



Mediterranean Insecurity

Radicalization and de-radicalization of Italian Muslims

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1. Introduction

Italian Islam is a matter of research which should be approached through a rigorous analytical lens, without the mediatic negative frame usually covering the topic. This means that any prejudice – being the the alleged invasions of migrants or the illegal diffusion of clandestine spaces used for daily prayers – will not prove useful to address the research questions in the spotlight¹. We ought to prefer instead a more comprehensive approach to look at the heterogeneous variety of Italian Muslims, rather than regarding them as a monolithic bloc. Some crucial variables - the ethnical composition, the religious commitment, the membership in one association, the social integration – cannot be ignored, if a serious research wants to engage with Italian Islam and to highlight its main features.

Italy has been so far exceptionally immune in front of jihadi terrorist attacks in Europe, though it hasn't been spared from the proliferation of criminal networks, Islamic safe havens and apocalyptic propaganda against the Holy See. Hence, a deeper focus on the dynamics of radicalization and on the current discourse around de-radicalization is needed. The threats evoked by jihadi propaganda and by the nexus between terrorism and migration flows across the Mediterranean have recently raised much concern in terms of national security, despite the more modest presence of Muslims in comparison

¹ For the debate about mosques in the North of Italy, see A. Triandafyllidou, *Religious diversity and multiculturalism in Southern Europe. The Italian mosque debate*, in T. Modood, A. Triandafyllidou, R. Zapata-Barrero, *Multiculturalism, Muslims and Citizenship. A European Approach*, Routledge, New York, 2006, pp. 123-128.

to other European countries. I suggest that a proper balance between a knee-jerk reaction aimed at the “securitization”² of Italian Islam, on one hand, and a laid-back approach which denies any link between Islam and terrorism, on the other, might produce larger benefits for the analysis of the issue and might give an academic contribution to the debate about counter- and de-radicalization³.

The paper is structured as follows. One section deals with the sociological and geographical description of Italian Islam and tries to give a precise account of the estimations of Muslims residing in Italy, being foreign-born, second-generations or Italian citizens who converted to Islam. Another section sketches the evolution of the jihadi threat in Italy during the 1990’s and the 2000’s, while the following one photographs the increased presence of homegrown jihadi sympathizers and *foreign fighters* who travelled to Syria and Iraq. These sections help to design a remarkable turn between a *first phase of jihadism in Italy* and a second phase of *Italian jihadism*, which both fell short to execute a terrorist plot on Italian soil. Additionally, in the last section I will critically discuss the possible reasons behind the radicalization of Italians and engage with the main theories and findings of the literature and the salience of a preventive approach based on de-radicalization and disengagement programmes.

Despite the efforts carried on by the national security Agencies, the monitoring activities show a constant presence of these threats. By the way, I will argue that Italian exceptional condition should be interpreted not only through the internal security prism, but also along the lines of its international strategies (more moderate and inclusive) towards the Islamic world and the broader Mediterranean. Furthermore, the presence of the Vatican should not be read as an obstacle in dealing with Islamic extremism, but as a unique opportunity to create the conditions of pacific coexistence and to enhance the religious dialogue, even in foreign policies. The conclusions highlight the central findings of the article and invite to carry out further research about the issue, hopefully from a cross-disciplinary perspective.

² Many scholars began to apply the well-known “securitization theory” (firstly introduced by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever) to religious issues. For a further discussion, see S. Croft, *Securitizing Islam. Identity and the search for security*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012, or L. Mavelli, *Between Normalisation and Exception: The Securitization of Islam and the Construction of the Secular Subject*, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 41(2), 2013, pp. 159-81.

³ For an overview of the debated concept and a deep literature review, see A. Schmid, *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature review*, ICCT Research Paper, March 2013.

2. The main features of Italian Islam

Islam is the sole common denominator among Italian Muslim communities, who stand out for their ethnic and national diversity, differently from other European States like France and United Kingdom. This is partially a consequence of the fact that Italy lacks a former strong colonial “backyard”, which could represent the geographical origin of migrants as it happens for other countries.

The *Report on Immigration* presented in 2017 by *Caritas-Migrantes* sketched an ethnical patchwork of Muslim foreigners legally residing in Italy, whose percentage has steadily grown over the last decades, in line with the national transition from an emigrant to an immigrant country. According to the report⁴, a consistent part of the total foreign population (around 5 million people) comes from countries mostly belonging to the Islamic cultural universe. Moroccan nationals account for the first group of Muslim foreigners (437.485), followed by citizens of Egypt (109.871) and Tunisia (95.645). Apart from Arabic countries, Italian Muslim communities are made up by migrants from Bangladesh (118.790) and Pakistan (101.784), whereas Senegal (98.176) stands out as the first Sub-Saharan African country of origin.

