On Othering

Processes and Politics of Unpeace

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4 Muslims in Italy

Rooting and Pluralism, Inequalities and Islamophobia

Fabio Perocco

Originally a continent of emigration, after the Second World War Europe became a continent of immigration—from within Europe and from outside. In 1950, foreign-born immigrants in Western Europe (people whose nationality differs from that of the country they live in) amounted to 4 million; in 1971, they were around 11 million; in 1982, 15 million; and in 1995, around 20 million.[1] In the 1990s, the world of immigration in Europe widened and took on a marked demographic, national, linguistic, and cultural heterogeneity. From a simple though no longer silent presence, immigration became a structural element of European societies. One example will suffice: in the mid-1990s, out of 55 million French, around 18 million had foreign-born parents or grandparents.[2] How about today? Well, on January 1, 2022, the number of residents in an EU28 country who did not hold EU citizenship was 23.8 million (5.3 percent of the EU28 population).[3] In addition, 13.7 million persons living in one of the EU Member States were citizens of another EU member state. If we consider the country of birth, including both residents born in a country that is not part of the EU and residents born in an EU country that is not the one they live in, on January 1, 2021 the number jumps to 55.4 million of foreign-born persons.[4] In Germany, a key country in Europe, currently 25 percent of the population has a migration background (Migrationshintergrund). When you consider such figures, it becomes hard to define yourself as "a real Finn" or "100 percent French."

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This immigration, which is unprecedented in the history of modern Europe, has been a powerful factor of social transformation in European societies. These numbers describe the great transformation of Europe in recent decades in all aspects of social life: demography, workplaces, urban landscape, social relationships, cultural dynamics, religion, and artistic production. For Europe this is a quantum shift, which is made even more radical when you consider that until not so long ago, in several European countries the program was to "cleanse" European-Aryan people of contamination by "inferior races" and Jews and thus eliminate them from Europe.

This transformation is the result of the social rooting of immigrant populations, which is the symbol of their social resistance, individually and collectively, to being exploited and to the conditions under which they live. The shift from "work immigration" to "settlement immigration" and "family immigration" has turned temporary foreign workers into stable residents and has turned temporary migrations (circular, seasonal, alternate) into permanent immigration.[5] This has indeed entailed not only a radical shift in the makeup of immigrant populations but also a transformation among immigrants at the level of identity, personality, or values. It also occasions an unexpected transformation within European countries themselves, many of which have tried to counter their own transformation in several ways: cultural or ethnic-racial selection, policies promoting temporariness and countering rooting, social alienation (*Entfremdung*), and ethnocentric assimilation. However, immigrants' push for stabilization and rooting has been so strong that no major events or policies since the economic crisis of 1973–1974 have managed to reverse this trend—not the subsequent policies to curb immigration and favour the return of emigrants, nor the global criminalization of immigration and making it increasingly precarious over the last two decades, or today's war on migrants.[6] Because there are such deep and structural causes behind contemporary migration, no containment policies, walls, or barbed wires can curb it. In this way, social rooting has gone from effect to cause, potentially leading to a further stabilization of immigrants "in transit" and therefore a further and powerful factor of transformation of European societies. Yet several European countries have continued to deny that they are immigration countries, and some still define immigrants as temporary guests.[7] Others have followed policies of neo-assimilationism, exclusion, segregation, subordinate inclusion, and ethnicization without recognition; today, almost all European nations are affected by the rise of institutional racism. Such apparently

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irrational reactions aim at influencing the *direction* and *speed* of the social transformation produced by immigration and at hindering human exchange on an equal basis. These responses also hinder solidarity between natives and immigrants to maintain a segment of the population in a condition of social inferiority and subalternity in the form of a racialized underclass.

These contrasting trends and forces may be observed in Italy, particularly in relation to the situation of Muslim immigrants, who are a plural and rooted presence but at the same time opposed and stigmatized.

A Plural Presence, an Obscured Pluralism

In Italy, the settlement of Muslims is recent and is linked to the arrival of migrant workers from Arab countries in the last three decades.[8] In the last fifteen years—in the wake of the arrival of new workers, refugees and asylum seekers, family reunification and natural reproduction—this population has grown: in 2018 there were 1.6 million Muslims, two thirds of whom reside in northern Italy, and who come mostly from Morocco (440,000), Albania (226,000), Bangladesh (141,000), Pakistan (106,000), and Egypt (111,000).[9]

From the point of view of national origin, it is a strongly plural presence, which has settled and stratified over time: in the 1980s and 1990s, immigrants came mainly from the Maghreb, Egypt and Senegal; in the 2000s, they were joined by Balkan Muslim populations; populations of West, Central, and East Africa, where Islam is practised;[10] populations from the Middle East (Iraq, Palestine, Syria, Turkey); and populations from the Indian subcontinent (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan). To this we shall add a marked demographic heterogeneity: in several cases there is a balance between men and women (Albania, Morocco); the percentage of children and youth, born or raised in Italy, is significant (above 20 percent), and the number of elderly people reunited with family or who have grown old in Italy is not negligible (around 10 percent).[11] There is also a relevant social heterogeneity in terms of territorial origin (metropolis, city, countryside; urban, rural, rural–urban environment), social class (from sub-proletariat to middle class), and education level (from illiterate to highly educated people). Also, migratory projects, social practices, and lifestyles are quite varied.[12]

Thus, Muslims constitute an extremely heterogeneous section of the community, representing dozens of different nationalities, languages and dialects, cultural traditions and local cultures, political orientations, religious

