centuries-old religious, tribal and ethnic identities and allegiances under non-elected rulers (kings and military officers). As later conflicts and civil wars in Lebanon and Iraq would demonstrate, it was a fragile process that bore the seeds of later crises of identity, legitimacy, power and authority' (2007, p.37). The humiliation and the instability produced by these initial arbitrary settlings were further exacerbated by another event, often considered the biggest betrayal for the region: the establishment of Israel in 1948. This event was a direct consequence of the Balfour declaration of 1917, which 'pledged to build a Jewish national home in the country' (Oren, 2002). Once again, all these actions were taken without any consultation with the regional forces and, thus, contributed to the intensification of those feelings of humiliation and loss, which consequently triggered the will of redemption and revenge (Fattah & Fierke, 2009, p.76). Osama bin Laden himself pointed at the expropriation of the Palestinian land as the most oppressive humiliation the Islamic *Ummah* is facing: 'The deliberate killing of innocent children in Palestine today is the ugliest, most oppressive, and hostile act, and something that threatens all of humanity' (Lawrence, 2005, p.147). In addition: '[W]e ask God Almighty […] to establish an order of guidance for our *Ummah* […] in which the banner of jihad is raised up high to

restore to our *Ummah* its pride and honour, and in which the banner of God's unity is raised once again over every stolen Islamic land, from Palestine to *al-Andalus* and other Islamic lands that were lost because of the betrayals of rulers and the feebleness of Muslims' (Lawrence, 2005, p.14). Directly related to the establishment of Israel is, then, the Six Days War which represents the 'mother of defeats' (Fattah & Fierke, 2009, p.77). While, due to length constraints, it is not possible to analyse the context surrounding this event and its consequences, it is fundamental to highlight the fact that, as al-Ansari stated, it 'created wounds which remain open and deep in the subconscious' (as cited in Fattah & Fierke, 2009, p.77). The fact that the tiny and relatively isolated state of Israel was able to defeat the Arab coalition and to occupy more territories was a source of deep humiliation and showed the inefficacy of Arab states and of the pan-Arab movement. As already mentioned, these themes are recurrent especially in the statements of Osama bin Laden: '[Y]our brothers in Saudi Arabia and Palestine are calling for your help and asking you to share with them in the *jihad* against the enemies of God, your enemies the Israelis and Americans. They are asking you to defy them in whatever way you possibly can, so as to expel them in defeat and humiliation from the holy places of Islam' (Lawrence, 2005, p.30). However, it has to be made clear that this feeling of humiliation cannot be uniquely ascribed to external arbitrary impositions, but also to the area's own perceived impotence and intrinsic powerlessness, intertwined with the delusion coming from the ineptitude of the ruling elites.

4.3. ISLAM AS A SOLUTION: TRANSNATIONAL JIHADISM

As put forward by Moïsi: 'The sense of historical decline at the root of the Arab-Islamic culture of humiliation has been reinforced and deepened by the cumulative impact of a succession of frustrations: […] most of all, the inadequacy of their own leaders. This latter source of frustration is even deeper because no outside forces imposed it on the populations […]' (Moïsi, 2009, p.63). Despite often being supported by the West, Middle Eastern leaders represented an almost entirely indigenous force, which did not prove able to provide security and stability in the region (Moïsi, 2009, p.63). As a consequence, more humiliation was generated by these countries' own 'corrupt, inept, or ignorant rulers', who through dictatorial and populist regimes, transformed the national states in private properties, by extending their rule to life-long terms, and by restricting the elite mobility to familial and tribal links. Practices of corruption and a general mismanagement of the public wealth produced economic oligarchies and suffering for big part of the population (Amirahmadi, 2015). Notwithstanding the personalism and tribalisation of their rules, these elites

were not able to eliminate the Islamic opposition, which in the late 1970s took advantage of these signals of general crisis and emerged as a new leadership (e.g. Islamic revolution in Iran) (Amirahmadi, 2015).

