



**REVISITING THE  
BARCELONA  
ATTACKS:  
REACTIONS,  
EXPLANATIONS  
AND PENDING  
DISCUSSIONS**

Moussa Bourekba (Coord.)

CIDOB **REPORT #02, 2018**

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**Editorial board:** Jordi Bacaria, Carmen Claudín, Carme Colomina, Anna Estrada, Elisabet Mañé, Eduard Soler and Eckart Woertz.

## **CIDOB**

Elisabets, 12  
08001 Barcelona  
Tel.: 933 026 495  
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Issue price: 5€

Print: Book-Print S.A.  
ISSN: 2564-9086 · E-ISSN 2564-9124  
Legal Deposit: B 11821-2017

Translation from Spanish: Tom Hardy  
Design and layout: Joan Antoni Balcells  
Web and technical support: Silvia Serrano  
Sales and shipments: Héctor Pérez

Barcelona, February 2018

## **Cover image**

David Junyent: Rambles, June 25, 2016 (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/davidjunyent/27333673173/in/photolist-HDodK8-6me7P8-HDpJW8-6mih6A-HDRVzj-gB1DJ-rjKJaS-Uf4HpE-6mih8L-8hVUt9-6migUm-Abij-5pWzKw-6me7VP-sgKVrF-6mihjo-5pRUQg-Esoji-5pSf24-8Q51Q-bkqDnC-7hTSQf-aJEZJ-7V3fNn-oVBKj-a5z6D-hrkoDe-XWEhXU-6YopiA-5ARm5k-6miheA-tMxUU-XZfFv-6me888-6wRU1P-rjXewe-7qTAxh-tMxUb-bACAx-5VqkVJ-emccB-fft2cB-daEtSX-7JQEn8-JZU6c-Fvkuu-8ZefCT-JZJQb-5pS2cR-5pRZHF>)



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Barcelona, February 2018  
ISSN: 2564-9086

**CIDOB**  
BARCELONA  
CENTRE FOR  
INTERNATIONAL  
AFFAIRS

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## INTRODUCTION

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**“**O beloved al Andalus. O stolen al Andalus. Do you think we have forgotten you? No, by Allah. What Muslim could erase from his memory Córdoba, Toledo and Shatiba [Xàtiva]? What sincere Muslim has not made the oath to regain you? Be patient, for you are not Spanish, you are not Portuguese. You are al Andalus of the Muslims.” So ended the statement published on January 30th 2016 by the Islamic State organisation (IS) warning of imminent attacks in European countries. A year and a half later, IS claimed the attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils on August 17th and 18th 2017 (17A). 17A surprised various analysts and observers, not because Spain was not likely to be attacked, but because 17A in some ways was different from other recent attacks on European territory.

Both the profile of the perpetrators and the reactions it produced invite us to reflect on three questions: Why did 17A happen? Who is directly and indirectly responsible for this tragedy? And, how can another one be prevented? These are questions that typically arise after a terrorist attack, but the case of 17A is different for one main reason: the fleeting nature of the debates that followed. The main aim of this report Revisiting the Barcelona attacks: reactions, explanations and pending discussions is to examine the terms of these debates along with the answers given to each of the three questions.

To do this, the authors of this report approach the attacks and their consequences from multiple perspectives. Moussa Bourekba focusses on the analysis of the different readings of the radicalisation process that prevailed and what this means for research and decision-making. Blanca Garcés-Mascareñas examines the reactions to the attacks from politicians and civil society, giving particular attention to the prevalent narratives about the attacks, their perpetrators and their victims. Jordi Moreras identifies the main

singularities of these attacks and casts doubt on the relevance of some of the debates that followed them (the role and representation of Islam in Catalonia, the issue of exclusion). Finally, using comparative analysis Fatima Lahnait explores the main strategies for preventing violent extremism implemented in Spain and Europe. She also shows that, despite the change of strategies from a security focus to a more comprehensive approach, the fight against violent extremism continues to demand new interpretations of the phenomenon in order to provide tools that are adapted to local contexts.

Although it seems that society has turned the page, the debate on why these young men from Ripoll decided to kill innocent people remains open. The debate on radicalisation is progressing, but today no consensus exists on the prevalence of one factor over another. Recognising this methodological limitation nevertheless represents an opportunity for analysts, researchers and decision-makers: instead of resorting to uniform patterns based on previous experience, the ever more diversified and multidimensional processes of radicalisation, require the adoption of multidisciplinary approaches. Only then comprehensive and creative strategies can be conceived to fight a threat that, far from dissipating, remains present and in constant mutation.

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**BARCELONA  
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One imam, one cell of young people and one mosque. At first glance, the configuration of the Barcelona and Cambrils attacks on 17 and 18 August 2017 (17A) seems to justify studies that focus on religious and cultural aspects of radicalisation processes. The perpetrators were all Moroccan, their guru was an imam and all were Muslim. Nevertheless, two distinctive factors of 17A have perplexed observers: the attackers came from a small town on the foothills of the Catalan Pre-Pyrenees and they were apparently well “integrated”; belying common assumptions about links between radicalisation, urban marginalisation and lack of integration. Despite the questions these two points raise, little attention has been paid to them. Some explain this lack of reflection by quoting the broad political agenda of the time, which was dominated by the Catalan independence challenge. Others have interpreted it as a reluctance to face up to sensitive debates about migration, peaceful coexistence and the feeling of belonging. A further possibility is that we find ourselves trapped in debates on interculturalism and merely socio-economic integration, which inhibits a deeper reflection on the questions raised by these attacks.

Beyond the reasons why this episode disappeared from public debate, do we understand what the events in Barcelona and Cambrils last August motivated? Above all, have we learned lessons from this drama? To address these questions this chapter first looks at the analytical frameworks that have been applied to 17A. It then proposes some lines of reflection for promoting a holistic, multidimensional approach to the radicalisation phenomenon. Such an approach is long overdue in a context in which the terrorist threat, far from being tackled, remains present.



## The terrorists' "Moroccanness"

Barcelona's reaction to the terrorist attacks of 17A was different from other countries as Garcés-Mascareñas (2018) points out in this volume. It was not followed by a declaration of war by the Spanish state, nor by pointing the finger at an internal enemy. Nevertheless, the attacks raised debates similar to those in other European countries. Part of the discussion centred on the origin – and by extension the country of origin – of the terrorists. Various analysts and journalists claimed this was a key explanatory variable in the radicalisation process. They followed a three-stage process of reasoning: first, the perpetrators of 17A were all Moroccan; second, the vast majority of those responsible for the attacks in Paris (November 13th 2015) and Brussels (March 22nd 2016) were also Moroccan; and, finally, particular attention must be paid to the cultural and religious dimensions, as Catalonia – where 29% of the Moroccans resident in Spain live – is the region from which most of those imprisoned for jihadism come<sup>1</sup>. As a result, this line of reasoning concludes that a potential relationship can be drawn between nationality and the propensity to commit acts of jihadist terrorism.

While the facts are indisputable, the reasoning is problematic in terms of its interpretation and the consequences it might entail. The existence of a supposed "Moroccan connection" has been highlighted repeatedly in various articles (Feuer & Pollock, 2017). Without sufficient care regarding the distinction between Moroccans residing in Morocco and members of the diaspora, some analyses linked issues of identity and related context directly or indirectly to the perpetrators of 17A. Emphasis was placed on apparently transnational ties, which might explain a possible ideological "contamination" of members of the diaspora by their families living in Morocco. The significant number of foreign combatants of Moroccan origin in the ranks of organisations such as the Islamic State (IS) and Al-Qaeda in Syria and Iraq was mentioned in order to draw conclusions about the radicalisation of a certain segment of the Moroccan population. The role of Moroccans was stressed; creating a seemingly organic chain from Raqqa to Ripoll that gave the phenomenon a cultural dimension. Finally, the hypothesis was advanced that the "failure to reform Islam in Morocco" would explain why violent extremism remains attractive to some Moroccans living in Europe.

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1. According to Reinales *et al.* (2017), they are the 23.2% of all prisoners for activities related to jihadist terrorism.

In the same line of argument others insisted on the historical humiliation and repression of the Amazighs in Morocco prior to 17A. This inherited past was placed alongside the current problems of integration and exclusion among members of the Moroccan diaspora in Europe. In similar fashion, an article in the newspaper *Le Monde* carried the evocative title “Morocco exports its jihadists” a few days after 17A (Khosrokhavar, 2017). While it is true that the sense of exclusion may constitute a factor in radicalisation, can we really explain 17A by reference to Moroccan context and history, even though its perpetrators were raised in Spain? Can we seriously conclude, as Farhad Khosrokhavar (2017) did in the *Le Monde* article, that “the Moroccan diaspora shows signs of radicalisation, especially those of Amazigh origin”?

Origin as the main explanatory variable is attractive because it helps to simplify a complex phenomenon: It guides the debate towards causes and guilty parties that are outside society and changes the terms of the debate. If the perpetrators are Moroccan, the problem must arise from their education, their culture or their religion. From this perspective, the questions no longer concern the society in which the individuals live or their personal history. Instead, the role of origin becomes the focus of the debate as a key factor in the vulnerability to the Salafi-jihadist ideology. However, instead of extrapolating certain conclusions based on their origins, would it not be more appropriate to focus on their life histories (background, primary and secondary socialisation, etc.) to better understand the subjective dimension of their commitment? This chapter seeks to show that if we do not take this subjective dimension into account we run the risk of turning the radicalisation process into a form of cultural or territorial determinism, instead of focussing on the conditions that allow this phenomenon to take shape.

**ORIGIN AS THE MAIN EXPLANATORY VARIABLE IS ATTRACTIVE BECAUSE IT HELPS TO SIMPLIFY A COMPLEX PHENOMENON: IT GUIDES THE DEBATE TOWARDS CAUSES AND GUILTY PARTIES THAT ARE OUTSIDE SOCIETY**

### **The sense of belonging: The crux of the integration issue**

Recent studies of the life stories of jihadists in Syria and Iraq (above all in the 2014–2015 period) indicate a growing diversification of profiles of those who commit acts of violence: the image of the jihadist terrorist as marginalised and hailing from the suburbs does not jell with the facts (Roy, 2017). In the case of 17A, two surprising statements about the thorny issue of “integration” were often repeated: as the boys from Ripoll were “integrated”, a perfectly integrated individual can be radicalised. The argument of “full integration”

was based on doubtful criteria, mostly their perfect Catalan (according to this criterion, most European jihadists are “perfectly integrated”) or them having jobs and playing sports. The statement by Núria Perpinyà, a social worker from Ripoll, that the young people “were integrated” (Ávila, 2017) was eagerly picked up without reflecting on the definition of “being integrated” or the pros and cons of the current integration model in Spain.

