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# *Terrorism as Ritual Process and Cultural Trauma: a Performative Analysis of ISIS's Attacks in Europe*

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## **Abstract**

Social sciences studied terrorism focussing mainly on causes, processes of recruitment, relationships with media and new media, propaganda. At the same time, Italian and European public opinion gave voice almost exclusively to military, political and economic analysis. Sociological reflection on Islamist terrorism focussed itself almost exclusively on the religious aspect of radicalisation of Islam, spending little efforts to widen the analytic perspective to the effects of ISIS actions on the (re)definition of the identity and the collective memory of the targeted nation. This article will offer a different point of view, providing a cultural sociological reading of Paris Attacks, aimed at understanding its performative aspects. We will approach Paris Attacks as an example of *social drama* (Turner, 1982) and will focus on the ritual efforts spent by France to manage, repair and define the cultural trauma (Alexander et al., 2004) deriving from the attacks. Data will consist of a performative analysis of ISIS's strategy in Europe and of the counter-terrorist demonstration held in Paris on the 9<sup>th</sup> of January 2015; and of a frame analysis of the speech pronounced by Francois Hollande on November 16<sup>th</sup> 2015, after the Paris attacks, and of all the articles published on the main French newspapers during the first week after the events. In the conclusions, we will discuss how those events help to conceive a new kind of cultural trauma that is typical of the age of *weak events* and of distrust in public institutions.

Keywords: cultural trauma, frame analysis, terrorism.

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## 1 Why studying the performative aspects? Terrorism as social drama

So far, the cultural aspects of terrorism have been studied almost exclusively by the sociology of religion. A minor attention has been paid to the cultural definition of the collective identity and memory of the countries targeted by terrorists. Nevertheless, terrorist attacks play a significant role in the redefinition of collective identities, both for the victims, the terrorist operators and the larger global audience.

Then, it cannot be properly understood without enquiring its cultural background, development, justification, representation. Before all, terrorism is communication: it targets public symbols, it uses media and symbols of identification to produce fear and affiliation, it produces frames of interpretation to constrain reality, it relates to rituals, ideology and religiosity.

In this paper we will approach terrorism through the connected theoretical lenses of *social drama* and *cultural trauma*. The first approach corresponds to the very famous theory on the performative aspects of social conflicts introduced by Victor Turner (1982). After the British anthropologist, social drama takes the form of an interruption of the customary relationship between the social contract and collective identity of a community, deriving from 'a sequence of social interactions of a conflictive, competitive, or agonistic type' (Turner, 1982: 33). The social effect of this fracture is distrust and moral panic. Therefore, the targeted social groups need to react by producing and legitimating a public interpretation of the events. Turner suggests that this process follows four phases: the breach, the crisis, the rituals of redress, and the final moment of reintegration or schism. In our hypothesis, in the case of Paris attacks these four phases correspond to:

1. The attacks of January and November 2015;
2. The crisis of legitimation following the events;
3. The civil rituals performed to repair and redress the fracture;
4. The acts of public definition of the war against ISIS.

To study the period of crisis, we will focus on the media coverage of the November attacks in Paris. We made this choice for their global relevance in the definition of a new terrorist era, after September 11. The corpus is represented by all the articles published by *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro* and *Le Parisien* in the first 10 days following the attacks (i.e. 14<sup>th</sup>-23<sup>th</sup> November 2015). This time lapse covers the peak of attention following the attacks and the first week after the Presidential address of the 16<sup>th</sup> November.

As concerns *civil rituals*, we will focus on the Republican March held in Paris after the Charlie Hebdo killings, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 2015. They represent one of the most interesting examples of civil rituals held in Western countries in the last decades.

Finally, concerning the moment of public definition of the conflict, we will analyse the speech pronounced by Francois Hollande on November 16<sup>th</sup> 2015. It provided an official public interpretation of the Paris attacks, it justified the implementation of domestic urgency measures and it asked for the legitimation of a growing engagement of France in international war conflicts against ISIS.

As regards the concept of cultural trauma, it has been developed in the last years by a group of influential durkhemian sociologists. It can be defined as the process of redefinition of collective memory and collective identity that 'occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways' (Alexander et al., 2004:1).

Studying an historical phenomenon in terms of cultural trauma means focussing on the processes of definition of the actors involved (perpetrators, victims, other actors involved), the nature of suffering and victimhood, the extent of audiences (Alexander, 2003) and their relationships with victims. Not all dramatic events become cultural traumas. This outcome depends on the salience of the fracture, the mobilization of symbolic and ritual energies, and the centrality of the targeted group. Actually, what transform an event of violence in a cultural trauma is a process of framing.

In this process, politicians and media play a pivotal role: 'Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described' (Entman, 1993: 52). After Entman, this process has crucial effects: it defines the problem, it provides moral judgments, it diagnoses causes and suggest remedies. Enlarging our perspective on a longer time scale, framing means transforming cultural meanings and collective memory. Snow and Benford demonstrated how the mobilisation of core cultural narratives (Snow, Benford, 1988; Benford, Snow 2000) is what makes a frame successful, in this regard.

Focussing on the institutional and public discourse following the Paris attacks held in January and November 2015, we will try to analyse what a kind of *cultural trauma* has been produced and how the European political and media actors participated in this production.

## 2 ISIS's strategy: time and space of attacks

To understand the role of ISIS attacks in the construction of a *cultural trauma* for Europe it is necessary to consider all its action globally, conceiving them as parts of a whole strategy of terror. Then, let us start considering the temporal and spatial distribution of the attacks.