In the same period, other events contributed to the consolidation of the idea of Islam as a solution for the instability of the Middle East and of transnational terrorism as a viable possibility. Particular reference has to be made to the invasion and following defeat of the USSR in Afghanistan – thanks to radical jihadists coming from all over the world – which marked the birth of terrorist networks, such as al-Qaeda (Fattah & Fierke, 2009, p.78). Moreover, the ideas supported by these organisations were further ignited by the writings of some intellectuals originally from the Middle East, but who received their education in Western countries; among these: Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb. Qutb, in particular, contributed to the building of the Islamic *Ummah*, of Islam as the only real civilisation and the universality of its law and beliefs (1965). More interestingly, these intellectuals developed their ideas during their residence in the US or in Europe, by coming in contact with the Western society, which they perceived as being morally indecent and decadent (De Zulueta, 2006, p.15).

In conclusion, it was this double-sided sense of humiliation, given both by the Western impositions and by the ineptitude of the local leaders, which generated a spread sense of impotence mixed with desire of revenge. All these feelings, fuelled by radical ideas of local intellectuals formed in the West, contributed to the development of networks of *mujahedin* committed to the cause in different parts of the world. Of course these assumptions must not be generalised and single cases, specific times and places should be considered. However, this section has given a brief account of the historical origins of the instability of the area as a whole, since they cannot be overlooked in analysing the correlation between humiliation and political violence. The rest of the study will focus more on humiliation as a universal human experience, how it is perceived and which effects it has in today's world.

5. HUMILIATION AND COUNTERTERRORISM

5.1. INTRODUCTION

After dealing with humiliation on a historical and regional basis in the previous section, the research will now delve into giving an explanation of the effect of humiliation on the individuals. In particular, by relating this to 9/11, this part will attempt to draw some conclusions regarding the effects of the *War on Terror* on a micro-level. The main aim is to highlight the importance that the concept of humiliation and emotions in general, deserve in terms of International Relations and foreign policy.

As observed by Kofi Annan: 'All the cruel and brutal things, even genocide, starts with the humiliation of one individual' (as cited in Hartling et. al., 2013, p.56). The concept of humiliation should, therefore, assume a primary role in the discourses related to political violence and especially to the radicalisation of individuals. As the following analysis will show, humiliation, as any other emotion, is experienced firstly at an individual level. However it is inherently social and relational: humiliation is produced within the relationship with the others and expressed through a specific language, which models a specific culture, and ultimately informs specific political actions (Fattah & Fierke, 2009, p.70). From this brief explanation it is already clear how the "universal" humiliation of the Arab world and the humiliation of single individuals are deeply intertwined. In order to demonstrate this, it is necessary, first of all, to give a sociological definition, which will, then be inserted in the general context of the *War on Terror.*

5.2. HUMILIATION AS A SOCIAL NUCLEAR BOMB

In order to give a sociological definition of humiliation and to understand the dangerous mechanisms it sets in motion, this part will take as a starting point the work of Hartling et al., who have been focusing on the idea of humiliation both from a psychological and from a sociological point of view (1999; 2013). The fundamental goal of their research is to identify humiliation as 'the missing link in the search for root causes of political instability and violent conflict' (2013, p.56).

From a strictly psychological and relational point of view, Hartling and Luchetta quantitatively individuate the possible outcomes of humiliation: withdrawal (social disconnection, isolation), aggression (retaliation, violence), and harmful affiliations (e.g. joining extremist groups) (1999). Since these effects triggered by humiliation are undeniably part of the human nature, they might be considered to a certain extent natural consequences. Nonetheless, it is fundamental to

understand how, in today's world, humiliation gains such a destructive power, which Hartling compares to that of a nuclear bomb (2013, p.64). According to the scholar, this comes from globalisation and the increasing global interconnectedness, which amplify the reaction to the feeling of humiliation (2013, p.58).

Humiliation is, of course, a universal human experience, and, according to Gilligan, the basic cause of violent behaviour is the will to eradicate the feeling of shame or humiliation – 'a feeling that is painful, and can even be intolerable and overwhelming' – by replacing it with the opposite feeling of pride (as cited in De Zulueta, 2006, p.19). However, in some cultures humiliation and shame are central in interpersonal relations and in group dynamics. In certain contexts of the Arab culture these two elements are intertwined, and assume a primary importance: shame is the most painful emotion, which through public exposure is exacerbated and transformed into humiliation. This sense is conveyed also by the vocabulary referred to this particular semantic field: in Arabic, *dhul* is the word for humiliation and it means dropping to one's knees in front of someone stronger. A *dhalil,* the humiliated person, is lowly and degraded. In Arabic texts, two other words follow this term: *mahanah* (degradation) and *esteslaam* (surrender) (Fattah & Fierke, 2009, p.72).