It is extremely hard to quantify how many people among these communities adhere to Islam: what emerges here is a query about the sociological criteria to define who can be defined as a “true Muslim”, since there are no common accepted standards to identify religious believers. In addition, a special reference needs to be made in relation to counties like Albania (467.687) and Nigeria (77.264). Another methodological problem arises insofar as these two countries are religiously fragmented, with Islam and Christianity being the mostly professed confessions. Consequently, since Muslims represent around the 55% of Albanian society and around 50.4% in Nigeria, scholars⁵ tend to apply the percentages of the country of origin to the diaspora of migrants, with a couple of *caveats* about the inaccuracy of this methodological choice.

The report published by *Caritas-Migrantes* numbers approximately 1.3 million of foreign Muslims residing in Italy, estimating thus a smaller presence than other

⁴ Caritas – Migrantes, *XXVI Rapporto Immigrazione*, Rome, 2017, p.2.

⁵ For instance, M. Livi Bacci, *In Europa i musulmani resteranno minoranza*, “Limes. Rivista Italiana di Geopolitica”, 1-2018, p 35.

research centres – 1.7 million⁶. The gap depends on the changing standards selected by researchers, who might be prone to include or exclude every Muslim residing in Italy “no matter what juridical and administrative status he obtained”⁷ among the population considered. Statistical errors can occur as well in the quantification of native Italian Muslims, around 900.000 persons⁸ who are usually divided in two broad categories: foreign-born people who acquired Italian citizenship and Italian-born nationals converted to Islam. Stefano Allievi, a prominent scholar who further investigated the topic of Italian conversions to Islam, counted around 10.000 in 1998 and claims that nowadays the total number has increased by some thousands – without any empirical evidence in support of the estimations⁹.

All else being equal, no surprises if the total number of Muslims in Italy would exceed 2.6 million of people, at least according to ISMU Foundation data, which adds 1.7 million of residing foreigners to 900.000 of Italian Muslims. This large estimation is confirmed by *Pew Research Center*, whose recent analysis pointed at a significant percentage of Muslims (4.8% of the population) and fearmongered public opinion. Therefore, worries about the demographic bulge of Muslim communities - which are projected to increase up to 8.3% of the total Italian population by 2050 (in case of “no migration”) and to 14.1% (in case of “high migration”)¹⁰ - have become a topical matter of interest and discussion.

Surveys and studies like the previous ones shed light on the nexus between the gradual settlement of European Muslims and the migration flows across the Mediterranean, deemed as a factor triggering social insecurity, economic competition for low-skilled workers and cultural frictions between European values (Christian and secular at the same time) and Islamic cultural mores, embodied by part of migrants. Even though the storytelling around the “invasion” from African shores is misleading, UNHCR traces a picture which brings about apprehension, as the arrivals on boats to Italian shores have fluctuated over the last years around hundreds of thousands - 170.100 in 2014, 153.842 in 2015, 181.436 in 2016, 119.369 in 2017¹¹. The sharp decrease in the number

⁶ A. Menonna, *La presenza musulmana in Italia*, Fondazione ISMU, Milan, June 2016, p. 2.

⁷ Ibidem

⁸ Ivi, p. 3.

⁹ S. Allievi, *I nuovi musulmani. I convertiti all’Islam*, Roma, Edizioni Lavoro, 1999, and *Conversioni: verso un nuovo modo di credere? Europa, Pluralismo, Islam*, Guida, Napoli, 2017.

¹⁰ Pew Research Center, *Europe’s Muslim Population will continue to grow – but how much depends on migration*, 4 December 2017.

¹¹ UNHCR, *Operation Portal. Refugee Situation. Mediterranean Situation*, 2018

of people disembarked in 2018 - only 21.561 – doesn't wipe out the anxiety on the nexus "Islamic migration-terrorism", which was rhetorically fuelled also by the former centre-left government¹², although empirically verified only in a minority of episodes.

From a regional perspective, Muslims are spread out throughout Italy with peaks of concentration in the Northern regions - 379.189 in Lombardy, 219.794 in Emilia-Romagna, 186.677 in Veneto – due to the wider possibilities to find an employment. This explains why 64% of Muslims have settled in the North of Italy, while only 21% in the centre (especially in Tuscany and Lazio¹³) and 15% in the South (with Sicily on the top).

