



The Denmark School

Young Muslims in Italy Parma and Verona

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February 2010

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Islamism and Radicalisation – *the Denmark School*

The ambition of the Denmark School is to remedy the fragmentation between different fields of research in Islamism. The Denmark School wants to explore the phenomena of 'Islamism' in its different manifestations and to highlight the mechanisms of radicalisation processes among Muslim youth in Europe. One of the innovative approaches is the linkage between 'soft security' and 'hard security'. While other projects mainly focus on *terrorism*, this project first of all focuses on *Islamism*. The identification of Islamism requires a distinction between three possible phases: 1) ideology, 2) movements and 3) political regimes.

The study of Islamism in international relations is usually limited to treating only one aspect of Islamism as a transnational actor, namely terrorism and the corresponding anti-terror measures. But Islamist ambitions and strategies are expressed through a number of other means, such as foreign policy, boycotts, crises, strategic alliances and perhaps even the acquisition of WMD. These must be mapped in order to provide an empirical basis for studying contemporary Islamist world views and conceptions of international relations.

Mehdi Mozaffari

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This report on Parma and Verona in Italy is the third report published by the Centre for Studies in Islamism and Radicalisation (CIR). Like two previous reports on Denmark (with special focus on Aarhus), this report is based on empirical research, in this case conducted by Professor Donatella della Porta and postdoctoral scholar Lorenzo Bosi, both from the Department of Political and Social Sciences at the European University Institute in Firenze, Italy.

This report is a piece of pioneer work, and its novelty far surpasses its modest length.

A report on Lille, France, and a report on Leicester, UK, will be published later in the same series.

It is important to mention that, for the sake of harmonisation, CIR organized meetings between the researchers to discuss and prepare the practical questions related to the process of investigation. At these meetings, the participating researchers coordinated their research and elaborated a common interview guide. It is also important to stress the independent character of these investigations. The projects have been carried out in accordance with the standards for good research practice, and the Centre has in no way interfered in the research process.

In this delicate and highly sensitive field of research, carrying out interviews is a difficult task and the researchers have faced various obstacles during the process. The completion of the investigations has taken many months. The interviews have mainly involved three different groups: Young Muslims, religious leaders and social workers who work with activities and issues in relation to Muslims and immigrants on a daily basis.

The reports were finished during the autumn of 2009 and were submitted to an international committee of experts for evaluation. Based on the comments of this committee, the researchers revised their reports. I should like to thank the members of the evaluation committee for a wonderful cooperation.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the reports exclusively reflect the findings of the researchers and do not necessarily express the views of CIR. Comments to the reports are welcome.

Mehdi Mozaffari

Head of CIR

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Donatella della Porta and Lorenzo Bosi

February 2010

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Lene Kühle and Lasse Lindekilde

January 2010

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Nobody is in any way responsible for our interpretations.

Firenze, January, 2010

Donatella della Porta

Lorenzo Bosi

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1. Introduction

The Research Question

Within the framework of a broader research project which addresses young Muslims in medium sized European cities,¹ our theoretical interest focuses on the process of identity construction. We look at this by analysing young Muslims' perception of distant conflicts, which involve Muslims around the world, as well as local conflicts around religious issues, such as the construction of new mosques or the opening of Muslim cultural centres, the delegation of teachers to public schools to provide Islamic religious instruction, the right to legitimately abstain from work on religious holidays or the right to wear the Islamic veil at work, but also on economic and social inequalities. Young Muslims in Italy are situated in a half way position between their (or their parents') countries of origin and Italian society, and seem to us to be particularly interesting subjects for research on identity formation. They are constantly forced to construct 'new' meanings within an entirely new context, or at least a context which is different from the one they experience at home. Young Italian Muslims do not yet represent a 'second generation' of citizens with a migrant background, but can better be seen as an 'in-between generation' in search of a sense of belonging.

Using concepts and hypotheses developed within social movement studies (for a review see della Porta and Diani 2006), we want to investigate how perceived political opportunities, at different geographical levels, influence young Muslims' attitudes and behavior in terms of social and political commitment. One main assumption is that perceived discrimination has different effects in different political contexts. According to social movement theory, closed political opportunities favor a radicalisation of the forms of action, as well as exclusive types of identities; vice-versa, open opportunities deradicalize forms of action and facilitate more inclusive types of identity (della Porta 1995).

Empirically, we primarily base our research on interviews with young Muslims in the cities of Parma and Verona, both situated in the North of Italy, the part of the country where there is a higher concentration of immigrants. A comparison of the two cities (Verona's political culture is traditionally right of centre and Parma has more of a left-wing culture) allows us to check to what extent local political opportunities influence political identities, even when these are constructed—as we expect to be the case for young Muslims in Italian cities—at different geographical levels.

In looking at identity formation, we aim to contribute to a recent debate that has recently developed in social movement studies regarding the growing spread of struggles oriented

¹ This research report, focusing on the situation of Young Muslims in Italy, was commissioned by the Centre for Studies in Islamism and Radicalisation, Faculty of Social Sciences, Aarhus University, Denmark. Similar reports have also been prepared for Denmark, France, and the UK.

towards a form of recognition which is opposed to demands oriented towards redistribution, with sometimes an opposition *tout court* between class-based (or interest-based) politics and identity based politics (Hobson 2003). Identity conflicts have been usually considered as more difficult to address, given their non-negotiable nature. Research on conflict resolution has suggested considering the presence of recurrent stages in conflict escalation (from conflict episode, to issue conflict, identity conflict and subordination conflicts), but also the importance of the narrative constructions of what is at stake in the conflict (Lewicki, Weiss and Lewin 1992). In normative theory, Nancy Fraser (2003) has warned of the risk that recognizing conflicts (and the discourse about them) might produce *displacement* (of claims of equality and social justice) as well as *reification* (of stigmatized identities), as at the turn of the century, social conflicts increasingly revolve around questions of 'recognition'. Even though the opposition between recognition and redistribution has been recently contested (Fraser 2003; Phillips 2003),² the debate about recognition struggles has been useful in focusing attention on the interplay the different claims (of recognition and distribution) present in several struggles, and the importance of the recognition of collective identities as an important dimension at stake in protest. As Alessandro Pizzorno observed long ago, not only in the new, but also in the old social movements, identity (and recognition struggles) precede interests, being necessary to the very definition of the collective interest and the negotiation of specific requests (Pizzorno 1993). There is not only an interaction of requests of justice and status, but also a "redefinition of recognition struggles as struggles for citizens' inclusion and political voice" (Phillips 2003: 264).

In line with other social movement scholars, we look at identity as a fluid and contingent social process that is context-dependent, and constructed in ongoing relations with a number of different audiences (della Porta and Diani 2006; Mueller 2003; Polletta and Jasper 2001; Melucci 1996; Crane 1994). In this sense, identification (e.g. as Muslim) is not only a process of self-assessment, linked to previously existing multiple identities, but is also contingently influenced by others, as it reflects stimuli coming from the outside. Political opportunities—in terms of channels of access to authorities as well as potential allies—are supposed to influence the forms of these identities as well as the repertoire of participation by the individuals involved. In particular, we expect collective identities to be more exclusive and forms of action to be more radical in a context of closed opportunities.

By reconstructing perceptions of local conflicts around religious issues as well as distant conflicts, we aim to understand how collective identities develop around contested definitions and feelings of injustice. A central question in our work is then how issues of recognition and distribution, identity and interest claims are constructed by young Muslims: how do they define what is at stake regarding these conflicts and their own identity?

² Nancy Fraser (2003) has in particular suggested looking at recognition as a question of status, combining reciprocal recognition and status equality.

Linked to this, we are interested in investigating to what extent—after September 11th—conflicts have evolved from those oriented around identities as migrants to those around identities as Muslims and how this changes the alliance structures (and political opportunities) of migrants' claims. In particular, while actors such as trade unions, as well as (often Catholic) NGOs and left-wing social movements in general have been very relevant (especially in the Italian case) in advocating the economic and social rights of migrants (della Porta 2003), the construction of religious identities and demand for their recognition seems to have displaced these potential allies.

In the remaining part of this introduction, we first present a concise discussion of our research design and then provide a general overview about the Muslim population and its organizational presence in Italy. At the end of the section, we describe in more detail the two medium-sized cities where we focused our empirical research. The report then includes sections on relevant areas of activities of young Muslims in Italy: education, employment and, religion, moving on to the analysis of identification processes and social and political participation, concluding with their own perception of the phenomenon of radicalisation.

2. Methodological Choices

We based our analysis on a comparative study of two most-similar cases and qualitative semi-structured interviews. In particular, through our interviews, we aim at generating an empirically grounded, in-depth account of how young observant Muslims react to conflicts on religious issues. We have structured our interviews on how local conflicts on religious issues as well as distant conflicts might impact on the identity building of young observant Muslims. Questions about their perceived conditions in educational, work and religious activities, as well as of the image of Muslims in the mass media and public opinion allowed us to investigate perceptions of social and political discrimination as well as the emergence of Islamic violence and terrorism, what we call here radicalisation.³

Following the research design of the broader project, we have chosen to conduct a relatively high number of semi-structured interviews. We have conducted 53 interviews, of which 28 in Parma and 25 in Verona.⁴ In each of the two cities, 3 representatives of the community have been interviewed (imams, presidents and spokespersons of the community). We have interviewed 5 social workers in Parma and 3 in Verona.⁵ Additionally, 17

³ We operationalize radicalisation as the introduction in a collective repertoire of action of violent forms, including categorical violence (a.k.a. terrorism) (Goodwin 2006).

⁴ All the interviews were conducted by the first author. The interviewees were informed about confidentiality issues and invited to ask any questions they may have about the research. After a short introduction of the personal background and academic affiliation of the interviewer, the informed consent process included a description of the research goals, the methodology and the criteria for the selection of potential interview partners.

⁵ Three of the eight social workers we met were Muslim. Interviews with them have been particu-

and 19 young observant Muslims, between 18 and 40 years old, have been interviewed respectively in Parma and in Verona.⁶ These interviews lasted between forty minutes and two hours, with an average of one hour. They were recorded, with prior agreement from the interviewee.⁷

As for the sampling criteria, we adopted a theoretical sampling oriented towards the group of individuals that, in line with the focus of the interviews on potential effects of religious conflicts on identity formation, were considered as particularly relevant for the research (see above) i.e. young observant Muslims. We also, however, tried to maximize differences within this group. We approached young observant Muslims through the local mosque representatives. At the end of each interview we asked for further names of young Muslims who might be willing to answer our questions. The snowball technique was then fundamental to the sampling process.