To sum up, three elements, described above, are relevant to the scope of the research: (1) the psychological dimension of humiliation as a trigger of violence; (2) the influence of global interconnectedness; (3) the importance of humiliation and shame in Arab culture. As the following section will show, these three factors all concur to the rise of political violence originating in the Middle Eastern scenario and to its transnationalization. Given the centrality of the concept of humiliation in the Arab culture, the feeling of historical betrayal together with the humiliation brought about by episodes such as Abu Ghraib, and their public and global exposure, contribute to fuel a certain need for revenge. In specific contexts, this translates into political violence directed towards what is perceived to be the cause of such grievances: the West. In the words of Osama bin Laden: 'These tragedies and calamities are only a few examples of your oppression and aggression against us. It is commanded by our religion and intellect that the oppressed have a right to respond to aggression. Do not expect anything from us but *jihad*, resistance, and revenge. Is it in any way rational to expect that after America has attacked us for more than half a century, that we will then leave her to live in security and peace?' (Lawrence, 2005, p.164). This last point raises the question of the effectiveness of the counterterrorism measures undertaken after 9/11. In particular, it is fundamental to question the extent to which the use of military force and, thus, more oppression and humiliation, can be effective in terms of counterterrorism. The next

paragraph will analyse the current counterterrorism efforts in order to establish whether they are successful enough in disarming the humiliation "social nuclear bomb".

5.3. AFTER 9/11: COUNTERTERRORISM OR COUNTERHUMILIATION?

In the aftermath of 9/11, the strong unilateral military response in Iraq and Afghanistan, the creation of Guantanamo and other events such as Abu Ghraib have often raised questions, not only about the legitimacy of such actions, but also about the real motives behind them. Without descending into the vast political debate in the context of this thesis and always considering the lens of emotion, the response of the US in terms of counterterrorism can be seen as a reaction to the humiliation provoked by 9/11 (Saurette, 2005). This assumption, thus, encapsulates a controversial point: to what extent can responding to humiliation with more humiliation be effective? How can a "counterhumiliation" strategy be successful? (Saurette, 2007).

As stated by Chalmers Johnson: 'The suicidal assassins of September 11, 2001, did not "attack America," as political leaders and news media in the United States have tried to maintain; they attacked American foreign policy' (Johnson, 2004, p.11). In particular, reference is made to the decades of interference in the region, by backing corrupt authoritarian regimes and by supporting Israel, thus fomenting anti-Americanism (Falk, 2012, p.26). Once again, in the words of Osama bin Laden this sense of frustration and humiliation can easily be detected: 'God has struck America at its Achilles heel and destroyed its greatest buildings, praise and blessings to Him. America has been filled with terror from north to south and from east to west, praise and blessings to God. What America is tasting today is but a fraction of what we have tasted for decades. For over eighty years our *Ummah* has endured this humiliation and contempt.' (Lawrence, 2005, p.104). With 9/11 the US had the chance to go beyond this spiral of humiliation and violence, by promoting a counterterrorism strategy focused on the elimination of the root causes of terrorism. Instead, the Bush administration and the neo-cons concentrated energy and resources in supporting a state-based militaristic response, notwithstanding the asymmetric character of the threat (Falk, 2012, p.14). As a result, 'The war on terrorism became a compelling story told in familiar nationalist terms of a country rallying and readying to strike back. A corps of instant experts appeared to satisfy the public hunger for information about those big, confusing, overlapping entities – the Middle East, the Arabs, and Islam – suddenly thrust into popular consciousness' (Hunt, 2002, p.419). In general, 9/11 shed the light on certain vulnerabilities that go beyond the state level and

the military logic (Falk, 2012, p.14), and that can be addressed, as shown, by using the lens of emotions.