As regards time, since the former attacks in Paris to the last significant actions in Nice, and elsewhere. 26 months have passed, and this temporal extension represents so far the duration of the ISIS attacks in Europe. During 2015 and 2016, we assisted to several terrorist actions conducted by operators directly and indirectly connected to the terrorist organisation, self-defined as ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). ISIS acts like a brand, a *franchising of terror*, sometimes organising directly the actions, others providing *a posteriori* justification to *free riders* initiatives. In terms of intensity and density, the organisation performed a double strategy: striking, highly intensive attacks were followed by less intensive but temporarily continuous actions. The former ones provoked several victims and a sensible threat to the collective identity, while the latter helped keeping a continuous public attention on the topic of terrorism and to develop a cultural elaboration of the events. As concerns the *striking events*, they consisted of four referential moments: firstly, the *Charlie Hebdo Shootings* (7<sup>th</sup> January 2015) in Paris, an attack to a French satirical journal that provoked 12 killings, and opened the season of terror in Europe; secondly, again in Paris, the *November Attacks*, i.e. the bloodiest and more concerted attacks to a European metropolis in the last 10 years (130 deaths in multiple contexts from the Bataclan club to the Stade of France); thirdly, the *Bruxelles attacks*, on March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2016, where 31 people were killed at their airport and in the tube; finally, lastly, the *Bastille Day Killings* in Nice, on 14<sup>th</sup> of July 2016, where 87 people were killed by a cargo truck deliberately driven into crowds on the Promenade des Anglais. Ranges of 4-10 months passed between these four fundamental events, but the low profile strategy continued in Europe, involving other countries (Denmark, Germany, Belgium) through repeated attacks occurring almost any month, with periods of stronger concentration (i.e. January-February, 2015; June-July, 2016), and periods of 'silence' (May-July, 2015).

The conciliation between the two strategies produced an ideal ground for the transformation of Islamist terrorism in a social problem and a matter of cultural trauma for Europeans. Reports about terrorism had a daily exposure on European media of different kinds (press, TV, web media) and social media played an innovative and fundamental role in the penetration of news in the daily life of a very large global audience.

ISIS terrorist strategy as any organised terrorist action is strongly oriented to salience. For salience we intend here some characteristics of the events and of their narration who made them prominent for the media and for the larger public space. Terrorist strategy is based, again, on both diachronic and synchronic reasons and finally is performed through an attack to collective symbols.

As concerns the diachronic level, Europe has become a target of terrorism after 10 years of relative peace. In this period, only a big terrorist attack stroke Europe: the double attack performed in Norway during 2011 by Andres Breivik, a right-wing extremist who killed 77 people in Oslo and Utøya for political reasons. Before it, the last bloody attacks were registered during March 2004 in Madrid and during July 2005 in London. Both concerted actions were attributed to Islamist terrorist belonging to al-Qaida networks<sup>1</sup>.

On the second hand, while European public opinion tends to limit its attention to the local events, Islamist terrorism is rather a global phenomenon. Several bloody attacks happened synchronically all over the world and the attacks held in Paris (130 deaths) and Nice (87) were less ferocious then others that happened during 2015 in Nigeria, Sinai, Syria, Kenya, Yemen, Tunisia. In the official interpretation of ISIS attacks to Europe, their continuity with global terrorism disappeared. Underlining the exceptionality of the events, media and politician tended to avoid any comparison and analogy with other contemporary ISIS attacks all over the world. Rather, journals, politician and experts used to propose analogies between the Paris attacks and September Eleven Attacks in USA: November attacks were commonly labelled as the European<sup>2</sup> 9\11 (see further). Associating Paris and New York and hiding the analogies with other non-Western countries situation played the discursive function of simplifying the ISIS actions as *attacks to the values of Europe and of Western world* in a rhetoric of *clash of civilization*.

Finally, the symbolic level of ISIS attacks targets spatial and temporal symbols of European and, *lato sensu* Western identity. On a spatial level, the attacks to the newsroom of Charlie Hebdo and to the book launch in Copenhagen (4<sup>th</sup> February, 2015) can be read as attacks to the freedom of speech and press. The attacks performed at Bataclan, Stade de France and cafes and bars in Paris on November 13<sup>th</sup> targeted symbols of the leisure time,

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<sup>1</sup> The attacks in Madrid were conducted using a series of bombings hidden in unattended luggage on commuter trains. They caused 191 deaths, just before the domestic elections. The attacks in London were conducted by 4 kamikaze (suicide bombers) who attacked some tube and buses stations causing 56 deaths.

<sup>2</sup> From here, we will use the label 9\11 to indicate the so called *September 11 attacks*, that happened on 9\11\2001 in the United States of America.

tourism, youth identity, consumerism and free lifestyle. The attacks to the church in Rouen (26<sup>th</sup> July, 2016) and the multiple attacks to Jewish targets during the 20 months can be read as attacks to the Western religious freedom.

### **3 The counter-terrorism performances: the march in January**

The social construction of Islamist terrorism as a cultural trauma has been performed both by ISIS and by French institutions. While ISIS used the *clash of civilization rhetoric* (Huntington, 1993) to provide killers a strong ideological justification for their violence, European politicians and media used almost the same rhetoric to justify their vulnerability, the suspension of civil freedoms for security reasons, the strong investment in military actions in Middle East and Europe (de Cock, Du Pony, 2016; Gomart, 2015; Gugle, 2015; Yilmaz, Çağla, 2012). The performative aspects of counter-terrorism consisted of two elements: public performances (rallies, demonstrations, commemorations, fests of solidarity) and public institutional speeches.

