

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
ITALY
NATIONAL REPORT 2018

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Executive Summary

The last political elections in March 2018 highlighted the issues connected to migration and the flows of political refugees, making them central issues in the political agenda and in the public opinion. The electoral consensus with League North (Lega Nord) and its leader Matteo Salvini has increased across 2018 following an anti-migration rhetoric. Within this discursive frame, the issues of Islam and Muslim communities have drawn particular attention through the stereotype of their incompatibility with Christian and Western cultures, and claims that Islam is a religion based on terrorism. The xenophobic and anti-Islam climate fostered by the traditional political players from the right wing, Lega Nord and Fratelli d'Italia, by the extreme-right movements (Casa Pound and Forza Nuova), and by the most conservative branches of the mass media, such as *Il Giornale*, has caused very negative effects on a social level, legitimising racist behaviours. Physical and verbal attacks on immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees, and Muslim citizens have increased in the north and south of Italy, leading to dramatic events such as the wounding by gunshot of six migrants from Nigeria in Macerata on 3 February and the murder of a Senegalese street seller, Idy Diene (54), in Florence on 5 March. Moreover, as outlined by research (see Vox Diritti), the hate speech towards Muslim communities has increased, reflecting the birth of a widespread hostility in Italian society towards cultural diversity. The response of civil society, the democratic associations, and an important part of the Catholic world has definitely been consistent, but it appears to be ineffective in terms of opposing this drift. The collaboration between these realities and Muslim NGO is becoming more and more urgent in order to contain the situation that is jeopardising the democratic structures and the future of civil coexistence in Italy.

Sintesi

Le ultime elezioni politiche del marzo del 2018 hanno evidenziato un'enfasi sui temi legati all'immigrazione e ai flussi di rifugiati politici quale problema centrale nell'agenda politica e nell'opinione pubblica. Il consenso elettorale verso la Lega Nord e il suo leader Matteo Salvini si è accresciuto lungo tutto il 2018 sulla spinta di una retorica anti-immigrazione. All'interno di questo frame discorsivo la questione dell'Islam e delle comunità musulmane ha avuto una particolare attenzione attraverso il solito stereotipato armamentario collegato all'incompatibilità con la nostra cultura cristiana e occidentale, e con i richiami ad una religione del terrore. Il clima xenofobo e anti-Islam alimentato dai tradizionali attori politici della destra, Lega Nord e Fratelli d'Italia, dei movimenti di estrema destra (Casa Pound a Forza Nuova) e dai settori più conservatori dei mass-media, come ad esempio Il Giornale, ha avuto effetti molto negativi a livello sociale legittimando comportamenti di stampo razzista. Si sono accresciuti sia al Nord che al Sud gli attacchi fisici e verbali nei confronti dei migranti, richiedenti asilo, rifugiati e cittadini musulmani fino ad arrivare ad eventi drammatici quali il ferimento di sei migranti nigeriani a Macerata il 3 febbraio e l'omicidio di un venditore ambulante senegalese a Firenze, Idy Diene di 54 anni, il 5 marzo.

Inoltre, come rilevato dalle ricerche (vedi VoxDiritti) è aumentato nel corso del 2018 il discorso d'odio nei confronti delle comunità islamiche, specchio di una diffusa penetrazione nella società italiana di ostilità verso le diversità culturali. La risposta della società civile, delle associazioni democratiche e di una parte importante del mondo cattolico è stata sicuramente ampia, ma appare inefficace a contrastare questa deriva. Sempre più urgente diventa la collaborazione tra queste realtà e le NGOs musulmane al fine di arginare questa situazione che mette in crisi gli stessi assetti democratici e il futuro della convivenza civile in Italia.

Country Profile

Country: Italy

Type of Regime: Democratic Republic

Form of Government: Parliamentary government

Ruling Parties: Five Stars and League North

Opposition Parties: Democratic Party, Free and Equal +Europe (centre-left parties), and Forza Italia

Last Elections: 2018 Legislative Election: Chamber of Deputies: Five Stars, 133 seats; Centre-Right, 151 seats (League North: 17,3% equal, to 73 seats); Centre-Left, 88 seats; Left, 14 seats; Far Right, 0 seats; Senate of Republic: Five Stars, 68 seats; Centre-Right, 77 seats (League North: 17,6% equal to 37 seats); Centre-Left, 43 seats; Left, 4 seats; Far-Right, 0 seats.

Total Population: 60.483.973 million (National Institute of Statistic, January 2018)

Major Languages: Italian

Official Religion: No official religion (Secularism)

Statistics on Islamophobia: N/A.

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: Regarding 2018, there is no official data on racism and discrimination; the public agencies such as UNAR (National Office Racial Antidiscrimination) have not published specific statistics or reports in the last year. The last official report is from the OCSE based on a report by the Ministry of Interior in 2016 that documented 33 racist incidents.

Major Religions (% of Population): 74,4% Catholic Church, 22,6% Irreligious, 3,0% Other (of which 15% are Muslims)

Muslim Population (% of Population): 2.800.000 (4,8%) (PEW Research, 2017).