When it comes to mosques, the correct estimation of the official number seems to be debated. Tracking a clear distinction between the official mosques (*masjid*) and the multitude of rooms and places of worship (private spaces, garages, abandoned depots), generally called *muşalla*, is thus a hard-methodological operation. Every attempt to list the mosques needs precise definitions: for instance, in the enquiries carried out by Rhazzali and Equizi, a mosque is defined as an architectural structure endowed with "spaces for the ablution process (*wudu*); large prayer halls apt to host the groups of believers during the Friday prayer and the other major celebrations of Islamic calendar; a tall minaret (*sawma'a*) which is designed to call the worshippers for the prayers (*adhan*)"¹⁴. Through this research toolbox, the two scholars managed to classify 655 mosques built in Italy.

This set of data is confirmed by the Minister of the Interior (*Comitato Esecutivo per i Servizi di Informazione e Sicurezza*), though it proves to be an underestimation if compared to the numbers (774) provided by the domestic intelligence (*Dipartimento delle Informazioni per la Sicurezza*). The gap is due to the propensity of national security agencies to include in the estimations even the places which are not strictly finalized to the religious functions, like all the spaces conceived for cultural events, recreational meetings and selling *halal* products. Accordingly, the mosques and the

(<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>).

¹² See for instance the interview released by the former Ministry of Interior Marco Minniti, who underlined the risk that some terrorists could sneak among the migrants in the boats. (https://www.huffingtonpost.it/2018/04/01/terroristi-nascosti-tra-i-migranti-il-rischio-attentato-e-altissimo-lallarme-di-minniti_a_23400233/)

¹³ A. Caragiuli, *Islam Metropolitano*, EDUP, Roma, 2013; F.Ciocca, *Musulmani in Italia. Impatti urbani e sociali delle comunità islamiche*, Meltemi, Roma, 2018.

¹⁴ K. Rhazzali e M. Equizi, *I musulmani e i loro luoghi di culto*, in E. Pace, *Le religioni nell'Italia che cambia. Mappe e bussole*, Carocci, Roma, 2013, p. 57.

muşalla, localized predominantly in the main cities and urban areas, provide the opportunity to meet other people of common ethno-religious roots and to produce moments of social aggregation.

Beyond the picture of the presence of mosques, few words are worth to be spent regarding the two main associations of Italian Islamic scene, namely the UCOII (*Unione delle Comunità Islamiche d'Italia*) and the Co.Re.Is. (*Comunità Religiosa Islamica Italiana*). The UCOII encompasses about 200 *muşalla*¹⁵. Although the ideological proximity to the *Muslim Brotherhood*, as it supported the former president of Egypt Mursi and the *Ennahdha* party in Tunisia, the association cannot be simply deemed as the Italian branch of the Islamist movement. Like the followers of Al-Banna, the UCOII shares the purpose of a bottom-up approach to reach the Islamization of the society. At the same time, its members consider the respect of the Islamic morality as a duty which doesn't jar with the integration in the host society.

Unlike the UCOII, the Co.Re.Is acts on a different level as it puts emphasis more on the spiritual and religious life of its adherents rather than addressing public morality issues¹⁶. This aligns with the different nature of its membership, composed mostly of Italian converts, who might have a role of mediation between Muslim communities and the Government of Rome. For instance, in the network of consultation bodies established periodically by the Minister of Interior (Pisanu, 2005, Maroni, 2010, Alfano, 2016) this association attempted to achieve the legal recognition of Islam by the State. The endorsed strategy of a *top-down* legitimization of Muslim communities chosen by this organization shed into light its more institutional approach.

Considered as a sort of “moderate” face of Italian Islam¹⁷, it should be put in question whether or not the Co.Re.Is has effective leverage on the national *Umma*.

3. Jihadism in Italy

¹⁵ M. Bombardieri, *Mappatura dell'associazionismo islamico in Italia*, in A. Angelucci, M. Bombardieri e D. Tacchini, *Islam e integrazione in Italia*, Marsilio, Venezia, 2014, p. 15.

¹⁶ Ivi, p. 18.

¹⁷ Following the rhetorical discourse of “good Muslims” who are compatible with Western values and act as a bulwark against the radicalization of “bad Muslims”. For a critical analysis, see M. Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim. A political perspective on culture and terrorism*, *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 104, No. 3, September 2002.