First, it must be underlined how the performative aspects of the French institutional counter-reaction to terrorism have shown an unusual power, in terms of penetration, salience and participation. Both after the *Charlie Hedbo Shootings* and after the *November attacks* the French president Francois Hollande gave life to innovative rituals of celebration of the French Republic and of its leading role in the definition of Western *civilization*.

As regards the former, on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2015 the government organised in Paris and in all the other big cities in France a monumental demonstration to fight terrorism, to support freedom of expression and to commemorate the victims of the attacks. A global number of 3.7 million of French citizens participated to the different demonstrations (1,5 millions in Paris). On a performative perspective, the demonstration in Paris showed something unusual in the ambit of civil religion (Bellah, Hammond, 1980): as happened few times in recent history, 50 political leaders marched arm-in-arm guiding the people march, with François Hollande at the centre of the cordon and of the stage of the *civil-ritual* performance. The participants were: representatives of the French government, leaders of major European powers (Italy, Germany, Spain, United Kingdom, among the others), leaders of Eastern European countries, the USA State Secretary Kerry, the leaders of Israel and Palestine, Turkey, Egypt, Russia, Ukraine, and of different African countries, including dictators; and, finally, representatives of the major monotheistic religions (Christians, Jewish, Muslims including the rector of the Parisian mosque Boubaker). At the first sight, this list included many contradictions and controversies: leaders of countries in war (e.g. Israel and Palestine, Ukraine and Russia, among others), visions of democracy in conflict, and so



on. But in a performative way, the representation of the suspension of those controversies helped France to demonstrate through the embodied sense of the arm-in-arm march, its power to join actors who give up their conflicts for a while, to support their ally.

The march aimed both at affirming on the stage of Paris to a global audience the power of France in affirming the laic and republic values of civilisation and to demonstrate and performatively exhibit the diplomatic power of the country. Similarly to the symbolic selection of significant spaces and times made by terrorists to commit the attacks, even the counter-terrorist demonstration moved in a spatial-temporal setting of performative significance. The march started at 3pm from Place de la République, moved towards Boulevard Voltaire, avenue de la République, to conclude itself at place de la Nation. An evident symbolism that joins those places and those toponyms: Illuminism, nation, and the Republic, i.e. the pillars of French collective identity.

As regards individual symbols, many participants, both religious representatives and simple people marching in the first rows, used to show their religious belonging as kippahs and hijabs; while the biggest part of other participants showed pencils and poster representing *Charlie Hebdo*, the French flag and the Rainbow flag. This intersection between religious symbols and symbols of the freedom of expression produced the performative effect to *frame* the attacks of ISIS as attacks to the western freedom of speech and to the western lifestyle. Thus, the ISIS-France conflict was framed as the opposition between a radical, non-secularized communitarian group against the avant-garde of civilization, freedom of expression, laicity. In other terms, event the counter-terrorist performance espoused the *clash of civilization* frame<sup>3</sup> (Huntington, 1993; *contra* Said, 1996).

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<sup>3</sup> The theory of the *clash of civilization* was introduced by Samuel Huntington in one influential article (1993) and a following book (1996), in which he suggested that world history was entering in a new phase, where “The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics.” Edward Said has defined the *clash of civilization* as a mythology based on two biased assumptions: “the notion that civilizations are monolithic and homogeneous and second how, again from Lewis, he assumes the unchanging character of the duality between us and them” (Said, 1998: 4). Tracing back this conclusion to his well-known *Orientalism*, Said suggested: ‘As I’ve argued in several of my own works, in today’s Europe and the United States what is described as Islam, for instance, because this is where the burden, I think of Clash of Civilizations thesis goes, what is described as Islam belongs to the discourse of Orientalism, a construction fabricated to whip up feelings of hostility and antipathy against a part of the world that happens to be of strategic importance for its oil, its

A second frame that can be recognised in the march is that of Republican identity. One of the most powerful National symbols showed during the march was a representation of a bleeding Marianne, a young lady dressed in white, with a crown and a mayoral sash. The personification of the Nation and the contemporary attribution of human feelings to her is aimed at stimulating national solidarity, pride, and the valorisation of national culture. Marianne's blood, the blood of a hunted country is a powerful symbol, recalling a variety of symbolic universes connected to the body. Marianne is a national emblem playing different functions in French republican history (Agulhon, 1979) and consequent different iconologies. Ichnographically, it is represented associated with a variety of other symbols of different genre: republican, as the three-coloured cockade; of emancipation (the broken chain); of power and strength (the guild, the lion); of national unity (the bundle), equity (the triangle), maternity (the naked breast). A more intangible but powerful symbol, the national anthem, *The Marseillaise*, resonated everywhere, from official congresses to the streets of Paris, to the stages.

After the attacks of Paris, again, we witnessed to a flourishing of symbols both in the public space and in the media. A stylised drawing of the Eiffel Tower was used as a symbol of peace, becoming a viral image all over the internet, media and social representations. The blue, white and red colours of the French flag have coloured the pages of the newspapers, the facades of the monuments and even the photographs of millions of Facebook users.

Behind these symbols, we can read different messages: they fulfil their most obvious function, that is to mobilize feelings of solidarity throughout the world. On the other hand, we can recognize an attempt to strengthen the sense of belonging and unity among the members of the nation, transferring emotions to collective totems, appealing to national pride and 'inculcating' a sense of cohesion within the group based on the communal heritage, history and culture. National symbols work as a 'signification' system that allows the building of a communication network that naturalizes our experience of reality and reassures, through membership, our collective identity (Geisler, 2005).