Main Muslim Community Organisations: UCOI (Unione delle comunità islamiche italiane), CoReIs (Comunità religiosa islamica italiana), Giovani Musulmani d'Italia

Main NGOs Combatting Islamophobia: In Italy, there are specific NGOs or public agencies dealing directly with Islamophobic issues. Islamophobia arises in the wider issue of defending the citizenship or human rights of migrants and of anti-discrimination complaints. Some important Catholic and laic associations at a national level such as ACLI (Associazioni Cristiane dei Lavoratori Italiani), ARCI (Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana), and ANPI (Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d'Italia), are historically at the forefront of the fight against all forms of discrimination and racism in Italian society. Some NGOs like Lunaria every year promote analysis and reports on racist and Islamophobic attacks in society. The Italian context is characterised by a significant variety of local civil society players who act against situations of exclusion and discrimination of migrants and Muslim communities. In this sense, the role of Muslim NGOs is important such as UCOCI (Unione delle comunità islamiche italiane), CoReIs (Comunità religiosa islamica italiana), and Giovani Mu-

sulmani d'Italia, but there is not a single "voice" against Islamophobia that is representative of all Muslim associations and communities.

Far Right Parties: Forza Nuova, Movimento Sociale Fiamma Tricolore

Far Right Movements: Casa Pound, Lealtà e Azione, Militia

Far Right Terrorist Organisations: N/A

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** No (depends on local decision)
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** No
- **Minaret Ban:** No (depends on local decision)
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Burka Ban:** No (depends on local decision)
- **Prayer Ban:** No (depends on local decision)

Introduction

The latest report on Islamophobia in Italy (2017) reported a significant concern about the increase of xenophobic and racist contents regarding migrants, asylum seekers, and Muslims in the public opinion and political discourse. During the election campaign, this concern became a tangible reality through a massive “bombardment” of hate speech, promoted by League North and its leader Matteo Salvini and supported by other far right parties like Fratelli d’Italia (Brothers of Italy). The negative representations of Islam and Muslim communities, as well as immigrants in general, have been the central features of a political struggle characterised by the nationalistic slogan “Italians First!”

After the results of the elections and the birth of a new government formed by the coalition of the League North and Five Stars, Matteo Salvini was appointed Minister of Interior, becoming responsible for the migration policy and the relations with religious minorities. Therefore, the xenophobic dynamic is still present and active. The consensus in favour of the extremist positions of League North is well proven by the increase of its votes in the last political elections, with a switch from 17% to more than 30% of potential votes registered by all opinion polls.

Italy does not have an official record of the events or attacks on Italian Muslim communities. There are some NGOs and specific anti-racist associations that collect data from different sources, mainly from the mass media. According to their analyses, it is clear that there has been an increase of Islamophobic content and hate speech in social media, politics, and mass media. A significant example, for instance, is the increase of hate tweets against Muslims from 22.435 in 2016 to 64.934 in the period 2017/2018. A different report on the social and political situation shows that Italy is increasingly becoming intolerant towards immigrants and Muslims¹.

A survey carried out by the Social Change Initiative in partnership with More in Common on the attitudes of Italians towards immigration has highlighted the concern that people with Islamic backgrounds will not integrate in Italian society: 40% of Italians claim that Italian identity and Islam are incompatible.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

During 2018, there was an important increase of physical and verbal attacks against immigrants, Muslims, and asylum seekers committed mainly by militants belonging to organised extreme-right movements, but also, in specific cases, by “normal” citizens, justified for their use of violence by the widespread xenophobic climate that has

1. “Immigrazione in Italia tra realtà e percezione”, Istituto Cattaneo, <https://www.cattaneo.org/2018/08/27/immigrazione-in-italia-tra-realta-e-percezione/>, (Access date: 2 September 2019).

become hegemonic in the public discourse. There is no official data from institutions or public agencies, but various NGOs or anti-fascist movements have promoted the collection of data about physical and verbal attacks. Some examples are *Cronache di ordinario razzismo* (Chronicles of Ordinary Racism) and the site <http://www.ecn.org//antifa>. The lack of official data on hate crimes and religious racism in Italy represents an important deficit for the enhancement of specific anti-discrimination policies and for the interventions to fight “societal racism”. Another important point of discussion regards researchers’ difficulty in differentiating migrant/asylum seeker/refugee victims of hate crimes from their religious memberships, and thus their difficulty in defining the various types of harassment. However, in the case of asylum seekers or refugees we know from official data that, in most cases, they come from Muslim countries (Tunisia, Sudan, Pakistan, Nigeria, and Algeria).² The most tragic events have been the wounding by gunshot of six migrants from Nigeria in Macerata on 3 February, and the murder of a Senegalese street seller, Idy Diene (54), in Florence on 5 March.³ In the first case, the assailant was a young Italian citizen, Luca Traini, ex-candidate in the administrative election with the League North and close to neo-fascist groups. His justification, reported after the racist attack, was related to the murder of a girl by a Nigerian immigrant. In the second case, the murderer was an Italian man, Roberto Pirrone, retired and 65 years old, who declared he had gone out to commit suicide but after changing his mind, he shot the young African man. The victim was a leading figure of the Senegalese community in Florence and in the local mosque, as reported by friends and local associations.⁴

In a small city of Giulia in Friuli-Venezia, a severed pig’s head was placed on the fence of a property hosting eight asylum seekers, at the end of the month of Ramadan. At the end of August, the keeper of a mosque in Salerno was heavily offended and beaten. In his statements after the brutal attack, he said that “they addressed me with ‘Fucking Muslim’”.⁵ In Padua, on a night of mid-March, an unknown person set fire to the front doorway of the local mosque. The police officers found evidence

2. See the official data from the Ministry of Interior: http://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/cruscotto_giornaliero_11-01-2019.pdf, (Access date: 2 September 2019).