It is worth stressing that a constant surveillance of the environment around the mosques and the cultural centres has been so far prioritized by the national authorities, suspicious of the Wahhabi propaganda financed by Saudi Arabia and of the donations coming from *zakat*¹⁸. A small part of the mosques was animated by the activities of militant imams, engaged in the recruiting of manpower for jihadi networks and blamed for the radicalization of some individuals. However, above all in the 1990's and the early 2000's, a growing herd of followers were lured by the call for jihad echoing in all Italy¹⁹.

A methodological premise is required before delving into the topic. My essay uses the word "Salafism" as an extremist version of Political Islam, which might trigger radical violence and jihadism. Nonetheless, a crucial distinction must be traced between Salafi Jihadism, embraced only by a minority of Muslims, and non-violent / quietist Salafism. The latter is more widespread than the former and it rejects any form of political participation, including the involvement in elections and violent attacks. They both exhort for a revival of Sunni Islam and they draw upon the same doctrinal and ideological source - the *Salaf*, namely the three generations of Muslims, and Islamic scholars such as Ibn Tamiyya and Muhammad Ibn Abd-Al Wahhab²⁰.

So far, few researches have been carried out around Italian jihadism: it is indeed a very recent object of investigation, hindered by the lack of a multitude of case studies. A recent report published by ISPI (*Istituto di Studi Politici Internazionali*) stands out as the most comprehensive work about Italian *foreign fighters*, whose contingent is estimated as comparatively narrow in front of the total 30.000 who travelled to Syria and Iraq from 104 countries (about 4000 hailing from Europe, according to ICCT²¹). Drawing upon the data provided by the National Police, the national contribution to the *Islamic State* troops reached 129 units, being soldiers, sympathizers or *muhajirun* who set off to bolster the project of Al-Baghdadi. Amongst the range, only 24 individuals were Italian citizens (and 11 were born in Italy)²². This data must be considered as one

¹⁸ C. Björkman, *Salafi-Jihadi terrorism in Italy*, in M. Ranstorp, *Understanding Violent Radicalisation. Terrorist and Jihadist Movements in Europe*, Routledge, London: New York, 2010, p. 236.

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 232.

²⁰ See S. Amghar, *Le salafisme d'aujourd'hui. Mouvements sectaires en Occident*, Michalon, Paris, 2011, and M. Adraoui, *Du Golfe aux Banlieues. Le salafisme mondialisé*, PUF, Paris, 2013.

²¹ B. Van Ginkel, E. Entenmann, *The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the European Union Profiles, Threats & Policies*, ICCT Research Paper, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, The Hague, April 2016, p. 4.

²² F. Marone, L. Vidino, *Destinazione jihad. I foreign fighters d'Italia*, ISPI – Istituto per gli Studi della Politica Internazionale, Ledi Publishing, Milano, 2018, pp. 15-16.

of the main interpretative keys of the absence of terrorist attacks on the national soil, so far.

Before analysing the path to radicalization of these individuals, it would be profitable to track the evolution of the jihadi threat in Italy, which started from the 1990's as several Salafi groups established their networks inside Italian urban outskirts, exploiting Italian strategic position as a bridge in the Mediterranean. As soon as the Islamist dangerous connections were unearthed, Italian pattern turned out to be not so much exceptional vis-à-vis other European countries usually in the spotlight.

During the 1990's, Milan became the main hotbed for the clandestine activities of North-African cells, which were constantly monitored and eventually dismantled in the early 2000's by the National Police²³. Those groups were made up mostly of members of the Egyptian *Jamaat Islamiya*, who relocated to Italy after Mubarak repression of Salafists in the 1980's and 1990's. Their leadership in the mosques and cultural centres of Viale Jenner and of Via Quaranta is broadly recognized, as well as their trans-boundary ties with pivotal figures of Al-Qaeda such as Ayman Al-Zawahiri²⁴.

Milan soon became known as a prominent hub for radicalization and recruitment for the *mujaheddin* leaving for Bosnia, during the former Yugoslavian civil war, and joining the “first wave” of jihadism²⁵, as the imam of Viale Jenner, Anwar Shabaan, had repeatedly called upon. Furthermore, the web of *musalla* spread out in all Lombardy – Como, Gallarate, Varese, Cremona – acquired a strategic centrality for the logistical support of the international jihadi networks (acquisition of high-quality forged ID cards, passports and visas, purchase of weapons and explosive materials) and for the preparation of terrorist attacks.