As we will see this kind of frame will find a direct continuity in the symbolic speech pronounced by the President Françoise Hollande on the 16<sup>th</sup> of November, three days after the November killings.

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threatening adjacency to Christianity, it's formidable history of competition with the West' (Said, 1998: 10).

#### 4 Framing the November attacks: the Hollande Speech

In the following two paragraphs we will introduce a qualitative frame analysis of the primary or master frameworks (Goffman, 1974; Snow, Benford, 1992) used by French government and media to provide a preferred reading of the events<sup>4</sup>.

The use of a primary framework in the interpretation of uncertain events is a deliberate choice aiming at: promoting a causal interpretation of events, giving a moral evaluation of the actors and facts, providing solutions, and suggesting policy actions. In this sense, we assumed a strong field-interdependence between political institutions and media.

The day after the terrible attacks of the 13<sup>th</sup> November, the French President convened a joint session of the houses of parliament at the palace of Versailles for the 16<sup>th</sup>. This was not a random choice, but a precise performative exhibition of the centrality of the French state and of its power. The palace of Versailles is one of the most powerful historical symbols of the Western exercise of power. On May 1682, Louis XVI made it the seat of the government of the kingdom of France, the home of the king and the location of the royal court. All the powers of France emanated from there. It has been used as palace power from Louis to Charles-Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, from the Kingdom to the Second Republic. After 1848, only two times it hosted political encounters: in 2009, when President Nicolas Sarkozy convened a congress in reaction to the global crisis, and, indeed, in November 2015 when indeed President Francois Hollande convened the Congress after the Parisian attacks. Scheduling the joint session at the Palace of Versailles has been, in other terms, a rare and powerful exhibition of symbolic power, which clarified its nature of political ritual<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> In our approach to Paris Attacks as a social drama, we considered Hollande's speech as the fourth moment. The reason why we will introduce it before the frame analysis of French press is theoretical. Hollande's speech has had, in fact, such a strong influence in defining the media representation of the events and orienting the representation of the crisis toward a warfare frame.

<sup>5</sup> This topic has had a large development in political and in cultural sociology, thanks in particular to the Neodurkheimians – from Robert Bellah, to Clifford Geertz, to Jeffrey C. Alexander. Bellah's *Civil Religion in America* (1968) applies the durkheimian theory, developed in the *Elementary Forms* (1912), of the religious dimension of any given community. In this contribution and in his furthers, the American scholars suggest that the concept of *civil religion* can be applied to secular societies, because their symbolic systems 'relate national political structures and events to a transcendent, supra-political framework that defines some "ultimate" social meaning' (Alexander, 1988: 7). His collaborator P. Hammond (1983) limited the application of the concept

In the following part of the paragraph, we will enlighten the frames used by the President in his speech, to construct the preferred institutional interpretation of the events.

The incipit of his discourse is quite significant: 'France is at war. The acts committed in Paris and near the Stade de France on Friday evening are acts of war... They are acts of aggression against our country, against its values, against its young people, and against its way of life'. In this exert, as well as in the rest of speech, terrorist attacks are framed, first, through the rhetoric of the *war*. This warfare frame is used to connote not only the acts of ISIS towards French victims, but also the French reaction against ISIS and other connected powers. Hollande announced in the speech 'the need to destroy Daesh', the connected threat that the attacks have 'strengthened [their] determination to destroy them [Daesh]', and the need for 'more airstrikes on the Daesh stronghold of Raqqa'. Finally, the implicit association between war and terrorism is used also to justify the French intervention in Mali, Syria, Iraq: 'the reason for my decision to intervene in Mali', 'we are fighting terrorism in Iraq', 'our enemy in Syria is Daesh'. Using war as a master frame of terrorist attacks is such an old strategy, opened by president Ronald Reagan during 1984 and continued by George W. Bush, who introduced the slogan *War on Terror*, after 9/11. Different scholars have spoke of *new propaganda* or *public diplomacy*. As explained by David Altheide, new propaganda

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to America, because of its peculiar institutionalization of religious rituality in a secular democracy. A second theoretical path, from Verba and Almond (1963) to Dayan and Katz (1992), connects media to political ritual. In particular, it is stressed the role of television and other media in virtualizing the participation of a larger audience to political rituals. Dayan and Katz also suggest that a proper characteristic of political rituals is that of favouring the reconciliation and reintegration of the community, after events of crisis.

Summarizing, Baringhorst enlighten the following points: '(1) political rituals are considered to be expression of an already existing normative consensus. (2) they are interpreted as symbolic expressions of a presupposed social integration; (3) they are seen as mechanisms that generate such a normative integration and (4) rituals are interpreted as constituents of such an integration' (2000: 293).

Finally, we add, 5) participation of citizens to political rituals can occur even if not everybody express a consensus in terms of values; 6) emotions play a crucial role in the transformation of the crisis in a new social state. This two aspects can be read both in the liminal conception of social drama by Victor Turner and in the study of political rituals by David Kertzer, who suggests: 'what is important in ritual is or common participation and emotional involvement, not the specific rationalizations by which we account for the rites [...] Rituals can promote social solidarity without implying that people share the same values or even the same interpretation' (1988: 67-9).

goes beyond the mere construction of arguments and content, 'is quite pervasive, repetitive and capable of superimposing symbolic messages' (Altheide, 2009: 281). In other words, it is hegemonic. The state provides a strong interpretation of the events and colonizes the public's imagination in this direction, providing materials and content to the media.