3. Agnese Ananasso, “Raid Razzista A Macerata, Spari Contro Gli Africani: 6 Feriti. Fermato Italiano Incensurato”, *La Repubblica*, 3 February 2018, https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/02/03/news/macerata_sparatoria-187934230/, (Access date: 2 September 2019); di Simone Innocenti, Matteo Leoni, Jacopo Storni, “Firenze, Spari Su Ponte Vespucci Ucciso Un Ambulante L’ira Dei Senegalesi, Danni In Centro”, *Corriere Fiorentino*, 5 March 2018, https://corrierefiorentino.corriere.it/firenze/notizie/cronaca/18_marzo_05/firenze-spari-ponte-vespucci-ferito-uomo-colore-67e87d22-2065-11e8-b9db-31561b61aa5f.shtml?refresh_ce-cp, (Access date: 2 September 2019).

4. Annalisa Camilli, “Un Paese In Cui I Neri Vengono Uccisi Per Strada”, *Internazionale*, 7 March 2018, <https://www.internazionale.it/bloc-notes/annalisa-camilli/2018/03/07/firenze-senegalese-ucciso>, (Access date: 2 September 2019).

5. Redazione L’Occhio di Salerno, “Razzismo A Salerno, Aggredito Ragazzo Convertito All’islam. È Il Curatore Della Moschea”, *L’Occhio di Salerno*, 28 August 2018, <https://salerno.occhionotizie.it/razzismo-salerno-aggredito-ragazzo-convertito-islam/>, (Access date: 2 September 2019).

of arson.⁶ In other cases, police forces played a part. The most serious case was the assault by three police officers (*Carabinieri*) on 28 June on a migrant day-labourer, with regular status, found in his house with guns and a copy of the Quran. He was subsequently arrested and taken into custody for no concrete reason. A few days later, the three *Carabinieri* were arrested for “fabricating” evidence against the migrant worker and unfairly accusing him of being an “Islamist terrorist”.⁷

Employment

In line with the lack of data on racist events, there is no specific, empirical evidence of Islamophobia regarding the complex and varying world of employment. All the Italian trade unions have a migration office which manages the main issues of migration and defends the rights of migrant workers, but they don't have a detailed analysis of discriminations based on religion. Moreover, a recent and detailed research on anti-discrimination by the main Italian trade union (CGIL) shows that anti-discrimination initiatives are sometimes inefficient because of their fragmentation, heterogeneity, and the inadequate knowledge of anti-discrimination laws.⁸

The survey “Work Force in Europe 2018” has highlighted that Italy has the highest rate of workers who feel discriminated against (42%), while 4% of the Italian sample (1.300 interviewees) declared being discriminated because of their religion (mainly of Islam).⁹

Two events have had a wide appeal on the general public. In mid-January, a judge of the Bologna Court denied a young lawyer her right to assist the judicial hearing because she was wearing the “Islamic veil”. According to press, the young lawyer refused to take it off and left the courtroom declaring that the judge would have to explain his behaviour by the fact “that this is the respect for our culture and our traditions”.¹⁰ In June, one of the main Italian trade unions reported that in one of the most important low-cost supermarkets (Eurospin) a migrant worker of the Islamic faith was transferred to another workplace because of his previous request to suspend the night shift during Ramadan.¹¹

6. “Incendiata Nella Notte La Porta Della Moschea Di Padova”, Ait Veneto, 8 March 2018, http://www.ansa.it/veneto/notizie/2018/03/05/incendiata-nella-notte-la-porta-della-moschea-di-padova_a1deb842-a469-4ef8-bc44-a7d5b204dce6.html, (Access date: 2 September 2019).

7. “Arrestati Tre Carabinieri, False Accuse A Immigrato”, Ait Cronaca, 27 June 2018, http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cronaca/2018/06/27/arrestati-tre-carabinieri-false-accuse-a-immigrato_c581d86a-f987-4afa-a65f-5bcaeb85992.html, (Access date: 2 September 2019).

8. Puppa F., “Sindacato, Lavoratori Immigrati E Discriminazioni Razziali Nell'italia Della Crisi”, *Mondi Migranti*, September 2018.

9. “Discriminazioni Sul Posto Di Lavoro”, *Avvenire*, 9 March 2018, <https://www.avvenire.it/economia/pagine/adp-discriminazioni-sul-posto-di-lavoro>, (Access date: 2 September 2019).

10. Guiseppe Baldessarro, “L'avvocata In Aula Con Il Velo: ‘Cacciata Dal Giudice, Ma Ho Vinto Io’”, *Rep*, 17 January 2018, https://rep.repubblica.it/pwa/generale/2018/01/17/news/l_avvocata_in_aula_con_il_velo_cacciata_dal_giudice_ho_vinto_io_-186711737/, (Access date: 2 September 2019).

11. “Chiede Di Non Lavorare Di Notte Durante Il Ramadan E L'azienda Per Punizione Lo Trasferisce”, *Torino.repubblica*, 4 June 2018, https://torino.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/06/04/news/chiede_di_non_lavorare_di_notte_durante_il_ramadan_e_l_azienda_per_punizione_lo_trasferisce-198170994/, (Access date: 3 September 2019).

Education

Generally, the Italian education system is strongly intercultural and open to the integration of children with different cultural backgrounds. In the last years, including 2018, there have been many examples of positive dynamics, but also some negative events of ethnic segregation in some schools of the metropolitan inner areas because of the effects of “white flight”.¹² A recent qualitative research carried out by the Catholic University of Milan entitled “The Religious Dimension in Multicultural Schools. Identity and Membership, Behaviours and Symbols, Conflicts and Values” highlighted how religious memberships are “ignored” in everyday relationships among students. Therefore, it is clear that the issue of religion in schools does not appear to play a role in school life. Moreover, the plurality of religious memberships does not seem to be a source of open conflict in classrooms, even if the largest part of critical situations recorded are connected to students with Islamic backgrounds.¹³

The multicultural school and history textbooks have been the object of a strong debate. For example, in October 2018, the newspaper *La Verità* published two articles against the educational book for secondary schools because of the “false positive representation of Islamic civilization”. The first article was a front-page editorial by director Maurizio Belpietro entitled “Brainwashing at Secondary Schools. The School Books Promote Islam”. The second was a long “critical” article by Francesco Borgonovo entitled “Brainwashed in the Classroom. In Our Children’s Book, Only the Christians Do Holy War”, which aimed to illustrate all the “supposed” mistakes of the author and to emphasise the implicit violence of Islam throughout history.