As is often the case in qualitative, case oriented research (della Porta 2008), we did not aim to make our sample representative. Not only is it far from being random, but it also focuses on a specific part of the Muslim population. We cannot therefore make any inference on identification processes in the Muslim community as a whole, neither in Italy, nor in the two cities chosen for our research. Also, given the very limited research on the issue, our research moves more within a context of discovery than within a logic of testing hypotheses. What we want to do however is to develop knowledge about the “observant” Muslims, those who frequent the mosques and participate in groups in which Islam plays an important role (e.g. *Giovani Musulmani d'Italia*).

Once we met with our interviewees, at a location of their choice, prior to conducting the interviews we informed them of our academic affiliation. We also mentioned that the interview was going to address: 1) migratory background; 2) education; 3) employment history; 4) identity; 5) religiosity; 6) social and political participation; 7) perception of the phenomena of Islamic radicalisation. All interviews were based on the same interview scheme.⁸ The respondents were also reminded to feel free to answer only those questions they felt comfortable with, and to discuss and add further suggestions on what they per-

larly interesting in providing a critical viewpoint from within the Muslim community.

⁶ As many as 23 of the 36 young Muslims we interviewed were of Moroccan origin. We also interviewed 4 young people from Tunisia, 3 from Albania, 2 from Senegal, 2 from Syria and 1 from Israel, Egypt and Algeria. Most of them were students or manual workers; only 3 were unemployed. Of the 36 young Muslims we interviewed, 23 were male and 13 female. Only 3 were born in Italy, most of their parents had come to Italy as economic migrants. The majority of our young respondents live at home with their parents or with some relatives. Only 7 were married and had children.

⁷ All the interviews were conducted in Italian. Quotes from the interviews have been translated by the two authors.

⁸ We have followed the interview scheme adopted in the “Radicalisation of young Muslims in medium sized European cities” project, adding a few more questions which we considered particularly relevant to the Italian case.

sonally thought to be important in relation to the stated purpose of the research. Thirty interviews were conducted with a single respondent, another three with two respondents each time. Interviews with more than one interviewee have not negatively affected the results of the interview, rather, in some cases, they had positive effects, stimulating better developed answers. Finally, we also conducted 3 interviews in Parma with representatives of social and political institutions, we selected them for their expertise on local conflicts over religious issues. We also rely on secondary sources, existing literature and official documents from political and institutional authorities.

Choosing to compare two medium-sized cities instead of focusing on a single case study, allows us to address the influence of the different political opportunity structure of Parma and Verona on our respondents views and their identity construction. As we are going to describe below, the two cities are similar in several respects—their size, the presence of migrants as well as the local economy—but different as far as the political opportunities and model of integration for immigrants are concerned. Parma had a historically left-wing culture because of the legacy of the Italian resistance movement, however in the last ten years the city has been governed by the “centre-right”. Verona has always been closer to the right of the political spectrum but what differentiates the two cities today is the strong electoral support for the Northern League (*Lega Nord*) in Verona. The city’s mayor, Flavio Tosi, is also a national leader of that party. The Northern League is well known for its populist, xenophobic and Islamophobic discourse.⁹ Central to its political agenda is the fight against immigration presented as a way to preserve local identities. Limiting the building and opening of new mosques is part of the Northern League’s fight against what they denounce as an “Islamic invasion”. In the last few years, local authorities in Verona have therefore shown little interest in developing and maintaining good relations with the Muslim organizations present within its boundaries and in expanding integration policies towards immigrants in general, and Muslim in particular. In Parma on the other hand the local administration has attempted to establish a dialogue with the local Muslim community. In each city there has been a campaign to close down the existing Islamic cultural centres, which also function as prayer halls. While in Verona the campaign was led by the city administration,¹⁰ in Parma the local authorities expressed solidarity with the Muslim community when some residents asked for an Islamic centre located near to where they lived to be closed.¹¹

⁹ “La guerra alle moschee. Nel Veneto 37 centri islamici nel mirino della Lega” in *il Mattino*, 5-12-2008.

¹⁰ “Verona, via gli islamici dal centro di preghiera” in *la Repubblica*, 9-8-2008; “Verona, il Tar fa riaprire la moschea” in *la Repubblica*, 24-10-2008.

¹¹ ““Tappeto a rischio incendio” Stop alla moschea di Parma” in *Corriere della Sera*, 31-1-2009.

The Muslim Population in Italy

According to the latest statistics, more than 1.5 million Muslims live in Italy, a country of about 58 million people. Only around 20,000 of them are Italians who have converted to Islam (Allievi 1999). The overall majority are immigrants, whether legal or not, who arrived within the past 10 to 20 years, mainly from Morocco, Albania, Tunisia, Egypt, Senegal, Pakistan, Turkey, Algeria, Somalia, Nigeria, Syria and Ethiopia (Allievi 2003). Moroccans (35%) are the largest and one of the oldest communities among Muslim immigrants. More than half of Muslims live in the north of Italy; almost one third are women and less than 10% have an Italian passport. The vast majority of Muslim immigrants belong to the age cohort 16-40. Their immigration to Italy is mainly motivated by the search for employment and a better quality of life, while asylum seekers are a small minority (Allievi 2003). They mainly work in small manufacturing firms, the construction industry, agriculture and domestic services.

Muslim immigrants form 33.2% of the more than 3.5 million estimated immigrants in Italy (Caritas/Migrantes 2008), who account for approximately 5% of the total resident population. Immigrants coming from traditionally Muslim countries are, according to the latest statistics, the fastest growing immigrant group. As opposed to other European countries where immigration has a long history and where Muslims have been present for decades, Italy has four distinguishing characteristics (Allievi 2003):

- Diversity in ethnic origin, language, cultural practice and country of origin;
- Rapid pace of entry and settlement;
- Higher number of “irregular” immigrants;
- Higher difference in the geographical distribution of the different groups throughout the country?

Having stressed the deeply heterogeneous, fragmented and non-centralised nature of the Italian Muslim community, we can now classify its population in terms of religious practices (ibid.). The majority of Muslims living in Italy used to be *secular*: they did not practice their faith, but did identify with Islam on a cultural level. Nowadays, a large part of the community practices its faith at home. A minority of the Muslim population, which nevertheless has started to grow in the years following the 9/11 events, frequents the mosque and participates in groups inspired by Islam. These are the *observant* Muslims, for whom religion plays an important role in self-identification.¹² So far very few people seem to be Islamic *fundamentalists*, orthodox Muslims who have a literalist interpretation of the Qur'an they apply to all times and places and aim to return to the idealized origins of early Islam through theological, cultural and economic agendas. They 'normativize' Islam as a total way of life and oppose integration in Western societies that they see as

¹² Among our interviewees this group is by far the most represented, as we were helped by local mosques and community representatives in contacting young Muslims.

alarmingly secularised, individualistic and materialistic (see the works of Kepel 2004; Roy 2004; Mozzafari 2007).

Islam is not yet recognised as an official religion in Italy. Nonetheless it has become the second most important religion in the country. The Italian State has not yet signed an “ad hoc agreement” (*intesa*) (Coppi and Spreafico 2008) so Muslims do not enjoy the benefits such an agreement would bring about. For example, unlike religious groups that have signed this agreement, Muslims cannot allocate a quota of their IRPEF (personal income tax) to the Muslim community, deduct donations to the community from their taxes, easily establish mosques and places of worship, delegate teachers to public schools to provide religious instruction, have the right to legitimately abstain from work on religious holidays, see an adjustment of legislation on funerary practices in order to respect Islamic traditions or observe other religious rites (Zincone 2006). As Coppi and Spreafico have noted, these aspects “concern two broad spheres: the informal public space peculiar to civil society and the formal public space subject to the direct control of central and local institutions. The founding of associations, the opening of places of worship, cultural and social initiatives belong to the former, while cemeteries, specific foods in schools cafeterias, Islamic slaughtering, the teaching of religion at school and the recognition of Islamic religious holidays, among other things, belong to the latter” (2008: 109).

Muslim Organizations in Italy

There were 660 prayer halls in Italy in 2009 (Allievi 2009). Apart from being places where Islam is practiced they are also spaces where some basic needs of Muslim immigrants are met and socialization in the religious community can develop (e.g. activities for kids such as instruction on the Qur'an and lessons of Arabic or Italian). This is why the origins of Muslim associations lie in mosques. Only a minority of Italian Muslims belong, however, to religious associations, the best known according to Guolo (2005) and Colella (2009) are:

- UCOII - *L'Unione delle Comunità e Organizzazioni Islamiche in Italia* (Union of Islamic Communities and Organizations in Italy), founded in 1990 as a federation of more than 50 mosques across the country, it claims to represent 200-300 Muslim associations and approximately 70-120 prayer spaces (Allievi 2009). It has a Europe-wide network and supports the Muslim brotherhood, but always respects the legal order. It is the largest Muslim organisation in the country.¹³ .
- The *Centro Culturale Islamico d'Italia* is based in Rome (1975). It is the only association which has been granted legal status. Its governing board is largely composed of the ambassadors of the Middle-East and North-African States, with particular support from Saudi Arabia and Morocco. It is linked to the Saudi Muslim World League.

¹³ <http://www.islam-ucoui.it>.

- The *Associazione dei Musulmani Italiani* (AMI) and COREIS in Milan (*Comunità religiosa islamica*)¹⁴ are smaller organizations, composed predominantly of Italian citizens who have converted to Islam and that claim to represent moderate Islam.

All these organisations compete with each other to represent the entire Muslim community in Italy. None has yet sought a State agreement or concordat (*intesa*).

