New Muslim Generation in Italy:
Between Believing and Belonging

Paolo BRANCA[a, 1] and Antonio CUCINIELLO[a]

[a]*Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan*

ORCiD ID: Paolo Branca https://orcid.org//0000-0001-8356-6330, Antonio Cuciniello
https://orcid.org//0000-0002-7743-2181

Abstract. The growing number of "new generations" of Muslims in Western countries is not only developing quantitatively into a complex phenomenon, but also implies gradual but important transformations within the Islamic communities (starting from families and mosques) and in society as a whole. Only a few of these dynamics are described and studied and rarely with a direct knowledge of the people concerned by them.

Keywords. Italy, Muslims, faith, practise

1. Introduction

Girls and boys originally from Islamic countries and families keep a highly structured relationship with their identity of origin, on the linguistic, cultural and religious level. Obviously, this also depends on the relationship they have with their family, their wider ethnic-religious community and the host country [1] and [2]. Indeed, it is not uncommon that the children of parents who were already involved in religious movements and who are often among the promoters and leaders of Muslim associations in Italy [3], [4] and [5][2] are in turn often members of or responsible for youth associations and, therefore, their respect both of the precepts (e.g., praying, fasting) but also of the norms of dress and behaviour are deeply influenced.

By attending mixed environments it is not uncommon for girls and boys to get to know one another and they are pushed to marry as soon as possible. In this way, from an economic as well as an ideological point of view, they find themselves dependent on their families of origin even more. Yet, there are also quite a few who prefer not to join, or in any case not to engage in, Muslim associations. They prefer to frequent Italian peers and are less dependent on the way of life of their countries and families of origin.

Knowledge of Arabic or the language of the family's native country may be only elementary for communicating with relatives, or much more developed. In fact, the

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[1] Corresponding Author: Paolo Branca, paolo.branca@unicatt.it

[2] In Italy the first mapping of immigrants' associations was done in 2014 by the Centro studi e ricerche IDOS. At present, 1135 associations have been counted [cited 2023 Feb 13]. Available from https://www.integrazionemigranti.gov.it/it-it/Ricerca-news/Dettaglio-news/id/1807/Aggiornata-la-mappatura-delle-associazioni-migranti-in-Italia-. In a recent study a certain amount of information have been collected on 255 Islamic associations spread throughout the country [6].

cultural and anthropological aspects are of different degrees of importance that they determine very different situations: from the case of young Pakistani or Bengali girls who have been murdered for refusing an arranged marriage to those who wonder why violating the fast is considered a crime in the country of origin, while here it is only a sin that does not involve state apparatuses or administrations [7]. Mixed marriages also reveal very varied behaviours: from the claim of a sincere conversion by the Italian husband, to purely formal conversions to please the family, to mixed marriages celebrated in church or only at the registry office, without other conditions.

2. At the beginning

After having experienced the great emigrations to the Americas and vast movements of workers within its own frontiers, Europe has found itself in the front line in receiving important flows of populations from the Muslim world. In Italy, historically [8], the start of a significant growth in the number of immigrants from North African and Middle Eastern countries (mainly Muslims, but alongside smaller numbers of Christians belonging to the various Oriental Churches) dates back to about forty years ago[3]. For a certain period of time it was an almost exclusively male presence for seasonal employment, commuters in precarious jobs who even when they had a wife and children in the host country did not have the intention or the possibility of being joined here by them [9] and [10]. With what they earned some opened businesses or small shops in their home countries and never returned, but the majority were unable to set aside sufficient amounts and returned home periodically, possibly with some relatives or acquaintances from the same area, to make another attempt at a migratory path that was less lonely and hopefully more successful. Their numbers then grew and were differentiated according to origin, language or Islamic movement [11] and [12].

The fact remains that the Muslim presence in Italy has as its characteristic trait a diversification of the countries of origin, therefore it is anything but a monolithic block. Consequently, both at institutional level and on the level of perception, it has more differences than resemblances [13][4]. In addition, the plurality of places of origin also has as a consequence a net complexity in the religious practices that are professed, beyond the traditional division between Sunnites and Shiites. If religious belonging can induce a stronger feeling of aggregation, it is equally true that the religious expression can be filtered through the different ethnic cultures of the countries of origin, the type of interpretation of Islam, from the most traditional to the most modern ones in which the various individuals, groups or bodies identify.

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[3] In Italy the most recent estimates reveal a moderate decline in the number of foreign citizens (from 6,222,000 as of January 1st, 2019, to 6,190,000 as of January 1st, 2020) [14]. As far as the number of foreigners and Italian citizens who are Muslims is concerned, in 2018 it amounted to 2.6 million individuals; 56% of these are foreign citizens resident in Italy, while the remaining 44% are Italian citizens [15] and [16].