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affiliations (Sunni/Shia), specific religious currents, somatic traits, lifestyles, and cultural practices—so much so that it is not an exaggeration to say that in Italy (and in Europe) such a composite and heterogeneous population has never been seen. This is a tiny cross-section, through a sort of miniature social transfer, of the large plurality that characterizes the Islamic world. And due to the marked regional pluralism of Italy, Muslim immigration and Islam have manifold expressions.[13]

However, this plurality is constantly obscured by institutions, the political sphere, and the mass media.[14] A triple process of demonization, spectacularization, and overmediatization of Muslims methodically represents them as an undifferentiated monolith; the dominant discourse generalizes and involves all Muslims in an intangible unity (the Islam-whole), obscuring internal pluralism and the changes within this population. The public discourse represents them through the characteristic traits of a total-Islam, a crystallized and all-consuming religious dimension (the Homo islamicus, imbued with religion) and a total pervasiveness of the community.

Rooting and Rejection

Muslims, like the majority of immigrants in Italy, have experienced a deep process of social rooting; with their insertion into the labour market, they have achieved a progressive, albeit difficult, social, housing and administrative stabilization. They are the first, largest, and most rooted and organized extra-European population in Italy for work reasons. They have created relationships in the workplace, they have forged links with the area and local people, and they have enlarged and consolidated their presence in the public space.[15] The cultural capital of this population has grown, transformed, and diversified. This has made them less docile, less open to self-compression and exploitation, tougher, and more resistant to the social conditions imposed by the labour market and the local context; this has increased their social value and social cost and has fed both their demands for equal treatment and their critical positions toward inequality and a fate of social inferiority. In raising the issues of working and living conditions reserved for immigrants, rights, discrimination, recognition, and respect for countries of origin and by rejecting both assimilationism and segregation, they have made clear that they do not want to be treated as second-class citizens. This has materialized

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in the workplace and in the public space with the demand for better living conditions, recognition of one's identity, and respect for one's origins.

Within this process of rooting, Muslims have followed diversified and flexible forms of social inclusion in the different local contexts of Italian society: local contexts that are diversified in terms of economic development, urban structure, and political cultures. The stabilization of Muslims has taken place in a diffuse and flexible manner, adapting to the economic, social and cultural features of the national context. Several Muslim strategies of interaction can be observed in the public sphere; local societies have responded to them with a mixture of reticence and suspicion, openness and solidarity, with each context of interaction bounded by cultural, political, and historical particularities. The social rooting has produced—like it or not—the transformation of the demographic, social, cultural, and religious frameworks of the country. Think, for example, of the religious scenario: in Italy today, there are about seven hundred places of Islamic worship (prayer rooms, mosques), differentiated in terms of national, political, and religious references.[16] This was something unthinkable until a few years ago in a country where for centuries the national identity and the urban landscape coincided with the Catholic religion and where, until a few decades ago, the idea of a single pure superior race/civilization was cultivated.

In conjunction with such processes of insertion, relationships and contact with local and other immigrant populations has expanded. Multiculturalism has progressed slowly but incessantly during daily life: work, friendship, and love relationships have increased. Daily multiculturalism has inevitably widened, day after day, in apartment blocks, schools, places of work, and leisure time. New forms of social and solidarity links were created within a trend toward shared life, symbiosis and exchange. This has contributed to the transformation of social relations and cultural dynamics, and to diversification and hybridization.

This is the very opposite of the expectations and demands of the production system, of governments and labour and migration policies, which require a temporary workforce, possibly unrooted, precarious, and with few rights—cheap, isolated, docile, and to be used according to the needs of the production system, thus avoiding the social and political costs of immigration. Muslim immigrants have become a wanted but not welcomed population. The increase in anti-Muslim racism and in anti-migrant Islamophobia aimed at

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countering their rooting, pushing them back to the margins, and diminishing their social value is no coincidence.[17]

Different social forces oppose these processes of transformation, trying to influence the direction and/or the speed of social change. Muslims are the object of a set of policies, practices and discourses aimed at devaluing and marginalizing them. The social inclusion of Muslims is often hindered and is continuously described by institutions, political parties, and the mass media in problematic and negative ways: Muslims are considered bearers of ways of life which are incompatible with European ones; as a threat to both secularism and the Christian identity; as a threat to modernity and tradition; as an isolated and self-referential entity and total and all-encompassing, encapsulated in the religious dimension; and cast as responsible for the failure of democracy, multiculturalism, and even the return of racism. Muslim immigration is systematically placed, by public policies and the dominant discourse, under specific headings: demographic invasion, cultural colonization, the Sharia-zation of Europe, uncompromising diversity, and absolute incompatibility with Italian values. The discourse points to the impossibility of integration because of "their culture," and presents Muslim communities as closed enclaves—angry, regurgitating discomfort, violence, religious fanaticism, and extremism.

Communities are described as organized, demanding, and critical: the dominant discourse and institutions identify and include these populations under the category of "Muslims," starting a top-down process of Islamization of social issues. They are the object of a process redefining them as "the other Muslim" in a completely negative and derogatory sense of the term, as "the Other" par excellence. Protests, struggles, claims as workers, as migrants, as young people, were turned by the dominant discourse and institutions into Islamic issues, into "the Islam problem," into "the Muslim immigration problem" within a top-down Islamization of social issues. The set of anti-Muslims policies, practices and discourses is systemic: it is the system of Islamophobia. A structural aspect of the Italian (and Western) society, with deep historical and cultural roots, Islamophobia is organic to the inferiorization and marginalization of Muslims, and functional to the legitimation and reproduction of social inequalities that affect Muslims structurally in Italy and in Western countries.