Under what criteria can someone declare that another person “is integrated” without making reference to their feeling of belonging? In this sense, the statement by one of the terrorist’s cousins provides a contrast: “Yes, we

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grew up here and do not have integration problems, but we are and always will be Moors. At school we were Moors and the girls did not want to go out with us. And the older ones thought we sold hashish” (Carretero, 2017). The contrast between the descriptions given by a member of the host society (social worker) and of the group we refer to here (Moroccan immigrants) invites us to reflect on the use of the concept of integration. If integration is understood as the “the process of becoming an accepted part of society” (Penninx & Martiniello, 2004), it is essential to bear in mind the three dimensions that shape this process: the politico-legal dimension (residence, political rights, etc.); the socioeconomic dimension (socioeconomic position, access to and participation in institutions, etc.) and the cultural and religious dimension. If the first two can be measured using objective criteria (having residency, having a job, going to

school, etc.), the third is much more difficult to identify as it “pertains to the domain of perceptions and practices of immigrants and the receiving society as well as their reciprocal reactions to difference and diversity” (Penninx & Garcés-Masareñas, 2016). Identification of the cultural and religious dimension is difficult first, because more than objective differences it relates to perceptions of diversity (ethnic, cultural, religious) and second, because those perceptions are expressed in different ways depending on the level being analysed (individual, group, institution). As a result, the idea that the “Ripoll boys” were integrated is based in large part on two of the three dimensions of integration, excluding a dimension that is fundamental and difficult to measure: the cultural dimension relating to the feeling of belonging to society.

This dimension is decisive because radicalisation processes systematically involve three breaks, which materialise consecutively (Crettiez et al., 2017): a break with society, considered “unholy” for not applying “holy law” and at war with Muslims; a break with the family, considered too lax in religious terms (i.e., not following the Salafi-jihadist creed); and a break with the Muslim community which, if it does not share the same ideology, is considered “infidel” (or to be “false Muslims”). The existence of this triple break makes the analysis of the feeling of belonging essential (as long as it can be identified) to understanding the processes of radicalisation, as it influences the personal and intimate journeys of individuals. Numerous studies and biographical accounts of terrorists have shown that a personal experience often constitutes a trigger for these processes, for example perceived injustice or exclusion (Gurr, 2012). These experiences nourish a feeling of exclusion that either preexists the process of radicalisation or is fed by the jihadist ideology – or both at the same time. According to the vision of the world promoted by jihadism, it is impossible for Muslims to live harmoniously in the West. On the one hand, it maintains that any kind of exclusion suffered by Muslims (racism, discrimination, Islamophobia, etc.) shows the anti-Islamic nature of the West; while on the other hand this conflict is spread to the international level by the multiple interventions by Western nations in Muslim countries (Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Mali, etc.). This dimension of exclusion plays a central role in the propaganda of the jihadist terrorist organisations, as it can offer a logical and coherent explanation for the feeling of exclusion an individual suffers and, in short, convince them that their salvation lies in taking revenge against the society accused of excluding them and/or killing other Muslims.

From this point of view, the idea that a perfectly integrated individual can become a terrorist deserves greater attention. If the “objective” criteria of integration are taken for granted it can lead to a culturalist approach that posits that the cultural, ethnic and religious origins constitute per se factors of vulnerability to jihadist ideology. Put another way, the culturalist focus runs the risk of equating the geographical areas with the greatest concentration of immigrants and children of immigrants – in this case Moroccans – with a necessarily higher risk of radicalisation. From here arises the need to go beyond this poorly defined conception of integration to be able to go deeper into the radicalisation factors. Firstly, by including a socioeconomic perspective, given the role of certain push factors such as the sense of injustice, experiences of discrimination, the rejection of institutions and the feeling of exclusion (Lahnait, 2018). Secondly, the socioeconomic perspective should be combined with a mapping of the human geography of radicalisation (terrorist networks, places of socialisation, family ties) in order to understand the spread of Salafi-jihadist ideology.

## **From an objective to a subjective approach: The necessary change of scale**

The explanation focussing on the cultural or religious dimensions of radicalisation is not only inadequate it is also dangerous. It is insufficient to the extent that it does not explain why, with socioeconomic, geographical, cultural and religious conditions being equal, some are radicalised while others are not. In this sense, such an explanation prevents us from understanding, to quote but one example, the overrepresentation of European converts in the ranks of jihadists. What is more, this reading tends to interpret radicalisation as a causal phenomenon rather than understanding it as a process. Nevertheless, radicalisation is above all a multidimensional process in which four dimensions interrelate: a personal/psychological dimension (see the push factors mentioned above); a socioeconomic dimension (relative deprivation theory); a political dimension (see the following section); and a religious dimension (Salafi-jihadism). These dimensions may combine or they may not. That is why it is as mistaken to base analysis on a single dimension as it is to consider abnormal a situation in which one of these dimensions is not present. So, for the “children of immigrants” from socioeconomically marginal areas, radicalisation can give shape to the hate generated by the feeling of exclusion, while for a middle-class convert it might be an answer to an authority vacuum. Both origins and motivations vary from one individual to the next, so it is impossible to build on linear schemes of analysis.

On the other hand, by overemphasizing the religiousness of certain individuals or even their tendency to identify themselves with the Muslim community, the culturalist reading does not take into account the numerous studies that underline many European jihadists’ lack of theological knowledge (Perliger & Milton, 2016), or the importance of individuals in introducing radical ideas to a group. As Nafees Hamid (2017) points out “Contrary to what many people believe, identification with Islam or the Muslim ummah (worldwide Muslim community) does not strongly predict willingness to fight and die for jihadist ideals. Instead, transcendent beliefs shared with close friends increased willingness to commit violence”. In other words, radicalisation is first and foremost a process of socialisation, whether it works by introducing a violent extremist ideology to a group and normalising it, recruiting friends and acquaintances, or sharing a vision of the world and committing to a project decided by the group or organisation to which they swear loyalty (*hijra* towards Syria or Iraq, attacks). This process often occurs in closed circles of friends and relatives (the members of the Ripoll cell included the partners of cousins and siblings) and places that are safely out of sight (outside the Ripoll mosque) (Ordiales, 2017).

In fact, a study by the Real Instituto Elcano reflects this social dimension of radicalisation: over 95% of those detained for jihadist terrorism in Spain belonged to cells, groups and networks while the proportion of “lone wolves” was less than 5% (García-Calvo & Reinares, 2016). This trend is also observed at the European level: more than a third of Belgian jihadists were recruited by just two people (Van Ostaeyen, 2016), while in France, as Pierre Puchot and Romain Caillet showed in their recent book (2016), the terrorist networks that have existed since the end of the eighties – affiliated with the Algerian GIA first and later Al-Qaeda – have played and continue to play a crucial role in the spread of jihadism in France and Europe. These transnational networks are structured, disband and restructure depending on circumstances both local (individual life paths, intelligence services) and international (conflicts).

Finally, the reading that focuses on cultural and religious criteria presents a risk when implementing counterterrorist measures such as surveillance focussed on areas populated by Muslims, immigrants and the children of immigrants. It should be noted that mass surveillance, as well as being costly and ineffective, can create a feeling of alienation among the groups mentioned, casting suspicion on the Muslim community in general.<sup>2</sup> This was the case with the PREVENT programme in the United Kingdom. Similarly, the *Protocolo de prevención, detección e intervención de procesos de radicalización islamista* (Proderai) has recently prompted numerous criticisms from Catalan civil society due to the risk of stigmatisation it involves (França, 2017).

Ultimately, what is at stake here is the changing of the scale of the analysis of the radicalisation processes of the perpetrators of 17A. It means combining analysis based on cultural aspects (macro scale) with subjective analysis (micro scale), focussing on the actors (networks, interactions) and, through a horizontal comparative process, putting this analysis into perspective with other forms of radicalisation, whether religious, sectarian or political. In this sense, the jihadist radicalisation phenomenon draws on indoctrination and recruitment methods similar to sectarian movements and extremist politics (for example, certain far-right groups): selective recruitment, gradual isolation, inclusion in a closed group, identification of an enemy, identification of a noble cause justifying any act, familiarisation with the group’s codes and norms, and moving on to an act of violence.

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2. On this point, see the extensive report: Amnesty International, “Dangerously Disproportionate: The Ever-expanding National Security State in Europe” (17 January 2017) (online) <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur01/5342/2017/en/>.

This approach serves a dual purpose: it allows our understanding of the phenomenon to be “deculturalised” while opening up new possibilities when understanding this phenomenon and providing answers to the challenges it presents (prevention, counter-narratives and alternative narratives, etc.). From this perspective, debates that are less impassioned and more pragmatic may emerge such as that on the relationship between prison and radicalisation. The case of Abdelbaki Es Satty (García, 2017) is one of many to remind us that prison is conducive to the development of jihadist terrorism (recruitment, radicalisation process and planning attacks). According to a study by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR), one in six European jihadists was radicalised in prison (Neumann, 2016). In some cases jihadism appears as the continuation of a criminal career through a politico-religious commitment.

In other words, it is necessary to develop – in parallel to an “objective” analysis framework at the macro level – readings that focus on the subjective dimension of the commitment to violent extremism.

### **Radicalisation as a politico-religious commitment**

In reaction to readings that focus on the cultural and religious dimension, other discourses focus on the environment in which the perpetrators of 17A grew up to explain the “why” of the attacks. In this way, questions arise that are linked, for example, to socioeconomic marginalisation in Spain. In contrast to the reading analysed above, this interpretation articulates the debate in other terms: instead of focussing on the origin or country of origin, it places emphasis on the life stories of the 17A perpetrators themselves. As a result, it insists that the tragedy is also related to the society in which they find themselves. In this way, the socioeconomic variables overlap with the cultural ones to demonstrate that other factors – socioeconomic in nature – play a role in the radicalisation process (Morera, 2018). This reading therefore has the merit of approaching this problem from a different perspective: it is devoted to establishing relations between the socioeconomic position and possible factors that may give rise to radicalisation processes.

Notwithstanding the merit of these discourses in changing the terms of the debate, they seem – like the other readings – to undervalue a dimension that is almost obscured in the post-17A analysis: the political dimension of radicalisation and, by extension, of jihadist terrorism. Though radicalisation processes relate to personal life paths and surroundings, in certain cases they are also the result of a process of commitment that has a political dimension (Burgat, 2008). In this sense, a necessary distinction has been hidden: what differentiates the ideologies of jihadism from its executors?

While the perpetrators of 17A were undoubtedly recruited, indoctrinated and manipulated by Abdelbaki Es Satty, the fact is that this was effectively a structured terrorist cell that was affiliated to a transnational organisation (Islamic State) and a politico-religious ideology (Salafi-jihadism).