Politics

The political dynamic in 2018, mostly because of the national and local electoral campaigns, focused disruptively on openly racist and xenophobic tones. The often reiterated political statements of League North by its leader Matteo Salvini are based on the typical aversive claims of “invasion”, “Italians First”, or “Close the borders”. We are witnessing a process of the dehumanisation of the foreigner identified in various ways, particularly in the case of asylum seekers and Muslims. This hegemonic representation is connected to a continuous devaluation of democratic civil society, NGOs and part of the Catholic Church, including the figure of the Pope, involved in the integration and in interfaith dialogue.

12. Matteo Piolatto, “La Segregazione Nella Scuola Secondaria Italiana”, *Weltforum.it*, 6 June 2018, <https://weltforum.it/il-punto/separati-a-scuola/la-segregazione-nella-scuola-secondaria-italiana/>, (Access date: 3 September 2019).

13. Maddalena Colombo, Rosangela Lodigiani, Mariagrazia Santagati and Antonio Cuciniello, “La Dimensione Religiosa Nelle Scuole Multiculturali. Identità E Appartenenze, Comportamenti E Simboli, Conflitti E Valori”, *Università Cattolica Del Sacro Cuore*, 12 January 2018, <https://progetti.unicatt.it/progetti-milan-eventi-la-dimensione-religiosa-nelle-scuole-multiculturali-identita-e-appartenenze-comportamenti>, (Access date: 3 September 2019).

The report “Barometer of Hate” published by Amnesty International has monitored the hate speech present in the social profiles (Facebook and Twitter) of the candidates in the last electoral campaign in Italy.¹⁴ Most of the hate speech analysed came from League North (51% of statements) and Brothers of Italy (27%). The migration has been the key issue of the collected data (91%), followed by the Islamophobic attitudes (11%). The main topics concern the typical stereotypes attributed to Islam and the figure of the Muslim: invasion, too many mosques in the national context, the subordination/inferiorisation of women and, most importantly, “the perception of Islam not as a religion but as an imposition of its ‘own’ law and justice” (Amnesty International, 2018).

Some paradigmatic examples are the following statements by Matteo Salvini expressed in his electoral campaign:

Once we have the government, we will regulate every Islamic presence in the country. Exactly as in difficult times Oriana Fallaci claimed, we are under attack. Our culture, society, customs, lifestyle are at risk (...) The skin colour is not so important, there is a real danger: centuries of history that risk disappearing if the Islamisation prevails.

(ANSA, 1/15/2018)¹⁵

The cultural issue is if Islam, nowadays, can be compatible with our values, with our freedom and with our Constitution I have strong doubts (...) The fact that Islam represents a risk is obvious if the Islamic declaration of human rights stipulates that Islamic justice prevails over national justice. This is a problem for me, I'd rather not be like in Great Britain, with the Islamic courts instead of the English courts.

(*quotidiano.net* 2/8/2018)¹⁶

The anti-migration and Islamophobic climates continued after the end of the national elections, and they represent the most important topic in the political strategy of League North. In the official “Agreement of Government” signed by League North and Five Stars, the issue of immigration is significant in terms of a much stronger control and repression of the migration flows. Specifically, “the control and the immediate closure of all radical Islamic associations, as well as of irregular mosques and places of worship” was highlighted.¹⁷ Other significant political play-

14. The posts, tweets, videos of 1.419 candidates were monitored daily during the last three weeks of the electoral campaign; for all methodological information and the complete report see: “Un Osservatorio Sui Discorsi D’odio In Campagna Elettorale”, Amnesty.it, <https://www.amnesty.it/barometro-odio/>, (Access date: 3 September 2019).

15. “Il ritorno della razza”, Cronache di ordinario razzismo, 14 June 2018, (<http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/il-ritorno-della-razza-lunaria>), (Access date: 3 September 2019).

16. “Elezioni 2018, Salvini Va All’attacco: ‘Islam Incompatibile Con La Costituzione”, *Quotidiano.net*, 8 February 2018, <https://www.quotidiano.net/politica/elezioni-2018-programma-lega-nord-1.3711353>, (Access date: 3 September 2019).

17. Pasini N. and Regalia M. “L’immigrazione Al Centro: Le Elezioni Del 2018 In Italia”, in *Fondazione Ismu, XXIV Rapporto sulle immigrazioni*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 2018.

ers have been very active. The militants of extreme right parties, Forza Nuova and Fratelli d'Italia, organised different manifestations against the opening of Islamic centres or mosques, and the presence of Muslim communities. For example, on 6 October, in the city of Bologna, Forza Nuova organised a demonstration against the construction of a mosque and displayed banners against Archbishop Matteo Zuppi calling him a “heretic” because he was in favour of a dialogue with the local Muslim community. (Fig. 1) In January, before the electoral campaign, activists of Fratelli d'Italia, in a small city close to Florence, affixed big posters in the area where the local mosque would be built with the claims “No Mosque” and “Italians First”.¹⁸ In June, counsellors of the Municipality of Naples exhibited a big banner with the writing “Islam’s Square” (instead of “Garibaldi Square”) fuelling an argument with the Mayor of Naples Luigi De Magistris, who is considered “guilty of permitting the historical centre of the city to completely change because of the uncontrolled arrivals of asylum seekers and illegal migrants”.¹⁹



Figure 1: Protest against the mosque in Bologna by Forza Nuova (6 October 2018),²⁰

18. Cronache Di Ordinario Razzismo, www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org, (Access date: 3 September 2019).