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Inequalities, Racialization of Exclusion, and Islamophobia

In Italy, as in the rest of Europe, the current condition and social position of the Muslims is heterogeneous. However, because of the interaction, accumulation, and transmission of inequalities, most Muslims find themselves in the lowest, poorest, and most precarious section of the working class. Muslims have higher rates of unemployment and underemployment than the majority of the population (and often than the rest of the population of foreign origin) and are more likely to be confined to the lower levels of the labour market. On average, they have lower levels of education, higher rates of poverty, a worse overall health profile, and a higher concentration in destitute urban areas and in poorer-quality housing. In 2014, the unemployment rate for Italians was 12.2%, for EU citizens 15.7%, and for non-EU citizens 17.4%, but the top five in the unemployment rate ranking by nationality were Morocco (27.3%), Tunisia (24.3%), Albania (22.7%), Pakistan (20%), and Egypt (19.4%).[18]

Islamophobia plays an important role in this regard: the depiction of the Islamic culture and religion as directly responsible for this situation and Muslims as victims of their own culture contributes to transforming this population into a backward religious minority.[19] At the same time, this population is a segment of the working class with a migratory background and foreign origins: it is doubly disadvantaged as foreign and Muslim, penalized because of its class position (migrant workers), its faith (Muslim), and its countries of origin being once under the rule of colonialism (dominated nations).

In this framework, xenophobia (racism against foreigners, as aliens), Arabophobia (racism against Arabs, as a cursed and damned race, the enemy based on “racial” difference) and Islamophobia (racism against Muslims, as the other absolute, based on religious difference) contribute jointly—through a multiple discriminations—to producing inequalities, to worsening deprivation and social compression, and to consolidating an excluded social segment on a religious basis. This *combined inequality* results from the interaction of the different dimensions of social inequality (work, income, housing, education, and health inequality) with the interaction of xenophobia, Arabophobia, and Islamophobia. This multifaceted interaction is the driving force of a process of production and accumulation of inequalities that structurally affect Muslims.

At this juncture, Islamophobia has gained primacy over xenophobia and Arabophobia. As a central element of contemporary racism and as a

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structuring factor of the current nationalisms, Islamophobia has become the most important element in the unequal reproduction of this social segment, plays a major role in crystallizing inequalities, and provides plenty of ideological support that paves the way for a range of discriminating policies and practices, whose outcomes and results it subsequently legitimizes.

A means for maintaining and legitimizing such inequalities is racialization: Muslims are defined as a "race" or a "semi-race," that is, "the Muslim race," through a social process in which the factors of race, culture, and faith overlap, and the religious dimension is racialized and the Islamic culture is naturalized.[20] Through this process, an extremely heterogeneous population is depicted as a unitary subject and as an exception.[21] The idea of a "Muslim exception" allows for the normalization of a religiously "racialized" underclass. By naturalizing inequalities—ascribing them to the nature of the Islamic culture—Islamophobia crystallizes the "Muslim issue" as the major matter of concern, the culprit of all the social issues related to immigration, under which all social issues are subsumed and turned into elements of a clash of civilizations caused by the culture of the Other. This exception is normalized by identifying Muslims as victims of their own culture and by pointing to their "way of being" as the cause of the social exclusion they suffer, thus ultimately blaming their exclusion and marginalization on them. In turn, this results in the culturalization and racialization of Muslims' social condition, regardless of its relation to Islamic culture and religion.

This dual process of racialization and marginalization draws on a broad and diverse set of social actors: best-selling authors, mass media, far-right parties and anti-Islam organizations, and state institutions. In Italy, the literary genre of anti-Islam publications—one of the most active sectors in the industry of Islamophobia—is quite widespread.[22] This branch produces bestsellers that reiterate and revise the set of elements that have historically converged in a caricatural representation of Islam and Muslims. Within it is a literary strand of publications, for example the Eurabia fantasy series, which is dedicated to promoting stereotypes of inferiority and conspiracy theories about Muslim immigration; in the Italian context, a popular and visceral style prevailed over a "scientific" and learned style.[23]

Besides the prevalence of works by Islamophobic foreign authors that have been translated into Italian, Italy has itself produced a fair number of them. The most famous is Oriana Fallaci: her work concerns the cultural colonization of Europe by Islam and the spiritual decline of Europe; in *The*

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Rage and the Pride (2001) and *The Force of Reason* (2006), she warns the West about the serious threat presented by Muslim immigrants because of their cultural backwardness and spiritual inferiority. The works of Magdi Allam, an Egyptian-born journalist, naturalized Italian, and convert to Catholicism, are also widespread, such as *Bin Laden in Italia* (2002), *Jihad in Italia* (2003), *Kamikaze Made in Europe* (2004), *Islam: Siamo in guerra* (2015), *Io e Oriana* (2016), and *Stop Islam*.