In the recent past, the national governments, both centre-right and centre-left, have shown little interest in developing and maintaining good relations with most Muslim organizations, especially with the UCOII. One problem they mention is that, unlike other religions, it is difficult to find a single broad based Muslim organization with which to negotiate. The decentralised institutional structure of the Islamic faith and the diversity of national origins among Muslims who immigrated to Italy in the last 10-20 years produce in fact organizational fragmentation. According to Schuster, when migrants from Islamic countries have formed associations, “these tend to be national ones (Algerian, Bangladeshi, Moroccan, Pakistani etc.). On the one hand, this is unsurprising people are unified by a common language- but on the other, when national groups are relatively small and the challenges they face are broadly similar (legal status, employment, accommodation), this segmentation militates against the creation of any strong voice.” (2005: 770). In 2005, the Interior Ministry set up a Consultative body (*consulta islamica*) on Italian Islam, with the stated intention of promoting institutional dialogue with Muslim communities in Italy.¹⁵ Guided by the Minister of the Interior, this body however seems more focused on solving the possible risks associated with Muslims (e.g. “irregular” immigration and the “terrorist threat”), than facilitating the integration of Muslim communities.

At the local level, Muslims’ main political objectives are concerned with primary needs such as obtaining places of worship and some form of cultural recognition (Allievi 2009). Their associations are in this sense an important referent, both for the communities their members belong to and for the local institutions, as they represent the immigrant Muslim population in the consultative bodies and instances of mediation and dialogue. One problem however is that these organisations represent only a small part of the Italian Muslim community, not the voiceless majority that neither attend mosques nor participate in religious associational activities. Many immigrants from Arab countries are, instead, affiliated or close to national or ethnic-based associations.

The Muslim Population in Parma

In Parma, of 180,000 inhabitants, 10,000 are Muslims, mainly from Morocco, Tunisia and Senegal. Islam is, after Catholicism, the second largest religion in Parma. An Islamic centre, located on the industrial outskirts of the town, functions as a mosque. Up to 500

¹⁴ www.coreis.it.

¹⁵ *Corriere della Sera*, 11-9-2005

people gather there for the Friday prayers. A second, smaller, mosque is mainly used by the Senegalese community. The representatives of the community state that more than 2000 individuals among the broader Muslim constituency are observant Muslims. There are different Muslim associations: Ahl al Bait (the main Shiite organization); Associazione Musulmani per il Dialogo; Movimento Musulmani Italiani. There is an inter-religious forum, in which various Muslim associations participate, together with groups of different religious affiliations (e.g. Jewish, different Christian denominations, and Buddhists). Immigration is in general quite stable, and from the outset characterized by a high number of family reunions and of 'legal' migrants with long-term settlement projects.

Politically, Parma has a left-wing tradition, even though in the last ten years the local government has been led by the centre-right. Channels of dialogue between the Muslim community and the local institutions exist in the form of local consultative bodies on some main issues of concern (e.g. the construction of a cemetery only for Muslims or the opening of Muslim cultural centres) and on integration policy. The local authorities have shown an interest in developing and maintaining good relations with Muslim organisations. Their inclusive attitudes are testified by the numerous initiatives for inter-faith dialogue. When, in September 2008 the Municipal Police arrested and assaulted a student from Ghana who they said they believed to be a drug dealer,¹⁶ the event was strongly condemned by the local authorities, and there were various public events in support of the Ghanaian boy and the broader community of migrants. Hate crimes against foreigners, and Muslims in particular, have been rare.

The Muslim Population in Verona

In Verona, of 265,000 inhabitants, 17,000 are originally from Muslim countries, principally from Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Senegal. Islam is, after Catholicism, the second largest religion in the city. An Islamic centre in a factory neighbourhood outside the city functions as a mosque. More than 300 people gather there for the Friday prayers. There is also a Sufi brotherhood in the city where immigrants from Senegal form a majority.¹⁷

Located in the North-Eastern part of Italy, Verona was characterised, until the 1950s, by high rates of emigration. Only in the last few decades, due to strong economic growth, has it become a destination attracting immigrant workers. Traditionally a very Catholic city, with a conservative local culture, Verona saw Christian Democratic rule for almost forty years. Since the 1990s, the Northern League has become particularly strong in the city. The Northern League mayor was elected in 2007 with more than 60% of the vote, winning the election with a campaign which focused on urban safety and anti-immigrant rhetoric. In the year 2008, he was put on trial for incitement to racial hatred.

¹⁶ The boy was taken to the police station where he was heavily abused with racist insults. "La denuncia di un giovane ganese Picchiato dai vigili", *Corriere della Sera*, 30-9-2008.

¹⁷ Called Muri, they have a more private type of religious practice.

No channels of dialogue exist between the Muslim community and the local institutions. A proposal for a consultative body for immigrants was opposed by the local authorities who have shown little interest in developing good relations with the Muslim organizations in the area and in expanding integration policies towards immigrants in general, and Muslims in particular. In many domains, from housing to education, migrants have been considered as a problem. This political stance has profoundly affected the degree of migrants' integration. In May 2008, a mosque in the north of the province of Verona was destroyed by bulldozers and the site was turned into a car park named after Oriana Fallaci, the Italian journalist notorious for her anti-Islam views. In the city, Muslims are often victims of manifestations of prejudice and hatred in forms that range from verbal threats to physical attacks on people and property. Verona is usually chosen by immigrants primarily for the employment opportunities it offers, but a very unstable immigrant population indicates that integration is much more difficult in Verona than in Parma. In the view of the social workers we have met, local authorities do everything they can to jeopardize integration: "Assimilation is the form of integration that the local authorities want. Immigrants have to be similar to the people of Verona. Only in this case would they speak of rights, but differences are not accepted at all. Verona is a very closed city to the immigrant population" (I SWVR 16-4-2009).

3. Educational Background

The education system is a very important arena of potential integration, but also a place where young immigrants can develop feelings of discrimination. Our interviewees, who mainly attended the less prestigious vocational training system, mentioned in fact concerns about the lack of cultural awareness within the system, as well as episodes of Islamophobia.

In general, as immigration is a relatively new phenomenon, there are still few immigrant children in the Italian educational system, including Muslims (these represent 34% of the entire immigrant population). Having said that, "in the span of approximately ten years, the number of foreign students rose from 70,657 units reported in the academic year 1997/1998 to 574,133 units in 2007/2008, which represent 6.4% of the whole school population, and an increase of more than 70.000 units compared to the previous year" (Santagati 2009: 130). In 2009, there was a further increase, the number of foreign students is now 628,937 which represents 7% of the entire student population (Caritas/Migrantes 2009). In Emilia Romagna, the region in which Parma is located, it is well over 12%. If the educational system does not pose any legal obstacles to full and equal opportunity for enrolment during school years (Queirolo Palmas 2006), it does not however provide a multicultural education. Schools seem to have taken into consideration the specific needs of Muslim students (for example issues relating to dress codes or food) on a case by case basis and do not reflect structured decisions at the national level. Language problems, poverty, and an insufficiently inter-cultural environment in schools may negatively affect educa-

tional achievements among Muslim students and result in early school drop-out.¹⁸ Only 1 out of every 35 university students come from migrant families (Caritas/Migrantes 2009).

As a matter of fact, foreign students do not always enjoy equal opportunities in terms of the choices they are offered for their further education/training in comparison with their Italian counterparts. Their chances are often restricted either by the wishes of their family or the fact that they are encouraged by the school to pursue a vocational path because of their social and economic background regardless of their academic potential. "The data provided by the Ministry highlight, on the one hand, that foreign students tend to privilege technical-vocational education. On the other hand, these data report that foreign students' educational paths tend to be characterized by less regularity... ..on average 42.5% non-Italian students remain behind with their studies and that this time lag tends to increase as students grow older" (Santagati 2009: 134-135). A social worker from Verona has stated on these issues:

In the high schools foreign students are particularly rejected, so they all go to certain vocational schools. There is a very high selection. The high schools are not at all flexible, they have not done anything to adapt to the growing number of foreign students and to the emergence of different cultures. Elementary schools have moved in this direction, they have changed their programs in order to solve these problems, which at the end are strictly related with integration issues. The high school situation is not unique to Verona and is almost the same everywhere in Italy. (I SWVR 16-4-2009)

This informal discrimination is felt by our interviewees that, with the exception of the three born in the country, have mostly spent only the last part of their education in Italy. The majority, have attended *istituti professionali*, even those who were in their own countries attended more academic high schools specialising in the humanities and science. Few of those interviewed are at university. Our respondents mentioned episodes of intolerance or Islamophobia in relations among students and between students and a single teacher rather than from the education system. Among them, a young female Muslim in Parma recalls that other schoolmates were shouting at her:

Beware of the bomb! (I PR G III 7-2-2009)

And a Moroccan boy in Verona recalls a similarly disturbing situation with a teacher at his school:

In the education system I have never had problems, but occasionally some person has not treated me with respect. One time, I was at school and there was a teacher who

¹⁸ Official reports concerning school attendance specifically for Muslims pupils do not exist at the national level. According to local reports on some cities (on Turin and Genoa, see Fischer and Fisher 2002), the drop-out rates are higher among Muslim pupils if confronted with Italian schoolmates. Ministero dell'Istruzione, Università e Ricerca, *Gli alunni stranieri nel sistema scolastico italiano. A.S. 2007/08* (Rome: MIUR, 2008), available at: <http://www.pubblica.istruzione.it>

had her kid there. Some of my classmates were playing with him, so I went close there to play as well. When I touched the kid the teacher told me “stay away and don’t touch”, then she used some tissues to clean the kid exactly where I touched him. To be fair this is a problem linked to that particular person, related to her knowledge, or rather her lack of knowledge. (I VRG VIII 25-3-2009)

In the majority of our respondents’ views, such attitudes have worsened following the events of September 11th. No particular initiative has been taken to address these problems by the school/educational authorities.

In line with our expectations, these types of Islamophobic attitudes seem to have been more frequent in the schools of Verona than in Parma. Some of our respondents have related them with the strong racist ideology present among the Hellas Verona F.C. football fans who have a strong influence among young pupils.¹⁹ They reflect however more general trends. According to *The Jerusalem Post* of July 1st 2005, “In Italy, a 2003 sampling of 2,200 teenagers between the ages of 14 and 18 found that over half believed that Muslims supported terrorism and 47 per cent stated that Muslims were ‘fanatic fundamentalists’” (Bleich 2009: 367).