[4] In 2021 Fondazione ISMU estimated that more than half the foreign Muslims resident in Italy are represented by Moroccans, Albanians and Bangladeshis [cited 2023 Feb 13]. Available from https://www.ismu.org/immigrati-e-religioni-in-italia-i-cristiani-sono-piu-del-doppio-dei-musulmani-comunicato-stampa-22-6-2021/

3. The turning point

As a consequence of economic-industrial cycles and the variable demand for labour, the European Union countries, including Italy, favoured the policy of family reunification[5]. More stable and permanent homes and work induced allowing wives and any children to join the working father.

In the case of very small children or those who were born in Italy and soon went to school here, the problem was clearly very different compared to older children who arrived after having followed at least one cycle of education in their home country. School and any sports activities first, then even attending local parish centres and scouting associations rebalanced the double reference to the family and to other formative agencies, but without solving it completely [17] and [18].

Growing up as Muslims in Italy in this period in history is probably not an easy experience. The climate of intolerance and Islamophobia pervades not only adults but also younger people, arousing profound reactions in particular amongst children and teenagers. There are many definitions used for them: "second generations", "new Italians," "children of immigrants", "half-Italians" and "new Europeans". But it is important to emphasise how there is a vision which accentuates their creative skills as born mediators [19]. This skill is also shown in the relationship with the religious belonging in the multi-faceted expressions typical of these new generations [1] and [20]. There is a social and cultural dynamism which at times clashes with the questioning that it is possible to be "Italians with the veil" or "Italians who observe Ramadan". In the face of these external perceptions there are the choices, either to become assimilated and camouflaged with the surrounding environment, or to retreat within one's ethnic identity. At the same time, this belonging is affected by changes which are nevertheless taking place; for example, as early as 2015, according to the IPSOS study *L'oratorio oggi*, ("The parish youth centre today"), at least one child out of ten in the parish youth centres in Lombardy was a foreigner, of these, one-third were Muslims [21]. This process also has a repercussion in the Muslim communities.

The fact remains that the religious dimension takes on aspects of characteristics of a resource in the experience of many youngsters who have been born and grown up in Italy. However, the numerous aspects of challenge of this belonging in daily life, both in the public space and on the Web [22] and [23], as well as in the family, community and school environment, cannot be avoided [24]. In particular, the public space becomes the arena in which they become the most visible, attracting gazes and debates towards themselves, with the opposite effect to that which the various religious rules would like to generate [25].

In general, settlement in Europe has imposed various transformations, both in the religious practice and in the belonging and way of saying they are "Muslims", in a community which already from the start is plural. The reasons for these transformations could be found, for example, in the material limits, often due to the lack of facilities and effective possibilities of exercising the faith, but also in the different way of living their religiosity in an environment where Islam is a minority religion.

To say that Islam is a plural reality sometimes arouses the angry reaction of Muslims who insist on its unitary nature. If, from the point of view of the basic principles,

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[5] See art. 29 of the Consolidated Body of Law on immigration and laws on the condition of the foreigner (published in the Official Journal no. 191 of 18 August 1998) which disciplines the institution of family reunification [cited 2023 Feb 13]. Available from https://www.camera.it/parlam/leggi/deleghe/98286dl.htm

it is true that all the followers of Islam agree on an essentially homogeneous nucleus of beliefs and practices, it is, however, equally obvious that we are in the face of a complex and highly structured world. Although the Arabic language and culture have been for centuries the fundamental vehicles to spread Islam and continue to enjoy a sort of privileged position, only about 20% of Muslims are Arabs, many other linguistic-cultural areas can be identified in the Muslim world. However, their demarcation is often uncertain due to the overlapping of various ethno-linguistic and geographic criteria, also because they are areas which have known over the centuries major movements of population and the spread of cultures.

In the light of this, what does it mean to be a "Muslim"? Attempting to answer, we could say that there are some who identify themselves in the Islamic tradition because they are closely linked to it from the experiential point of view, some who, on the other hand, have a detached relationship with the practice or who develop only some elements of the theological tradition, or there are even those who experience the religion as a mere fact of identity, without necessarily respecting the practices. Therefore, belonging to Islam presents a clear sociological complexity, as it can be intersected by a plurality of analytical levels, a characteristic feature which deconstructs a fairly widespread image of it, based on only the sense of belonging and observance [26].

The biographies of Muslim children/youngsters and their families show the variety of individual memberships of the Islamic community. The equivalence between an individual of foreign origin coming from a context of a Muslim tradition and an individual who self-defines as a practising Muslim and who concretizes this belonging with membership of a Muslim organization cannot be taken for granted. Belonging culturally to the Muslim universe includes a plurality of types of individual relationships which are expressed [10]. Often vast and ambivalent terms such as the West and Islam have been used in an essentialist or monolithic way, forgetting their complexity and plurality. To speak about Islam, therefore, does not mean bringing together under the same label situations, people, families and groups that are very different from one another, thus risking contributing to the "ethnicisation" of Muslims. On the contrary, it means trying to take apart this vision from the outside which risks simplifying complex realities. As a consequence, in educational contexts, it is important to remember that in the widest meaning of critical interculture, education on intercultural relations remains an indispensable option, on condition that it is not understood as "pedagogy for foreigners" and above all that it is developed taking on a position that is aware not only of the difference but also of the inequality between people [27]. In addition, the religious question must concern schools and teachers [17]. It is clear how schools that completely refuse to accompany pupils on the paths of religious identity fail in their educational task [28], [29] and [30].