Works such as these exert a significant influence both on the common reader and on the other actors of Islamophobia, with which they interact dialectically. For example, in the 1990s, mass media specialized in producing negative discourses around immigrants through the distorted use of the concepts of Otherness and diversity, identifying in the Muslims their most notorious representatives. In 1997 a popular talk show (*Pinocchio*) unveiled to the Italian public the presence of Muslims in the country and contributed to fixing the characterizing features of Muslim immigration: Islam as a total, uniform, unitary order; the Islamic religion as an obstacle to integration; Muslim communities as closed entities, as isolated, self-referential enclaves. This has resulted in an increased focus on Muslim immigration and a growing suspicion of Muslims, fuelled by mass media that depict their presence as unnatural, troublesome, and threatening. Through a systematically hostile register, Muslims migrants came to be depicted as radically different: an ancestral, organic kind of difference and diversity that must be kept distanced and isolated. The "integration of Muslim immigrants in the national society" was a priori regarded as problematic and impossible because of "their culture." In the 2000s, the picture changed in concert with international events. Violent press campaigns have specifically targeted local contexts, individual and collective subjects (representatives of local communities and associations), and aspects of social life (mosques, the veil, the burkini, the Muslim diet). The focus on Muslim immigrants has become more and more constant, insistent, and obsessive.

Muslims have been depicted as a global threat, which in turn has fuelled feelings of dislike and refusal; Muslims, depicted as a pathology, are associated with images of strangeness, isolation, and self-exclusion. The mass media have turned them into public enemy number one, obscuring their daily life and real conditions of existence through countless distortions, generalizations, and reductionism. Muslim immigration has become the object of a racialized regime of representation, functional to its subordinate inclusion: using the

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discursive routines of emergency and security issues, the mass media have promoted the exclusion and marginalization of Muslim immigrants from social life while encouraging the adoption of special and urgent control policies, which has sometimes resulted in central and local governments actually adopting restrictive measures. The media industry of Islamophobia has been untiringly devoted to the social and symbolic inferiorization of Muslim immigrants, thus contributing to their subordinate condition.

Italy has been at the forefront in Europe in terms of anti-immigration and anti-Islam parties; the main reference here is the Lega Nord (Northern League). Born at the end of the 1980s in the name of autonomism, neoliberalism, and anti-southern Italy racism, it was a leading agent in the spread of the discourse on Muslim immigration as a global threat and as a carrier only of backwardness, obscurantism, and ineptitude. For the past twenty-five years, Lega Nord has been a firm opposer of Muslims' rooting and integration—considering them aliens, impossible to integrate, lacking both skills and willingness to integrate—and has been one of the major political forces in the country. It has frequently participated in government coalitions, holding key ministries and functions of the state at both central and local levels and governing several cities and regions in northern Italy.

The party's late-1990s hostility against Muslim immigration became, in the 2000s, pillars of its propaganda and line of action. Lega Nord promotes itself as the defender of national identity, guardian of the Italian people's Catholic identity, and custodian of modern progress, which is threatened by "Muslim obscurantism." It especially claims to be the champion of the cultural tradition of local communities in northern Italy, of the "motherland" threatened by cultural globalization and international migration.[24] Lega Nord has permanently placed the topic of "Islamic invasion" among the pillars of its political communication and focused its political action (especially at the local level) on mobilizing against Islam's presence in public space. Several party chapters, members, supporters, and local administrators have harshly opposed the public presence of Muslims (Islamic cultural associations, prayer halls, mosques, halal food in schools and canteens, afternoon schools in Arabic, after-school care for children) and Muslim celebrations (Īd al-Adah, Ramaḍān, ʿĪd al-Fitr) by organizing marches, torchlight processions, pickets, mobilizations, desecration of areas to be turned into mosques, municipal interpellations, messages to newspapers, signs, and graffiti.[25] Several local administrations governed by this party have adopted provisions (municipal resolutions, regulations, bans,

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etc.) limiting Muslims' private autonomy and rights or denying the recognition of Islam in the public sphere.[26]

Lega Nord's hostility toward Muslims is a structured, long-term activity, considering the following dates: on June 23, 1995, the president of the Chamber of Deputies in the Italian Parliament, Irene Pivetti, a prominent member of Lega Nord, privately took part in a "redress rosary" organized by the Lepanto Cultural Centre following the opening of a mosque in Rome; in 2018 and 2019, Matteo Salvini, the explicitly anti-Islamic leader of Lega Nord, took to kissing a rosary at campaign rallies and other public events.[27] A decade earlier, during the national meeting of the party in 2008, in front of tens of thousands people, Salvini made the following comments:

> I want a revolution against illegal immigrants. . . . I want the streets cleaned up from all these ethnic groups that are destroying our Country. . . . I want a revolution against nomads, gypsies. . . . I had two nomad and gypsy camps in Treviso destroyed. . . . I want to eliminate all the gypsy children that rob the elderly. . . . I want double zero tolerance! . . . I want a revolution against those who want to open mosques and Islamic centres. . . . They can go pray in the desert. . . . No more Muslims! They are to go back to their countries! . . . They can go piss in their mosques! . . . I want a revolution against those who tolerate headscarves and burkas. . . . I don't know who hides behind those headscarves and burkas: there could be someone with balls or with a machine gun in between his legs. . . . I don't want to see black, yellow, brown, grey teachers for our youth. What do they teach? The culture of the desert? The culture of those who chase lions or those who chase gazelles in order to eat them?[28]

Lega has influenced the public significantly, even those who don't identify with the party: its stances have influenced the other parties and both national and local government policies on migration and integration.[29] Its white supremacist slogans have been endorsed by various sectors of society (but not by the Catholic Church), and some have found their way into the programs of majority parties, influencing the political agenda. Over the last decade, groups and movements from the traditional neo-fascist right wing have joined in (Fiamma Tricolore, Forza Nuova, Casapound), which has led to an exponential regrowth in demonstrations and mobilizations against migrants and the places of Islam.