19. Redazione na, “Napoli, striscione vergognoso di FdI: ‘Piazza dell’Islam’”, *FarodiRoma*, 18 July 2018, <http://www.farodroma.it/napoli-striscione-vergognoso-di-fdi-piazza-dellislam>, (Access date: 3 September 2019).

20. Antonella Scarcella - Noemi Di Leonardo, “Forza Nuova: ‘Sradicare Islamizzazione’. Antifascisti Protestano, Traffico Bloccato”, *Bologna Today*, 6 October 2019, <https://www.bolognatoday.it/cronaca/forza-nuova-moschea-san-domenico.html>, (Access date: 3 September 2019).



Figure 2: Large banner affixed by Fratelli d'Italia in a central square in Naples (18 July 2018).

Media

The aggressive articles from the traditional right-wing press (*Il Giornale*, *La Verità*, *Il Tempo*, and *Libero*) against migration, Islam, and Muslim communities continued in 2018, in line with a communicative xenophobic strategy in order to negatively represent the Islamic culture as incompatible with “our customs” and characterised by violence and terrorism. The rhetoric is aimed at promoting a vision of Islam in terms of public order and/or security linked with the so-called illegal Islamic centres or mosques. The anti-Islam communication strategy promoted by these newspapers is joined with the blaming of all the political, religious, and civil players involved at different levels in the defence of the rights of migrants and/or Islamic communities. Some important opinion leaders such as Marcello Veneziani, columnist for *Il Tempo*, and Giancarlo Mazzuca, columnist for *Il Giornale*, wrote different articles against Pope Francesco and the most progressive Catholic magazines (e.g. *Famiglia Cristiana*, *Avvenire*), which they consider guilty of opening a dialogue with Islam and of being the “enemies of real Christianity”.²¹

During the intense electoral campaign, *Il Tempo* published a front page claiming the following:

21. “I Nemici Della Civiltà Cristiana”, Marcello Veneziani, 27 July 2018, <http://www.marcelloveneziani.com/articoli/i-nemici-della-civiltà-cristiana/>, (Access date: 3 September 2019); Giancarlo Mazzuca, “Il Papa Non Frena Il Dialogo Con L'Islam”, *il Giornale.it*, 1 April 2018, <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/papa-non-frena-dialogo-lislam-1511169.html>, (Access date: 3 September 2019).

It is important to highlight the numerous news and/or opinions strongly contrary to Pope Francesco and all the different figures of progressive Catholic clergymen, bishops and representatives of the Catholic Church who openly defend refugees, migrants, and Muslims.

Islam votes for the left parties. Exclusive: In the mosques and in the worship places Muslims are invited to vote against Salvini and Meloni. If the right wing wins, there will be no *Ius soli* and restrictions to migrants and irregular religious centres.

(*Il Tempo*, 18 February, 2018)

Some days later *Il Giornale* published a similar and irritating title:

Call of the iman: In the ballot box Allah sees you. Muslims, vote for the left parties.

(*Il Giornale*, 28 February, 2018)

The mass media discourse builds that we call the “Islamophobic common sense” which normalises the xenophobic and racist attitudes in the public opinion. The year 2018 has been paradigmatic of this dynamic in the media and it is only in part justified by the electoral period. Most of the news in the right-wing newspapers regarding Islam or Muslims emphasise a sort of obsession in terms of “submission to Sharia” or the “Islamist effect”. For example, *Il Giornale* on 5 May, 2018, published some news about a project promoted by a hospital in Lodi (an important city close to Milan) regarding Muslim women and their medical treatment by female doctors in the following terms: “Attempts of Sharia. Islam conquers Italian hospitals”.²² The word “submission” is very important, and it constantly recalls the “threatening configuration” of Islam. The “alchemy” consists in the transformation of normal situations of integration into risks of Islamisation of Italian society.

However, the obsession of representing Islam as a brutal religion is well exemplified by *Liberio*, which, after the tragedy of the collapse of the bridge in Genoa in August, published an Islamophobic article along with the following title:

For the Islamics it has been Allah: The bridge collapsed because you have not built the mosques.

(*Liberio*, 17 August 2018) (Fig. 3)

The newspaper *Il Giornale*, again, in 2018 published two books inspired by explicit anti-Islamic feelings. On 15 September, it published a book focused on the figure of Oriana Fallaci entitled *The Enemies of Oriana. Fallaci, Islam and the Politically Correct*, where the author repeatedly dwells on the rhetoric of the famous reporter against the menace of Islamisation towards Italian and European societies and the presumed “buonismo” (bleeding-heart liberalism) as an accessory to this potential threat. Later, on 8 November, the newspaper offered its readers the pamphlet *The Black Book of Italian Islam* that focused on an analysis that

22. Nico Di Giuseppe, “Lodi, L’ospedale S’inchina All’islam: Solo Personale Donna In Corsia”, *il Giornale.it*, 4 May 2018, <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/lo-di-lospedale-si-inchina-allislam-solo-personale-donna-1522465.html>, (Access date: 3 September 2019).

took for granted that Muslims are an “internal enemy” and Islam is a religion of violence against which an intervention to defend our social, cultural, and moral order is needed.