The concept of family for the populations of the southern shores of the Mediterranean has not yet been reduced to only the mononuclear couple (parents + children) but continues to include a large circle of other relatives, friends, acquaintances and even neighbours often called "uncles" or "aunts", with a predominance of belonging to this group compared to individualities, whilst in the post-modern West, this relationship is significantly different if not completely overturned [31] and [31]. It is obvious that in a migratory context things change, but contacts by phone and holidays in the place of origin keep alive to varying degrees this network of relations in which the new generations often find themselves in midstream, perceived here as Italians, but not 100% and there as Europeanized or Westernized Arabs, which they also feel themselves

when questioned in this regard or when they reflect on the question of their identity [33] and [1].

However, in recent years, the spotlight trained on the so-called second generations, both by academia and experts in the sector, and by political deciders, has begun to weaken. It is sufficient to think of the debate which has been archived for some time now on the revision of the law on citizenship (law no. 91 of 5 February 1992), despite its obsolete nature being given widespread consideration [35]. In addition, the economic crisis becoming more acute on the one hand and the accent on the landings and on asylum seekers on the other, have put the daily condition of children, teenagers and young adults born and who have grown up in Italy in the background [34], after a period when essays and reflections on their condition had multiplied [36], [37], [19] and [38].

Walking through the streets and squares, boys and girls of the Muslim faith discover their identity as a minority[6]. The public space appears as a place for revealing one's minority identity, for boys but in particular for girls, in particular those who wear the veil and are more easily the target of discriminatory and violent actions. This experience takes on macroscopic features in the media context, where violence is expressed in words but with effects that are often profound and lacerating for those enduring them in the first person. However, the resources implemented by boys and girls are multiple, especially when, entering young adulthood, they become capable of "playing" with their identity, with irony and self-irony, defusing at times even hate speech, therefore managing their multiple belonging creatively and dynamically. As a consequence, extraneousness can become a game [39].

4. Women and children

Although reduced numerically, the family continues to be the fundamental reference. The role of the mothers contributes greatly to this, as they are mainly housewives, have reduced and minimal relations with the local population, follow TV programmes on Arabic satellite channels, know and practise Italian less than their husbands who for work learn it more quickly [40] and [41]. Until the children start going to school, things are not all that different from the country of origin, even though at times the children act as interpreters for their mothers simply when going shopping or in the playground, but also at the doctor's or in contacts with the public offices for information and/or documents. Primary school marks the start of change and then gradually in the subsequent phases of the educational path there is inevitably a major change: the pupils spend more time in an Italian-speaking context, the mothers' help in doing homework is gradually reduced and as the boys and girls grow up they often spend time in places of study or leisure that are complementary (after-school clubs or local parish youth clubs [1] and [42].

However, the picture is anything but homogeneous: for example, if the Egyptian wives/mothers are overwhelmingly housewives, this is not the case of the Moroccan women who at times immigrate alone and do not have family here or, if they have one they often work outside the home at least with part-time jobs, thus in situations which are more similar to those of many local families [7] and [41].

If the sensation of a danger of invasion exists with the natives, with respect to the large arrivals of foreign immigrants, the concern of the latter of not being assimilated is

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[6] Twine [43] speaks about "boundary events", i.e. episodes that appear as bland references to a difference, for example racist insults, in the street, or on public transport.

no less present. The religious aspect plays a dominant role in this question: not only teachings and rites, but also dietary habits and clothing of the places of origin are encouraged and the mosque becomes a place of aggregation, keeping interpersonal, associative and at times linguistic bonds with, for example, courses of literary/Quranic Arabic [44], [45] and [46]. This aspect, on the contrary, is almost totally absent, for example, amongst the Egyptian Copts, who consider their language too closely linked to the Muslim identity, which is the reason why they do not make any efforts to keep up its knowledge.

The distance between the different ways of speaking of the individual countries and Classical Arabic (used only in writing) complicates things more; it is not simply a question of keeping the mother tongue, but learning a third language, which is artificial and not used in daily life, especially at the weekends which some would prefer to spend elsewhere rather than the spaces in the mosque used for this purpose [17].