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National institutions, at both central and local levels, have helped in the spread and application of Islamophobia. They did this in two ways: "passively," by not acting, not legislating, and not applying anti-discrimination rules against verbal and physical attacks, threats, and abuse, thus indulging anti-Muslim racism; and "actively," by promoting exclusion and discrimination within public policies and local integration policies, in rights regulations, and in rules on private autonomy.

A remarkable example can be found in provisions against the opening or presence of mosques/prayer halls.[30] The war on mosques has not only involved political mobilization and citizens' groups at the local level, but also administrative-bureaucratic harassment by municipalities.[31] Many cities concocted elaborate bureaucratic tricks to hinder, curb, or stop the opening of prayer halls. Their main reasons concerned traffic and road issues (that is, the lack of parking spots), hygiene/sanitary issues, or technical/structural issues in the buildings and problems in the intended destination of use. Since 2000, there have been several bans, denied permits, and evictions, culminating in Regional Law no. 2 of the Lombardy region in February 2015, also known as the "anti-mosque law."[32] Drafted as formally valid for all religions (with which the Italian state has or has not agreements), it has dire effects for Muslims' freedom of worship through prerequisites and elements that hinder the opening of prayer halls, including additional controls by a part of the regional council and the possibility for municipalities to hold advisory referendums on whether to open mosques. Similar provisions using urbanistic tools as elements of discrimination were then approved by other Italian regions. The Veneto region, legislating on the management of landscape and territory, approved Regional Law no. 12 in 2016.[33] This law, which never mentions Islam, provides municipal administrations with effective urbanistic tools to hinder or deny (through indirect discrimination) the authorization to open mosques/prayer halls.

From these examples we can infer that Islamophobia, as a material relation of oppression, is a structural element of the system of social relations and social life in Italy. In particular, institutional racism, Italian-style, has state-sanctioned Islamophobia among its distinctive features.

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Conclusion: Between Lights and Shadows

Over time, Italian society and immigrant Muslims have developed important processes of rapprochement and exchange that have matured in workplaces, schools, and places of daily life. However, at the same time, three problems can be observed: (1) a problem of social relations between the Italian society and immigrant Muslims, marked by repulsion, rejection, and exclusion of the latter; (2) a problem of public representation of Muslims, as the dominant discourse systematically paints Muslims in a distorted manner using inferiorizing stereotypes; and (3) a problem of recognition of Muslims in the public space and in the public sphere.[34] Italy, which has not yet come to terms with the history of its creation as a nation, is struggling to accept Islam and to incorporate it into its history and collective consciousness.

On one hand, slowly, day after day, daily multiculturalism has made its way into the sharing of the same physical and social spaces, into the sharing of the same material condition of working class. Sometimes this sharing has become a mixture, a dynamic projection toward new identities that transcend their origin. This has materialized in mixed unions and marriages, in new relationships of friendship, in sports associations, in new forms of solidarity and social bonds, and in Islamic–Christian relations promoted by the progressive component of the Catholic Church. On the other hand, these experiences and dynamics of exchange and mutual integration have interested only a part of Italian society, whereas the majority of the parties, the mass media, state institutions, and a good part of the local population are unwilling to accept Islam as a component of Italian society and unwilling to recognize Islam in the public sphere—so much so that Islam, despite being the second-largest religion in Italy, has no legal recognition as a religion by the Italian state. Despite Islam's importance in Italian religious and social life, the Italian state has officially recognized the following congregations by signing an agreement that allows, among other things, directing portions of taxes to these entities: the Catholic Church, the Waldensian and Methodist Churches, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Union of Jewish Communities, the Union of Adventist Christian Churches of the Seventh Day, the Assemblies of God, the Holy Orthodox Archdiocese of Italy and Exarchate for Southern Europe, the Christian Evangelical Baptist Union of Italy, the Italian Buddhist Union, the Apostolic Church in Italy, the Italian Hinduist Union,

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and the Italian Buddhist Institute Soka Gakkai. It has no such understanding with any representative of Islam.[35]

This situation has repercussions for all immigrants and the local population. Islamophobia, as a form of racism (the highest form of racism in the neoliberal era), negatively affects all immigrant populations and throws shadows of suspicion over them. Moreover, it leads large portions of local populations to accept discrimination and racism, thus creating a deep, unnatural division among the people. The systemic Islamophobia directly affects Muslim immigrants and simultaneously poisons local populations, who are encouraged (from above) to dig an unbridgeable chasm.[36]

For these reasons, the stance on Muslim immigration is an important bench test for the working class and a major challenge for radical and class-centred antiracism. The alternative to building bridges among people and solidarity is pogroms, interracial clashes, and war among the poor. Peace is not obvious; it is a non-obvious process. Because it is not taken for granted, the achievements and successes of peace must be continually protected, preserved, and guarded to avoid subsidence and setbacks. Racism, as a social relationship of domination and an ideology of legitimation of domination, is a weapon of mass division, an instrument for the destruction of relationships and experiences that operates under the banner of equal exchange, co-operative encounter, and reciprocal integration.

The social transformation linked to migration is filled with positive potential, including the possibility of overcoming national lacks and national antagonisms, and of freeing society from a scrap, a rattletrap, like nationalism. However, this potential can be revealed only if racism and discrimination fall; unfortunately, racism and discrimination have intensified precisely to block social transformations and prevent this potential from being realized. Therefore, solidarity and peace, equality and friendship between peoples, or confrontation and enmity between peoples, is a central issue for those who aspire to peace and egalitarianism and for those who oppose to them. As far as I am concerned, I know which side to be on.