Previously, at the beginning of February, a journalist of *Il Foglio* published the book *Il suicidio della cultura occidentale: Così l’Islam radicale sta vincendo* (The Suicide of Western Culture: This Is How Radical Islam Is Winning). The thesis of this book is a “typical” topic: the threat of Islamisation towards Europe, and the defeat of Christianity and Western cultures because of our “multiculturalist” decay and softness.



Figure 3. Front page of the newspaper *Libero*, 17 August 2018.²³



Figure 4: Cover of Alberto Giannoni's book *The Black Book of Italian Islam*.²⁴

23. Andrea Morigi, “Per Gli Islamici È Stato Allah ‘È Crollato Perché Non Avete Fatto Le Moschee’”, Pressreader, 17 August 2018, <https://www.pressreader.com/italy/libero/20180817/281668255817363>, (Access date: 3 September 2019).

24. Alberto Giannoni, *The Black Book of Italian Islam*.

Justice System²⁵

In many cases, the role of the justice system is fundamental in applying the anti-discrimination law in Italy, in sustaining the legal citizenship rights of Muslim communities, and in avoiding verbal and physical attacks. Following are two paradigmatic examples: in June, the court of Milan based on the Anti-Discrimination Law condemned the mayor of Albettonne (a village close to Vicenza), a proponent member of League North, for racist statements against migrants, Roma people, and Muslims during certain television and/or radio interviews. On a radio program, the mayor had declared, “We’ll be the largest European pig breeding farm if they want to open a mosque”.²⁶ In December, another important sentence was promulgated by the Regional and Administrative Court of Lombardy against the Regional Law adopted by the Government of Lombardy in 2015 regarding the construction of mosques. For the court, the regional law would be an obstacle to the freedom of religion enshrined in the Constitution as the former laid out explicit norms restricting the latter; this verdict was in line with the sentence in 2016 of the Constitutional Court over the illegitimacy of regional standards.²⁷

Internet

In continuity with the 2017 report, the relationship between the Internet, social media, racism, and fake news has been decisive in the widespread misrecognition and false representations of Islam and Muslim citizens.

In 2018, the NGO Vox Diritti published the report “Map of Intolerance in Italy”, a mapping of hate speech on Twitter. The analysis of 6.544.637 tweets showed the increase of hate tweets in 2018 (from March to May) to 36,93% compared to 32,45% in 2017 (from May to November). According to the results, the growth of hate tweets against Muslims is significant: Islamophobic tweets increased from 22.435 in 2016 to 64.934 in the period 2017/2018.²⁸

Regarding the presence on the Internet of extreme-right movements and neo-fascist groups directly involved in the “Islamophobic marketing”, there is a large

25. We want to thank lawyer Alberto Guariso, involved for many years in the defence of the rights of immigrants and Muslim communities, for his information on the justice system and employment.

26. “Odio Razziale: Joe Formaggio Condannato A Milano”, *Vicenza Today*, 07 June 2018, <http://www.vicenzatoday.it/cronaca/sindaco-albettone-joe-formaggio-condannato-tribunale-milano-razzismo-rom-migranti.html>, (Access date: 3 September 2019). For the sentence see: “Il Sindaco Di Albettonne Offende Profughi, Rom E Musulmani: Condannato A Risarcire Il Danno Alle Associazioni”, *Associazione Per Gli Studi Giuridici Sull’immigrazione*, 8 June 2019, <https://www.asgi.it/discriminazioni/il-sindaco-di-albettone-offende-profughi-rom-e-musulmani-condannato-a-risarcire-il-danno-alle-associazioni/>, (Access date: 3 September 2019).

27. “Legge Anti-Moschee, Altolà Del Tar Della Lombardia”, *Il Giorno Milano*, 24 August 2018, <https://www.ilgiorno.it/milano/cronaca/legge-anti-moschea-1.4104055>, (Access date: 3 September 2019); Redazione, “Legge Anti-Moschee, Nuovo Stop, Riforma”, *9 October 2018*, <https://riforma.it/it/articolo/2018/10/09/legge-anti-moschee-nuovo-stop>, (Access date: 4 September 2019).

28. Redazione Vox, “Ecco Le Mappe Di Vox Contro L’intolleranza”, *Vox*, <http://www.voxdiritti.it/ecco-le-mappe-di-vox-contro-lintolleranza>, (Access date: 4 September 2019).

variety of FB pages or Internet sites as outlined in previous reports. In this frame, it is noteworthy to underline the importance of the neo-fascist movements Forza Nuova and Casa Pound in the social media and the Internet with their anti-Islam and anti-migration discursive strategy. In 2018 both movements' FB pages reached 273.697 and 250.914 followers respectively, with a widespread presence of local headquarter FB pages, 97 and 101 respectively. In 2018, two news sites were born on Facebook: "No Islam Italia" (No Islam Italy) whose page reached 10.425 likes, and "No Invasion, No Islam" with 18.575 likes.²⁹

The electoral campaign and the formation of the new government played a determinant role in the increase of Islamophobic hate speech in terms of "sovereignism". Some Internet pages such as "Riscatto Nazionale" (National Liberation, www.riscattonazionale.org) or *Identità.com* (Identity) are paradigmatic of the relationship between the xenophobic news and online attacks against Islam and Muslim groups in defence of "Italianess". The increase of fake news or "bad news" about Islamic issues (and immigrants in general) is highlighted by the large audience of sites such as www.bastabugie.it linked to ultraconservative Catholic thought, or iNews24 with its recall to "Italians First" whose FB's page has reached 1.5 million likes in 2018.

Recently, the famous racist and Islamophobic site of fake news *voxnews.info*, repeatedly closed down by postal police, has been connected with another successful site, whose name is paradigmatic: "all the crimes of immigrants" (*tuttiicriminidegliimmigrati.com*).