Although marginal in the Muslim world, jihadism has become a consolidated political and religious movement on a global scale – even in Europe – especially over the past three decades. Among the rank and file, the ideologues have constructed a coherent and renewed ideological paradigm with a clear political project: creating a state with its own institutions. In other words, these are not clueless people who are violent for violence's sake, but followers of a trend that has its references, its rational reasoning and its own religious logic. As Puchot and Caillet note, in their eyes, the ideology forms a coherent whole: they have not contracted a disease, they have embraced a vision of the world (2016: 288). Thus, attributing the radicalisation processes of the perpetrators of 17A to a mere matter of disoriented young men who are victims of the lack of integration, or to issues exclusively related to socioeconomic marginalisation, obscures this dimension of radicalisation. This means we run the risk of failing to consider jihadist ideology's attractive power: by considering it morally unacceptable we neglect to study it in depth so as to understand the vision of the world and the future it promises its followers.

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Therefore, a precise analysis of these cells and networks is essential not only to move beyond culturalist readings but also to propose other keys to understanding the motives and modes of participation within jihadist terrorist organisations.

## **Conclusion**

From the analysis point of view, 17A shows that the debates on radicalisation processes are open. Two antagonistic readings prevailed: an approach focussing on the religious and cultural dimensions and another that focussed on the role of the socioeconomic background. Of course, in Barcelona, just like in any other part of Europe, neither of the two explanations is enough to understand what happened. The culturalist reading moves the debate towards the "other" whose cultural and religious particularities are factors in their vulnerability. And, while



the socioeconomic reading has the merit of presenting fundamental problems, it does have a disadvantage: it obscures the “agency” of the actors involved and the politico-religious dimension of radicalisation (role of recruiters, jihadist ideology, terrorist networks, etc.).

Just as in other parts of Europe and the world, the debate on radicalisation suffers from a major problem: it systematically leads to a continuous confrontation between those in favour of different visions and disciplines. Nevertheless, given its process-centred, multidimensional nature, the analysis of radicalisation phenomena cannot leave out the pluridisciplinary focus that takes in the four dimensions involved in the radicalisation process: personal, socioeconomic, political and religious.

At a time when many celebrate the end of the proto-state of the so-called Islamic State, which they mistakenly interpret as the end of the movement of the same name, the speed with which the in-depth debates were eclipsed after 17A is troubling. It is as if the event was treated like a tragedy that arose by accident, with no deep reflection on its details. At the time this paper is written, hundreds of foreign European combatants are attempting to return from Syria and Iraq to Europe and European countries remain on high alert: it is more urgent than ever to take a holistic view of the terrorism phenomenon, instead of reacting periodically and hastily to its consequences.

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**17A:  
BARCELONA  
GOES OFF SCRIPT**

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CIDOB REPORT  
# 02- 2018

A terrorist attack's goal is not the deaths in themselves, but the response they provoke. In his crucial book *Terrorism: how to respond* (2010), Richard English says the threat terrorism poses to democracy is not the danger of death and destruction – always limited compared to a war – but the risk of provoking ill-thought-out and counterproductive responses from states. According to Simon Jenkins (2016), the danger arises when the dead become politics. This is what Yuval Noah Harari (2017) calls the strategy of the fly: knowing that it is small and fragile, the fly enters the elephant's ear in order to provoke the effects it cannot bring about alone. Hence, with many terrorist attacks, we move from the dead to terror and from terror to the politics of fear.

From the terrorist's perspective the dead are the transmitter through which a certain message is broadcast and demands are made. For Al-Qaeda first and later the Islamic State, the deaths are necessary to defend themselves from the West and, as a result, act as a reminder that the world lives under constant threat. From the perspective of the countries and citizens affected, the attacks have tended to generate reactive discourses of polarisation. One of the most emblematic cases is that of the United States after 9/11. According to Kellner (2007), the Bush administration built up a complete Manichean rhetoric based on the distinction between good and bad, between those who "like us" are in favour of freedom and those "from the axis of evil" who want to destroy us. From there, "the politics of fear and lies" as well as the "spectacle of war" made hitherto unthinkable legislative changes possible, an unprecedented expansion of the arms industry and the military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In Europe similar arguments have been deployed after each attack. Some people have equated terrorism with Islam, immigration and refugees;

some have returned to casting doubt on the possibility of Muslim integration; some have, without nuance, distinguished a West of reason in favour of freedom from a barbaric and destructive Orient. These arguments have led many governments to declare themselves at war. This is where the narrative becomes fact. Declaring oneself to be at war does not necessarily mean a war starts. France, for example, had been part of a coalition fighting the Islamic State since 2014. Declaring yourself to be at war means verbally formalising the state of being at war, while launching a military operation on a specific place (Raqqa, in the case of the November 2015 Paris attack) has the aim not of winning the war but of symbolically punishing (invoking justice, although also implicitly revenge) those who supposedly attacked your people.

But in Europe, each jihadist attack is followed by a war being declared on a supposedly internal enemy. The best illustration of this war directed inwards is the declaration of the state of emergency, with the indefinite deployment of the army, the strengthening of online and offline surveillance measures, the introduction of preventive sentences and the paring back of fundamental rights and freedoms in exchange for greater security. These are emergency measures that can be deployed indefinitely (oxymoronic as an indefinite state of emergency may sound) and which, in some cases, end up becoming law. Here, again, the case of France is paradigmatic, with a new antiterrorist law (November 2017) which according to the government represents a “fair balance between freedom and security” and according to human rights organisations involves turning what were strictly exceptional measures into law.

Alongside the securitisation of the state, in many European cities there has also been a progressive criminalisation of immigration. Again, this has taken place at first at a discursive level, explaining terrorism through origin, religion or lack of integration. At a later date, the narrative became fact and therefore policy, with increasingly strict measures against irregular immigration, greater entry control (including of the refugees meant to be relocated from Greece and Italy) and more integration programmes, not only to support the processes of cultural and socioeconomic inclusion, but also to show (in an almost declaratory way) that the state is doing away with outsiders, rewarding those who integrate and penalising those who do not. Some measures seek declarative gestures more than results. This shows that policies do not always become facts, or if they do, they often remain at the levels of discourse or symbolism.

In this context, what happened in Barcelona after the attacks on August 17th 2017? To what extent have similar arguments been deployed or, by contrast, has Barcelona gone off script?

## The three noes

In the first days after the attacks on August 17th and 18th in Barcelona and Cambrils (17A), three noes were expressed. The first, like in other European cities, was the NO to terrorism. The messages condemning terrorism came unanimously from all institutions, political parties, social entities, governments and international institutions. To this point Barcelona stuck to the script.

Alongside the messages condemning terrorism, a second no was rolled out: the NO to racism and xenophobia. While the attacks in Madrid on March 11th 2004 (11M) were interpreted as the result of the Iraq war, and the discussion was therefore fundamentally political, after 17A demonstrations of hate against Islam grew significantly: from attacks on mosques in Montblanc, Granada, Seville, Logroño and Fuenlabrada, to small rallies by far-right groups. This time, social networks also amplified the xenophobic and hate-filled messages directed at Islam, for example making the hashtag #StopIslam a trending topic over the days following the attack. In this context, the response by most political and social actors was resounding: NO to xenophobia, to racism and Islamophobia, almost with the same force as the NO to terrorism.

Some days later, a third no began to take shape: the NO to fear, expressed in Catalan as *"No tinc por"*. This was, in fact, the slogan for the demonstration held on August 26th (26A) rejecting the attacks. It was not politicians behind the banner. It was the Barcelona City Council that decided that those who should lead the demonstration were the security services, the emergency and civil protection services, municipal cleaning staff, taxi drivers, the anonymous citizens who helped the victims; in summary, all those who had been on the front line during the attacks. The demonstration ended with a speech explaining what we are not afraid of and why we are not afraid (now expressed in the plural). Among other motives, it was affirmed that "we are not afraid" because "instead of dividing us we will find ourselves more united in the incorruptible defence of freedom and democracy through the diversity of our cultures and beliefs" and because "Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, expressions of racism and xenophobia have no place in our society".

Barcelona did go off script in this triple NO to terrorism, xenophobia and fear. These three noes were not contested or the subject of discussion. In this sense, they functioned more as slogans than as points of arrival following in-depth public and political debate. Nevertheless, slogans also have their power. Condemning xenophobia with almost the same intensity with which terrorism is condemned involves rightly remembering that the

issue is not one of some against others. In fact, the declaration of the 26A demonstration spoke of neither enemies nor terrorists. Saying “I am not afraid. We are not afraid” also means rejecting, even if only implicitly, the strategy of terror of some and the politics of fear of others.

### **Victims against terrorists**

17A happened in Barcelona but it happened in a strange way, different to similar attacks in other European cities. Barcelona empties in August, neighbourhood businesses shut, and the general feeling is that on the city's streets only the tourists remain. All the more so on the Ramblas and around the Sagrada Família, which seems to have been an intended target. It should be no surprise, then, that among the 16 dead, as well as Spaniards, there were citizens of Italy, Belgium, Canada, the United States, Australia and Portugal, and that the majority of the 155 injured were also tourists of 34 different nationalities. This attack was not made on a train filled with commuters on their way to work first thing in the morning, as in Madrid; or during a national holiday on a seafront promenade full of families from the city itself, like in Nice; or at a Christmas market on a normal afternoon, like in Berlin. More than with other attacks, in Barcelona the victims represented the whole world.

And who were the terrorists? On the one hand, we have Abdelbaki Es Satty, thought to have been the brains behind the terrorist cell. As Galdon points out (2017), his life story fits the typical portrait of the European jihadist: a young man (though not an adolescent), socialised in petty crime (smuggling hashish in his case), who had spent time in prison and had contacts with the Islamic State on some of his trips abroad. On the other hand, we have a group of young people aged between 17 and 24 of Moroccan origin who grew up in Ripoll, a small town in the Catalan Pre-Pyrenees. According to Galdon, such young terrorists had never previously been seen. They were all known in the town, had work, friends and apparently *normal* lives. As Raquel Rull, a social worker in Ripoll, recalled: “they were boys like all the others. Like my sons, they were Ripoll boys”.<sup>1</sup>

While the victims came from around the world, the terrorists were from here and, especially in Ripoll, they were considered (at least after the attacks) part of *us*. This explains why the biggest question for many was:

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1. See: <http://www.elperiodico.com/es/sociedad/20170822/carta-educadora-social-ri-poll-6237368>

Why them? Beyond culturalising discourses that explain the processes of radicalisation through origin and religion, two parallel stories were deployed that were not mutually exclusive. On the one hand, the radicalisation of the young men from Ripoll was explained as the result of the manipulation of Abdelbaki Es Satty, who apparently convinced them from his position as imam of Ripoll. The mayor of Barcelona, Ada Colau, denounced the “the infinite cruelty of those who dehumanise adolescents and turn them into murderers”.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps because of their age, because they had barely had time to acquire the motives – or at least not sufficient ones – to prefer to die in the act of killing, the questions raised were: To what extent were they conscious of what they were doing? To what extent did they really want to die while killing?