Our respondents (90% of them) also complained about the fact that the Italian educational system does not provide specific courses on the culture of their countries of origin or classes in the native languages of immigrant children. They criticise the lack of an intercultural approach, and the lack of information provided about religions other than Catholicism. Paradoxically, the situation regarding these issues seems to have improved somewhat after the events of September 11th, as curiosity has increased. As a female respondent recalls regarding her experience at school:

There was never enough discussion in class about intercultural issues; but after 9/11 many controversies about what was happening started to emerge. So also in our class you could see that people were starting to talk about what foreigners do, about what they come to do here, and about what Islam really is. From that moment on, many schools have started to work on intercultural issues. (I PRG VI 9-2-2009)

In Italian schools, while the teaching of Catholicism is part of the curriculum, that of other religions is not.²⁰ This is felt by our respondents to be discriminatory, being by far the

¹⁹ The majority of our respondents in Verona said they would not feel comfortable to go to the stadium, fearing to be insulted or even worse.

²⁰ An agreement was made in 1929 between the Italian state and the Vatican, and ratified in a new law in 1985. It reads: “The Italian Republic, recognizing the value of religious culture, and keeping in mind that the principles of Catholicism are part of the historic heritage of the Italian people, will continue to assure, among the broader goals of education, the teaching of the Catholic religion in all public schools below university level”. In order to respect freedom of conscience and the educational responsibility of parents, attendance of religious education class is however not compulsory (Bernardini and Bernardini 2008).

largest complaint in relation to the Italian education system. What our interviewees complain about is however not the existence of an hour of religious teaching per week, but rather that this hour is dedicated exclusively to the Catholic faith, and that a Catholic priest is allowed to teach it. During this hour (officially, of religious teaching), Islam and other religions are totally ignored or, even worse, mentioned with reference to violence against women or terrorism. So most of the time our respondents have felt the responsibility to defend Islam as a way of defending themselves, their families and their culture. Instead of one hour of Catholicism per week, most of our respondents ask for the Italian education system to provide teaching about different cultures and religions by inviting priests, imams and other experts from other religions.

When explicitly asked, our interviewees have however expressed no preference for separate education for Muslim children. They have strongly opposed the Government's proposal of organizing separated classes for immigrants, as in the words of a 25 year old girl this law "would worsen the situation. It would become worse than the ghetto. Kids should stay and grow up together" (I PRG II 5-2-2009). In fact, Islamic schools are not generally preferred if the choice is between these and Italian state schools.²¹ The young Muslims we interviewed wish to send their children to learn Arabic and Islam in the afternoon, whenever possible, but the Italian state system is generally preferred as in their view this will improve their children's access to qualified jobs in the future.

Social workers as well as the representatives of the Islamic communities we have met in both cities consider the educational system to be crucial to the integration of young Muslims and an antidote against any form of radicalism. Schools in their view can act as integration institutions. They therefore stress that the educational system when it does not fight discrimination, can become a potentially exclusionary institution. Social workers also mentioned a number of intergenerational conflicts that have emerged between the young Muslims (especially girls) and their own families as they tried to adapt to the new country (I SWVR 16-4-2009). Local institutions sometimes tried to mediate through social workers with a Muslim background who have tried to deal with these conflicts as local representatives of the Islamic communities. Young girls seem to have been particularly affected by these problems.

4. Employment History

If, as mentioned, most immigrants come to Italy for economic reasons, it is especially in their working environment that integration, but also discrimination, is felt. Our interviewees in fact mentioned that they often felt discriminated against, in part as immigrants in general, in part (especially women), as Muslims.

²¹ There are only a few Muslim faith schools in the country (mainly in big cities like Milan and Turin). They are not financed by the government.

The labour market position of Muslims in Italy can be described in the same terms as for the rest of the immigrant community in the country (Ambrosini 2000), as difficult, precarious, poorly-paid, dangerous²² and socially penalised or even worse for those who work illegally and as a consequence have no social protection at all. Immigrant workers often face discrimination in recruitment procedures on the grounds of their actual or perceived nationality, colour or religion (Bencini, Cerretelli and Di Pasquale 2008). They are in fact systematically disadvantaged. The rate of unemployment among immigrants in Italy approaches 9.5% (against 7.1%, for Italians), and immigrant women are particularly disadvantaged as their rate of unemployment is around 14.7% (Zanfrini 2009).²³ The average household income of Muslim immigrants living in Italy is much lower than for the native Italians, around one thousand Euros a month, while for Italians the average is 36% higher. Despite this, the role of immigrant workers in the Italian labour market is ever increasing and there is an increase in immigrant entrepreneurial activity.

Among the young Muslims we met, most of those who are not students work in subordinate, unskilled and poorly paid positions. In fact, our interviewees perceive this as a sign of injustice, even though they do not associate these disadvantages specifically to their religious affiliation, but see themselves as having the same problems faced by other immigrants. As one Moroccan worker told us, “The majority of foreigners in Italy are seen as dangerous and as people who steal jobs from the local people” (I PRG VI 9-2-2009). A 26 year old Tunisian man said that “sometimes it has been difficult to find a job, but this depended very much on the culture of the employer. There were cases where the employer did not want to employ foreigners” (I PRG V 7-2-2009). The young observant Muslims we have met tend not to read their situation in the job market as influenced by being Muslims. Asked if they felt discriminated against on the job market the overall majority of them say that they have not experienced any discrimination because they are Muslims, but rather as foreigners.

Our female respondents gave, however, a different account, as they felt discriminated in practicing their religion. In particular, several interviewees in Verona and in Parma mentioned that they feel discriminated against if they wear the *hijab* or that they choose not to wear it as they are afraid they would lose their job.²⁴ As a Moroccan woman stated during an interview, she does not wear the *hijab* because she is sure that in that case she will be fired from her job:

²² Additionally, “the number of casualties among workers of foreign origin has increased by 8.7% this year in comparison to last year, which is a clear sign of this increasing trend. Interestingly, these data reflect an opposite trend to the data on Italian workers, among which the situation is still alarming, but work casualties have actually decreased (by 3.4% in the last year)” (Bencini, Cerretelli and Di Pasquale 2008).

²³ INPS, *Un fenomeno complesso: il lavoro femminile immigrato* (Rome: INPS, 2008); available at: http://www.inps.it/news/Il_lavoro_femminile_immigrato.pdf.

²⁴ See interviews I PRG II 5-2-2009; I PRG IV 7-2-2009; I PRG XII 11-6-2009; I PRG XIII 20-6-2009; I PRG XV 27-6-2009; I PRG XVI; I VRG XIX 5-7-2009.

The Muslim women wearing the veil cannot work in an office. This is the real problem for a Muslim woman in Italy. (I PRG XIII 20-6-2009)

At work, generally, employers allow workers to observe religious holidays and rituals (e.g. prayer breaks during the workday and serving halal food). But this is done on an ad hoc basis and is not formally recognised by law. Even though the potential for conflict on these issues seems remote at this stage, the lack of legislation can be expected to have a negative effect in the future.

Eight respondents also stated that in the workplace the relations with non-Muslims have become more complex since September 11th. Complaints focus on reduced tolerance towards the wearing of the *hijab*, and prayer opportunities or people of (presumed) Islamic belief in general. A university student, originally from Syria and now living in Parma told us:

In this period I am looking to find a place to do my apprenticeship, but they look at me in a rude manner. The employers only look at your external appearance. For them, I am a foreigner and customers would run away because of this. I wear the veil and this is a huge problem for them. Until now I have not found anybody who told me, "Yes, you can do the apprenticeship here at our place". (I PRG II 5-2-2009)

Interviewees also resent being considered as simply "economic resources". When the President of the Italian Republic declared immigrant workers a fundamental resource for the national economy, some of our respondents saw this as a sort of exploitation. The need to be recognised as every other human being with his or her own rights is particularly important for our interviewees.

They have to consider us not only as a burden, but as human beings as well. If one stays at home from work because he is ill he then has a sense of guilt because when he goes back to work it seems like he has committed an offence. (I PRG VII 2-3-2009)

Where in Parma all the women we have met work or study, in Verona our female sample shows that those women who do not study are predominantly housewives. In this latter city the social workers we met have pointed out that the labour market seems to particularly discriminate against women and this can be an especially negative phenomena as women who stay at home have particular difficulty in integrating into the host country and tend to raise their children away from the host culture (I SWVR 12-3-2009; I SWVR 16-4-2009).

5. Identity

The Image in the Mass Media

Identity is not only constructed at an individual level or negotiated within a community, it also emerges as a social process contingently imposed and shaped from the outside by other actors, among which the media are particularly powerful. Young Muslim identity is also created by the image they want to oppose. A new revitalized sense of the collective “we” seems today to have emerged and been imposed from outside the Italian Muslim community, in a process of interaction with the environment in which it develops. Among our respondents, growing Islamophobia had the result of strengthening their search of a meaning in life, producing a Muslim identity around a shared sense of vulnerability, exclusion, and incomprehension from the majority society (Massarri 2006).