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

The connection between opinion leaders, bloggers, newspapers, FB pages, Internet sites, and leaders (or leading figures) of far right parties or movements is the most significant issue of the Islamophobia network in Italy. This Islamophobic "nebulas" present some main recognisable players that rely on a common strategy, but not a specific think tank. It is possible to identify a synergy between the ultraconservative sectors of the Catholic Church, mass media (the right-wing newspapers *La Verità*, *Il Giornale*, and *Liberò*), and the cultural system, with the political parties joined by the neo-fascist movements that promote and reiterate sovereignism and racist discourse (such as Lega Nord, Fratelli d'Italia, Casa Pound, and Forza Nuova). In 2018, the election time and the resulting government were critical factors in the increase of the pseudo-debate in negative terms against Muslims and Islam.

29. No Islam Italia, Facebook, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/NoIslamItalia>, https://www.facebook.com/Nicola-costanzoo/?ref=br_rs, (Access date: 4 September 2019).

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Political Initiatives

In certain occasions, the main centre-left party (Democratic Party) has played an important role in supporting the needs of Muslim communities at a local level. For example, the Democratic Party in Lodi, an important city close to Milan, gave its headquarters for the end of Ramadan; the event was participated by one thousand Muslim men and women from the city and the surroundings.

The role of the ANPI, the national association of Italian Partisans, in fighting the extreme right-wing party or neo-fascist movements in Italy by denouncing them to police and organizing public demonstrations in every part of Italy to sustain the dialogue with migrant and Muslims communities is also crucial. The ANPI represents a fundamental “enemy” of neo-fascist movements or groups in terms of resistance to racism and Islamophobia.

In May, the organizing committee of the Islamic constituent in Italy showed its concern over the draft of the “Government Agreement” signed by the League North and Five Stars. The text contains strong claims stigmatising religious practices of Islam and reaffirming typical stereotypes and prejudices that view Islam as a serious threat.³⁰ In a following interview, a spokesperson from the mosque of Turin and the imam of the mosque of Florence declared their worries about the statements of the Minister of Interior Matteo Salvini aimed at criminalising the Islamic communities.

The Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities of Trieste signed a historical shared document expressing strong dissent against the demonstration of Forza Nuova on the celebration day of the patron saint of the city.

From the perspective of fighting the anti-Islamic prejudice that is widespread in Italian society, the project “Donne Unite contro l’Islamofobia” (Women United against Islamophobia) promoted by the European Network Against Racism (ENAR)³¹ is significant. In this dialogical frame it is important to mention the organisation of meetings for the “Christian-Islamic Dialogue Day” on 27 October in Ravenna whose main theme was “No Mosque Is Illegal!”. In these significant meetings, organisers have wanted to reaffirm the principle of “religious freedom” enacted in the Italian Constitution that cannot be subordinated to urbanistic rules or to any popular referendum in order to approve the construction of new places of worship.³²

30. Redazione, “Islamofobia E Xenofobia Nel Programma Di Governo. La Denuncia Della Costituente Islamica”, FarodiRoma, 18 May 2018, <http://www.farodiroma.it/islamofobia-e-xenofobia-nel-programma-di-governo-la-denuncia-della-costituente-islamica>, (Access date: 4 September 2019).

31. “Donne Unite Contro L’Islamofobia”, Centro Per La Cooperazione Internazionale, <https://www.cci.tn.it/CCI/Eventi/Donne-unite-contro-l-islamofobia>, (Access date: 4 September 2019).

32. “27 Ottobre, Giornata Ecumenica Del Dialogo Cristiano-Islamico”, Radio Voce Della Speranza, 24 October 2018, <https://radiovoicedellasperanza.it/27-ottobre-giornata-ecumenica-del-dialogo-cristiano-islamico>, (Access date: 4 September 2019).

Another important step towards the dialogue between local public institutions and Islam is the “Progetto di formazione dei ministri di culto islamico” (Project of Training for Islamic Ministers) born from the impulse of the Prefecture of Brescia and realised through the collaboration between the University of Brescia and the Islamic Centres of Brescia and its district. At the beginning of December, more than 50 diplomas were handed out to all those who had joined the project. Some of these new “ministers” will be operative inside the prison of Brescia to combat the process of radicalisation.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Islamophobia in Italy is real. We can confirm the existence of two anti-Muslim feelings strongly connected. We have called the first one “Political Islamophobia” because of the expressions of the main leaders of right and extreme-right parties or movements, based on the notion of “securitisation”, criminalisation, fear of Islam as a “terroristic religion”, and a strong struggle against the mosque which is seen as a threat. The second one is “Cultural Islamophobia”, related to the specific opinions that part of the mass media release, by portraying Muslim people only in connection to the migration phenomenon, and Islamic culture as not integrable and as deeply sexist.³³

This double and interconnected configuration of Islamophobia in politics and culture needs to be fought with a multiplicity of instruments and players at every level of civil life.

Regarding NGOs, democratic and anti-racist movements, and left-wing parties, it is necessary that they act together at local and national levels to enhance the struggle against the widespread racism and Islamophobia in Italy. It is a difficult task in the current sociopolitical situation because consensus with the anti-migrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric of League North and of its leader Matteo Salvini is very strong.