On the other hand, the radicalisation of the young men from Ripoll also raised the question of what we are doing wrong as a society. As one of their sisters stated at an event in Ripoll, “for a young man who was born in Catalonia or arrived there at a young age to rebel against the country and the most valuable thing they have, their city, means we have a real problem that we must not hide”.<sup>3</sup> What went wrong for so many young people to prefer to die in the act of killing than to learn, fall in love and have fun? How do we explain how the imam of Ripoll was able to find a dozen young people, almost adolescents, in a town of 10,000 whose rage was greater than their desire to live? According to the mayor of Ripoll, “they enjoyed public schooling, work integration programmes, had girlfriends, played sport”.<sup>4</sup> In the words of Olivier Roy (2016): “they were neither the poorest, the most humiliated, nor the least integrated”.

These two narratives did not go without criticism. While some denounced the scant attention given to the victims (for example in the 26A demonstration), others criticised the closeness and condescension with which the terrorists and their families were treated. Referring to an event organised in Ripoll, Antonio Puigverd (2017) wrote in *La Vanguardia* “that it did not seem that the victims were those who died on La Rambla (mentioned only once), but the Maghrebis of Ripoll”. For Puigverd they were no longer “our young people” but “Maghrebis”. Voices like his requested a thicker line be drawn between victims and terrorists, between *us* and *them*. This same criticism reappeared

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2. See: <http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/alcaldessa/es/blog/no-tenemos-miedo>

3. See: <http://www.europapress.es/catalunya/noticia-hermana-oukabir-protagoniza-acto-ripoll-contra-atentados-20170826221815.html>

4. See: [https://www.ara.cat/societat/Alcaldes\\_0\\_1859814075.html](https://www.ara.cat/societat/Alcaldes_0_1859814075.html)



weeks later following the proclamation with which the philosopher Marina Garcés opened the Mercè festival in Barcelona. Garcés alluded to the absence of both the victims and the “young men from Ripoll” and remembered that we will never know “if they really wanted to die in the act of killing, as they did”<sup>5</sup>. This simple question triggered condemnation from certain political parties and newspapers and, in their wake, an avalanche of accusations over social networks.

### ***Us against them***

Many saw the murder of film director Theo van Gogh at the hands of an Islamist extremist (Amsterdam, 2004) as irrefutable proof of the failure of multicultural policies. For many it was also the definitive confirmation that Islam is incompatible with Western democracies, that the values of some cannot peacefully coexist with those of others. In a similar way, France experiences “its attacks” as direct attacks made from within by those who reject the founding principles of the republic. In a recent article, Gilles Kepel (2017) speaks of the need to “integrate *outsiders* into the universe of *insiders*”. In both one case and the other, increasingly strong dividing lines have been drawn between an enlightened *us* defending liberal values and a barbaric *them*, obscurantist and fanatical, that is often associated with immigration and Islam.

This dichotomous thinking is relatively absent from the accounts that emerged after 17A in Barcelona. As well as condemning xenophobia, Islamophobia and racism, most of the institutional discourses coincided in insisting once again on the messages of integration and in defence of harmonious coexistence in diversity. There was, nevertheless, one great exception: Xavier García Albiol, leader of the Popular Party (PP) in Catalonia, requested more monitoring of mosques and prayer centres, and for all illegal religious centres to be closed. Although he admitted that the majority of Muslims do not “practise terrorism” and it is only a minority that do, he called Islam the only religion in the world that “kills in the name of God”. García Albiol also took advantage of the occasion to justify the rejection of immigrants in general using the well-worn and repetitive argument “ours first”. This led him to say that “there is no Islamophobia here, what we have are certain gentlemen who have come to take advantage of our system”<sup>6</sup>.

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5. See: <http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/premsa/2017/09/21/prego-dobertura-de-la-merce-2017/>

6. See: <http://www.ccma.cat/tv3/alcanta/els-matins-destiu/els-matins-destiu-29082017/video/5685159/>

However, in contrast to other European cities, this exclusionary and dichotomous discourse was not the dominant story, nor even one that was jostling for dominance. It was made from isolated positions and in the case of García Albiol, isolated even within his own party. This does not mean that Catalan or Spanish society is more open and tolerant of diversity. In fact, opinion polls show that attitudes to immigration do not differ substantially from those of other European countries. What is different is the dominant political discourse. Words such as *convivencia* (peaceful coexistence), diversity and interculturality are on the lips of most political parties. Integration policies, now with shrunken budgets, are drawn up and justified using these same principles of coexistence and interculturality. This explains why the discourses, like the policies, do not change substantially when there are changes of government, as is the case with Barcelona City Council.

In an article published in *Ara*, the political scientist Jordi Muñoz (2017) explained the predominance of these more inclusive discourses through the absence of xenophobic parties. It is not that clearly anti-immigration options have not appeared, such as, for example, *Plataforma per Catalunya* or the PP itself on certain occasions, but that when they have, they have not succeeded. In the case of Catalonia, the effects of the *Pacto Nacional para la Inmigración* (2008) must not be forgotten. It agreed a shared vision between most of the political forces (except the PP), municipal organisations and the main economic and social agents. Though the predominance of those discourses avoided dichotomous distinctions in the style seen in other European cities, it also shut down important discussions.

The question “What are we doing wrong as a society?” is difficult to answer without at the same time questioning what lies beyond the discourse itself. What if the “young men from Ripoll” did not feel as part of *us* as our accounts want us and them to think? What if our model of social coexistence is different from the one we think we have?

## **NO to war**

According to Bourekba (2015), it is fundamental to “deIslamify” the focus on the jihadist phenomenon and consider it as a means, among others, of political violence. In other words, stop emphasising the religious narrative

**IN CONTRAST TO OTHER EUROPEAN CITIES, THE EXCLUSIONARY AND DICHOTOMOUS DISCOURSE WAS NOT THE DOMINANT STORY, NOR EVEN ONE THAT WAS JOSTLING FOR DOMINANCE. THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT CATALAN OR SPANISH SOCIETY IS MORE OPEN AND TOLERANT OF DIVERSITY. WHAT IS DIFFERENT IS THE DOMINANT POLITICAL DISCOURSE**

of the protagonists, which strengthens the notion of incompatibility between Islam and democracy and, as a result, encourages the growing stigmatisation of Muslims in Europe. Speaking, by contrast, of “political violence” means understanding the motives behind their radicalisation in the wider context of the rebirth of the self-proclaimed caliphate on Muslim soil and the wars taking place there. If we analyse the responses in Europe to date, we may conclude that Islamifying and culturalising explanations have had the most weight, equating jihadist extremism with Islam, immigration and refugees. When seen in a political light, as we have seen, it has been to “declare war”. In this context, what happened in Barcelona after 17A?

Neither in Catalonia nor in the rest of Spain has any politician declared war. Certainly, the Iraq war, the 11M attacks and the mass citizen demonstrations at that time, which not only changed the government

**WHAT IF THE “YOUNG MEN FROM RIPOLL” DID NOT FEEL AS PART OF US AS OUR ACCOUNTS WANT US AND THEM TO THINK? WHAT IF OUR MODEL OF SOCIAL COEXISTENCE IS DIFFERENT FROM THE ONE WE THINK WE HAVE?**

but led to the immediate withdrawal of troops, are facts that are too recent to have been forgotten by any politician. But not only has war not been declared. In Barcelona, led by the social organisations, a section of society has condemned the Spanish state’s (direct and indirect) participation in the other wars often forgotten in the West. At the August 26th (26A) demonstration, they dressed in blue and reclaimed old slogans such as “No to war” and “Your wars, our dead”. According to Francesc Mateu (2017), director of Oxfam Intermón in Catalonia, they wanted to move beyond a model of manifesting grief and condemnation

to also point out responsibilities and demand different attitudes and policies.

What were the demands made by those in blue (#anemdeblau) at the 26A demonstration? The unitary manifesto made five major demands: it urged the condemnation of xenophobia and Islamophobia; demanded the response to the 17A attack not take the form of more repressive security; remembered the many other dead who “do not appear on the front pages of the newspapers”; and denounced the hypocrisy of the politicians, above all the Spanish government and the monarchy, “who promote wars and fuel armed conflicts through the sale of arms to countries such as Saudi Arabia<sup>7</sup>;

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7. See: [http://www.lafede.cat/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/manifest26A\\_adhesions\\_cat1.pdf](http://www.lafede.cat/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/manifest26A_adhesions_cat1.pdf)

and finally, in clear continuity with the citizen's campaign "Casa Vostra Casa Nostra" (#volemacolir) and the large demonstration that took place in Barcelona in February 2017, they asked for open borders for refugees.

The 26A demonstration was partly coloured blue. Just as with the demonstrations that followed 11M in Madrid, sections of the public responded by claiming these other dead forgotten by the West for their own (with signs such as "Madrid=Baghdad" and "they are our dead too") and questioning the role of Western governments in the wars, which are understood as the ultimate causes of the attacks. "The enemy is war" was shouted from Madrid. "Your wars, our dead" was shouted again from Barcelona. With slogans like these the attacks were interpreted as "political violence" and the demand was not for "more war", but "NO to war", questioning the government's role in the violence hidden behind jihadist extremism at global level and thereby dissolving the dividing lines between friends/enemies, democrats/the violent, the West/barbarity.

### Conclusion

To what extent did Barcelona go off script? To return to Hariri's strategy of the fly (2017), unlike in other European cities, the elephant did not move in the expected way. Beyond the almost mimetic, ritualised reproduction of grief and condemnation, Barcelona has not declared itself at war either externally or against a supposedly internal enemy. In the accounts that followed the attack, what prevailed were NO to terrorism, NO to xenophobia, NO to fear and, finally, from social entities and sections of civil society, NO to war. From there, the dichotomous reasoning of friend/enemy, West/barbarity and insider/outsider that was

so characteristic of the accounts given in other European cities has not been constructed. From the NO to fear, there has also been no place for the "politics of fear" and neither have we seen a progressive securitisation of the state or a gradual criminalisation of immigration. Or not yet, or not in a dominant way. Neither was there in Madrid after 11M.

But that the elephant did not move as expected does not mean that it did not react. Sporadically, voices have called for a stronger line to be drawn between victims/terrorists and us/them. Most voices have been raised

**BARCELONA HAS NOT DECLARED ITSELF AT WAR EITHER EXTERNALLY OR AGAINST A SUPPOSEDLY INTERNAL ENEMY. IN THE ACCOUNTS THAT FOLLOWED THE ATTACK, WHAT PREVAILED WERE NO TO TERRORISM, NO TO XENOPHOBIA, NO TO FEAR AND, FINALLY, FROM SOCIAL ENTITIES AND SECTIONS OF CIVIL SOCIETY, NO TO WAR**

along the national axis, as part of the Catalonia/Spain confrontation. This is where the elephant moved furthest. Newspapers such as *El País*, *El Mundo*, *La Razón* and *ABC* decried how handling the attacks would be used to “campaign for the Catalan independence *procés*”, while at the same time asking that 17A serve as an alarm call to end “the democratic absurdities” attributed to Catalan independence supporters. One of the main targets in this battle of narratives was the Catalan police force, the Mossos d’Esquadra. 17A showed up the seriousness of the lack of coordination between some police bodies and others, as well as the implications of having security forces with terrorism competences but without access to the main international databases. The Mossos became the subject of criticism from those who demanded unified management of the crisis, while in Catalonia many politicians, media and part of civil society turned them into an almost heroic symbol of the antiterrorist fight and citizen protection. In this context, it is not surprising that, beyond those who “went in blue”, the 26A demonstration also became a space of confrontation between some and others.