For some, then, there is an additional problem: every year the Egyptian state sends inspectors to Italy to set examinations in Arabic on all the subjects in order to help the reinsertion of the pupils in Egyptian schools if they ever return to the home country. Always dreamed of, this perspective is however rare and students therefore have to do the whole school syllabus in two languages, with high costs for private lessons and great efforts required by the students who at times are distressed and feel a sense of refusal at the double effort imposed on them without a realistic purpose. There was also a brief experience of teachers sent to some schools in Lombardy at the expense of Morocco, but their way of speaking could not be understood by other Arabic speakers and they did not speak Italian which prevented them from speaking to their colleagues or other local school staff.[7]

5. Anthropological questions

The challenges that Muslim boys and girls have to face in the places where they have to give their name and surname are very different and more insidious. In the first place, there is the management of the relations in the family [20]. The greatest problems arise in particular circumstances of family and community life, such as the month of Ramadan, or when girls are asked to wear the veil or on the choice of a partner. It is at these passages of life that the youngsters, and more often the girls, have to confront the expectations of their parents, not infrequently facing up to conflicts and differences of opinions, adopting strategies to succeed in pursuing their objectives without losing the confidence of the adults of their community.

The question of relations inside and outside the family is clearly more on the anthropological level than the purely religious one.[8] We have already mentioned the hierarchy of group > individual, typical of "traditional" societies, but alongside this there is also that of adults > young and male > female. The respect due to brother who is older only by one year or the decision-making role of fathers and uncles does not have any equivalence in the post-modern West and is being transformed at worldwide level, especially in urban and educated environments [31] and [31]. The fact remains that

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[7] From the school year 2005-2006 courses of Arabic were organised in a number of Italian schools [47].
[8] Zhou [48] speaks in this regard of "generational dissonance", when the children do not correspond to the aspirations of their parents, generating intergenerational conflicts which have an influence on the formation of the identities of the second generation.

taking on attitudes of defiance or addressing adults with disrespectful expressions, more than prohibited is even unconceivable, as it was during our childhood and adolescence, which was not in the Middle Ages.

It cannot be defined in a generalized and uniform way to what extent and how these conditionings can influence the relations between the new Arab and Muslim generations with their families [1] and [7]. It is nevertheless true that in rare but dramatic cases, fatal outcomes are reached: we only have to think of the Pakistani girls killed for their refusal of forced marriages. But there are also very different cases: a young Muslim girl who became pregnant and whose Italian "fiancé" left her decided not to abort. The family did not repudiate or punish her, although of course they were not pleased with what had happened, but the media were not interested in speaking about this case.

The topic of religious faith for youngsters from Muslim families is certainly a further element of complexity. One discriminating factor is definitely the difference between those who adhere to a "private Islam", only going to the mosque on important holidays, for whom religion even risks being a "burden", or those who play an active role in associative life. They are the ones who consider themselves "Italian Muslims": youngsters present and active in local life, in networks with others of their own age, both in the European migratory context and in the countries of origin; they can be considered representatives of an Islam "influenced" by the confrontation with the reality of Italy [49].

It is important to consider the character of fluidity of religious belonging. Culture can effectively take on different forms, like a non-Newtonian fluid which on contact with external agents can appear in solid, gaseous or liquid form [50]. In the same way, Muslim youngsters can, in specific circumstances emphasise rites and practices, whilst in others soften those same aspects or not give any importance to them. From the educational point of view, it is important to know these dynamics to give value to the religious experience of the boy or girl, even when they do not seem to give it great importance, and on the other hand to be able to defuse possible reactions of defence or emphasis on specific aspects of religious practice.

6. Phases and malaise

Except for the rare cases of families who provide independently for the education of their children or send them to the few Arab-speaking schools, during primary school the problem of the identity of immigrants in state schools remains, so to speak, "latent". This is not so much because there are no references to the culture of origin, but because those directly concerned coexist with their native peers naturally, without the different colour of the skin, exotic names, dietary or other differences creating problems of tensions [51].

The phase of adolescence is more delicate: it is a period when everyone has to face a complex period of formation of the personality, often experienced in opposition, or if not, at least in a dialectic relationship with family, school and peers [52, 53, 54].

If studies continue to university level as well, it can be noted that the questions of identity are generally overcome, but a clear preference can also be seen, by students and their families who can afford it, for technical and scientific faculties which anticipate a more satisfactory and professional future, which is an understandable choice. However, by avoiding the humanities, this choice risks leaving those concerned without the adequate knowledge and instruments to check and consciously make choices regarding belonging and the self-definition of identity.

The question of the education of religious leaders in loco is part of this enormous problem which in the regime based on the agreement between the Vatican and the Italian state, cannot find a solution, while in other parts of Europe the presence of non-confessional Faculties of Divinity offer at least an alternative to imams who are "imported" or even "parachuted" into places they know nothing about or to improvised imams.[9]

The cases in which some of the young and not so young people we have just mentioned look for or are sent for psychological help, a phenomenon which so far is little known and studied as it actually deserves, are not rare.