The first (failed) suicide car-bombing in Europe took place in Rijeka, in 1995: according to Italian DIGOS, the attack had been previously planned in Viale Jenner²⁶. Besides Milan, other cities (Turin, Bologna and Naples) have been largely employed as strategic bases for the recruitment of volunteers and for the organization of terrorist attacks worldwide. No surprises, hence, if the involvement of Italian-based cells

²³ L. Vidino, *Il jihadismo autoctono in Italia: nascita, sviluppo e dinamiche di radicalizzazione*, ISPI - Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, Milano, 2014, p. 31. Of the same author, see *Islam, Islamism and Jihadism in Italy*, Current Trends in Islamist Ideology, vol. 7, 4 August 2008.

²⁴ C. Björkman, *Salafi-Jihadi terrorism in Italy*, op.cit., p. 234.

²⁵ See G. Kepel, *Terreur dans l'Hexagone. Genèse du djihad français*, Gallimard, Paris, 2015, p. 51, quoting the “*Call to Global Islamic Resistance*” uploaded on the web by Muhammad Al-Suri in 2005.

²⁶ L. Vidino, *Il jihadismo autoctono in Italia*, op. cit., p. 32.

coming from this wide network has been acknowledged even in the 2000's – for instance, the suicide bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad in August 2003²⁷.

In the aftermath of 9/11, Rome counter-terrorism policies managed to crack down on the majority of Islamist movements foreign networks. However, Viale Jenner mosque petered into the operational hub for radicals and wannabe jihadists and into the departing point for several fighters who fled to Iraq in 2003. The first trend of Italian-based jihadism neither triggered terrorist attacks inside the country, nor was it made up by groups of Italian citizens, but it paved the way for a stronger awareness of the danger and raised the concerns of the national security agencies.

The demographic gap between the Italian second generations of Muslims of foreign background and the likewise generations of other European countries – France, UK – has been gradually filled over the last fifteen years, which have witnessed the action of the first Italian born-and-raised militants. Some episodes casted a light on the shift in the jihadi *modus operandi*, ushered in the aftermath of 9/11. If in the 1990's Italy has been challenged by foreign-settled networks who never hit Italian targets, the jihadi threat soon began to be embodied by “lone wolves” who were suspected to plan attacks against national targets, though devoid of contacts with international movements.

A first failed terrorist plot happened in Agrigento in 2001, where a sort of *improvised explosive device* realized from a gas camping stove exploded on the stairs of the Tempio della Concordia. The same kind of bomb wrought havoc in the Duomo station of Milan seven months later. The National Police found that Domenico Quaranta, was behind the two episodes. The Sicilian man was deemed to be afflicted by psychological problems and to have embraced radical Islam in the prison of Trapani²⁸.

Similar patterns would be replicated over the years to come (December 2003 in Modena, March 2004 in Brescia), with the involvement of foreign-born Muslims (Muhannad Al-Khatib, Moustafa Chaouki)²⁹. The geography of the plots confirms the long-term strategic centrality of the North of Italy. Admittedly, the first Italian convert who pledged allegiance to violent jihad hailed from Sicily. All the aforementioned profiles highlights that the risk of violent and sudden radicalization must be monitored

²⁷ C. Björkman, *Salafi-Jihadi terrorism in Italy*, op.cit., p. 237.

²⁸ For the likelihood of a causal mechanisms between some paths of radicalization and the time spent in prisons, see F. Khosrokhavar, *Radicalisation*, Paris, Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 2014, pp. 156-167.

²⁹ For a further reconstructon, see L. Vidino, *Il jihadismo autoctono in Italia*, op. cit., pp. 35-38.

in every Italian corner, both in terms of Italian citizens converted to Islam, and of foreign Muslims who take advantage of Italian centrality in the Mediterranean.

Over the time, no autochthonous groups would have taken the lead of the Italian jihadi scene, owing to the constant prevention of the national security and the zero-tolerance attitude of Italian judicial system – as shown by the introduction of the art. 270 *quinquies* of the Penal Code³⁰. Spare cases of radical imams preaching extremist versions of Islamic thought were gradually discovered and tackled thanks to the sheer enquiries of national security agencies. The arrest of Mostapha Al-Korchi in Ponte Felcino (2007) preceded the similar operations against two other radical mosques in Macherio (Milan) and Sellia Marina (Catanzaro), cutting in advance the possibility that the religious propaganda echoed in the mosques might trigger the radicalization of worshippers, as acknowledged by part of literature³¹. The overwhelming number of files discovered in the personal computer of the arrested unearthed the increasing centrality of Internet as a major tool for jihadi propaganda³².