But in this Madrid’s 11M was not too dissimilar. There the elephant did not move in the expected direction either. Instead of turning the dead into terror and the terror into the politics of fear, the Madrid attacks triggered an unprecedented confrontation between the government, who for the first few days continued to insist ETA was responsible, and the growing numbers of those who doubted that. As a result, the demonstration was not unified either. As Amador Fernández-Savater (2015) recalls, at the end of the demonstration, in a surprising and unpredictable manner, the politicians had to quickly leave the street to escape anonymous people shouting the question “Who was it?” While in Barcelona the confrontation was along the national axis, in Madrid it was more left-right. As Fernández-Savater also says, the civil confrontation between the “two Spains” then resurfaced: one that insisted on ETA’s responsibility and, as a result, appealed to the constitution, and one that not only asked who was responsible, but demanded an immediate end to the war.

The fact that in both Barcelona and Madrid the elephant ran in an unexpected direction only confirmed one fact: when we talk about immigration, as well as terrorism, we speak about nothing more than ourselves. The fly may provoke an angry reaction from the elephant, but the elephant will only move down the path it was already walking.

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## TEN DAYS IN AUGUST

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CIDOB REPORT  
# 02- 2018

After the tears always come the hard questions. Or at least that is what we thought would happen after last August's attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils. But that is not what happened. The political class, the media and public opinion were all too absorbed in the controversy between Spain and Catalonia on how to tackle the questions so abruptly put on the table by the story of a group of young Moroccans resident in Ripoll who had been planning a series of attacks on Catalan soil for months. Never before has an event of this magnitude been so swiftly followed by a turning of the page with no conclusions drawn about what happened, or citizens being informed. The debate on the issue remains pending.

After these tragic events the same patterns were activated that have unfortunately become usual after a terrorist attack on European soil attributed to jihadism: mourning, solidarity with the victims and a lot of questions asked. We have developed a triple response when facing terror, which has a palliative effect on our collective consciousness: political determination (proclaiming the "unity of democrats against terrorism"); security action (through the deployment of police and preventive measures); and emotional solidarity (participating in collective mourning that serves to generate a sense of shared victimhood, in this case through the use of the hashtag *#notincpor*). These gestures are activated almost automatically in a post-traumatic setting in which the emotional response overlays the rationalisation of what happened (Badiou, 2016).<sup>1</sup> The media take charge

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1. Alain Badiou's arguments after the Paris attacks on November 13th 2015, relating to the collateral risks of these actions on our societies could well be applied in this case. According to him, the exclusive dominance of trauma and emotion has four consequences: authorising the state to take measures that serve to erode public freedoms; reinforcing identity impulses; transforming the idea of justice



of placing us within contexts of meaning in which only what has happened is spoken of, and all other news is at a secondary level.

When political gestures, security measures and spontaneous expressions of contained emotion also dominate the news, two-thirds of the story which seek to establish how events unfolded before, during and after the attacks have already been closed. The third and final part of the narrative circle involves the activation of an expert discourse which normally combines inductive, deductive and prospective exercises analysing the causes, motivations, ramifications, connections, consequences and other evidence that suddenly appear with regard to the perpetrators of the attacks. This paper proposes to contribute to a reflection on what

**NEVER BEFORE HAS  
AN EVENT OF THIS  
MAGNITUDE BEEN SO  
SWIFTLY FOLLOWED BY  
A TURNING OF THE PAGE  
WITH NO CONCLUSIONS  
DRAWN ABOUT  
WHAT HAPPENED,  
OR CITIZENS BEING  
INFORMED**

happened during those ten days in August, which, more than offering a chronological description of what happened, or offering an evaluation of what was done well or not so well, seeks to act as a reminder of how our societies mature and learn when they face adversity (Muro, 2017). We intend to provide a review of what happened from a perspective based on the social knowledge accumulated by a society that has had to face a growing series of uncertainties, and to which it has had to provide a more or less articulated response.

### **Three singularities**

Three particular features stand out about these attacks: first, the fact that the police and security services were unable to detect any sign of the impending attacks' and how they were precipitated by the fortuitous explosion a few days earlier in Alcanar (Tarragona). This shows the extent to which the detection networks deployed in Catalonia were ineffective. Second, we have already referred implicitly to the extremely short mourning period of barely two weeks. The political circumstances experienced in Catalonia for some years may explain the brevity of this social grief when compared to other similar attacks. To use an expression that has become common in recent times it seemed that Catalan society "switched screens" to the sovereignty dispute playing out between Spain and Catalonia. The third unusual feature is the one we want to analyse in more detail, as we

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with overtones of revenge; and granting victory to the terrorists by giving disproportionate impact to their actions.

consider it to be highly revealing of the way Catalan society conceived of itself as a society in progressive pluralisation. It relates to the fact that, as soon as it was known that the place where the perpetrators of the attacks grew up was Ripoll, and that nothing in their life histories seemed to predict that they would become terrorists, the first questions of what had gone wrong began to arise.

Looking more deeply into the responses given “in the heat of the moment” over those days, as well as some of the consequences that resulted months later, we can see the attempts to explain events that no one ever imagined would happen. This does not mean that Barcelona, like other global cities, was not a candidate for lengthening the list of capitals wounded by terrorism, but that the perpetrators in this case did not fit the common profile of the marginalised young person of immigrant origin.

In this respect, the array of questions and answers that followed the tragic events could have led in two contradictory directions: either to suggest introspective reflection to review the way Catalan society evaluates its own social model, or to shift all the questions towards the causal search for a series of external factors whose confluence could have provoked this fatal outcome. It appears that the first group of questions has been shelved and that we have launched into embracing the always comfortable claim that this is an element that is external to Catalan reality (and even to the reality of the Muslim communities in Catalonia themselves). Saying that the first and last reason for what happened was the increased presence of Muslim communities inspired by Salafism has enacted an exorcism which allows the evil that must be eradicated to be identified, and limiting it to a threat that can be named. By taking this second path, a desire has been shown to avoid the necessary self-criticism we must undergo concerning a model of social integration whose continued validity we should be questioning.

### **Never one of us**

In his classic essay on the stranger, Alfred Schutz (1974) argued that for the society that receives them, as their footprint remains very recent, the stranger is an unknown person. They have neither formed part of nor shared the society’s history, and can only be judged by their current acts. The society into which they insert themselves demands a permanent commitment from them, both in terms of their individual integration and that of their family. Without their memory being recognised, and given the weight of present obligations, life histories become the only capital the stranger is granted to claim his singularity. Our society is resistant to accumulated sociological evidence: despite many children of parents who emigrated not

inheriting their parents' condition as migrants, we always end up reminding them – implicitly or explicitly – of their expatriate condition. The statistics tell the opposite story: 21.5% of Moroccans living in Catalonia on January 1st 2017 (211,384 according to the Statistical Institute of Catalonia) were born on Spanish soil, and 36.8% of them are under 25 years old. Despite this, a recent report, whose overall synthesis declares that “the consistent similarity of the results among members of the second generation and the children of Spaniards of the same age suggests the integration of the former into a single community”, suggests other much less hopeful results (Portes *et al.*, 2017). The report's preliminary study informs that:

“Although national origins are not significant grounds for any of the key integration indicators, once other variables are controlled for, young people of Moroccan origin and others of Islamic descent must be subject to greater attention from the authorities and society in general to prevent their religious identification generating reactive attitudes of opposition and receptiveness to radical ideologies. While, as a whole, the second generation advances towards positive inclusion in Spain, we know that a just a few exceptions to this process can have tragic results. It is here that the Spanish authorities, social agents and society in general must focus” (Portes *et al.*, 2017: 15-16).

The conclusions of this study were presented on November 27th 2017, so the possibility that its authors had the events of August in mind should not be discounted. As an exception that seems to confirm the rule, it highlights that the development of identities assembled around references as structured as the religious ones are an unsatisfying variable in a premise based on the idea of integration.

After the first moments of emotional reaction, another type of question was articulated that attempted to address how this could happen. Without doubt, the statement that raised greatest feeling during those days,<sup>2</sup> was the piece written by Raquel Rull, a social educator from Ripoll, aimed at one of the young people who took part in the attacks (“How could it be Younes?”), which went viral on social networks and was subsequently republished by several Catalan newspapers.<sup>3</sup> This heartrending letter not only flowed with the desperation of someone who knew the life stories of these young people first hand, it also asked a question of great importance, which the author asked twice: what have we done (or stopped doing, or never

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2. Along with the image of the father who lost his three-year-old son in the Barcelona attack hugging the city's disconsolate imam in Rubí on August 24th.

3. *La Vanguardia* and *El Periódico de Catalunya*, among others (August 22nd 2017).

thought that we had to do) for this to happen? This document contains a message that it would be difficult for any sociological study made in Ripoll from this moment on to convey, and which the summary of the court case in progress will be unable to capture. She is brave enough to wonder about the uncertain dimensions of the social reality, those which are implicit and which we fail to capture with our theoretical and methodological tools. In her own terms, Raquel Rull dares to recognise that, despite having the impression that many efforts were made to make these young men feel like any other young people, something supplanted all that effort. Her testimony, alongside those of others<sup>4</sup>, had the effect of displacing questions in another direction away from the reasons that led these young men to carry out these attacks. Both statements articulate a question that is not directed at anyone in particular, and does not seek political responsibility, but is aimed at Catalan society as a whole. This is a question that arises out of the day-to-day lives of people who know the difficulties inherent in everyday community life first-hand, and who, as on previous occasions, bear witness to what it costs to generate solid trust and how easy it is to lose it. No doubt both statements could perfectly well be accepted by other people aware of the fragile consistency of the social fabrics of other neighbourhoods in the rest of Catalonia.