Secondly, it must be enlighten how September 11 has defined a new kind of cultural traumas connected to terrorism. In this sense, Kaplan (2005) and Alexander (2006) suggested the existence of a *spiral of meaning* that links September 11 to the following *cumulative traumas*.

A second frame defining the nature of the conflict is that of the *clash of civilizations* (Huntington, 1995). After Hollande, the very targets of ISIS attacks were the symbols of French civilization: its values, the young people and their lifestyles, its democracy and civil freedoms. In his speech, Hollande defines France as 'a beacon for humankind'. Somehow, he used the same rhetoric of *orientalism vs. western civilisation* used by Daesh in its propaganda for the recruitment of foreign fighters and for the self-sacrifice of them against Western targets: 'Daesh, which is fighting us because France is a country of freedom, because we are the birthplace of human rights'. The recall to human rights is a constant in the construction of *orientalism* (Said, 1977). As well as the *laicity* discourse, it pretends to be neutral, but is based on a Western normative definition of what is human and which are the rights to be guaranteed to humans. Therefore, it helps stigmatising non-western cultures and enforcing a sense of belonging based on the Us\them opposition. This generalisation has the wider effect of justifying political and belligerent actions in different war theatres referring to the same 'civilising' mission. Furthermore, it has the function of expelling any possible other explanation based on: proper war actions, economic reasons, conflicts in foreign affairs, internal dynamics of marginalisation and connected actions of crime. At the same time, framing a terrorist act as a war act instead of an internal mass crime justify exceptional actions of reaction inside the domestic territory, but it is also functional to justify a series of pre-existing interventions of France on external fronts of war.

A third frame in Hollande speech is the *Good vs. Evil rhetoric*<sup>6</sup>. Again, this opposition is analogous to similar past rhetoric of othering of the enemy,

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<sup>6</sup> The definition of Good and Evil is such a rare topic in sociology. After Lemert (1997), this reluctance depends on three reasons: refusal to deal with morality, tendency towards cultural relativism, scares attention to universals. Nevertheless, a significant and varied bibliography exists on this topic.

from the Cold War, to the war against Saddam Hussein (see Altheide, 2004; Alexander, 2004). In the speech, it is performed using adjectives and nouns defining Daesh with a strong negative connotation, as: 'abomination', 'vile', 'cowards' and 'cowardly murderers', 'despicable killers', 'barbarians'; but also by the religious-political adjective of 'jihadist'. Moreover, using civilised, democratic, positive connotations when defining France and French people: 'staunch', 'tough', 'courageous', tolerant and laic ('France, which makes no distinction of colours, origins, backgrounds, religions'), globalised and open ('What the terrorists were attacking was the France that is open to the world').

A final frame is that of 'nationalism' and its celebration. In the second paragraph of the speech, the exceptionality of both its location, the court of Versailles, and of the institutional situation – the joint session of the French Parliament – are framed through the *solemnity* of the moment and the need for *national unity* and social cohesion. A sub-frame connected to nationalism can be called the French *grandeur*. It includes references to 'the strength of the State', to the triumph 'over much more fearsome enemies', to the history of a country that 'has surmounted many other trials' and to the global support to France: 'I have been receiving messages of solidarity from heads of state and government around the globe'. It is evident the continuity between the frames used in the demonstration on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January and this speech and it will be evident in the next paragraph a further continuity between this speech and the construction of a discursive space through the media.

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A first approach – the one recognizable, for instance in the works of Wolff (1969) – defines evil as a characteristic of modern social life, connecting it to the social problems of alienation, erosion of meaning, bureaucratization in modern life.

Further, a large part of the classical sociological production, including the works of Merton, Hughes, Arendt, Coser, Bauman dealt with the topic in the socio-historical analysis of Nazism. Common to these scholars is a tendency to separate the practices of evil, from their actors and to problematize how 'evil', as a social system, is organized and performed.

Finally, an approach based on performativity, rituals and cultural trauma is nearest to the conception of evil provided by Robert Bellah (1971) who connects the cultural foundation of United States to the definition of some axes of good\evil, based on the religious, political and the economic ground. As for the definition of enemies or for *otherization* as a wider phenomena, a definition of evil is always connected to a discourse of self-definition in terms of good. However, this process of hetero and auto-attribution is purely pragmatic and ambivalent, as Lyman (1978) has brilliantly suggested. Any definition of evil answers to contingent socio-cultural contexts and to pragmatic reasons of self-definition and exclusion of others.

## 5 A Frame Analysis of French Press after November Attacks

Concerning media, we collected and analysed all articles published by the newspapers *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro* and *Le Parisien* in the ten days following the attacks in Paris, on 13 November 2015 (November 14<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>th</sup>). The choice was based on criteria of relevance, dissemination and plurality. *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* in fact represent, at the same time, the first two for popular magazines and the cornerstones of the French newspaper journalism. *Le Parisien* is the fourth best-selling newspaper in France, with a circulation of 215,000 copies a day. Its relevance in the events is given by an obvious territorial dimension, but also by the relevance of the regional press in the French context (De Cock, Du Pont, 2016). Finally, from a political point of view those three broadcasts show balanced and differentiated editorial policies: *Le Monde* has a center-left orientation, *Le Figaro* a center-righteous and *Le Parisien* shows a substantial political neutrality.