In the Italian popular imaginary, Muslims have become a synonym for foreigners and immigrants in general (Schmidt di Friedberg 2003). In most of our respondents’ opinions, negative portrayals of Islam in the mass media have contributed to growing societal intolerance towards Muslims. A 23 year old Italian boy, whose parents migrated to Parma from Syria, commented that:

In the newspapers and on the television there is not a good image of Islam. This image is related to violence. This does not help integration, there is a need for more objectivity. (I PRG I: 5-2-2009)

Along the same lines a 26-year old Moroccan stated:

The news only talks about Islam when there is a car bomb or a suicide bomber. When there is a physical offence or when a husband beats his wife then they speak about Islam. In my view the newspapers should speak of what Islam is in reality. (I PRG IX 15-3-2009)

Mass media are perceived as the main actors responsible for these stereotypes as they have depicted a negative image of Muslims as ‘trouble-makers’ or violent insurgents, collectively responsible for a deterioration in the local and national public security. Furthermore, Muslims have been stereotyped as illegal immigrants, threatening the Italian way of life, its ‘national identity’ and possessing a patriarchal structure that impedes the emancipation of women (Diamanti and Bordignon 2002; Sciortino 2002; Soravia 1999). Widespread among our respondents is the belief that the mass media, for the sake of sensationalism, distort the truth about them and Islam in general: “Since 9/11 mass media have started to use an Islamophobic language” (I PRG II 5-2-2009). Public opinion shifted slowly in the last ten-twenty years from tolerance and curiosity to fear and intolerance exacerbating xenophobic attitudes toward immigrants and Islamophobic ones toward Muslims (Schmidt di Friedberg 2003; Cere 2002). In the ENAR Shadow Report on racism

in Italy in 2008, Camilla Bencini and her colleagues discovered that “[t]hroughout the year, episodes of racism towards Muslim citizens occurred and Muslims were a target of different forms of hostility, in particular towards mosques, through acts of vandalism and violent attacks. Cases of Islamophobia occurred in 2007 as well” (2009: 9). The mass media representation, or what our respondents perceive as misrepresentation, seems to negatively affect Italian Muslims who feel attacked as part of the broader Muslim community. This is not only felt by young Muslims, but also the broader community. As the president of the Islamic community in Verona, originally from Sudan, clearly stated:

The mass media don’t represent us in a good way. We have been used as part of a political conflict which we have nothing to do with. The mass media have created a fear against Muslims so sometimes we become part of this conflict even if we do not have anything to do with this. The work done by the Islamic community in Italy over the last forty years has been amazing. We have been able to eliminate every kind of idea which goes against the state and the law. We should be praised for this and not criticised. I think that the Italian State should have better integrated the Muslim community. As a doctor, if you have in your body an organ, and you accept this then your body works better. If you don’t accept it, “you are not Italian, you are different”, at the end this organ dies or it is rejected and it can create serious problems for the whole body. One can die if his body rejects an organ. (I VRP 22-6-2009)

A young Muslim boy from Verona made a telling comment in reference to the presence in public debates of the misrepresentation of Muslims: “Luckily they can’t blame the earthquake [in Abruzzo] on Al Qaida” (I VR GXII 15-4-2009).

The stereotypes spread by the mass media are reflected in everyday experience of Islamophobic attacks. Our interviewees mentioned discrimination in their personal lives, for example in daily contact with others while walking in the streets or taking the bus:

I met a doctor who, when I have started to wear *hijab*, no longer wanted to see me ... people in the street sometimes shout at me, “Go back to your country, take away that headscarf”. Everything I do when I am in the street I have to be careful because I wear the veil. If I throw something in the street people reproach me because I am Muslim, if this is done by an Italian woman then nothing would happen. (I PR G III 7-2-2009)

One time I was out with my Muslim friends and an old guy, who was on his bike, shouted at us, “Go back home.” I answered, “Yes, I’m taking the bus”. Another one spat at us. I did not even stop to question why, if you start to discuss with them they merely see you as an uncivilized foreigner. So it is better to be seen as a foreigner and that is it. (I PRG XIII 20-6-2009)

The Building of a Religious Identity

Faced with this stigmatized identity, a positive sense of the self is created around increasing religious commitment. Despite coming from different ethnic groups and different parts of the world and speaking different languages, Italian Muslims feel a sense of shared identity with Islam often mentioned as the most important bridge among these diverse communities. Young immigrants from Arab nations feel a stronger relation to their ethnic-religious identity than to their ethnic-national identity. In fact, our interviewees counter the public prejudices against Islam and Muslims by promoting a more positive image. Doing this they choose to become active actors in the discourse about themselves by talking to their non-Muslim peers and allowing them to get to know Muslims first hand rather than through the media.

Identification with religious practices develops as other potential sources of identification weaken. Most of the young Italian Muslims we have interviewed migrated to Italy as part of family reunification (*rincongiungimento familiare*). Even if they regularly visit their country of origin, they say they feel like foreigners in both countries. A Moroccan boy in Verona stated: ““What is my identity? My identity is in transition” (I VRG XVII 17-7-2009); and a Moroccan girl in Parma said, “I feel neither Italian, nor Moroccan. I am always undecided” (I PRG XIII 20-6-2009). Religion for the young Italian Muslims we have met, seems to satisfy a desire to find some sense of moral certainty and place in the world, in order to counter feelings of resentment and wounded pride (Roy 2002, 2007). Islam seems to offer them stability and a framework where they can live as Muslims in Italian society. There exist, in their words, a “before” of uncertainty and an “after” of certainty once they have encountered religion. They say to have reflected on what it means to be a Muslim only when they have moved to Italy, something they have not done in their countries of origin where being a Muslim is not the subject of ‘difference’.

Unlike their parents, the young Muslims do not see Islam as reproducing religious practices in a new country, in an ethnic interpretation, but functions instead as a ‘life-style’ which helps them to understand themselves and feel part of a community. The identification with Islam is felt more strongly than the identification with a particular ethnic group. Our respondents proudly stated that it is more difficult to be a Muslim in a country where Muslims are the minority. For this reason they feel like real believers, as they say they made a personal choice which they renew daily, rather than having simply inherited their religion. Practising is what differentiates, according to many of our interviewees, a good Muslim from a bad one. Young Italian Muslims show in this a clear individualisation of the vision of religiosity as Muslim identity is presented as the result of an individual choice. Young observant Muslims seem to individualize themselves through Islam (Maddanu 2009). Religious belief is however not hidden or practiced only in private, but is in-

stead exhibited in the public sphere as a sign of identity which links the individual to a global Islamic community (*umma*).²⁵

Most of our interviewees declared they have modified their religious practices after September 11th. Those events, and what followed them, caused a surge of Islamic pride among young Muslims forcing them to defend their religion, building a more cohesive community. Confronted with what they perceived as an attack against them, particularly from the media, they reacted by increasing their commitment to religious affiliation, and publicly showing this in their everyday lives. Representative of what has happened in the last few years is what these Moroccan girls have said:

With the events of 9/11 and the bad image attached to Islam I chose to wear the veil...the community is scrutinised by the media and the authorities which has given us a lot of power to say, "Yes, we are Muslims, we are here, and we do not fear anything". (I PRG VI 9-2-2009)

After 9/11, I started to read up on more information regarding my religion. This has been done by my mother as well. We have done this in order to answer all the questions people were asking and all those you could hear on television. (I PR G III 7-2-2009)

In counteracting the negative perception of themselves and their community, 24 of our young Muslims turned towards religious teaching in order to become more informed about their religion. Among our respondents $\frac{3}{4}$ said they have moved in this direction.

Most of our respondents perceive that acceptance by Italian society is more and more premised on 'assimilation', and the assumption that they should renounce their Muslim identity. The ensuing sense of exclusion is of particular significance face with the challenges posed by terrorism. They believe that since 9/11 they have all been seen as terrorists. The president of the Islamic community in Verona has seen this process affecting many young Muslims:

The community today has been transformed, there are families and they want to educate their kids. This has brought a return to religion. But there is also another reason. If someone is always badly treated and offended, then maybe this person goes to look for his origins. When you are badly judged: "you are like this, you are a terrorists" without any distinction. This has happened for many young Muslims, even if a young person doesn't know so much about religion then he starts to ask many questions. This is what has made many young Muslims to go back to their religion, it is a way to understand their identity and who they are. (I VRP 22-6-2009)

²⁵ "Scontro di civiltà a bordo vasca. Il caso del burkini in piscina a Verona" in *Corriere della Sera*, 19-8-2009.

Four of our respondents said they have only recently started to reveal their religious affiliation as they feel more protected by a larger Muslim community today than in the 1990s. This has led some of our respondents, who until a few years ago practiced their faith at home, to a sort of 'coming out' in relation to their religious belonging. Publicly showing their religiosity, they have also asserted an identity which is different from that of their parents or from other young immigrants.

In the last years I have been able to say, "Yes, I am Muslim." The fact that the community has increased gave us strength. For example, it gave women the strength to wear the veil. You start to see in the streets other women that wear it so you too start to think that you want to wear it. (I PRG XIII 20-6-2009)

One third of our respondents say they have found a way to break their social isolation by publicly being Muslim. After 9/11 if Muslims have been badly treated by the media, this attention also increased curiosity at a local level, at work and school where Italians have started to ask questions about the Muslim religion, and are interested in knowing more. According to some of our respondents, in the last years they have been able to free themselves from their social isolation as immigrants and to build new links with non-Muslims. Paradoxically if 9/11 has certainly created Islamophobia in the country, it has as well given an opportunity to Italian Muslims to feel part of a community and to receive attention or at least to become recognisable, even if this contains a negative image.

Feelings of second class citizenship are high among young Italian Muslims. By challenging a negative image of Islam these young Muslims feel a sense of strong identification that transcends ethnic boundaries, proud in resistance toward the negative image that the media depicts.

Having said that, our interviews clearly show that young Italian Muslims are not turning away from all what the Western way of life offers them. It seems more that they pick and chose what they want to adopt from the new societies where their parents have immigrated. Those girls and young women we have interviewed seem more attached than male respondents to Islam and its practices. This growing Islamic identity among young Italian Muslims does not seem, however, to favour a process of radicalisation.

Among our young interviewees in Parma, we have observed a more autonomous understanding of what it means to be a Muslim and weaker links to the local prayer centre and to their parents compared with our young Muslim respondents in Verona. In this latter city, the closed opportunities seem to have produced more dependence upon the religious institutions, leaders and family.

6. Religiosity

Religious Practices

The religious sphere plays a fundamental role in the identification process. Thirty out of thirty-six young Italian Muslims we interviewed said they have been socialized into Islam by their parents. But if Islam was passed to them from their parents this, according to our respondents, was not automatic or predetermined. The religious practices which they adopt are not in their view imposed by their parents, but they are perceived in terms of an essentially individual reflection on matters of religion. Where parents were influential in transmitting Islam they say that other many possible choices were open in front of them. Muslim religion is said to be “a sort of base for every kind of life choice” (I PRG XIII 20-6-2009). All of them frequent mostly Muslims friends, but half of them said they have Italian friends as well who they met at school or who they regularly meet at work. One third of those respondents who use the internet at home said they do not use it to search for information about religious issues, as they state that “it can be dangerous”, “you can find everything on the internet”.²⁶ They use the internet instead mostly to chat with friends and relatives in other countries. Sometimes these conversations are also related to religious issues.