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IN THE LARGE URBAN  
AGGLOMERATIONS**

So why Ripoll? It was conceivable that this could happen in another setting, but not in a city in the interior of Catalonia with 11,000 inhabitants at the entrance to the Gironese Pyrenees. Few have realised that this case lays bare the errors of assessment that suggest that in the smallest communities the integration of immigrant populations is much more effective than in the large urban agglomerations. It has been said that this is due to the close relations between people, something that is valued in the lives of small localities and even in neighbourhoods with strong associative networks. But this must always be put in perspective and other factors must be attended to. What happened has also invalidated the idea that processes of violent

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4. Like that made by Hafida Oukabir, one of the perpetrators' sisters, at an event in Ripoll on August 26th, that "for a young man who was born in Catalonia or arrived there at a young age to rebel against the country and the most valuable thing they have, their city, means we have a real problem that we must not hide".

radicalisation occur in urban contexts with a strong presence of immigrant communities. The proof is that the radar of the security forces' had never focussed on Ripoll, at least not in the way they do on other municipalities in metropolitan Catalonia.

### **Old debates, new issues**

As tends to occur in situations such as these, old questions are revived that had probably been left unresolved, or which had perhaps been shelved for a later date. The involvement of the imam of one of Ripoll's two mosques in the rapid radicalisation of these young people again raised the question of the situation of imams in Catalonia. Their contractual and educational precariousness, alongside a lack of connectivity with the social context in which they carry out their duties, remains one of their main limitations. In the early 2000s, in Catalonia a drift of public opinion was generated that demanded training for imams. And so from 2002 to 2012, Catalan language training was provided, to which were gradually added elements relating to history, law and the Catalan public institutions. But the questions raised after the attacks were not aimed at training, but at monitoring imams, given the evidence that the communities chose their imams in an inadequate manner.

At the start of this debate all eyes were on the director general of religious affairs in the Catalan government, Enric Vendrell, who, in statements to the radio station *RAC-1* (August 22nd) said that, under the principle that "each faith has the absolute autonomy to choose its religious figures", suggested that the only thing the Catalan government could do was, at most, a process of accompanying this selection process. This response fits with the legal framework in force in Catalonia, and was met by comments from some within the Muslim community requesting greater involvement from the Catalan government in regulating the figure of imams (Rodríguez and Ribas, 2017). Implicit in these demands was the issue of the representation of Islam in Catalonia, with the suspension of the institutional support given by the Catalan government to the *Consell Islàmic i Cultural de Catalunya* (Catalan Islamic and Cultural Council), with which it signed a collaboration agreement in 2002. The situation of de facto non-representation of Islam in Catalonia, despite the repeated complaints made by Muslim communities, did not seem to concern the Catalan institutions before the attacks. But afterwards, it was necessary to show who was who and stage the existence of these dialogues. The first test had to be passed in the hours following the attacks with the presence of Muslim representatives on television stations, and then at the reception given by the president of the Catalan government on August 21st. In both cases, voices were soon being raised from within these communities questioning the representativeness of certain people at

these events. This is not a new phenomenon. It has been going on for years in Catalonia and the Catalan political institutions are perfectly aware of it. Hence the degree of confusion produced by the absence of a minimally representative structure among Catalan Muslims.

The meeting held on December 21st in the headquarters of the Ministry of Governance of the government of Catalonia, presided over by the councillor herself and accompanied by the director of religious affairs aimed to relieve this absence. According to an article published by *El Punt Avui* (September 22), “the meeting was held at the request of the councillor, who wants to begin a process of working with the Islamic communities, and it was agreed to continue holding regular meetings with the aim of reaching agreements” (Roruera, 2017). The image showing the participants in this meeting, the first held after the attacks, again raised suspicions in various sectors of the Muslim community, who publicly expressed their doubts about the representativeness of some of the people invited to this meeting on social media. What is true is that some of them are part of sociocultural bodies that are long established in Catalonia, despite, nominally, not being able to be considered religious bodies or as representatives of Muslim communities.

Once again the difficulty of forming a minimally representative organisation of Islam in Catalonia has been made clear. But one of the collateral effects of the attacks has already begun to emerge in the form of the first reactions from within this network of associations, because a range of actors (specifically the large mosques that host significant numbers of worshippers) want to play a greater role, meaning that some of the previously existing balances may be changed.

### **An inherited exclusion**

The most important questions that must be resolved after what happened are connected to the doubts about *why*. It will still be some time before more details can be accessed about the social contexts and family and personal circumstances that shaped the lives of the young people who participated in these attacks. But it is the moment to articulate some thoughts that might help understand what happened in Ripoll, which could happen again in any other town or neighbourhood in Catalonia. On *Critic.cat*, the sociologist Santi Eizaguirre (2017) published a very interesting article in which he explained the socioeconomic setting of Ripoll and the area in which it is located. I believe that some of his points are particularly important for defining the environment that hosted the processes that activated the fatal outcome. Eizaguirre says:

“Ripoll [...] is also a southern European city, ageing and impoverished. [...] The best educated young people do not find many opportunities – they leave for nearby cities and do not return to the area. [...] In the case of those involved in the attacks, it becomes clear that young people cannot be treated as a group in a broad, homogeneous sense” (Eizaguirre, 2017).

What the author suggests, as well as describing a context of prolonged structural crisis in a mountain region, is that, despite the fact that social inclusion dynamics may exist that join spaces and institutions to each other, a restricted range of opportunities remains that forces them to emigrate and seek other more favourable places to progress professionally. His final comment suggesting the existence of features that differentiate the group of young people and prevent them from being treated as a homogeneous whole I interpret as another new argument supporting the idea that the young men who carried out the attacks were at no point treated like the rest. They were never one of us, because their families weren't either. We never valued their socialising role, nor did we understand why they wanted their sons and daughters to follow in their footsteps. We did not value their cultural baggage, or their language, not to mention their beliefs. We resisted those beliefs entering the school, and we wanted them to base themselves on our identity without right of reply. They live among us, but we have never considered them to be just another member of our community. Our indifference towards their project of cultural transfer and continuity has led their two main social institutions, the family and the mosque, into crisis.

Alain Badiou (2016: 71) argued that the origin of the young people is fairly unimportant – their spiritual, religious origins and so on – what counts is the choice they made with regard to their frustration. And in this there are significant differences between parents and children, because some have lived in diametrically different socioeconomic circumstances. We still have not been able to assess the effect of the economic crisis on migrant groups, especially Moroccans. We know significant displacement of families has resulted to other European areas with better opportunities, but we do not know the impact of this loss of human capital. The crisis has temporarily coincided with the age many young people of Moroccan origin enter the labour market, whether they have finished their studies or not. This crisis was triggered among the parents, expelling them from productive sectors in which they had been for years, but we still do not know what impact it will have on young people starting their first jobs. And, following Eizaguirre (2017), here it does not help us to apply the estimates of youth unemployment as a whole without making specific reference to young people from Moroccan families.

It is clear that the sense of frustration these young people may experience when they see themselves displaced within the society in which they have been educated and raised is proportional to the fact that they have been socialised within it, and mastered many of its codes and rules, in contrast to their parents. In the Schutz (1974: 107) text already quoted, he dared to state that the stranger makes an effort to investigate the cultural pattern of the group they are joining, and when they manage to recognise and adopt these principles, it can be said that their integration process has been successful and “then the stranger is no stranger any more, and his specific problems have been solved”. Although it is very likely that he was not thinking about young people whose parents emigrated years before.

In Ripoll, as in other parts of Catalonia, there is a corner where the boys of Moroccan origin meet in the afternoon. There is another corner where adult Moroccan men meet, chatting in the open air in the early spring heat, waiting for prayer time. Both presences are well-established in our social environment, like the groups of regulars at one bar or another, or the retirees playing petanque. Their presence, like that of the small groups of women in hijabs walking towards the market on Monday, attracts nobody’s attention. Nobody is bothered by them, as we’ve all seen each other, despite the fact that we have never exchanged a word. Nobody asks about anybody and discreetly all return to the intimacy that is important only to a few. A courteous indifference indicates an absence of conflicts to us, no worry fills us because we do not know what is happening. And in the meantime many identities continue to grow out in the open.

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**PREVENTING  
VIOLENT  
EXTREMISM TO  
COUNTER HOME-  
GROWN JIHADISM:  
LEARNING  
BY DOING**

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CIDOB REPORT  
# 02- 2018

During the last fifteen years, Europe has increasingly become a target for terrorist attacks. In response, various countries have launched national counter-radicalisation plans, combining hard and soft methods, in order to prevent individuals from becoming radicalised and participating in violent actions. These countries knew that there could be a threat from within and that some of their citizens weren't immune to radical ideologies like the ones promoted by the so-called Islamic State, Al-Qaeda or Al-Shabaab. This was recognised by the European Union which, since the early 2000s, has made significant investments in policies, programmes and interventions aimed at tackling these issues.

Due to its long history of internal political violence, Spain has been actively involved in counterterrorism efforts.<sup>1</sup> At present, the threat from Islamist extremists is likely to replace that of Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) as Spain's primary terrorist adversary. In fact, the country already suffered the worst Islamist attack in European history on March 11 2004, when the blasts from ten bombs on Madrid commuter trains killed 191 people. The attacks were carried out by immigrants who had spent significant time in Spain. More than a decade after those horrific events, Spain remains a target for Islamist extremists. Moreover, like other European countries, it is now facing an increasing radicalisation phenomenon that may lead to violent extremism and home-grown Islamist terrorism. In this context, on August 17th and 18th 2017, the tourist areas of Barcelona and Cambrils were the targets of terrorist attacks, killing 15 and wounding more than 100 people.

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1. *Spain: Extremism and counter-extremism* - [www.counterextremism.com](http://www.counterextremism.com)

Spanish citizens of Moroccan descent, born and/or raised in Spain, were the perpetrators of the actions. They were part of a terrorist cell formed in 2016 and made up of at least ten members. Preventing such attacks is a challenging task.

Violent extremism is a broad concept. It covers the violent actions that extremists are responsible for (political violence, terrorism, hate crimes, etc.). A fundamental initial step in effective programming for preventing violent extremism is to understand what is driving it. There is no single cause or pathway into the process of radicalisation and violent extremism, but rather a wide array of factors. And there is no perfect solution/model to counter it.

**RECRUITERS AND GROOMERS EXPLOIT VULNERABILITIES (SOCIAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL) AND MANIPULATE EMOTIONS TO PERSUADE AND LEAD RECRUITS INTO VIOLENT EXTREMISM. POLITICAL FACTORS AND THE IMPACT OF FOREIGN ARMED CONFLICTS CAN ALSO TRIGGER GRIEVANCES AND A SENSE OF REVENGE TOWARD THE HOME OR HOST COUNTRY**

**Drivers of radicalisation**

Existing research indicates that the majority of radicals come from second generation Muslims born in Europe or who grew up there, while the others are converts. Most of them have little knowledge and proper understanding of the religion. It is mainly a youth movement and peer phenomenon. These second generation immigrants are often “stigmatized, rejected and treated as second-class citizens” (Ranstorp, 2016: 4), and yearn to belong to a group that accepts them.