The period of observation of the corpus was instead dictated by theoretical reasons. For our research it was crucial to consider the primary frameworks attributed to the events in the first phase of history next to them, i.e. when the attacks themselves suspended the normal course of daily life and required a collective reflection catalysing the public opinion and the public sphere. In these phases of institutional and interpretive *crisis* (the phase 2 of Turner's social drama model) media reveal best their role in the social construction of reality. They communicate under conditions of uncertainty, and yet, provide answers to the events characterised by disambiguation. It is in this gap between uncertainty and disambiguation that the performative aspect of the social construction can be better captured. Disambiguation, indeed, plays a crucial function: it is oriented to the political reasons of social cohesion, institutional and moral trust and consensus building. Globally, we collected and analyses 334 articles: *Le Monde*, 101; *Le Figaro*, 135; *Le Parisien*, 98.

The relationship between media and power in France must be understood within the particular structure of the country and of its media system (Lamizet, 2013). As regards French Republic, its imaginary is based on the voluntary participation of citizens to republican values of liberty, equality and fraternity, but is still understood as an expression of secularism, which first means the prevalence of the State on collective cultures and cultural pluralism. As concerns the relationship between Press and political power, French government has always played a strong control or influence on press, pushing towards an educational model of representation, and favouring an over-use of editorials and comments (D'Almeida, Delporte, 2010).

### 5.1 The warfare frame

The already mentioned primary framework of the 'war' found a clear correspondence in the French media coverage. Faced with an event so upsetting and frightening for the population as a terrorist attack in the heart of the capital, media played a crucial role during the first phase of public uncertainty. As mediators between political leaders and the population, journalists play a decisive role in the perception of the event and on their effects on public opinion. Therefore, their power derives from the effects of penetration, in terms of *resonance* – i.e. the credibility of actors, the frameworks of interpretation and salience (Snow, Benford, 1988).

The 'war' declared by Holland became the 'war' narrated by the newspapers. In the analysed texts, the presence of this metaphor is dominant: titles such as 'War in Paris'<sup>7</sup>, 'Holland, the Politics in time of war'<sup>8</sup>, 'C'est la guerre'<sup>9</sup>, 'When the youth of France enters war'<sup>10</sup>, 'The war continues'<sup>11</sup> occupy the covers and the first pages of the newspapers in the days following the attacks. These lexical choices enlighten the intention of the journalists to adhere to the Presidential warfare frame. We can recognize here all the power that resides in the linguistic device of the *metaphors*. It models public perceptions, conceptions and beliefs towards a phenomenon to the point that the metaphor – the war – and the object in question – the attacks – create the same image, the *telemorphosis* of terrorism (Baudrillard, 2002).

As in Hollande's speech, the lexical analysis of the articles shows a predominant use of the metaphor of the war, clearly preferred to the frame of crime. Words that are part of the lexical field of crime, such as *victims, justice, murder, criminal act* are much less recurring than others clearly related to the frame of war, such as *ally, battlefield, target, battle, fight, conflict, curfew, enemy, conquer, strategy*. The term *ally* is used to connect war to the *us-and-them-frame* (see 5.3) In some article *ally* identifies the Western nations. In others, potential entities to be defined: 'to the eyes of all our current and potential allies on the field, the war against the Islamic State is the number one priority'<sup>12</sup>; 'which allies against daesh, what means of war, what methods?'<sup>13</sup>.

The word *target* [*cible* in French] is used to connote the terrorist targets as war objectives:

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<sup>7</sup> *Le Figaro*, 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> *Le Monde*, 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> *Le Monde*, World, 16<sup>th</sup> November, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> *Le Figaro*, 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> *Le Figaro*, 19<sup>th</sup> November, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> *Le Figaro*, 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> *Le Figaro*, 18<sup>th</sup> November, 2015.



'The targets [*cibles*] are carefully chosen for the symbols that they embody'.<sup>14</sup>

'We know that in theory, for the Islamic State, every Western ... carries with him\her a target [*cible*] in front of or on the heart'.<sup>15</sup>

'In the symbolism of the targets [*cible*] that are linked to their hatred, we respond with our pride'.<sup>16</sup>

The constitution of the *warfare framework* is performed also through direct and indirect discourse, i.e. quotations. The quotation has already interested the field of study of the CDA because, even if its use can convey a resemblance of objectivity and authenticity, it has a precise function in the media discourse (Fairclough, 1995). It is never a mere reproduction, but rather a representation, which reflects and reproduces the underlying ideology of newspapers. Especially direct citations are carefully selected between official speeches and declarations in order to frame a given reality. We can show some example in the analysed articles:

France will be 'pitless' (Hollande) and intends to 'annihilate' the enemies (Valls).<sup>17</sup>

'France is at war against assassins,' said the head of state. Everyone agrees.<sup>18</sup>

'It is an act of war that has been prepared, organized, planned from the outside and with internal complicities that the investigation will establish,' said Francois Hollande, on Saturday.<sup>19</sup>

The use of citations plays the dual function of strengthening the framework of 'war' and presenting events as evident and established, as already framed by the actors' policies (Fairclough, 2001; Garcin-Marrou, 2001). Through the inclusion of selective quotations, media content reflects the dominant institutional attitudes by legitimizing them (Fairclough 1995): if the head of state said: 'France is at war against the assassins', then 'Everyone agrees'. This also implies that, according to the journalist, everyone – that is to say all the French people – share the same visions and opinions. This is a typical device used to homogenize the national group and to hide the political fragmentation of the country.

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<sup>14</sup> *Le Monde*, 16<sup>th</sup> November, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> *Le Figaro*, 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2015.