Which elements, then, are essential to produce an effective counterterrorism strategy? According to Cortright, 'conflict transformation, sustainable development, and responsive governance' should have the priority (2012, p.200). In addition, they should be focused on 'drying up the wells of injustice and desperation from which they spring' (Cortright, 2012, p.200). These proposed alternatives enhance the importance of peace-building, economic development, and the expansion of human rights as fundamental ways of addressing the root causes of terrorism and armed conflict, thus creating the basic conditions for the promotion of justice and peace (Cortright, 2012, p.200). The idea to go beyond the traditional battlefields in the fight against Islamist terrorism is endorsed also by Stern. According to the author, terrorists fight among civilians, increasing the rate of collateral damage. Islamist terrorists, in particular, provoke the government they oppose into reacting in a way that makes these governments look like they want to humiliate and harm Muslims. As a consequence, Guantanamo, and similar detention centres or episodes of torture, have become for Muslim youth symbols of the US hypocrisy and aggression (2010, p.96). This vicious circle, in which counterterrorism policies produce more and more humiliation and therefore more and more retaliation violence, should be interrupted by looking at the specific causes for recruitment. Only by understanding the nature and the extent of these social and cultural individual grievances, and by focusing on preventing their emergence or contributing to the uprooting of their causes, can they be effectively opposed. As a result, prevention in terms of recruitment must, then, take into account different factors and personal reasons. As a matter of fact, terrorist movements often originates in reaction to an injustice, real or perceived, that must be corrected. However, people do not join the cause only for ideological reasons. Ideology is, in fact, not even the most important factor; some people become terrorists for the same various reasons as other people choose other professions: 'market conditions, social networks, education, individual preferences' (Stern, 2010, p.98).

In general, the field of humiliation as a reason for affiliation with a terrorist group is an unexplored one, but it is assuming an increasing relevant role among the explanations for political violence. As Goldsmith explains: 'How daily experiences of humiliation of young Muslims wherever they reside relate to broader ideological and cultural contests […], is a major question for our political leaders as well as for criminologists. The social construction of Islam as a 'victim' of the West is a matter

demanding investigation because of the growing evidence that this is how many Muslims feel' (2005, p.118).

6. CASE-STUDY: THE HUMILIATION OF GUANTANAMO

6.1. INTRODUCTION

Since its opening in 2002, the detention camp of Guantanamo Bay has always been the focus of heated debates about its relation with the rule of law and the legitimacy of the methods of interrogation employed. This section will not enter into the legal field, but it will instead deal with the role played by humiliation in the detention camp.

Through the stories of two terrorists, who have apparently further radicalised in Guantanamo and returned to the battlefields after their release, the analysis will show the inefficacy of similar counterterrorism measures. Moreover, the idea this part puts forward is that such measures are actually counterproductive, and facilitate the terrorist organisations in the recruitment of new members. For these reasons, in recent years, disputes regarding the prison's closure are increasing. As stated by Joe Biden in 2005, Guantanamo is the 'greatest propaganda tool that exists for recruiting of terrorists around the world' (as cited in Postel, 2013). However, research on this specific issue is not possible in this context, since it would require more space for a deeper study.

6.2. A DOUBLE HUMILIATION: THE GUANTANAMO'S LEGACY

As already mentioned, this research will not deal with the legitimacy of the inhumane and humiliating treatments the detainees undergo in this 'ethical, political, and legal limbo' – an existence of domination, degradation and dehumanization which Agamben calls "bare life" (Danchev, 2006, p.264). The present analysis will instead focus on their strategic efficacy. The dehumanisation and humiliation brought about by torture enhance the will of revenge on the single individual and, on a more general level, radicalise the community which the detainee is part of. As stated by Camus in the *Algerian Reports* (1958): 'Torture has perhaps saved some, at the expense of honour, by uncovering thirty bombs, but at the same time it aroused fifty new terrorists who, operating in some other way and in another place, will cause the death of even more innocent people' (as cited in Danchev, 2006, p.275). As a result, torture is a double-edged sword. First of all, it is counterproductive in terms of de-radicalisation, since, according to a Pentagon report released in May 2009, one in seven of the 534 prisoners who had been released from Guantanamo had engaged in terrorism or militant activity (as cited in Bumiller, 2010). Second, it is often ineffective in terms of intelligence, since innocent people would say anything in order to end their suffering. Not only does Guantanamo raise disturbing issues about the long-standing and