When they have doubts about religious questions, our respondents ask friends, Imams in mosques, their parents; most of them say that Cable TV with Arabic language programmes have been really helpful and continue to be helpful for their religious education. During these programmes, often the *ulemas* answer questions regarding the correct behaviour Muslims should adopt. Arabic TV programmes seen in many Muslims houses of our respondents in the last few years seem to have been a significant element which has helped revitalise the religious faith of many members of the families.²⁷ They seem to provide a sense of belonging to an imagined community (*umma*) around the world, and contrast the condition of self-isolation that one third of the young Muslims, we have met, say to have felt, particularly at the beginning of their new experience in Italy and among women by far. Arabic programmes on cable TV with are preferred in comparison to the internet as they are seen as more trustworthy.

The Sunnis form the largest denominational group among Muslims in Italy. There is a large variety of different forms of religiosity and religious experience among Muslims in the country. All our respondents said they pray 5 times a day, the same as their parents and friends, but 5 said they have a brother or a sister who do not yet practice their religion. Mothers seem to be more religious than fathers in the family. On average, our young observant Muslims read the Qur'an a couple of times a week, whereas there are some

²⁶ The websites more often mentioned are islamoai.it and islaguid.it.

²⁷ The most watched satellite TV-channels viewed by our respondents are: RTM (Moroccan); Al Jazeera and Arab Sat.

who read it every day. All of them fast during Ramadan and take part in *Iftar* and *Itikaf*. From our sample a clear gender gap in mosque attendance emerges: only 2 young observant women regularly go to the mosque.

Half of our respondents said they have become more religious in recent years due to their growing up as well as what happened after September 11th. As we said above, in Italy the Al Qaida attack seems to have generated a religious revival among many Muslim families. Half of the observant young Muslims we met said they have participated in the past in inter-faith dialogue events where different groups were brought together such as: the Italian Muslim youth, the Union of Italian Jewish Youth, and the Youth section of the Associazione Cattolica dei Lavoratori Italiani (ACLI). During these events, that in our respondents view have been generally positive, the intent was to share together life experiences on political and religious issues. Among those who did not participate in such events we find a common belief that other religious groups – especially the Catholic and Jewish traditions – were given preferential treatment over Islam.

Religion and Politics

Among our respondents none has expressed sympathy for any association or movement in Italy and abroad, apart from the *Giovani Musulmani d'Italia* (see below). The construction of an Islamic state does not seem important to them, so much that some of them have even difficulties in explaining what an Islamic State is. Ten of them tend to associate the term with a country where Muslims form the majority of the population. Those few who see the formation of an Islamic State as a goal for a Muslim think that this is not possible in Western countries. The Islamic State in Arab countries is, in their view, achievable through consensus. While answering these questions over the Islamic State some respondents criticised Saudi Arabia's wealth as something that is against what the Qur'an says. A young Syrian man in Parma claimed that:

If a country is multi-religious it is right that its law is secular. If on the other hand, a country is 100% Muslim then Islamic law would be right for everybody. The Islamic state is right in Saudi Arabia, but it would be wrong in Lebanon. (I PRG I: 5-2-2009)

According to another respondent, originally from Morocco, the Islamic state is not a priority, not even in Muslim countries:

To feel fulfilled as a Muslim doesn't depend on whether you live in an Islamic state or not, but on the right to practice your own religiosity as an individual. Once I can pray, I can do my things, I am not interested in being able to control or oblige someone to do things against his will. Coming close to God should be an individual desire. (I VRG VIII 25-3-2009)

Well representative of the majority of our interviewees is what a 24 year old female from Morocco declared “I don’t think that the institution of an Islamic state is a priority. I don’t like it very much because within a State there are many people who are not Muslim” (I PRG XVII 28-6-2009). For half of our interviewees, Islam has, however, a sort of political message which is strictly connected with the social welfare of a country or to the entire world somehow. This emerges from the quotations below:

Islam doesn’t 100% own a political message, but there are some principles and values that should be recognised as political messages. (I PRG XIV 22-6-2009)

In my view Islam has a message about how to organize society. (I VRG IX 25-3-2009)

It is not possible to divide politics from religion. Within Islam there are determinate rules that have also a political importance. In this sense, Islam has a political message. (I PRG VI 9-2-2009)

Islam surely has a political message, that of creating justice in the world. This is the message of Islam because as we can read from the Holy Books, Islam is mercy, peace and justice. (I PRG I 5-2-2009)

Islam contains a political message that is equality. Religion sometimes can help politics and politicians. (I PRG XVII 28-6-2009)

Instead, for the remaining two thirds of our respondents Islam contains no political message: “A real religion has nothing to do with politics” (I PRG XIII 20-6-2009); “Islam is only a religion, it’s something personal” (I PRG IX 15-3-2009). For the young observant Muslims we met, the enemies of Islam are both inside the Muslim community and outside of it. Those who give a bad representation of Islam are enemies of Islam: among these interviewees have also included Islamic terrorists, but especially those immigrants from Arab regions who violate the prescriptions mentioned in the Qur’an such as drinking alcohol, eating pork, soliciting prostitutes and not practicing their religion. External enemies of Islam are George W. Bush, the *Northern League* and Israel. These external enemies are perceived by half of our respondents as at war against them and their religion. When our interviewees talk about these external enemies, they tend to associate them with the devil.

When we asked about this, no aspect of Islam emerged as the most important. The customs observed by Muslims are defined as linked more with their country of origin or that of their parents rather than with Islam. Our young respondents showed little awareness of different theological positions. What they mentioned, is their search for a ‘true Islam’ that would allow them to live their everyday lives as Muslims in a non-Muslim society.

They also mention concerns with some unresolved issues specifically affecting Muslims in the area of religious rights, which are framed in a language of universal rights. Young Muslims say the community has experienced difficulties mostly in establishing mosques and places of worship (Allievi 2009). There are very few Islamic places of worship in Italy. Most Muslims gather and pray in ad hoc locations ranging from basements to garages and private flats. A Moroccan man in Parma expressed his concern regarding the difficulties of obtaining a proper place to pray:

In Morocco there are Christian churches and Jewish synagogues, even if we don't like Jews so much for what is happening in Gaza. Here it seems like asking for a mosque is something really strange. We have a complete right to a mosque. (I PRG X 15-3-2009)

Muslim communities, the public authorities, residents committees, Christian organizations, and social movement organizations of different traditions tend to participate in local contention that often takes place over the construction of new mosques or the opening of Muslim cultural centres, and associations (Allievi 2009). The young Muslims we interviewed showed a strong interest in these issues, even though in none of the two cities did they seem ready to organize public protest for their claims. In the opinion of the social workers we met, particularly those in Verona, it seems that local conflicts over religious issues are likely to escalate more than ever before (I SWVR 12-3-2009) (I SWVR 16-4-2009).

Again in line with our expectations, only in Parma did the young Muslims believe that the local leadership of the community has the opportunity to speak with the authorities and solve these issues in a reasonable way. In Verona, they still trusted the representatives of the community to try to develop channels of dialogue with the authorities, but developed a more dependence upon the religious community. Feeling continuously under threat, Muslims in Verona reacted by building a closed and parallel community, within which they feel safe. Closed opportunities seem to have facilitated the growth of self-exclusion among young Muslims. Confronted with a less hostile environment, our observant young Muslims in Parma are less linked to the local leadership of the Muslim community. Moreover, they seem more mature and able to intervene in the public debate, together with their representatives. In particular, the interreligious forum has facilitated this opening by sponsoring numerous public events where young Muslim can speak and mature.

7. Participation and Citizenship

Forms of social and political participation are normally linked with political and social opportunities as well as with forms of collective identities, which in turn contribute in shaping them. In both cases, a limited recognition of individual political rights is reflected in a low rate of political participation.

The overwhelming majority of Muslim residents in Italy do not have Italian citizenship, and thus do not enjoy full participation in the political life of the country (Zincone 2006). Among our respondents only the three young Muslims who were born in Italy have the right to vote in local and national elections. The rest of our respondents have said that they would vote if they had the opportunity. Even though half of those who work are also members of trade unions, 24 of our respondents declared that they do not participate in collective social or political activities. The 12 who do participate, do so in Muslim associations or work for charity at the local level. Nevertheless, when compared with other young immigrants, Muslims show slightly more interest in collective behaviour and political participation (Allievi 2003).

Between the interviewees there were 7 activists from *Giovani Musulmani d'Italia* (2001). This is a unisex organization which emerged after September 11th with the intent of countering the growing "Islamophobic" discourse in the media. The aim of the organization is to show a different image of the Muslim world and to offer young Muslims an opportunity to meet and develop. This identity is different vis-à-vis from that of their parents, who are often accused of being unable to grasp the main features of Italian society and to recognise the necessity to adapt their religious beliefs to a European context. Tariq Ramadan and his 'Salafi-reformism' seem very popular among its leaders. The *Giovani Musulmani d'Italia* is both centered on education and social activities. It holds workshops, publishes Islamic magazines and organizes sporting activities (Maddanu 2009; Frisina 2005, 2007).