<sup>16</sup> *Le Monde*, 19<sup>th</sup> November, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> *Le Figaro*, 16<sup>th</sup> November, 2015.

<sup>18</sup> *Le Figaro*, 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2015.

<sup>19</sup> *Le Monde*, 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2015.

## **5.2 The clash of civilization frame The warfare frame**

Analysing the co-occurrences of the world 'war', we can find several expressions belonging to the political and military vocabulary, such as 'civil war', 'war of civilization', 'holy war', 'war of religion', 'urban war', 'total war'. In this article, there is no space enough to consider the religious element. We will just briefly report that public opinion in France and all over Europe has been divided in two political parts with relative visions about the relationship between terrorism and Islam. The more xenophobic part stressed that the origins of terrorism is in the background of Islam and that terrorist acts descend directly from Muslim principles. The more progressive part maintained the absence of any relationship – 'pas de amalgame' – between Islam and ISIS. A quick reading of the newspapers seems to confirm their adherence to the collective will to refuse the amalgam between Islam and terrorism. Nevertheless, the use of 'holy war' and 'war of religion' is very common in the article we analysed. Between the lexical and the conceptual level, we noticed a clear contradiction.

Finally, consider the following exert: 'They [web surfers] also post Marianne's faces or the Eiffel tower stylised as a sign of peace... Always in blue, white and red. Read the texts of the Internet users. They assert a strong message: in the face of barbarism, we French people resist to the assassins, we are not afraid of them'.<sup>20</sup>

Again, through the personal pronoun 'We\Us' the journalist speaks on behalf of all the French, assuming a uniformity of intents and ideas for the whole group. According to the journal, the message conveyed by the national symbols that flourished in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, is a message of solidarity, but also, above all, a message of resistance against the threat of terrorism, and of the 'barbarity' of the 'assassins'.

The use of the word 'barbarism' recalls the linguistic choices made by Hollande in his speech and shows us how some words are used strategically for shaping the public perception of events. Defining 'barbarian' one of the two parts of an opposition, necessarily implies considering the other as the symbol and the carrier of civilization. Indeed, the civilized vs. barbarian opposition is crucial for redressing the cultural trauma, as Benjamin and Todorov suggested in their books (Benjamin, 1974; Todorov, 2009). The *barbarian* is the necessary point of comparison of any identity construction based on ethnocentrism. As more as one's ethnocentric identity perceives some weakness, as more the opposition becomes vital (Walzer, 1999).

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<sup>20</sup> *Le Monde, Cultures et Idées*, 16<sup>th</sup> November, 2015.

### 5.3 The *Us* and *Them*-frame

A third frame used in press representation is the *Us and Them frame*. The enunciated *us* is post-ethnic, post-cultural, post-religious. It is based on the emancipation of the subject, and on the recognition of the democratic values of the Constitution and of the capitalist production model. Conversely, *jihad* is represented as an old-fashioned commitment, a closure within the community, a sense of religious construction of the present, opposite to modernity and incompatible with present time.

The 'us' used in the articles refers to the whole French people who share a common identity and who are in binary opposition to the 'other', 'the enemies of the Republic'. The choice of the journalists to use the pronouns 'we\us' shows their willingness not only to address French people, but also to speak on behalf of the entire French community (Van Dijk, 1995; Brookes, 1999; Fortanet, 2004). They feel authorised in it, when they say that the French 'went to war'<sup>21</sup> and when they speak of the 'war effort' they must 'lead'<sup>22</sup>, assuming homogeneity and uniformity of thought within the group. The authority whose journalists feel invested is reinforced by other linguistic expedients, like the use of conjugated verbs in the imperative – 'let's get together' (Fortanet 2004) – or the use of modal verbs as 'we must' and 'we will need', that are very common in the corpus. According to Fairclough (1995), modal verbs reveal the position of authority implicitly adopted by the author towards others, who in our case assumes the role of representative and guide of the people.

*Othering* is accomplished by the use of linguistic devices of categorization and labelling. It takes place primarily by geo-political categories that act on the structures of actorial pertinence of the narration, suggesting a consequentiality between belonging to a nation or religious identity and the willingness to carry out terrorist actions. In Parisian attacks it was possible to register a fundamental difficulty in the othering process, given the French citizenship of the young terrorists who made the attacks. They were born or raised in France and they were socialized to a European Islam. Discursively, this difficulty was circumvented by combining, even improperly, French citizenship to the nation of origin of the families. Terrorists have then been identified as French-Algerian, Franco-Tunisian and so on. This combination led to an essentialisation of culture: the cultural substratum has been reified in the representation, giving it a biological base.

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<sup>21</sup> *Le Figaro*, 21<sup>st</sup> November, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> *Le Monde*, 20<sup>th</sup> November, 2015.

A second language device of othering is represented using terms such as *jihadists*. On the one hand it marks an absolute strangeness of the actors; secondly, it suggests a monolinear relationship between religion and terrorist action; thirdly, it provides a bombers's profiling; fourthly, it provides an imaginary about terrorism and an exoteric religious world, made of desert training camps, jeep occupied by bloodthirsty warriors waving black flags, cities destroyed and dismembered bodies. ISIS' reality, it is worth repeating, is much more complex.

#### **5.4 The Nationalist frame**

National symbols are a system of signification, which allows building a communication, naturalizing our experience of reality, reassuring us on our collective identity, strengthening our belonging to a culture (Geisler, 2005).