still current history of US torture and about the choices in terms of military policy. It also raises questions about why people torture, and, above all, why the US government tortures innocent people, who have no information to surrender that can halt their agonies (McClintock, 2009, p.63). By highlighting a different perspective, it is important to notice the fact that torture produces a double humiliation. It acts on the victim as much as on the torturer. As reported by Danchev: 'Humiliation breaks people. It makes them talk. This may or may not produce good intelligence. It surely widens the circle of shame. Humiliation is reciprocal—reversible, as Baudrillard would say. A detainee, hooded like the Ku Klux Klan, is threatened with electrocution: America electrocutes itself. "The fact that such things could take place among us is a humiliation we must henceforth face. Meanwhile, we must at least refuse to justify such methods, even on the score of efficacy. The moment they are justified, even indirectly, there are no more rules or values; all causes are equally good, and war without aims or laws sanctions the triumph of nihilism"' (2006, p.275). Also Osama bin Laden himself provides a similar interpretation and presents the events at Guantanamo mostly as a humiliation for the US: 'What happens in Guantanamo is a historical embarrassment to America and its values, and it screams into your hypocritical faces: What is the value of your signature on any agreement or treaty?' (Lawrence, 2005, p.270).

As shown in this brief analysis, humiliation sets in motion an endless cycle of violence, revenge and ultimately more humiliation. The humiliation experienced by the US after 9/11 is not different from that experienced for centuries in the Arab world; at the same time the counterterrorism efforts undertaken by the US are not different, in scopes and modalities, from the actions carried out by those people who have chosen the path of terrorism. The following section will enforce this hypothesis by showing how Guantanamo and similar responses contribute to strengthening the feelings of humiliation and do not in fact lead to de-radicalisation. The two reported stories will highlight the importance of finding a solution for the root causes of terrorism.

6.3. RADICALISATION IN GUANTANAMO: UTHMAN AL-GHAMIDI & ABU SUFYAN

If proper integration programs are not implemented, prisons can become places of further radicalisation for terrorists (Awan, 2013). In this sense, the stories of the ex-Guantanamo detainees Uthman al-Ghamidi and Abu Sufyan al-Azdi are paradigmatic. They show how humiliating detention can be dangerous and renew the will of revenge and to make the counterpart experience the same humiliation. The analysis of an article written by al-Ghamidi and

an interview to Abu Sufyan, and published in the second issue of *Inspire* (AQAP's magazine), will underline the already explained logic of the vicious circle of humiliation.

Al-Ghamidi was kept in extra-judicial detention in Guantanamo for five years. The initial reasons for joining the *jihad* in Afghanistan are explained as follow: '[The Islamic *Ummah*] needed to be saved from its enemies that were surrounding it. It needed those who would cure its deep wounds and I knew that could not be achieved except through jihad and preparation for it' (Al-Ghamidi, 2010, p.11). Once again, in this quote the theme of the vindication of the *Ummah* is recurrent, and even more recurrent is the theme of humiliation. Writing about 9/11, al-Ghamidi reported: 'We had humiliated America and struck it on its soil using its own planes as weapons. We damaged its economy and weakened its strength and we had them drink from the same cup they have been having our *Ummah* drink from for years. Now we were equal, sending the clear message: we kill from you as you kill from us and as you strike terror in us we strike terror in you' (Al-Ghamidi, 2010, p.12). After being captured on the Pakistani border, al-Ghamidi was transported to the detention centre in Cuba and, after five years, he was moved to another prison in Riyadh, where he underwent a very bland rehabilitation program for some months. In 2010, after his definitive release, the former Guantanamo detainee was again one of the most wanted leaders of AQAP, promoting the *jihad* to avenge 'the counterterrorism operations in Yemen as part of a crusade led by America against the Muslim world' (Joscelyn, 2011).

The story of Abu Sufyan is similar to that of al-Ghamidi: the *shaykh* was arrested in Afghanistan by the Pakistani intelligence and then transported to Guantanamo, where he spent six years imprisoned. After this experience, his words against the US are even harsher: 'Before imprisonment I used to think that there was some bottom-line humanity left in the Americans as is found in human beings in general regardless of the differences in beliefs and the fact that we are enemies. But after I got to deal with them directly, I came to the conclusion that mankind needs to protect its humanity by fighting Americans who are the enemies of the human race' (Al-Malahem, 2010, p.42). Following the release and the Saudi rehabilitation program, Abu Sufyan went back to the battlefield, and these feelings of betrayal and humiliation were even more intense and tangible: 'I headed towards Yemen because the *mujaheddin* in Yemen have raised their banner. The Muslims are still being killed, manmade laws are still ruling over our land, the disbelievers are still on the soil of the Arabian Peninsula, and our honor is being violated. All of these are reasons why I cannot put down my arms. The rehabilitation program […] was basically a set of new religious beliefs imposed by the American tyrants on the Muslim societies and is being enforced by

the traitor governments of the Muslim world. Whoever goes against these beliefs is imprisoned or murdered and unfortunately there are some who wear the cloak of scholarship but have sold their religion for a cheap price and they are marketing these false beliefs on behalf of the Americans' (Al-Malahem, 2010, p.42). Abu Sufyan, after becoming the deputy leader of AQAP, was killed in a drone attack in July 2013.