Notes

1 Klaus Bade, *L'Europa in Movimento* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2001); available in English under the title *Migration in European History*, trans. Allison Brown (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2003). To these figures, naturalized immigrants and

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their descendants shall be added, as once they obtain citizenship they are no longer included in the statistics on foreigners. In countries such as France or Great Britain, naturalized foreigners outnumber foreigners.

2 Bade, *L'Europa in Movimento*, 378.

3 "Migration and Migrant Population Statistics," Eurostat: Statistics Explained, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics#Migrant_population:_23.8_million_non-EU_citizens_living_in_the_EU_on_1_January_2022.

4 Idos, *Dossier Statistico Immigrazione* (Rome: Idos, 2022), 60.

5 For a more complete discussion of this shift, see Abdelmalek Sayad, *La double absence* (Paris: Seuil, 1999).

6 See the following books for in-depth discussions of increasingly precarious status of immigrants: Mohammad Chaichian, *Empires and Walls: Globalization, Migration, and Colonial Domination* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket, 2014); Tim Marshall, *Divided: Why We're Living in an Age of Walls* (London: Elliott and Thompson, 2018); Migreurop, *Guerre aux migrants* (Paris: Syllepse, 2007).

7 Saskia Sassen's *Guests and Aliens* (New York: The New Press, 1999) offers a comprehensive analysis of worldwide immigration.

8 Islam has ancient roots in Italy. However, toward the end of the nineteenth century it had almost completely disappeared; it has reappeared in recent decades as a result of labour immigration.

9 Muslims account for 30 percent of foreigners in Italy. For further information, see Fondazione Ismu, "Immigratie Religioni in Italia [Immigrants and Religions in Italy]," 2019, http://www.ismu.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CS-ISMU-Immigrati-e-religioni-in-Italia-2019.pdf. These figures do not include immigrants who have obtained Italian citizenship, immigrants who are not registered with the municipal registry office, or undocumented migrants. Italy does not require one to declare one's religion: the above data are obtained from an estimate based on the percentages of religious affiliation in the countries of origin and applied to the nationalities in Italy (basically a statistical criterion applied to the countries of origin that identifies the main religion and minorities on the basis of government data). As for the Albanians—overall around 430,000 people—these criteria and data could be quite arbitrary.

The primary regions of settlement in Northern Italy are, respectively, Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna, Veneto, and Piedmont.

10 The African countries from which these immigrants arrived include Nigeria, Niger, Mali, Sudan, Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Cameroon, Chad, Ghana, Burkina Faso, and the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire.

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11 These figures are taken from "'Le comunità migranti in Italia': Rapporti 2020 ['Migrant communities in Italy': 2020 Reports]," *Integrazionemigranti.gov.it: Vivere e lavorare in Italia*, https://integrazionemigranti.gov.it/it-it/Dettaglio-approfondimento/id/30/Le-comunita-migranti-in-Italia-Rapporti-2020.

12 Annalisa Frisina, "Young Muslims of Italy: Islam in the Everyday Life and the Public Visibility of a New Generation of Muslims," in *Annual Review of Sociology of Religion*, edited by Giuseppe Giordan (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 329–51; Chantal Saint-Blancat, "Italy," in *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam*, edited by Cesari Jocelyne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 265–310.

13 For further context, see: Enzo Pace and Khaled Rhazzali, "Muslim Communities in a Catholic Country: The Case of Italy," in *Islam in the West*, edited by Abe Ata and Jan Ali (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 237–55; Chantal Saint-Blancat, ed., *L'islam in Italia. Una Presenza Plurale* (Rome: Edizioni Lavoro, 1999); Chantal Saint-Blancat and Fabio Perocco, "New Modes of Social Interaction in Italy: Muslim Leaders and Local Society in Tuscany and Venetia," in *European Muslims and the Secular State*, edited by Jocelyne Cesari and Sean McLuoghlin (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 99–112.

14 Regarding evidence on public images of Muslims, see Alfredo Alietti and Dario Padovan, *Islamophobia in Italia. Rapporto Nazionale 2018*, (Ankarra: Seta, 2020), https://setav.org/en/assets/uploads/2020/04/R156It.pdf; Marco Bruno, *L'islam immaginato. Rappresentazioni e stereotipi nei media italiani* (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 2008); Laura Cervi, Santiago Tejedor and Monica Gracia, "What Kind of Islamophobia? Representation of Muslims and Islam in Italian and Spanish Media," *Religions* 12, no. 6, (2021): 1–17, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060427; Bruno Cousin and Tommaso Vitale, "Le magistère intellectuel islamophobe d'Oriana Fallaci," *Sociologie* 1, no. 5 (2014): 61–79; Enzo Pace, "Giochi di specchi. L'immagine dell'islam nei media," in *Islam plurale*, edited by Mostafa El Ayoubi (Rome: Com Nuovi Tempi, Roma, 2000), 19–33; Fabio Perocco, "Dall'islamofobia al razzismo antimusulmano," in *Razzismo di stato. Stati Uniti, Europa, Italia*, edited by Pietro Basso (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2010), 467–91; Fabio Perocco, "L'enjeu 'Islam' en Italie," in *Religion(s) et identité(s) en Europe. L'épreuve du pluriel*, edited by Antonela Capelle-Pogăcean, Patrick Michel and Enzo Pace (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 2008), 141–57; Andrea Pin, "Islam in Italy," in *State, Religion and Muslims*, edited by Melek Saral and Şerif Onur Bahçecik (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 302–46; Viviana Premazzi, "Young Muslims and Islamophobia in Italy: What is at Stake?" *Culture e Studi del Sociale* 6, no. 1 (2021): 51–64.