7. The "continuers"

The difference of origin and also of location in Italy are variables that are too different to be able to propose a generalised evaluation, but in one specific case, some common and significant elements emerge, namely second generations belonging to families of figures engaged in Islamic centres [55] and [56]. Naturally they are "traditionalists" who have always ensured that their offspring respect not only the observance of the rites but also the habits and customs of the country and culture. Often activists in Islamic movements at home, they are often the promoters of associations and places of aggregation and worship in the country of immigration [6]. To state that these young people are forced to follow in the footsteps of their parents would be inaccurate and misleading. Many of them sincerely admire the commitment of their parents to the service of the community and are not unaware of the oppression they had suffered at home due to their activism. The fact that these centres of aggregation are often points of reference for the concrete needs of new arrivals increases their value in the eyes of young people sensitive to socio-cultural topics [45] and [46]. Despite their respect for the "Islamic way of life", they are however influenced by the environment in which they live: the Muslim youth groups do not have separate places for boys and girls and the latter at times take on leadership positions that are formally recognised and the girls are often more numerous and active than the boys. The other side of this medal is the handover from fathers to sons as figures of reference of the group almost with the creation of dynasties. Habits and behaviour ingrained from their growing up in Italy nevertheless remain and are so obvious that at pan-European meetings of Muslim youth associations,[10] on their arrival they are immediately recognised as coming from Italy due to their gestures, the way they express themselves or dress.

From the point of view of integration, the effort of acculturation and harmonisation of the ways of understanding and interpreting reality, of deconstruction/construction, adaptation, is similar to that of other youngsters of immigrant origin, suspended between attitudes of openness and desire for integration. But the religious difference profoundly marks their growth and the processes of integration in the surrounding environment. Youngsters who are born and brought up in Italy are aware of their "Italianness" and have more cultural instruments; however, difficulties can remain in discovering their identity, For some, faith is a heritage from which they can slowly be freed, for others it

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[9] For a training course for imams and Muslim ministers of religion, see the *PriMED* project; https://primed-miur.it/ [cited 2023 Feb 13].

[10] The Forum of European Muslim Youth and student Organisations – FEMYSO, for example, is a pan-European network of 32 Member Organisations across 20 European countries; see https://femyso.org/ [cited 2023 Feb 13].

is a key element in their life. Like many Italians of their own age, they can keep a religious identity as a "façade" without actively taking part in the community as a piece of the mosaic of their identity [49]. However, the characterisation of the Muslim in external eyes remains significant and has an impact on their processes of growth. For them there is the risk of always being considered foreigners in their own country.

In the case of a more or less direct engagement in politics, it is more common that these youngsters belong to left-wing formations or parties, which is not surprising if we take into account that on the right-wing there are often positions that are definitely contrary to migratory flows or even fully-fledged forms of xenophobia. It is rarely pointed out, however, that for the traditional values they express (order, family, the role of women and religious institutions…) they would seem potential partners for conservative movements.

Another very "particular" type of second generations of Muslims are the children of Italian converts, of whom we do not intend to speak here but from the point of view of their political positions offer a very wide range of variable positions: their parents were often activists in movements of the extreme right-wing or left-wing in their youth and seem to have adhered to Islam as a new form of opposition to the West and/or to Christianity after the crisis of the great ideologies.

The phenomenon of the many mixed couples (with one Christian partner and the other Muslim) is sometimes a private question between only the couple, who nevertheless have to decide on the religious education of any children they may have: if some prefer to leave the choice to their children when they are adults, others celebrate the holidays of both religions, but the cases of "absorption" of one of the two into the faith of the other are not rare. As is generally known, a Muslim man can marry a Jewish or a Christian woman without her necessarily having to convert, in the opposite case, religious and also civil law in many Islamic countries demands at least a formal conversion by the man to be able to marry a Muslim woman. At times this occurs in Italy today without there being any real interest by the bride, not to upset the parents, to consider the religious rite aesthetically preferable to the simple notarial act of a registry office wedding and so on. There are however groups of mixed couples who wish to live bringing out the best of their respective religious differences and they have been meeting periodically (under the guidance of a priest or an imam) for this purpose for several years. If we bear in mind that often families would prefer a candidate that is not only of the same religion but Arab, the existence alone of these couples reveals the profound changes that are taking place [57] and [58].