In the analysed newspapers, we found articles entirely devoted to national symbols, such as 'When Marseillaise makes the Congress vibrate' (*Le Figaro*, 17<sup>th</sup> November 2015, p.2) or 'Planet Blue-white-red' (*Le Monde*, 21<sup>st</sup> November 2015). The attempt to strengthen the sense of national unity which is evoked by national symbols can also be found in other elements of the texts. An example is the recurrence of the rhetorical figure of the *personification*. With this metaphorical device, authors give life to what Wodak et al. called a 'constructive strategy' by demanding identification with an anthropomorphic nation. Consider the following examples:

'Paris never dies'. (*Le Figaro*, 18<sup>th</sup> November 2015); 'France is crying. She is not afraid.' (*Le Parisien*, 15<sup>th</sup> November 2015); '[...] a free, courageous and fraternal France, capable of assembling and to face the threats'. (*Le Parisien*, 19<sup>th</sup> November 2015).

In this narration, France plays an actorial role, showing the characteristics of human beings such as crying, acting 'facing the threats', feeling emotions like fear, freedom, courage, fraternity. We can recognize here an attempt to identify readers with the nation and to transmit a sense of participation of people to an imagined community, consistent with the symbolization of the Marianne shown during the Republican march. This confirms the important role that metaphors play, along with other linguistic and symbolic elements, in the mental construction of the nation (Billig, 1995). These elements are part of a broader constructive strategy of assimilation, continuation and inclusion in the group, which implies the exclusion of those who do not belong to it, or the exclusion of those which do not conform to its values.

## 6 Discussion: on cultural trauma and civil religion

Our outcomes show a strong continuity between primary frames used to construct the Parisian attacks through civil rituals, institutional speeches and media discourse, on a first hand; and between the French construction of a *cultural trauma* and the *war on terror* rhetoric used by Americans, during Cold War and after September Eleven, on a second hand. From a media studies perspective, we have shown a strong field-dependence between political power and newspapers in France, consisting with the DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach approach (1982).

From a performative point of view, this continuity can be better interpreted as a case of *cultural trauma*. In the rituals we analysed, what emerges is a framework of opposition between a civilization based on the pillars of French Revolution and a guilt-free massacre – in the same sense of Duster<sup>23</sup> (1971) – conducted by a representative of an enemy civilization. Its transformation in a cultural trauma has been leaden through a strong emotional recall to national unity, social cohesion, and national symbols as devices of repair; othering symbols of differentiation, and *clash of civilization* rhetoric, as devices for defining the impossibility of a reconciliation. This choice had the pragmatic effect of taking back the State in the public sphere, creating consensus around the suspension of civil freedoms and the introduction of exceptional measures of social control, profiling a precise, but ambivalent, enemy of the Nation: Islamic radicalism, but in a certain measure Islam as a whole; defining an enlarged audience, including all Western and non-Western countries.

Furthermore, the outcomes allow us to discuss on civil religion and cultural trauma. As Turner (1982) suggested, rituals play both a structural and an anti-structural function. They have a function of regulating social life, but, at the same moment, they dissolve and recreate a sense of community, performatively, during their liminoid phase. Therefore, the rituals following Paris Attacks supported the production of a new National pride, based on the founding values of French Revolution and on the opposition to the perfect counter-referent: radicalism. The cultural trauma has been declined as the opposition between two forms of *mythification*: the positive mythification of French Revolution, and of its practical application in nowadays French

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<sup>23</sup> Duster (1971) listed six elements that characterize a de-humanized massacre, like the ones conducted by terrorists in Paris: public faith in the organizational arm of violence, downgrading of individual grounds for action, fragmentation of distributive responsibility in organizations, secrecy, a vulnerable population, the development of a motivation for massacre.

society; and the negative mythization of Islam (Liogier, 2012), as the reign of Evil.

In the *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912), Emile Durkheim used French Revolution as the example *par excellence* of a moment revealing ‘the attitude of society for setting itself up’. Analysing the civil celebration of the values and historical memory of 1789, he expressed his very well-known theory of the symbolic and religious nature of society: ‘Society and its essential ideas become, directly and with no transfiguration of any sort, the object of a veritable cult...things purely laical by nature were transformed by public opinion into sacred things’ (1915: 245). The principles of the Revolution themselves became a religion ‘which has had its martyrs and apostles, which has profoundly moved the masses, and which, after all, as given birth to great things’ (Hunt, 1988: 35).

In this sense, in our opinion, the reaction to Paris Attacks showed a new form of civil religious rituals (Bellah, Hammond, 1980) which became typical of the age of weak events (Baudrillard, 2003). In this time, the performative power embodied both in the spirit of terrorism and in the aesthetic of globalization imposes a new performative affirmation of the State, through rituals and through the celebration of a domestic cultural memory. Indeed, national dramas following mass crimes are more and more the (media) events (Dayan, Katz, 1996) where the State shows itself more powerfully. The transformation of dramatic events in cultural traumas is more likely to happen in nations, as France, where cultural memory is linked to strong myths of the origins of the State, as for the 1789 Revolution; and when historical processes are more likely to produce a mythization of the opponent: Islam, as we said. It is not a case that the following Bastille Day killings in Nice targeted the temporal symbol (July, 14<sup>th</sup> 2016) of France Republic foundation.

Belligerent conflict is then transformed in a symbolic war between global actors who use well-known cultural narratives to justify the perpetuation of their political, and economic interests. With any possible, symbolic and non-symbolic, mean.

Finally, discussing the *cultural trauma* theory, we can intend the Paris Attacks as an historical moment which, differently from Holocaust, revealed a proper cultural failure of secularism and laicity model in the modern Nation State (Seligman, 2008).

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