15 Significant unionization and an important associative phenomenon with different aims and characteristics have taken shape in several cultural, political,

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religious, support, and advocacy associations. Mosques and prayer rooms have played an important role in the process of rooting, as they are much more than just places of worship. They are also, for the mass of secularized immigrants, a point of reference, a place of exchange, and of sociality—one of the few doors open to immigrants where they can find material and moral support.

16 For further discussion of faith-based integration, see Enzo Pace, "Religious Congregations in Italy: Mapping the New Pluralism," in *Congregations in Europe*, edited by Christophe Monnot and Jörg Stolz (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2018), 139–56; Enzo Pace, "Religious Minorities in a Society Monopolized by Catholicism," in *Minorities and Populism: Critical Perspectives from South Asia and Europe*, edited by Kaul Volker and Ananya Vajpeyi (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2020), 217–30. The information on Islamic places of worship needs to be seen in the context of other data on places of worship in Italy related to immigration, as it shows not only how immigration has restored the weight of religious pluralism in Italy, but, above all, the size of the Muslim presence in the country: 355 Orthodox parishes and monasteries, 38 Sikh temples, 500 Nigerian Pentecostal and charismatic churches, 350 Ghanaian Pentecostal and charismatic churches, and 650 pastoral centres for Catholic immigrants (Pace, "Religious Congregations").

17 In the context of several Islamophobias that have existed in the world.

18 Ministero del Lavoro, *Quinto Rapporto Annuale. I migranti nel mercato del lavoro in Italia* (Rome, 2015), 32–33, https://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita/immigrazione/focus-on/ingresso-e-soggiorno-per-lavoro-in-italia/Documents/V%20Rapporto%20annuale%20MdL%20Migranti%202015_%200%206.pdf.

19 For a broader discussion of Islamophobia in Europe, see Simon Dawes, "Islamophobia, Racialisation and the 'Muslim Problem' in France," *French Cultural Studies* 32, no. 3 (2021):179–86, https://doi.org/10.1177/09571558211028202; Giulia Evolvi, "Hate in a Tweet: Exploring Internet-Based Islamophobic Discourses," *Religions* 9, no. 10 (2018), https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9100307; Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison, "Immigration, islam, 'identité nationale' : vieux débats, vieux démons," *Topique* 114 (2011): 93–106, https://doi.org/10.3917/top.114.0093; Ayhan Kaya, *Islamophobia as a Form of Governmentality: Unbearable Weightiness of the Politics of Fear* (Malmö: Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration Diversity and Welfare, 2011); Arun Kundnani, "Integrationism: The Politics of Anti-Muslim Racism," *Race and Class* 48, no. 4 (2007): 24–44, https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396807077069; Arun Kundnani, *The Muslims Are Coming! Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror* (London: Verso, 2014); Laura Mijares Molina, Johanna Martine Lems, and Virtudes Téllez Delgado, "Constructing Subaltern Muslim Subjects: the Institutionalization of Islamophobia,"

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Revista De Estudios Internacionales Mediterráneos 24 (2018), https://doi.org/10.15366/reim2018.24.001; George Morgan and Scott Poynting, *Global Islamophobia Muslims and Moral Panic in the West* (London: Routledge, 2016); Aaron Ponce, "Excluding Europe's Muslims: Symbolic Boundaries and Anti-immigrant Attitudes Along a Racial–Ethnic Hierarchy," *Humanity and Society* 43, no. 4 (2019): 375–402, https://doi.org/10.1177/0160597618814884; Salman Sayyid, "Islamophobia and the Europeanness of the other Europe," *Patterns of Prejudice* 52, no. 5 (2018): 420–35, https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2018.1512481.

20 On the process of normalizing inequality through racialization, see Jocelyne Cesari, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Steve Garner and Saher Selod, "The Racialization of Muslims," *Critical Sociology* 41, no. 1 (2015): 9–19, https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920514531606; Fred Halliday, "Islamophobia Reconsidered," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22, no. 5 (1999): 892–902; Nasar Meer, "Racialization and Religion: Race, Culture and Difference in the Study of Antisemitism and Islamophobia," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, no. 3 (2013): 385–98, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2013.734392; Saher Selod, "Citizenship Denied: The Racialization of Muslim Men and Women post 9/11," *Critical Sociology* 41, no. 1 (2015): 77–95, https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920513516022; Saher Selod and David Embrick, "Racialization and Muslims," *Sociology Compass* 7, no. 8 (2013): 644–55, https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12057.

21 See Chantal Saint-Blancat and Ottavia Schmidt di Friedberg, "Mobilisations laïques et religieuses des musulmans en Italie," *Cahiers d'études sur la Mediteranée orientale et le monde turco-iranien* 33 (2002): 91–106, https://doi.org/10.4000/cemoti.725.

22 See Nathan Lean, *The Islamophobia Industry* (London: Pluto Press, 2012).

23 For examples of a more "scientific" and learned, see Hans Magnus Enzesberger, "The Radical Loser," January 12, 2005, http://www.signandsight.com/features/493.html; Bruce Thorton, *Decline and Fall: Europe's Slow-Motion Suicide* (New York: Encounter Books, 2007).