What, then, moves an individual from radical opinion to radical action and violent extremism? Islamist violent extremism is the result of a personal journey, the combination of push (conditions that are conducive) and pull (individual motivations) factors and a system of belief that justifies the use of violence (UNESCO, 2017). These drivers and dynamics include grievances and resentments based on societal and social factors and tensions (identity and culture issues, real or perceived marginalisation and discrimination, strong sense of injustice and victimhood, etc.). Recruiters and groomers exploit vulnerabilities (social, psychological) and manipulate emotions (anger, frustration) to persuade and lead recruits into violent extremism. Political factors (for example, the ban on the Muslim veil, the fight against secularism, the West at war with Islam) and the impact of foreign armed conflicts (identification with the suffering of others, double

standard politics, Iraq/Syria, Palestine, etc.) can also trigger grievances and a sense of revenge toward the home or host country. Ideological and religious dimensions (belief in apocalyptic prophesy, a Salafi-jihadi interpretation of Islam, a desire and “call of duty” to protect the *umma*, rewards in the afterlife, and so on) build on these foundations.

The radicalisation mechanisms (different degrees and speeds of radicalisation) are therefore an interplay between push and pull factors within individuals. Further to that, new technologies have made it possible for anybody to be part of any virtual community and adopt any value system. For generation 2.0, social media (echo-chambers for extremist views) enable virtual participation in the cause and contact between like-minded people. Given the increasing number of individuals who engage in extremist groups online, issues around policing and restriction of the internet are subject to debate among preventing violent extremism (PVE)/countering violent extremism (CVE) practitioners, governments, and internet service providers.

Over the past two decades, violent extremism has globally been addressed primarily through security-based counter-terrorism measures adopted to reduce/deter/counter the threat posed by violent extremist groups. Since a few years ago, more comprehensive approaches have been implemented to address the factors and drivers that make individuals join violent extremist groups. Countering violent extremism (CVE) counters processes of radicalisation that lead to violent extremism, not terrorism. It seeks to mobilise and empower actors that are not traditionally associated with national security, such as local authorities, educators, social workers, and civil society. The aim is to create awareness and resilience among populations that are perceived as potentially vulnerable or “at risk”, to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism (PVE) and assist radicalised individuals who are willing to turn away from extremism (so-called “deradicalisation”). The measures include public information campaigns, capacity-building for communities, targeted prevention programmes in schools, universities, youth and sports clubs, in religious centres, prisons (considered “hotbeds” of radicalisation), refugee centres, and on the internet.

**CVE PROGRAMMES  
COUNTER PROCESSES  
OF RADICALISATION  
THAT LEAD TO VIOLENT  
EXTREMISM, NOT  
TERRORISM; SEEK  
TO MOBILISE AND  
EMPOWER ACTORS  
THAT ARE NOT  
TRADITIONALLY  
ASSOCIATED WITH  
NATIONAL SECURITY,  
SUCH AS LOCAL  
AUTHORITIES,  
EDUCATORS, SOCIAL  
WORKERS, AND CIVIL  
SOCIETY**

Only a small number of people who become radicalised may go on to commit acts of violence to achieve their goals, and they don't turn into extremists overnight. An individual's progression to violent extremism is complex and there is no evidence to predict when or how an individual will act on violent impulses. But some factors have a stronger impact than others on the processes of radicalisation, such as indiscriminate repression and/or stigmatisation of a group based on their religious or ethnic background after a terrorist attack, and foreign violent conflicts.

**THE ROLE OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES SHOULD BE TO ENABLE NETWORKS OF PUBLIC SECTOR AND CIVIL SOCIETY STAKEHOLDERS TO LEAD CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE INTERVENTION SERVICES TO RAISE AWARENESS OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM, PROMOTE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, AND BUILD RESILIENCE AGAINST VIOLENT EXTREMISM**

**National action plans: Contents and challenges**

National action plans designed and implemented in several countries took those elements into consideration once they were highlighted through research. Most PVE and CVE programmes in Europe were implemented after a terrorist attack or attempt by home-grown terrorists. The strategies reflect local contexts and conditions, and were tailored with the purpose of mitigating the risk of and strengthening resilience against violent extremism. They provide opportunities for cross-sector and interdisciplinary collaboration and learning between domestic and international stakeholders and organisations for countering violent extremism. If the efforts are aimed at protecting and preserving the society at large, the fear that certain groups will

continue to be marginalised and stigmatised remains, encouraging an “us versus them” rhetoric.

In this regard, the role of local authorities should be to enable networks of public sector and civil society stakeholders to lead culturally appropriate intervention services to raise awareness of violent extremism, promote community engagement, and build resilience against violent extremism. Locally led programmes have more credibility and efficiency but, first, the authorities have to identify and promote the “right people/messengers” who understand the target audience, its culture and education. However, earning community trust is never easily achieved. People tend to be suspicious and, when it comes to PVE/CVE, they may treat prevention actors – even the ones active at the grassroots level for a long time – as agents or spies of the authorities/government in charge of implementing a hidden

agenda or interested in making profit from the subventions allocated to their organisations.

Religious or community leaders who promote “moderate” practices and interfaith/intercultural dialogue are also often seen suspiciously in some quarters. They are requested (or expected) by the local authorities to reach out and mentor vulnerable young people, and to deter those who tend to agree with violent extremist ideology (Mandaville and Nozell, 2017). As radicalisation and violent extremism is perceived by general public opinion to have deep links to religion – jihadists use religious rhetoric and ideology to justify their actions –, religious leaders/figures are (depending on the countries) actively engaged in PVE, despite the threats made by extremists, and in developing and spreading counter-narratives within the communities and in prisons<sup>2</sup>.

The policy process underlying the development and implementation of PVE and CVE programmes should follow a basic four-step policy cycle. The assessment and definition of the issue should be the first step. The development phase of a programme would consider the most effective response to the identified issue. For example, is it more important to address an individual’s ideology or an individual’s identity, and the vulnerabilities related to each? The implementation step would then aim at achieving pre-defined objectives. The evaluation phase should follow, as it is valuable for determining whether the programme met its objectives (Romaniuk, 2015). To be fully effective, the process supposes a good knowledge of the targeted audience and understanding how the programme would be received in the community in which it would be implemented (to avoid a feeling of stigmatisation). Communication around the programme appears crucial.

### **The Spanish approach to PVE/CVE**

Radicalisation has affected Spain since long before the 2014 uptick of Islamist extremist activity with which several European countries were confronted. In recent years, the Spanish government has largely focused on preventing attacks from the growing threat of Islamist extremism and the recruitment of would-be jihadists and foreign fighters (who pose a security threat upon their return from conflict zones like Syria, Iraq or Libya). Given its experience

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2. A number of those who succumbed to recruitment by violent extremist groups were radicalised and recruited in prison.

with ETA, Spain's jurisprudence and bureaucratic systems have the capacity to investigate and prosecute suspected terrorists. Its police forces – Guardia Civil and Policía Nacional – have the experience to counter and neutralise home-grown terrorists.

The Spanish approach to counter-terrorism PVE/CVE is based on four pillars (similar to the UK ones):

- Prevention: acting against radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism at its sources (by tackling its drivers);
- Protection: reducing Spain's vulnerability to attacks;
- Pursuit: addressing terrorist activities; and
- Response: restoring normality after an attack.

In 2015, Spanish police arrested 100 suspected Islamist extremists. The government's efforts to counter domestic extremism are closely associated with its clampdown on illegal immigration and efforts to integrate existing immigrant communities and promote social cohesion. The Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, where recruitment and support for extremism is significant, are a major CVE concern. Barcelona has a long history of radical Islamism. Between 1996 and 2013, nearly 29% of people sentenced for jihadist-related terrorism offenses were arrested in the Barcelona province (Reinares y García-Calvo, 2015).

In May 2016, the southern Spanish city of Málaga joined the Strong Cities Network (114 global cities), an institution launched by the United Nations in September 2015 to build community resilience and cohesion in order to counter violent extremism. The network aims to support cities and other local authorities on an international basis and to enhance local approaches to preventing violent extremism by facilitating information sharing, mutual learning, and the creation of new and innovative local practices. The network's key tenets are to connect, inform, empower, build, innovate, and represent.<sup>3</sup>

Málaga serves as a pilot for the implementation of the Spanish national strategy against violent extremism. It includes youth radicalisation intervention and community-based programmes to improve communication between government and non-governmental organisations.<sup>4</sup> The local level plays a

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3. See: <http://strongcitiesnetwork.org>

4. See: <http://www.osce.org>

key role in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism, and in designing and implementing prevention policies and programmes, as the actors know their areas and populations. This was developed during the summit organised by the Alliance of European Cities Against Violent Extremism held in Barcelona on November 15<sup>th</sup> 2017.<sup>5</sup> Preventive measures to tackle violent extremism were presented to mayors and representatives from 40 European cities and 18 countries. Ada Colau, the mayor of Barcelona, emphasised the effectiveness in the long term of prevention, with a focus on education, youth empowerment and access to professional and social opportunities rather than repression, saying:

“Barcelona is a city of peace. Terror will not stop us from being who we are: a city open to the world, courageous and supportive”<sup>6</sup> The mayors all agreed that their cities have to adapt to the challenge of violent extremism, promote and stay committed to a culture of peace and dialogue, respect for human rights and social cohesion – via community engagement – in order to prevent violent extremism in all its forms and manifestations. It is safer to act in a pre-crime space and to use prevention tools and strategies.

### **Early identification: The Danish approach to PVE/CVE**

The Danish approach towards countering violent extremism privileges prevention. It includes supporting local governments and actors in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism. This approach is essentially focused on the early identification of risky behaviour and signs of concern among professionals and focuses on a preventive social agenda rather than a security one. Their approach targets three levels called the “prevention triangle” (Fink, Romaniuk *et al.*, 2013). The *general level* consists of building and strengthening the state’s resistance against extremist propaganda through campaigns and general education, with a focus on inclusion, democracy, and civic citizenship. The *group level* focuses on specific vulnerable groups, for example, youths at risk of radicalisation, and attempts to forestall the radicalisation process through, for instance, role model visits and dialogue workshops. Finally, the individual level includes intervention to reverse

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5. Created by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, Efus, and the cities of Rotterdam (Netherlands) and Aarhus (Denmark) following the Aarhus conference, in November 2015, to develop capacity building activities and exchange initiatives, experiences and resources. <http://www.vvsg.be/nieuws/Paginas/The-Aarhus-Declaration.aspx>

6. See: <http://catalannews.com/society-science/item/alliance-of-european-cities-against-violent-extremism-meets-in-barcelona>



the radicalisation process, with the support of professional mentors and parent coaches. For example, dialogue workshops would be held to raise awareness among young people in vulnerable areas about the phenomena of radicalisation and violent extremism. They would be trained to use critical thinking, to adapt their behaviour towards each other, and reconsider their preconceptions about minorities. After the workshops, participants would be surveyed to capture their thoughts about the event and whether it changed their behaviour or attitudes in a lasting way.