Social and political involvement in causes which affect local communities is instead not present among our interviewees, who perceive such causes as being outside their sphere of influence. For our respondents, participating and acting collectively makes sense when the goal is to support marginalized Muslims across the globe. Local issues, as primary needs, are left in the hands of the leaders of the community. The overall majority of our interviewees – with no difference between our two cities- show more affinity towards pro-Palestinian activism than towards pro-immigrants rights groups. Among them, a Tunisian boy in Verona declared:

At the local level, to protest for a mosque is not what interests me. This is a form of self-service. I am against this. I think that these kinds of things can be solved by the administration and the local community. On the other hand, I went to Rome and Milan to demonstrate. There I did not protest against Israel, but in favour of the population of Gaza. Because the war was not against Palestinians, but against the population of a small province. I protested for humanity, not against Israel. The fact that the country with the fourth strongest army in the world could do what we have all seen on television motivated me to protest. I demonstrated for all humanity. (I VRG VI 14-3-2009)

There is however also a bridging of local and global concerns. As a 40 year old interviewee recalled, during the war in Gaza in early 2009 there were demonstrations throughout

Italy to show solidarity with its population.²⁸ These demonstrations caught the attention of public opinion. During the demonstrations in Milan and Bologna, Muslim protesters prayed in front of the cathedrals. This was interpreted by the mainstream media as acts of provocation, these acts are presented by our respondents however as stating a universal right:

We did not pray as an act of provocation. No, we prayed as a form of respect to our religion. We did not do this in order to show that we are strong, but because this is the country where we live and the constitution guarantees us this right. If in the future this will no longer be the case we will not pray in the squares then. (I VRG VI 14-3-2009)

Italian Muslims have so far found problems in collectively organizing to assert their interests in the political arena, something that has also been noted in other European countries (Warner and Wenner 2006). According to our interviews with young Muslims and the representatives of the communities of Parma and Verona, this is a specific stage in their development into social political actors in the political arena. This is clearly underlined by the president of the inter-religious forum of Parma, who observed:

My impression is that first of all they want to consolidate as a community and then only later on they will raise their voice, only if they become reasonably strong. At the moment they don't want to create any fear. In my view, this is a behavioural strategy. The real question is if then the Italian Muslim community will develop a plural vision of Islam or if, when they will be strong enough, they will turn to fundamentalism. Not only is it too early to say what will happen, but the fact is that it is not an option that is only in their hands. So it is more difficult to foresee what will happen. It is up to us, as Europeans and Italians, to work so that a modern and European Islam can become dominant. (I PR 20-7-2009)

8. Radicalisation of Muslim Youth

Perception of the Phenomenon of Religious Radicalisation

None of our Muslim respondents consider the phenomenon of Islamic radicalisation in Italy to be a threat. Not by chance, there have been until now very few trials for crimes of political violence by Islamic groups (Bonanate 2008).²⁹ The young observant Muslims we met vary from saying that the phenomenon does not exist at all (1/3 of our respondents) to saying it is irrelevant (2/3). In their view the media is responsible for creating a threat

²⁸ "La piazza islamica" and "Preghiera e libertà" in *La Repubblica*, 7-1-2009: 25.

²⁹ Those few people who have been arrested in Italy in connection with Islamic radicalism have mainly been charged with logistical support for international terrorism, not planning attacks in this country.

that in reality does not exist, and they do this for various reasons, either to sell more newspapers or to attack Muslims, or to cover up other problems.

Until now I have heard something only on the television, but nothing happened. On television, they say 'we have taken two Muslims in a mosque. They had weapons and they were planning things'. A week later, in the newspaper you see a short article, so short nobody can see it, where you read that those two guys have been acquitted. (I VRG IV 12-3-2009)

There is someone who wants to hide what he is doing. So, blaming Islam they can do whatever they want. Many countries go to war because they have interests in those other countries: Darfur, Iraq, Palestine, etc... The majority of the latter countries are Muslim, so I say you have to create a war. I can go to a country because I want a piece of land or its oil. This is not accepted by anyone. Instead if you say: "look, I am going there because there are two suicide bombers that are intent on destroying the world", so that's fine, they answer "we support you on this". They know that it is not like this, but they support the war. In most of the countries where there is a war, there is something. There are always things that start these wars. These countries are Muslim, so? "Islam is terrorism, we have to eliminate this terrorism", but in my view terrorism has been invented by those countries which want wars in this way. (I VRG IX 25-3-2009)

Even though Italian soldiers fought in those wars, given its traditional pro-Arab policy, Italy does not seem, to our respondents, to be under threat from future attacks. As a Tunisian boy observed:

In Italy in my view there are no possibilities to see terrorist attacks, because Italy doesn't want to participate on its own in these international wars. Italians don't want that. But Italy is doing this to show the USA that it is an ally. But if it was another country instead of the US then Italy would have not gone the same way. Italy in Arab countries is not seen as an enemy that wants to attack and colonize, but nevertheless some politicians do this in order to make the US happy. (I VRG VI 14-3-2009)

The president of the Islamic community in Verona has stressed the work done from within the Italian Muslim community to counter any potential form of radicalism:

In Italy, I think, the problem of Islamic radicalism is marginal. In my view this is very much because of the work done by the Arab students at first and the UCOII after. In my view, this is a problem that has become marginal. They have done this through education and information. Because if a person lives what he believes with ignorance then he does the wrong things. If instead he lives knowing things and he is really familiar with his religion then when he sees some behaviour he is no longer influenced since he knows that these things are wrong and that they are not related to his religion. It could be politics or extremism, but it is not his religion. The most important thing is to educate because radicalism flow from ignorance. (I VRP 22-6-2009)

The president of the inter-religious forum of Parma agrees that the fundamentalist component in the city is almost non-existent:

We know from the information we have collected and from the statements of the president and Imam of the community that here in Parma there are many different views. We think that the radicals and the fundamentalists are in a minority. Among the observant and non observant Muslims there is a prevalence of very quiet families. (I PR 20-7-2009)

The first reaction of young Italian Muslims when they are asked about Islamic radicalism is defensive. They tend to counter the existence of Islamic radicalism by saying that violence and terrorism are much more present in other religions or coming from particular states (USA and Israel). Islam is in their view non-violent. Widespread is the idea that:

A suicide bomber has nothing to do with Islam. He is only someone that uses Islam in order to justify his choices, but Islam has nothing to do with him and what he does. A person that is a regular mosque goer and who does what the Imams say, for sure you don't need to worry about that person ...Islam does not tell you to do these [terrorism] things. By going to a place and shooting at civilians you do what others are also doing, so what is the difference between you and them? Nothing, so you have nothing to do with Islam. (I VRG IX 25-3-2009)

While opposing terrorism, half of our interviewees deny however that Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine, and the insurgents in Iraq commit acts of terrorism. In their opinion bombings directed against foreigners, Israelis or Americans, whom they feel have lost their status as noncombatants because they are occupying another country, are justifiable. They see in fact these acts as forms of resistance, which they do not link to Islam, but rather to a broader anti-colonial framework.

When someone comes to my house to occupy it, I attack him in order to defend it. It is a form of resistance. (I PRG IX: 15-3-2009)

If to defend myself I become a suicide bomber, why do you want to call me a terrorist? Palestinian suicide bombers, for example, are not terrorists. If someone attacks Israel he is defending himself because he has been attacked. In my view, Palestinians defend themselves and do what they have to do. Italy has done the same, defending itself throughout the centuries against the aggressors. Here, at the gate of the city of Verona, there is a plaque that remembers as heroes those who have defended Italy. They are nice and good because they defended their nation whereas Palestinians are not nice because they defend their nation. What kind of reasoning is this? Why do we want to call them Muslim terrorists? Do we do this because now terrorism and Islam are connected? (I VRG VI 14-3-2009)

Jihad is seen by almost all of our respondents as a form of daily, non-violent resistance:

By *Jihad* we mean resistance, but Islam doesn't say kill. Mohammed didn't say kill kids, old people or women. You fight only where you have war in your territory. There you can defend yourself, it is your own right, but also there you have rules to follow. (I PRG XIV 22-6-2009)

Jihad is a justified right, but is often abused by Muslims as well. *Jihad* can be done by every citizen, it is not only picking up a Kalashnikov. Making us recognized and accepted in Italian society is also a form of *Jihad*. (I PRG XIII 20-6-2009)

There are different types of *Jihad*. There is *Jihad* in the work place, there is jihad for studying. Jihad means commitment. Then there is the other *Jihad*, that is when religion is under threat, but obviously everyone who is under threat defends himself. It is the same thing. I want to see, if another religion is attacked, if it would not defend itself; it is the same thing. (I PRG VI 9-2-2009)

Only twice did our respondents use discourses that could refer to a war of the 'West against Islam' or a 'clash of civilizations'. When they speak of violence, they tend not to do so with reference to religion; rather they claim that Islam supports peace and opposes indiscriminate violence. A Syrian boy suggested that:

The radical phenomena we see are in no way related to Islam. The message that you find in the Qur'an is mercy, peace and justice. (I PRG I: 5-2-2009)

Acts of violence, such as suicide bombings in Western countries, are rejected and in five cases, as the one below, these people are bitterly criticized as enemies of Islam:

A bad Muslim is someone who blows himself up, because Islam has not told you to do this. Muslims who do these kinds of things are enemies of Islam. (I PR G III 7-2-2009)

Ten respondents stressed that not every Western country is the same. In some countries they believe suicide bombing might be legitimate:

The attacks in London and Madrid were carried out because they participated in the war in Iraq. They have not been done in countries which did not participate in these wars. They said, "You come to make war in our countries, then we come to yours." (I VRG VI 14-3-2009)

While condemning the killing of innocent civilians, nobody seems to support the United States and its war on terrorism. All of them condemn the means used, even though they are more split regarding the ends. A fourth of our interviewees tend to see jihadist terrorists as 'brother led astray'. When asked why these people commit violent acts, our interviewees pointed to the terrorists' ignorance of Islam. This lack of religious knowledge is, according to our respondents, strengthened when an individual is surrounded by others who share similar views. They are seen as somehow disconnected from the rest of society. A 26-year old Moroccan stated:

Radicals are people who don't know anything, they are exploited people. Radical leaders brainwash them. They say to these people that they will go to heaven. Some radical leaders exploit the poverty and ignorance of these people. (I PRG IX: 15-3-2009)

Israel remains however for almost all the young Muslims we have met a "hot topic". As the president of the inter-religious centre of Parma recalls:

The most difficult point is Israel. Regarding Israel, there is the belief that it is always a political factor, also if they consider Israel as representative of the Jews. So, even if they don't blame all the Jews of the world, there is anyway the use of religion as a cause of what is happening. On this argument, they keep referring to it explicitly and they don't change their position. (I PR 20-7-2009)

Radicals, for our interviewees, are influenced by fanatical leaders and motivated by problems related to discrimination or racism, as well as the consequences of events such as the war in Iraq of 9/11. It is unlikely for them that some young Muslims in Italy could become radicalized solely from exposure to the use of the Internet. The process of radicalisation needs a face-to-face relation where leaders act as recruiters.

Encountered Religious Radicalisation

Our respondents say that the authorities and the media have created the image that people who regularly frequent the mosque share "radical beliefs".