8. "And yet it moves"

The experience of common reflection and education carried out with a group of boys and girls from the association *Giovani Musulmani d'Italia* ("Young Muslims of Italy" – GMI) is however, completely different has been however, completely different in some meetings on Sundays 15 years ago to share and comment together their experiences. Born in Italy, or having arrived here very young, they attended Italian schools and feel Italian. They are seeking the right ways to remain faithful to their belief, without giving up being youngsters like others. The work done with them was stimulating for various reasons. In the first place they are youngsters, by their very age in an intermediate position, between the reassuring certainties of when you are young and of the family on the one hand and on the other the typical concerns of personalities who are still being formed and

perspectives still not very clear with regard to their future. In these conditions there is also the fact that the principles and values of their families' cultural and religious traditions do not correspond exactly with those around them and indeed, they are perceived as problematic. Moreover, especially in recent years, they have taken on further negative values due to events which concern the whole world and which seem to be directing it dangerously towards a perspective of conflict. Nobody seems able to take on their demands: the language and attitude of those who lead the Islamic centres are inadequate for youngsters born or who have grown up in Italy, especially for those of them who attended Italian schools and now feel similar to their Italian classmates [59]. Following in the footsteps of their fathers, they often decide on specialisations of the technical-scientific type and therefore remain impoverished on the humanistic side, which makes them easy victims of two phenomena: belonging to Italian culture as "poor relatives" on the one hand and a poor awareness of Islamic civilisation itself [60].

In these meetings there were about a dozen young Muslim boys and girls from Milan and other cities in northern Italy. There were six encounters, held on a Sunday, as for many of them, still at high school, having to travel on other days would have meant missing school. The meetings were held from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. We dealt with the problems typical of their age and their particular condition. The work carried out shows a strong demand on them to have points of reference for their maturing together with a different perception of the self with respect to the adults that remain more strongly linked to the habits, customs and mindsets in the country of origin. An outstanding need to clarify ideas about some controversial points of the Islam-modernity confrontation also emerged, such as the female question, politics, the relationship between faith and reason… and the desire to be liberated from a marginal and defeatist image of the world of origin, aiming at full integration as Italian citizens of the Muslim faith who can play an active role in society.With them we produced the DVD *Conosciamo l'islam: Giovani musulmani italiani* ("*Let's get to know Islam: young Italian Muslims*") to present their reality. In the pages of the *Corriere della Sera* newspaper it was criticised as a "sugar-coated" video which conveyed an idyllic vision, attacking the parents of the youngsters interviewed. They were, in any case, youngsters who were trying to commit themselves in new directions. One of them, of Syrian origin, appeared in the footage as he conveyed the solidarity of his community to the Jews who each year commemorate the departure from Milan's Stazione Centrale of the convoys for the concentration camps, an event which was repeated the following year as well, with the presence of a Palestinian girl. The video also featured a girl of Egyptian descent, who was born and grew up in Italy, who had not asked to be exonerated from the lesson of Catholic religious education in her high school and had accepted doing volunteer work in the parish youth centre of her neighbourhood. Her father collaborated with the Franciscan missionaries in their charity work in the poor countries of sub-Saharan Africa. Obviously no mention was made of these situations in the indictment which condemned this film without the possibility of appeal.

The most recent initiative undertaken with the youngsters of the GMI, but also with young Christian Arabs and non-religious Arabs was that of publishing, once a month, some pages written by them and hosted by the weekly magazine *Vita*. The supplement was called *Yalla Italia* (which in Arabic means "Come on, let's go… Italy!") and its aim was to give a voice to this new generation who has such a lot to say but does not know how to make itself heard [1].

The first issue was dedicated to humour, which actually offers infinite and very funny examples [61] and [62]. "*Smile at the world and the world will smile at you!*" Who

would ever have thought that this is an Arabic proverb? Or another one which says, "*Keep away from evil and pull faces at it*"? Yet, the obtuse gazes of the fundamentalists are dangerously spreading the image of a whole world that is incapable of irony. The offspring of an ancient civilisation based on the "word", the Arabs love having fun with language. Yet, when exasperation makes us lose control, in the East as in the West, it is precisely about sacred things or simply in the usually prohibited semantic fields, that language makes us go beyond the limits. Arabic is no exception when, to tell someone to get lost, they say "May your religion go to hell!", which means that you have made me so angry that I spit on what is most sacred for you.

The second issue of the supplement, on the other hand, was on the relations between fathers and children, who inevitably have different visions to the same questions. When a young girl from Milan, the daughter of an Egyptian woman and an Italian father, was offered an Arabic course at school, she answered with slight annoyance: "I'm no immigrant!" Others were very pleased to attend these courses, but they were mainly children from primary schools or teenagers at high school. When they are at middle school, it is well known that teenagers will carefully avoid anything at all that can make them seem different from their peers. This means that the problem of identity has to do with many variables. In short, like all human questions, it is not about applying principles or theories, but accompanying a complex and at times contradictory process of evolution, in continuous change, full of risks and of surprising potential. It is above all families, who are often disoriented, and schools, already weighed down by a problematic amount of work and very seldom supported by orientation and means that are suitable for adequately facing the challenge, that deal with this. This means that our society is already a great laboratory, where a continuous mediation between different cultural and religious traditions is taking place, which are not to be conceived as predetermined entities, but interwoven elements of which each one of us is the place of a very unrepeatable synthesis. There is effectively the risk that on both fronts the least noble and most ephemeral aspects of the massification which characterises this grey epoch of ours, prevail. For Europeans, the slightly degrading role of the affluent, concerned above all that the poor relatives are not too much of a disturbance, willing to support them on condition that they are willing to carry out the humblest tasks and sharing in at least some collective rites to show that they are not completely uncivilised. For the immigrants, especially if they are Muslims, that of reactionaries anchored to a medieval, theocratic and sexist vision of the world, to be removed as soon as possible to show that they can soon become similar to us. Reality is already well beyond this type of simplification.