24 For Lega Nord, Alain de Benoist has been an important cultural reference, especially regarding the relationship between cultural globalization/ethnonationalism and the absolutization of cultural differences (cultural racism and differentialism).

25 On November 21, 2000, the mayor of Rovato (Brescia) decided that "non-Christians" should maintain a distance of at least 15 metres from the small town's church. On December 17, 2000, Lega Nord organized a large demonstration against Muslim immigration and against illegal immigration in Milan, which was attended by approximately 20,000 people.

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26 Examples include the 2008 petition against offering an Arabic language course for the children of immigrants in the primary school in Sant'Agostino (west of Ferrara); the demonstrations in Treviso in December 2002 against the creation of an Arabic school and against the celebrations for ʿĪd al-Fitr, the demonstrations against Īd al-Aḍḥā in Montebelluna in February 2003 and against the creation of an Islamic cemetery in Udine in November 2008.

27 Salvini's use of the rosary recalls the 1571 Battle of Lepanto, in which the naval forces of the Christian Holy League faced off against those of the Muslim Ottoman Empire. In preparation, Pope Pius V asked Christians to recite the rosary, and the Holy League emerged victorious.

28 I have selected salient fragments from Salvini's address to the national gathering of the Lega Nord in Venice: "Festa dei Popoli—Gentilini," September 14, 2008, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_WCZNQJkV3E.

29 The majority of Italian institutions are not very much in favour of Islam and Muslim immigration. See the statement by Silvio Berlusconi at the Berlin summit of September 26, 2001, when, as the head of the Italian government, he claimed that Islam is inferior and the Western world is superior: "They are lagging behind 1400 years."

30 Mobilizations took place in Bologna, Genoa, and Padua, where movements were created at the local level for a referendum against mosques.

31 A constant feature of anti-mosque mobilizations is physical and symbolic violence, insults to religion, humiliation and vilification of religious symbols, the desecration of others' values, and de-humanization. Often demonstrations concluded with desecrating lands or buildings by parading pigs and spreading their urine and dung, as happened in Lodi (October 2000), Padova (November 2007), and Genoa and Bologna (2008). There have been attacks, raids, and damage throughout the whole country: in January 2003, the entry door of a prayer hall in Imola (Bologna area) was damaged by a Molotov cocktail; December 2006 saw a fascist raid—including posting a pig's severed head—against the working site of a mosque in Colle Val d'Elsa (Siena area) after a torchlight procession attended by around five hundred people (a few months earlier, in May, Oriana Fallaci stated in the *New Yorker*: "I'll blow it up! I'll go to my anarchist friends, take explosives with them and blow it up"). In April 2006, the entry door of Parma's prayer room was damaged, and swastikas were painted on the walls; in July 2006, the door of the prayer hall in San Remo was disfigured with swastikas; in 2007, there were attacks against prayer halls in Abbiategrasso and Segrate (Milan area); in 2008 and 2012, cherry bombs and firecrackers were thrown in the prayer hall of Battipaglia (Salerno area); in February 2008, there was a bomb attack against the mosque of Milan (via

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Quaranta); in August 2011, there was an arson attack against the Islamic cultural center in Bologna; in October 2013, a fascist blitz attacked the prayer room of Ravenna; in March 2014, a raid damaged the inside of the prayer hall in Rieti and burned the Qur'an; in February 2015, an arson attack hit the prayer hall in Massa Lombarda (Ravenna area); in December 2015, a cherry bomb hit the prayer hall in Montagnana (Padua area); and in 2016, the prayer hall of Bergamo was damaged, and a cherry bomb used against the prayer hall of Padua (Arcella).

32 "Principi per la pianificazione delle attrezzature per servizi religiosi" [Principles for the Planning of Religious Services Premises], Regione Lombardi, https://www.regione.lombardia.it/wps/portal/istituzionale/HP/DettaglioServizio/servizi-e-informazioni/Enti-e-Operatori/Territorio/governo-del-territorio/principi-pianificazione-attrezzature-servizi-religiosi/principi-pianificazione-attrezzature-servizi-r.

33 "Modifica della legge regionale 23 aprile 2004, n. 11 'Norme per il governo del territorio e in materia di paesaggio' e successive modificazioni" [Amendment to Regional Law 23rd April 2004, no. 11—Rules for the management of the territory and on landscape], Regione del Veneto, https://bur.regione.veneto.it/BurvServices/pubblica/DettaglioLegge.aspx?id=320306.

34 With respect to the lack of recognition of Islam, it is worth noting the absence of Muslims, who are for the most part the subject of the debate.

35 In any case, Italy is aware of Islam as an internal phenomenon, and this realization contributed to the re-discovery of the country's collective memory of a Catholic identity and to the renewal of the debate on unresolved matters such as the relationship between religion and the state. The recognition of Islam as a public religion has not been dealt with very decisively in Italy, with the debate often shifting to more general matters, especially the deficit of internal integration that has long been ailing Italy and the frailty of the Republic's founding pacts between liberals, Catholics, and socialists (Enzo Pace, *La nation italienne en crise*, Paris: Bayard, 1998).

36 For a discussion of the way in which colonialism dehumanizes the colonizers and de-civilizes the colonizers, see Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme suivi de Discours sur la Négritude* (1955) (Paris: Présence Africaine, 2004).

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