Another plot hit the headlines in October 2009, bringing the attention on the steady growth of the local jihadi threat. The attack conducted by Muhammad Game was interpreted as a turning point by the intelligence agencies, although the *curriculum* and the *modus operandi* of the man were akin to the previous terrorists³³. Game was a Libyan man who had settled in Italy in 2003. He tried to provoke a massive explosion against the firehouse of Santa Barbara in Milan, which appeared to be again as the core area of Italian jihad.

The thwarted and low-level attempt caused serious wounds at his eyes and the loss of his right hands, whereas two Italian soldiers got lightly injured. Game's radicalization path had happened quickly, through the help of the web (where he got in touch with Al Suri's *Call to a global jihad*, to be conducted leaderless³⁴) rather than of the mosque, since he had been expelled from Viale Jenner as "unfaithful". An "anti-imperialistic" hermeneutic key might be useful to frame his gesture, because of his attitude vis-à-vis

³⁰ "Punishment of individual who both provide and receive training about explosives, weapons and every technique deemed to be employed for terroristic purposes", *ivi*, p. 41.

³¹ G. Kepel, *Quatre-vingt treize*, Paris, Seuil, 2013, and G. Kepel, *Terreur dans l'Hexagone*, *op.cit.*

³² See ICSR - The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, *Countering Online Radicalization: A Strategy for Action*, London, ICSR, 2009, and L. Schlegel, *Online radicalization. Myth or reality?*, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, September 2018.

³³ L. Vidino, *Il jihadismo autoctono in Italia*, *op.cit.*, p. 43.

³⁴ On the same point, see also M. Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad. Terror network in the Twenty-First century*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008.

Italian foreign policy in Afghanistan – while the hypothesis of “post-colonial” rage³⁵ against the heritage of Italian conquest of Libya seems to be marginal.

4. Italian Jihadi fighters

The above mentioned cases didn't see the full involvement of Italian national citizens, who were about to enter the scene in the following decade. This is the real breakthrough between the two phases examined, since an increasing group of subjects, raised in Italy and italophone, was gradually lured by the jihadi texts and calls for action – especially online. In the following section, I will set up to describe and figure out the differences among the category of Italian *foreign fighters*.

Drawing firstly among the comprehensive picture sketched by Lorenzo Vidino, it is possible to identify some profiles acting in the indigenous jihado-scene from the early 2000's, such as Barbara Aisha Farina, converted to Islam when she was 22. The young woman, settled in Milan, founded the journal *Al-Mujahidah* and created online communities for jihadi sympathizers, justifiers and aspirant militants, most of all Italian converts³⁶. Some of them ended up being caught by the authorities after the Operation Niriya, launched in 2009, like Muhammad Jarmoune, born in Morocco and raised in Lombardy.

Even though the autochthonous members of the unsophisticated Italian jihadi wave didn't manage to hit any target, they alerted the intelligence agencies above all for the unstoppable dissemination of radical material. Furthermore, Jarmoune was accustomed to share tutorials on how to prepare chemical devices and to boast off his moral commitment to join the global jihad. He was arrested in 2012 and then condemned to 5 years and 4 months of prison pursuant to art. 270 *quinquies*³⁷.

In the following year, Brescia, another hotbed of Italian Islamic radicalism, witnessed the *affaire* of Anas Al-Abboubi, whose identikit reminds us of Jarmoune. The likewise Moroccan-born youngster raised the attention of the security apparatus by advertising the texts of jihadi ideologues (for instance, Anwar al Awlaki, among the leaders of *Al-Qaeda in Arabic Pensinsula*) and sharing his will to join the Caliphate in Syria. He joined the local hip-hop scene with the screen name of McKhalif. The introjection of

³⁵ P. Blanchard (dir.), *La fracture colonial*, Paris, La Découverte, 2006.

³⁶ L. Vidino, *Il jihadismo autoctono in Italia*, op. cit., p. 50.

³⁷ Ivi, p. 60.

the norms and the values of a specific sub-culture would have been replied in a second moment, when he embraced jihadism. It is worth highlighting that the feeling of belonging to the same crew, the exhibitionism and the *street dawla* are all features shared by the two sub-cultures³⁸. Furthermore, this equivalence calls forth the interpretation of jihadism as a “generational choice” – and a “nihilist move” – introduced by Olivier Roy³⁹.