The third issue covered holidays. For many youngsters of the second generation of Arab immigrants in Italy, it is a sort of regular appointment with the country of origin of their parents. Their grandparents are there, together with a more or less boundless number of relatives, different habits and customs which are curious and at times bizarre, but always mediated by the fondness that from a very early age has been instilled in them for a land to which each of them has their own way of belonging. How many times have they heard Mum and Dad or at least one of them telling the story of something "there", often with an approach between the fabulous and the exotic, as often happens to memories which are filtered by the heart before reaching the brain to at last emerge on the lips? Here they are then, facing a past which they have not chosen for themselves, which is part of cumbersome luggage but of which at times they are also proud, disoriented on both sides of the Mediterranean, too Arab to be completely Italian, too Italian to be fully Arab.

How can they deal with it? In the oldest and wisest way: by getting by as best as they can, avoiding the sharp edges and slipping away from confrontations that are too open and harsh.

9. Talents marked 2G: "Second generations"

For many years the voices of young people were almost completely absent from the periodicals, book or publications of Italian Islamic Centres. Their age, linguistic problems and lack of adequate backgrounds have certainly played a role in this phenomenon. But so have the already mentioned generational "hierarchy" and the command of Italian by converts who have often had a past of "activism" that has made them the main or even the only authors of what is printed: from occasional leaflets to newsletters that come out with varying regularity.

9.1. The female writers

More recently, some books written especially by young Muslim women of the second generation have nevertheless appeared on the independent editorial market. Perhaps it is not a surprise that the first to emerge did not belong to any group of association. Randa Ghazy was born in Italy in 1986 to an Egyptian family and obtained a degree in International Relations from the University of Milan, As early as 2002 she published *Sognando Palestina* ("Dreaming of Palestine") [63], which was then translated in 16 countries. Only three years later, with the same publisher, she wrote *Prova a sanguinare: Quattro ragazzi, un treno, la vita* ("Try and bleed: Four kids, a train, life") [64] and in 2007 *Oggi forse non ammazzo nessuno: Storie minime di una giovane musulmana stranamente non terrorista*, ("Today maybe I won't kill anyone: Small stories of a young Muslim woman who strangely enough is not a terrorist") [65]. This book is certainly more autobiographical, in which she deals with the stereotypes she has to face, but is no less explicit on the customs and habits of her country of origin, especially on marriage. She has been working for some time now for an important NGO, but in London (the brain drain does not make any distinctions), where she has married an Englishman, while her sister – who has stayed in Italy - is married to an Italian.

Widad Tamimi (born in 1981), the daughter of a Palestinian who fled after the 1967 war and an Italian of Jewish origin from the USA, published in 2012 for Mondadori *Il caffè delle donne* ("The women's café") [66] in which she seeks to find her identity tracing the past of her "plural" family, was destined to even wider horizons, as she now lives and works in Slovenia.

"Older" than them (born in 1967) but who came to writing later is Rania Ibrahim, of Egyptian origin, married to an Italian and the mother of four children who, with her *Islam in love* [67], tackles the topic of a mixed couple (like her own) but setting the story in Great Britain between a veiled woman (as she is not) and a boy with xenophobic tendencies who amidst a thousand disagreements and paradoxes are able to crown an apparently impossible union.

Sumaya Abdel Qader, born in Perugia, Italy, in 1978, the daughter of a doctor, a Palestinian imam of Jordanian nationality, was one of the founders of the GMI and is very active in Muslim associative life. With her first book, *Porto il velo, adoro i Queen*, ("I wear the veil and love the Queen") [68] while highlighting her religious practice, she also ironically challenges prejudices and stereotypes, to which she returns in a more

constructive way with *Quello che abbiamo in testa* ("What we have on our head") [69], again starting from the hijab which did not stop her from being elected to the city council of Milan in the local elections.

The most recent is Francesca Bocca-Aldaqre (born in 1987) a convert. After studying at the Università Vita-Salute San Raffaele, she took a doctorate in Munich in Neuroscience but in the meantime travelled around the world learning Arabic and becoming a Muslim. In 2016 she became head of the Istituto di Studi Islamici Averroè, with manuals in Italian which she herself edits in a project, the guidelines of which are collected in the book *Un Corano che cammina: Fondamenti di pensiero educativo, didattica e pedagogia islamica* ("A Quran on a path: Foundations of educational thought, Islamic education and pedagogy") [70]. In 2019 with Pietrangelo Buttafuoco she published the book *Sotto il suo passo nascono i fiori: Goethe e l'Islam* ("Flowers grow under his steps: Goethe and Islam") [71]. She then continued with *Nietzsche in Paradiso: Vite parallele tra Islam e Occidente* ("Nietzsche in Paradise: Parallel lives between Islam and the West") [72] and with the late Massimo Campanini, *Manuale di Teologia Islamica* ("Manual of Islamic Theology") [73].