To sum up, two elements generally contribute to the further radicalisation of Guantanamo detainees. First of all, the humiliation experienced in prison, that adds to the spread feeling of humiliation and betrayal perceived in some contexts in the Arab world. Second, the lack of effective and specific rehabilitation programs which allows the re-integration of the detainees after their release. These elements will be further developed in the general conclusions of the research.

7. CONCLUSION

The research has attempted to demonstrate the importance of emotions in International politics by asserting the influence of the dynamics fuelled by humiliation on the rise of political violence in certain contexts of the Arab world. These mechanisms, which are deeply rooted in history, have sociological effects that are enhanced by the global interconnectedness of today's international system. As a result, counterterrorism strategies, which respond to violence with more violence and humiliation (e.g. Guantanamo Bay), contribute only to the further radicalisation of the individual, as shown by the cases of the former detainees al-Ghamidi and Abu Sufyan.

The enforcement of sustainable security practices should be focused primarily on prevention. In order to limit terrorism it is fundamental to successfully limit the recruitment in extremist movements; this goal can be achieved only by looking at the root causes of political violence, at the grievances and inequalities experienced or perceived that drive an individual to join these groups (Stern, 2010). This includes, especially in Western societies, the development of political actions intended to create an environment that facilitates the integration and prevents the marginalisation of individuals at risk of radicalisation (Stern, 2010)

Another fundamental step to be carefully considered regards the re-integration and de-radicalisation of individuals involved in jihadist political violence. As shown in the case-study, the Saudi program was not tailored in order to meet the real needs of the former detainees and, therefore, it failed in its purposes of de-radicalisation. As reported by al-Ghamidi and Abu Sufyan themselves, the rehabilitation program includes just a very bland "religious re-education"; in addition, after the release, the prisoners are still closely monitored by the intelligence services (al-Ghamidi, 2010; al-Malahem, 2010). A more human-inclined approach should, instead, be attentive to the psychological and sociological needs of these individuals which often suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder (Stern, 2010).

Finally, a lot can be done in terms of political process. As demonstrated in the study, waging war to counter the threat of terrorism is an inappropriate strategy (Cortright, 2012, p.199), since often '[i]t is the presence of U.S. forces in certain countries […] that motivates suicide terrorism and sparks armed resistance' (Cortright, 2012, p.200). According to the 2008 RAND Corporation study *How Terrorist Groups End,* political integration and effective law enforcement – as opposed to military force – bring violent actions carried out by terrorist groups to an end (Cortright, 2012, p.201). What can be learned by the present consequences of decades of foreign occupation of the

Middle East is the need for truly indigenous political leaders, and not Western-supported puppets. So far the analysis have mostly focused on the US counterterrorism efforts, however, effective counterterrorism policies must be comprehensive and be implemented at a systemic level. Thus, such strategies should not be based on the unilateral action of a single actor, but on a consolidated and multilateral cooperation of all the actors involved. Such actions should be tended towards the erosion of the support for political violence in the form of jihadist terrorism, by alleviating or eliminating the social malaise from which it originates. In addition, these policies must not take the form of an imposition from foreign actors, but they should, instead, be carefully planned in order to meet the specific needs of the single community in which they are designed to operate.

More in general, what the research has intended to show is the need for a more humane and emotion-based approach to the world of International Relations. By pointing out the risk of reading events such as 9/11 only through a classical realist lens, the analysis advocates for the elaboration of responses that go beyond the pure and immediate use of military force. The field of emotions in International Relations is still an unexplored one, but in some cases it can offer an important criterion for comparison to back up the pitfalls of traditional approaches. In particular, humiliation should be considered a main force wracking today's world, and all the necessary efforts should be made to prevent the creation of an endless spiral of more humiliation and violence. As stated by Moïsi, all these policies in the Middle East should come down to specific goals: 'Political reforms, economic progress, cultural enrichment, and psychological/emotional changes are deeply interrelated. It all boils down to one issue: self-confidence' (Moïsi, 2009, p.86).

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