### **Security vs rights? Conflicting goals and synergies in the UK**

But if prevention has been widely acknowledged as an important component of counter-terrorism strategies, legitimate concerns exist in some European countries that PVE may become an excuse to restrict civil society, freedom of expression and human rights. The extent of individualised risk factors for radicalisation, coupled with country-specific priorities and values, has given rise to a broad range of approaches and interventions for preventing violent extremism around Europe.

Both the Channel programme in the United Kingdom and Hayat in Germany are PVE initiatives that address ideology and identity as equally important issues. Channel uses a multiagency joint referral model. The police work with public bodies, including local councils, social workers, health services, schools and the justice system to identify those at risk of being drawn into terrorism, assess what the risk might be and then develop tailored support for those referred to them. It has a national infrastructure that is adapted and delivered locally.<sup>7</sup> Channel includes a panel of experts from the local community (such as social workers, or people who know the individual who has been referred) who work together to discuss risks and appropriate next steps. It is a voluntary intervention process that requires participants' consent to participate.

Channel is a key part of the UK's Prevent strategy, which was created in 2003 but only made public a few years later as part of the wider counter-terrorism strategy called CONTEST (Prevent – Prepare – Protect – Pursue). It was reviewed in 2011 in order to separate direct counter-terrorism activities from integration work with communities. The programme deals with all forms of extremism and aims to stop people becoming violent extremists or supporting terrorism. Prevent has three objectives:

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7. See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance>

- Challenging the ideology that supports terrorism and those who promote it;
- Protecting vulnerable people; and
- Supporting sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation.

Several grassroots not-for-profit organisations contribute to the Prevent agenda by implementing the programme at community level. For several years, the London Tigers group (based in London) has used diversionary tactics to engage former and current gang members and prompt a sense of brotherhood through sport. Based on this work, the group expanded into the implementation of PVE/CVE by taking referrals from the Prevent and Channel programmes. The organisation's new focus is to build a sense of identity that encompasses both religion and a sense of national heritage.<sup>8</sup> By so doing, the London Tigers grasp jihadism through the lens of gang culture. Other British organisations developed "Young Leaders" programmes to apply the Prevent agenda. Their objectives are to foster the leadership skills of young people and raise their awareness of violent extremism and encourage peer to peer discussions on the issue.

Despite its success, criticisms of Prevent abound, including that it alienates and stigmatises Muslim communities, restricts freedom of thought and expression and impacts human rights.<sup>9</sup> The statutory Prevent Duty – enforced in 2015 – requires social services, faith leaders, teachers, National Health Services, doctors and others to refer any suspicions about people to a local Prevent body. Since then referrals have flourished. Individuals perceived to be at risk of radicalisation are referred to a local Channel board consisting of school representatives, social workers, chairs of Local Safeguarding Children Boards, Home Office Immigration and Border Force officials who, as part of CONTEST, will then review the referral and decide if further action is necessary. One of the main criticisms is that teachers have to police their own pupils/students for signs of potential radicalisation – young people being considered both "at risk" and "a risk" – radical opinions can't be challenged at schools anymore and students refrain from expressing themselves. The situation undermines trust between teachers and students.

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8. *Contemporary Approaches to Countering Violent Extremism*, National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2017. *Countering Violent Extremism Through Public Health Practice: Proceedings of a Workshop*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

9. See: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/aug/09/prevent-referrals-double-since-2017-uk-terror-attacks>

## **Bringing on board relatives and imams: The German and Italian approaches**

Hayat – a family-led model – focuses specifically on countering Al-Qaeda and ISIL narratives and ideologies. It relies on counsellors to act as bridges between institutions, individuals at risk, and their families. Hayat has two different channels for referral, a government hotline and a community hotline, both of which offer first-line assessments. The United Kingdom and Germany have PVE strategies that include former extremists. They have proved to be efficient, under strict control, in addressing the issue of jihadism and violent extremism, especially with young people with whom they share their experiences and disengagement stories.

The absence of terrorist attacks on Italian soil does not mean that Italy has been immune from the jihadist ideology. Measures for the prevention of “jihadist radicalisation and extremism” have been drafted (Solfrini, 2017). Italy is trying a socioeconomic approach to preventing radicalisation and violent extremism among young people. Starting in September 2016, more than 500,000 18-year-old citizens of the European Union living in Italy, regardless of ethnicity or religion, became eligible to receive vouchers valued at more than €400 each, which allow recipients to visit museums for free and go to concerts and movies for reduced prices. The access to leisure activities was a tool to enhance a sense of belonging to the society. A proper analysis of this initiative requires the benefit of hindsight. Following reports about radicalisation, a strategy for preventing radicalisation in prisons has been adopted. Although Italy has a Muslim population of just 2.5%, the share of Muslims in Italian prisons is estimated to be between 15% and 20%. One of the strategy’s aspects is to increase the number of prison imams who are vetted and committed to promoting principles of equality, citizenship, and Islamic pluralism (D’Emilio, 2017).

### **France: Secularism and PVE/CVE**

France has been struck several times by Islamist terrorism since January 2015, with more than 240 lives lost. The country has traditionally taken a repressive approach against terrorism and extremism, close to the traditional American one (Hellmuth, 2015). CVE was introduced along with the new counterterrorism strategy in April 2014. Hence, the country was late to develop any measure designed to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism. However, the new French strategy was very comprehensive and was based on the sacred secularism principle. The new model comprises 4 key pillars:

- A nationwide counselling hotline called the “*le numéro vert*” (Green Line) introduced in 2014 and run by the Interior Ministry’s Coordination Unit for Counter-Terrorism (Unité de Coordination de la Lutte Anti-Terroriste, UCLAT);
- A nationwide online based counter-narrative campaign designed to increase visibility of the Green Line counselling hotline, called “*Stop Djihadisme*” and launched in January 2015 (Gee, 2015);
- In January 2016, the third pillar was introduced: dedicated deradicalisation-focused prison wings, with specially trained staff to focus on inmates convicted of terrorism.<sup>10</sup> It closed ten months later;
- The opening of dedicated deradicalisation centres across France, with the idea of instilling French civic values as some form of counter-narrative to the violent extremist ideology.<sup>11</sup> One-to-one tailored mentoring for the residents (on a voluntary basis) was organised, but the only deradicalisation centre that actually opened in September 2016 closed down after much controversy in July 2017. It received only nine residents, and none after February 2017. €2.5 million was spent.<sup>12</sup>

Although the strategy had a few good results, in 2017 a parliamentary commission called most of the CVE strategy a failure. The report of the commission condemned the lucrative “business of deradicalisation” developed by the organisations in charge of implementing the projects.<sup>13</sup> Fraud and even abuse of the clients were then revealed. Within three years, the French government spent close to €100 million without proper evaluations and monitoring of the subsidised organisations in charge of implementing the prevention and CVE projects. Faced with the tragic events the government had to react to tackle the major threat of Islamist violent extremism. The lessons have been learned.

The latest CVE initiative is called RIVE (*Recherche et Intervention sur les Violences Extrémistes*) and it is an ambitious project, unique in Europe, implemented secretly in France since the end of 2016. The pilot version has 14 adults in its charge, both men and women, and attendance is mandatory. It aims to

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10. See: <http://www.gouvernement.fr/argumentaire/lutte-contre-la-radicalisation-en-prison>.

11. See: [http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2016/03/10/un-premier-centre-de-deradicalisation-ouvrira-avant-l-ete\\_4880551\\_3224.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2016/03/10/un-premier-centre-de-deradicalisation-ouvrira-avant-l-ete_4880551_3224.html).

12. See: [http://www.lemonde.fr/police-justice/article/2017/07/28/fermeture-de-l-unique-centre-de-deradicalisation-de-france\\_5165938\\_1653578.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/police-justice/article/2017/07/28/fermeture-de-l-unique-centre-de-deradicalisation-de-france_5165938_1653578.html).

13. See: [http://www.senat.fr/espace\\_presse/actualites/201707/rapport\\_final\\_de\\_la\\_mission\\_dinformation\\_sur\\_le\\_desendoctrinement\\_le\\_desembrigadement\\_et\\_la\\_reinsertion\\_des\\_djihadistes\\_en\\_france\\_et\\_en\\_europe.html](http://www.senat.fr/espace_presse/actualites/201707/rapport_final_de_la_mission_dinformation_sur_le_desendoctrinement_le_desembrigadement_et_la_reinsertion_des_djihadistes_en_france_et_en_europe.html)

disengage them from violent extremism and reinsert them into society. The approach is holistic and specific to the profile and needs of each individual.<sup>14</sup> French values and *laïcité* don't seem to be the major component of the project, and a Muslim chaplain provides religious guidance if needs be.

## Conclusion

In recent years, there has been a shift in focus away from traditional security measures to more holistic approaches, in order to prevent violent extremism. Building resilience against violent extremist ideologies at the individual and community levels and addressing the root causes of violent radicalisation became crucial. And there is a clear urgency to address radicalisation and recruitment to violent extremism in prisons as well.

Every terrorist attack is a stark reminder of the need for effective strategies to prevent and counter violent extremism, especially when considering that the jihadists are “made” in European societies and not imported. But PVE proves to be challenging and is still in its infancy in some European countries. Solid evaluations of its effectiveness are lacking, so it is too early to fully demonstrate PVE's outcomes and to measure the full extent of the strategies' successes and failures. Nonetheless, there is an emphasis on the willingness to understand and share what works best in this field and what doesn't. In that respect, the effective cooperation mechanisms at the European level ensure exchanges of good practices. Learning by doing remains essential. Three years after it stunned the world by proclaiming a caliphate, the Islamic State has lost most of the territory it once controlled. But its ideology remains. Violent extremism – in all its forms – still represents a major challenge.

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# CIDOB

BARCELONA  
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The attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils on August 17th and 18th 2017 (17A) surprised various analysts and observers, not because Spain was not likely to be attacked, but because 17A in some ways was different from other recent attacks on European territory. Both the profile of the perpetrators and the reactions it produced invite us to reflect on three questions: Why did 17A happen? Who is directly and indirectly responsible for this tragedy? And, how can another one be prevented? These are questions that typically arise after a terrorist attack, but the case of 17A is different for one main reason: the fleeting nature of the debates that followed. Although it seems that society has turned the page, the debate on why these young men from Ripoll decided to kill innocent people remains open. The debate on radicalisation is progressing, but today no consensus exists on the prevalence of one factor over another. Recognising this methodological limitation nevertheless represents an opportunity for analysts, researchers and decision-makers: instead of resorting to uniform patterns based on previous experience, the ever more diversified and multidimensional processes of radicalisation, require the adoption of multidisciplinary approaches. The authors of *Revisiting the Barcelona attacks: reactions, explanations and pending discussions* approach the attacks and their consequences from multiple perspectives. Only then comprehensive and creative strategies can be conceived to fight a threat that, far from dissipating, remains present and in constant mutation.