9.2 The rappers

American Hip Hop in the 1980s gave a voice in its various expressions - Mc'ing/Rap, Dj'ing, Writing/Graffiti and Breakin' - to different minorities, especially of colour or immigrants, who expressed at the same time forms of social exclusion and the vitality of the young in a form relating to their identity. As time passed, the phenomenon spread elsewhere, including to Italy, where quite a few rappers are of Arab origin and some have achieved considerable fame.

Amir Issaa, who was born to an Egyptian father and an Italian mother in Rome in 1978 and was brought up there, started as a breaker and writer in The Riot Vandals collective in the 1990s. His first album as a soloist was *Uomo di prestigio* ("Man of prestige"), with EMI/Virgin in 2006. After other productions he started his own label, bringing out *Grandezza naturale* ("Grandezza naturale") and, together with *The Ceasars* composed the soundtrack of the film *Scialla! (Stai sereno)* ("Easy!") by Francesco Bruni, being nominated for a David di Donatello award and the Nastro d'Argento. He is also well known for his work in prisons and collaboration with social initiatives together with well-known NGOs.

Maruego, born in Morocco in 1992, arrived in Italy at just over a month old.

Karkadan, "rhinoceros", was born in Tunis in 1983 but arrived in Milan when he was about twenty and rapped first in a Frenchified Tunisian Arabic and then in Italian, making several albums.

Zanko El Arabe Blanco, born in Milan to Syrian parents in 1983, is also a multilingual rapper (Italian-French-Arabic) who has made several albums and in particular two videos: *Vu Raccumandà* and *Made in Terraneo.*

Mahmood (Alessandro Mahmoud) was born in a neighbourhood in the outskirts of Milan in 1992 to a Sardinian mother and an Egyptian father who then separated. He stayed with his mother, who taught him Sardinian and a love for her native island and he studied singing from when he was a child, subsequently coming into contact with the world of music production where he had the opportunity of collaborating with other artists and receiving initial recognition. His career was crowned by his victory at the Sanremo Festival in 2019 with the song *Soldi* ("Money"), which also came second in the

2019 Eurovision Song Contest 2019. His style has been defined "Morocco-pop," a mixture of Italian pop music with influences from Arabic music.

10. Conclusions

According to a well-known saying, "From close-up, nobody is perfect". The adjective which concludes the sentence is intended as ironic, alluding to something strange or bizarre… but it also applies if understood in another meaning: "common", "similar or even mass-manufactured". This applies to everyone, but even more so to those who have some element of diversity that is theirs more through fate than by choice. The brief considerations set out here have the intention of showing this. Also and above all, those who belong to "migrant" generations following the first one are often a jigsaw, first of all for themselves and in their "own" environment. Like the others, but in a special way and each one in their own way, they are human beings, therefore a mystery for themselves which can certainly and must be tried to be understood, by observing and above all accompanying them in their unique path, but without the illusion of being able to completely discover their secret.

The social private sector already started a few years ago to try and at least improve some of these situations, but a huge amount still remains to be done, systematically and as part of a global project. In the meantime, the institutions should equip themselves to carry out their dutiful action of control, verification and legalisation. Initiatives undertaken in emergencies, to break the circle of isolation and the spiral of involution, have achieved results that are anything but negligible, but have not yet sparked off the virtuous circle of emulation, also because of petty and instrumental controversies that have sometimes discouraged those who have honestly tried to work hard but without offering any contribution to alternative solutions, and thus providing the alibi for those who do nothing, leaving the field open to adventurous bunglers. The logic of welfare culture can hold up only in the short term and for extraordinary situations. If it becomes the rule, it risks not solving the problems, but making them chronic. Ambitious and complex projects, with clear purposes and well-defined stages, guided essentially by the goal of offering a service of quality to users and certainly not inspired by the logical notes of "remission" , is still missing. In the meantime, a critical mass has been reached which no longer allows shortcuts. Or further extensions. Parallel initiatives, which are not coordinated, partial and extemporary when not risky would end up by producing a confusion in which the final objective would fatally be lost sight of and would encourage ambiguous compromises. A healthy and responsible democracy cannot make do with palliatives and must be able to promote and reward the best practices, otherwise it loses all credibility, becoming lost in sterile disputes which are more effort than they are worth. Institutional bodies which have the skills, the means and the wish to intervene remain the only solution to reclaim that insidious no man's land which is getting larger and where too many have already risked getting lost for too long.

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