Muslims who regularly go to the mosque are not radicals. My father for example doesn't agree on killing innocent people, me neither. These people who do these kinds of attacks are the ones who should be killed". (I PRG X 15-3-2009)

This is wrong, terrorists don't go to the mosque. A good Muslim should practice his religion. (I PRG XIV 22-6-2009)

In contrast, our respondents claim that a good policy for countering Islamic radicalism is to build and officialise mosques. A 27-year old Moroccan said:

In my view the authorities are wrong when they oppose the construction of new mosques. Once you open a mosque, you disclose yourself as well, practically then you have a place where everybody can come to check on you. People who want to do certain things would be stupid to come in the mosque; they need secret places. (I PRG VI 9-2-2009)

Only official mosques seem for our respondents (e.g. young Muslims, imams and social workers) to have the power to educate young Muslims to respect others. According to our interviewees, the fact that mosques have been under surveillance by the authorities and the media has not discouraged them, rather the reverse is true, as it might have increased their willingness to practice Islam in the mosques.

De-radicalisation: Possible Initiatives

The majority of our respondents support collaboration with the Italian authorities to fight against Islamic radicalism in the country. Good relations between Muslim communities and local/national authorities seem to them essential. In their view, schools should facilitate dialogue between different cultures, the legitimization of local mosques should empower Italian Muslims and reduce the temptation of isolating themselves in ghettos. For the imams and the representatives of the communities we have met, education about what Islam really says would be the real antidote to any potential radicalisation. In order to counter radicalisation, they ask for more power to be given to community leaders, claiming that the closure of mosques and Islamic cultural centres is what could most likely produce radicalisation. Mosques in fact are seen as places to teach and educate and also provide a form of social control over the larger community. Mosques help bring to the fore possible problems and solve them.

In the view of the social workers we have met, Muslim and non-Muslim NGOs should develop and expand strategic partnerships to counter radicalism among young Muslims. The mass media, in their opinion, should not generalize regarding Muslims as this may reinforce feelings of 'us against them', a precondition for the emergence of radicalism. The construction of a more relaxed atmosphere toward Islam is crucial. Social workers are unanimous when they see the struggle for equal opportunities as the best way to create immunity from radicalism.

When the Italian authorities have expelled individuals who were under suspicion of spreading radical ideas or sympathizing with international terrorism, or when financial flows to potential terrorists were interrupted and raids of suspected Islamic terrorists were carried out (Pomponio 2008), our respondents have shown agreement with such tactics. They see these as legitimate as far as the authorities have sufficient proof, and as far the media send a strong and consistent message that clearly distinguishes between extremists and the vast majority of moderate Muslims. The problem connected with the

loss of civil liberties in exchange for security connected with such measures (Bleich 2009) does not have any effect for most of our respondents.

If it is true they are right. Maybe it should be known if the proof they have is reliable or not. (I PRG XIV 22-6-2009)

If they have proof, then I think that it is legitimate. (I PRG XIII 20-6-2009)

Even though repressive policies are softer than in their countries of origin, some are however concerned that repression might impinge on the rights of the target population.

The problem is if the sentence is right or not. My worry is that, then, they will send everybody away. "You have a beard, so I will send you away because you are a radical Muslim". When they stop you, pointing their rifles at you, the police says that it is a check, but what kind of check is it this? There is no problem, you can stop me, you can ask to see my ID. I know this is your job and I respect that, but if you stop me and you surround me, then I don't like this. We should not change people and after complain because people have changed. Some events are so important they change people. (I VRG VI 14-3-2009)

Even if some deny that the risk of radicalisation exists, our respondents call for the leaders of the religious community to do more in order to prevent it. In particular, they asked for events to speak with young Muslims about these things:

Mosques do well, but they have to do more; they should invite the media, organize conferences, it should be done more often. (I PRG XIV 22-6-2009)

Yes, they have a very important role. They should use all the instruments they have. This is their real role. (I PRG XIII 20-6-2009)

The Islamic centres should be more open they should create the opportunity to make Islam known to the broader society. This would also allow young Muslims to have the chance to integrate better as they will not close themselves off in their own little groups. (I PRG XVII 28-6-2009).

To organize events to counter Islamic radicalism within the mosque is seen, however, as problematic as they feel the threat is being misinterpreted by the authorities.

Inside the mosque you can often hear speeches about Islamic radicalism. But it should be more discussed, on the other hand not too much because then it seems that you want to do something. We need to be careful because outside the mosque this could be misinterpreted and then there is the risk that they send you back to your country. (I VRG IX25-3-2009)

The leaders of the communities we have met also stress that they have to do more to engage with society, to overcome the barriers and problems they face and to take greater responsibility for integration. They feel it is important to turn the disaffection of the young Muslims into constructive action. Nevertheless, in their view commitment and involvement also need support from civil society, that needs to do more in order to accept diversity and overcome the barriers to integration (I PRL 7-2-2009) (I VRL 22-6-2009). Integration, which is seen as the real and durable solution to any possible phenomena of radicalisation, requires effort from both the Muslim community and the wider society. No particular difference seems to emerge among the leaders of the two communities in Parma and Verona regarding these topics, as both seem to adhere to the positions of the UCOI, of which they are both members (I PRL 7-2-2009) (I VRL 22-6-2009).

9. Conclusion

Conflicts over religious issues tend to be read as conflicts of recognition, which are usually considered as more difficult to mediate than redistributive conflicts, as they tend to develop non-negotiable claims as well as demands of recognition of differences which do not resonate with widespread principles of equality. Our results indicate a complex picture, with both dimensions interacting with each other. At school and at work, but also in society at large, young Muslims experience social and economic discrimination, which is however seen by them as being related to their status as migrants and only partially (and interestingly, more by women than by men) to their religious identity. In the process of identification, young Muslims seem to react to their perception of stigmatization of the Muslim community with a quest of recognition of an identity that is stigmatized by others.

Identification is relational: the shift of religious practices from the private to the public realm resonates with the politicization of the Muslim identity from the outside. According to our interviews, feelings of discrimination arise in the educational system, where episodes of xenophobia add to a systemic lack of recognition of other religions and cultures, as well as in the work place, where young Muslims feel discriminated, first of all as migrants, but also (especially women) because of their religion. Stigmatization is perceived as dependent not so much upon institutional constraints, as upon the anti-Islamic image spread by the media, and the everyday signs of Islamophobia which follow. Faced with stigmatized identities, public forms of religious commitment emerged which lead to the development of positive collective identities.

If identities develop in interaction, we noticed as well an inter-twining of local and global issues. Stigmatization is perceived in face-to-face experiences, but these interact with a

distant experience. There is, therefore, an identification with Muslims around the world, considered as victims. September 11th is perceived as the turning point, in individual and collective history.

Injustice frames and the quest for recognition are however not translated into claims of differential rights, but rather framed in universalistic terms. On the contrary, at the local level requests are framed in a language of equality, as recognition of the same rights as those of believers in other religions. Not only is the establishment of an “Islamic” state (perceived as a state in which Muslims form a majority) in Europe is considered as unrealistic, but also the establishment of faith schools is opposed. Instead claims are for some-kind of “soft multiculturalism”, as well as tolerance for (e.g. the dress codes) of different religions. At the global level, an injustice frame is applied to the situation of Muslims in Palestine and other areas, but the vision of Muslims within a “clash of civilizations” is not adhered to.

Mobilization strategies on local and global issues differ, however. At the local level, the representation of requests related with equal rights in the practice of one’s own religion as well as with social rights is mainly delegated to the leaders of the community. Given the perceived stigmatization, protest is considered as potentially counterproductive. Direct mobilization is instead perceived as legitimate on global issues, referring to perceived injustice against Muslim people in various areas of the world. Here as well, however, violence is considered as neither useful, nor legitimate in the Italian context. However, in the context of war – in Iraq or Palestine – violent acts are accepted as part of a right to defend your land against foreign occupation that is usually recognized in other contexts. The discourse on Islamic radicalisation is, therefore, considered as yet another indicator of the discrimination against Muslims.

Some of these conclusions might be linked to the specific Italian situation.

- First of all, and in line with the assumptions of the political opportunity approach, very closed opportunities discourage mobilization in the street. In this sense, contrary to our expectation, both Verona and Parma are considered as essentially closed.
- Additionally, recent migrants tend to rely upon their own community (and community representatives) in their attempt to integrate. The fact that almost all our interviewees are first generation migrants testifies to the (temporary) lack in Italy of the dynamics of radicalisation of migrants of a “second” or “third” generation, which has been considered as very relevant to explain urban riots as well as religious fundamentalism in other European countries (e.g. Wiktorowics 2005).
- Finally, Italy has aimed at playing a role of broker in the Middle East, and this has traditionally meant the development of particular relations with the Arab world. Some of these conditions are open to, or even bound to change in the future.

Other results seem, however, more generalizable beyond the Italian case. Among these:

- First, the interplay of local and global issues as sources of grievances and claims, as well as identification. Direct experiences of discrimination interact with the perception of global stigmatization. The intensification of religious practices, as well as religious identification, develop therefore as reactions, religious commitment being perceived as a source of security and self-worth.
- Additionally, the presence of multiple repertoires for multiple territorial levels of action indicates adaptation to the perceived political opportunities. It also indicates the relevance of global issues in the identification process.
- a shift of identity from their socio-economic status as migrants to a religious identity as Muslims seems to affect the potential alliances as it jeopardizes the support of the traditional actors of migrant rights advocacy (such as unions, Christian NGOs, or left-wing social movements) that are more at ease with a discourse of social justice and solidarity than with one addressing “other” religious practices.

Our comparison of Parma and Verona also confirms some hypotheses of the impact of political opportunities on the forms of collective identity. In particular, more closed opportunities in Verona produced more secluded identities and more dependence upon the religious community; more open opportunities in Parma allowed instead for the development of more inclusive types of identities, as well as a more individualistic form of religiosity. From the interviews that we have done we can conclude that neither Parma nor Verona display concrete evidence of radicalisation over religious issues. But whereas in Parma, future possible conflicts seem more likely to be solved as in the past through dialogue between the local institutions and the Muslim community, the situation in Verona is different. Here local conflicts over religious issues seem more likely to escalate.

In this sense, we can say that even though distant conflicts could be relevant, interacting with challenges that are perceived in everyday life, for the construction of collective identities, the concrete forms they take are influenced more by the local opportunities and constraints for socio-economic integration and cultural recognition. As expected, less local opportunities facilitate more exclusive and secluded identities, while more local opportunities facilitate more inclusive identities. Further research is, however, needed in order to control and specify this hypothesis.

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