After the establishment of the Italian branch of the network *Sharia4*, the authorities arrested Al-Abboubi to prevent any plot against the most crowded places of Brescia. However, judged as a “*passive and randomly consumer of jihadi propaganda, which was only shared and never saved of his laptop*”⁴⁰, Al-Abboubi was released after some months. He finally managed to reach the *Islamic State* in Syria and currently we lack any further information about him, except from some videos harshly critical more of Western anomic culture rather than of its geopolitical posture.

The most prominent Italian *foreign fighter* has probably been Giuliano Ibrahim Delnevo, the 24-year old converted who died in Syria in June 2013. His path reminds of the stories of “Salafi *top-down* oriented” mentioned by Muhammad Adraoui. The French sociologist proposes this label to designate the former members of the *Tabligh* movement (based on non-violent and face-to-face propaganda), who end up in developing more extremist opinions, dissatisfied with the moderate approach so-far embraced⁴¹.

Delnevo experienced his conversion to Islam during the time spent in Ancona with some members of *Tabligha Jama'at*. After coming back to Genoa, his native city, he deeply studied the conceptual pillars of Deobandi Islamic School, broadly considered as a source of inspiration of the Afghan *Taliban* movement. The progressive evolution towards a violent form of radicalization was not accepted by the local mosques, which drew away from the extremist propaganda fueled by Delnevo’s crew⁴², and occurred instead in the virtual space of the web, as his Youtube channel *Liguristan* exemplifies.

³⁸ Ivi, p. 66. For a more complete assessment of the “sub-cultural” interpretation of jihadism, see U. Conti, *Il terrorismo jihadista occidentale. Considerazioni per un’interpretazione sub-culturale*, Comunicazioni Sociali. N.1, 2017, pp. 141-150, and T. Hegghammer, *Jihadi Culture. The Art and Social Practices of Militant Islamists*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017.

³⁹ O. Roy, *Le djihad et la mort*, Seuil, Paris, 2016, pp. 52-53.

⁴⁰ L. Vidino, *Il jihadismo autoctono in Italia*, op. cit., p. 68.

⁴¹ M. Adraoui, *Du Golfe aux Banlieues*, op. cit., p. 42.

⁴² L. Vidino, *Il jihadismo autoctono in Italia*, op. cit., p. 72.

Yearning to answer to the call for jihad, he settled to Turkey in 2012 with the purpose of crossing the Syrian border. The attempt was not achieved and Delnevo was obliged to come back to Italy, but he later succeeded in reaching the Islamic State. There is a good likelihood that the decision to give up typical Muslim mores and costumes (long beard, traditional clothes and so on) and to pretend a total disengagement from the previous beliefs (according to the principle of *taqiyya*) was a rational choice which helped him to flee for Syria. He passed away in 2013 on the battleground, while fighting in the suburbs of Aleppo for a Qaedist militia.

Delnevo is one of the most notorious among the 129 *foreign fighters* showing a connection with Italy. Although the sample is very minute compared to other countries, recent studies have tried to identify the prominent features of 125 profiles object of the analysis. As mentioned before, only 11 individuals are Italian native, while 24 have acquired Italian nationality. The others mostly come from North Africa (50,4%)⁴³. Results show that the origins of Italian *foreign fighters* reflect the geography of Muslims communities, since Lombardy accounts for 31,7% of the 82 profiles who can be associated with a place of residence in Italy, followed by Emilia-Romagna (12,1%) and Veneto (10,6%)⁴⁴. This geographical trend appears to be dominant both for single individuals travelling to Syria on their own without signals of peer pressure (like Delnevo⁴⁵), and for some entire families whose radicalization happened along the lines of groups dynamics and polarization.

To this extent, the four cases studies selected by Francesco Marone can be all localized in the North of Italy. The different patterns experienced by the families unearth their “binding ties”⁴⁶ and provide a frame on how group radicalization usually unfolds. It’s worth stressing that the two of them that finally managed to reach Syria were driven by the crucial role played by women – complexly around the 10% of Italian *foreign fighters*⁴⁷.

⁴³ F. Marone, L. Vidino, *Destinazione jihad. I foreign fighters d’Italia*, op. cit., p. 16.

⁴⁴ Ivi, p. 17.

⁴⁵ Nonetheless, Delnevo cannot be regarded as a “lone wolf” because of his previous contacts with the *Tabligh* movement. For a further conceptualization, see C. McCauley, S. Moskalenko, *Toward a Profile of Lone Wolf Terrorists: What Moves an Individual from Radical Option to Radical Action*, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 26, 2014, pp. 69-85.

⁴⁶ F. Marone, *Ties that Bind: Dynamics of Group Radicalisation in Italy’s Jihadists Headed for Syria and Iraq*, *The International Spectator*, Vol.52. N.3, 2017, pp. 53-55.