As Censis, an independent centre of social research, highlighted in its last annual report, Italian society is experiencing a sort of “psychic sovereignism” defined by a closure, a retreat, and an intolerance towards diversity.³⁴

Another significant analysis has shown with extreme clarity that Italians bear negative feelings towards Islam and Muslims. The research promoted by the Social Change Initiative in partnership with More in Common on the attitudes of Italians toward immigration and refugees has highlighted that “the concern that people from Islamic backgrounds may not integrate into Italian society is reflected into the point of view held by 40 per cent of Italians, claiming that Italian identity and Islam are incompatible”.³⁵

33. This double representation is deeply present in the Islamophobic ideology; see: Padovan D. and Alietti A., “The Racialisation of Public Discourse”, *European Societies*, 14:2, 2012, pp. 186-202.

34. “About the final report”, CENSIS, http://www.censis.it/10?shadow_ricerca=121097, (Access date: 4 September 2019).

35. Tim Dixon, Stephen Hawkins, Laurence Heijbroek, Míriam Juan-Torres and François-Xavier Demoures, “Attitudes towards National Identity, Immigration and Refugees in Italy”, July 2018, <https://www.thesocialchangeinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Italy-EN-Execuative-Summary.compressed.pdf>, (Access date: 4 September 2019).

According to a Eurispes report in Italy in 2018, just 28% of Italians know the right number of foreigners (8% of the entire population) and, above all, only 31.2% evaluate correctly the presence of immigrants following the Islamic religion, which is 3%.³⁶

On 29 May, the PEW Research Centre published the report “Being Christian in Western Europe” based on the survey carried out in 2017.³⁷ From the main empirical evidence, the Italian sample has the highest rate of people who know “not too much” or “nothing at all” about the Muslim religion and its practices (74%), and the highest rate related to negative responses regarding the “acceptance of a Muslim as member of the family” (43% of the sample compared with the average of the entire sample which stood at 24%) and “a Muslim as a neighbour” (21% compared with the average of 11%). Fifty-three per cent of the Italian interviewees declared that Islam is fundamentally incompatible with the “country’s culture and values” putting Italy at the second place in the whole European sample behind only Finland. Another significant source is the report “Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey Being Black in the EU” promoted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). Among the most relevant “grounds for discrimination experienced in four areas of daily life in the 5 years before”, the Italian sample of black minorities declared to be discriminated on religious grounds in 10% of the cases, ending up at the third place behind Denmark and Sweden.³⁸

Another important observation regards Islamic organisations, which are fragmented and weakly represented. Consequently, there are different obstacles to find a unitary “voice” against the negative public discourse that affects Muslim collectives.³⁹

Moreover, under the League North-Five Stars government the path of institutional dialogue between the state and Islamic organizations signed by the previous government in December 2017 has been interrupted. Now, it is impossible to know when it will be possible to continue this necessary official dialogue.

In this frame of hostility and difficulty to react, the work of progressive forces should focus on building an anti-discrimination network on the different levels of everyday life and on the constant condemnation of discriminatory events/acts/laws which affect the rights of citizenship of migrants and Muslims. In this perspective, it

36. “About Rapporto Italia”, EURISPES, 2018, http://www.eurispes.eu/sites/default/files/Eurispes_Sintesi_Rapporto_Italia_2018.pdf, (Access date: 4 September 2019).

37. The survey has been realized on 15 European countries, including Italy. For all methodological information and the complete analysis, see: “Nationalism, Immigration And Minorities”, Pew Research Center, 29 May 2018, <http://www.pewforum.org/2018/05/29/nationalism-immigration-and-minorities/>, (Access date: 4 September 2019).

38. “Being Black in the EU”, Fra European Union Agency For Fundamental Rights, November 2018, <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2018/eumidis-ii-being-black>, (Access date: 4 September 2019).

39. We thank Reas Syed for his information about the dialogue between public institutions and Islamic associations and for his analysis of the fragmentation of Islamic representation at the local level.

is important to recall the significant role of the judiciary system in the application of the anti-discrimination law and in the defence of religious rights.

In terms of policy, we suggest:

1. The creation of a permanent worktable for interreligious dialogue; some significant examples of dialogue between Islamic and Catholic organisations at a local level represent a solid starting point.
2. Supporting the main Islamic organisations to find common grounds to claim their rights and to contrast the xenophobic and Islamophobic public discourses more effectively.
3. Creating a systematic and efficient system of data collection on Islamophobic, racist, and discriminatory events; some NGOs, as mentioned above, are important in this perspective but they must be supported in their job with the possibility to integrate all the main sources of data.
4. Strengthening the anti-discrimination network between NGOs, associations, trade unions, and left-wing parties, especially at a local level where it is possible to act more effectively to promote equality and justice.
5. Strengthening the fundamental political role of UNAR (National Office for Racial Anti-discrimination) in order to implement national policies against religious discrimination, above all in the contexts that are more close to inclusiveness of diversity; in this perspective it is important to sustain the work directed to create anti-racist networks inside civil society.
6. Implementing an educational policy in the school system that supports “religious literacy” to prevent conflicts and to deepen knowledge about Islam.

Chronology

- **12.01.2018** Sesto Fiorentino (Florence): Militants of the Brothers of Italy affixed a big billboard close to the lot of land designated for the construction of a mosque that stated, “No to Mosque” and “Italians First”.
- **17.01.2018** Bologna: A judge denied access to the court to a young lawyer because she was wearing the Islamic veil.
- **29.01.2018** Rome: Matteo Salvini declared that nowadays Islam is a danger and his future government would put a stop to the irregular Islamic presence in Italy.
- **03.02.2018** Macerata: Luca Traini, a supporter of far right movements such as Forza Nuova, shot a group of Nigerian immigrants; six immigrants (five men and one woman) were wounded.
- **08.02.2018** Milano: Matteo Salvini declared being against a project for the construction of an Islamic centre, claiming that “Islam is incompatible with the Italian Constitution”.