⁴⁷ F. Marone, L. Vidino, *Destinazione jihad. I foreign fighters d’Italia*, op. cit., p. 16.

Maria Giulia *Fatima* Sergio converted to Islam in autonomy, drawing upon a wide range of sources on Internet. Soon after the marriage with an Albanian man, Aldo Kobuzi, they left for Syria, where they met with his sister. *Fatima* received a firearms training and endeavored to push her family (mother, father and sister) to convert and then to join the Caliphate. The timely intervention of the Italian police thwarted the attempt, which seemed to be justified more on the promise of a better social position rather than a true Islamic commitment⁴⁸.

Alice Brignoli, renamed *Aisha* after the conversion, likewise married a Muslim man, Mohamed Koraichi, born in Morocco and raised up in Italy. The couple petered into a gradual radicalized outlook from 2009-10, showing that in some cases the acquisition of such a psychological and religious-inspired background might require years rather than sudden breakthroughs. It is reported that they reached Syria in 2015, where he embraced the arms of IS, whereas her family wasn't pressed enough to join the Middle East troubled waters⁴⁹.

As far as the two other cases described in the article are concerned, their projects of leaving Italy was stymied by the punctual intervention of the *National Police*. One couple was made up by another Italian aspirant jihadi woman, Sara Pilè, and by her Tunisian husband, Naim Sagrari. The attention of the Police was caught by a conspicuous online activity revealing a radicalization process *in fieri* and the alleged intention to join the Caliphate. Sagrari was thus arrested and deported from Italy. The Bencharki-Moutaharrik case, finally, is a detailed example on how a wide network of people might go through a radicalization process after a tragic experience, such as the death of a beloved one.

To sum up, the events underline the variety of patterns chosen by *foreign fighters* and make the case for a fertile interpretation of the *push-factors* of jihadism, not restricted to dogmatic explanations. Furthermore, despite the small percentage, the increasing actorness of women sows the seeds for further investigations on the feminization of jihad, meant as the deeper and wider participation of women in a universe thus far dominated by a patriarchal view. For instance, Maria Giulia “Fatima” invited her sister to take an active part in the process because

⁴⁸ F. Marone, *Ties that Bind: Dynamics of Group Radicalisation in Italy's Jihadists Headed for Syria and Iraq*, op. cit., p. 53.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, for a complete account of both stories.

“Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) allowed women to realize the hijra for the cause of God, whilst we have always needed the permission (of the husband or the father). It is indeed a religious duty!”⁵⁰.

The call for a larger autonomy of the *muhajirat* (the woman who achieve the *hijra*) jars with the traditional and conservative narrative of political Islam endorsed by some militia. However, women have historically contributed to the operational support during some conflicts, constrained to act on a smaller scale and according to necessities⁵¹.

The multiplication of virtual communities and the erosion of traditional boundaries might be a turnaround in jihadism in terms of the position and the roles of women. On the topic, some Weberian ideal-types were pictured to frame the rationale of female participation in jihad: 1) the utopic and apocalyptic *muhajira*; 2) the jihadi-bride and the naïve teenager; 3) the Mulan/adventurous fighter; 4) the “Florence Nightingale/Candy-Candy”, usually a student of medicine with humanitarian purposes; 5) the tricked/coaxed woman, unconsciously taken to Syria⁵².

5. Hypothesis about radicalization

Against this portrait, it’s worth to elicit the recurrent red thread among the radicalized. Every attempt to draw upon a monocausal explication to grasp the true meaning of Italian jihadism would probably fail, since there are too many characteristics and paths at stake. Accordingly, it’s hard to get away with whom or what is responsible for the radicalization of Italians: whether, on one hand, it is all about the diffusion of Salafist propaganda and the consequent “radicalization of Islam”⁵³, or, on the other hand, it is more accurate to point at the “nihilist”⁵⁴ attitude of youngsters using Islam instrumentally to fulfill their desire of disruption and death.

Both the hermeneutics keys are necessary and contribute to figure out more about a puzzling question. The approach suggested by Gilles Kepel, mentioned above, is

⁵⁰ M. Bombardieri, *Le donne italiane dell’ISIS. Processi, attori e luoghi della radicalizzazione*, in S. Allievi, R. Guolo, M. K. Rhazzali, *I musulmani nelle società europee. Appartenenze, interazioni, conflitti*, Guerini e Associati, Milano, 2017, p. 132.

⁵¹ See S. de Leede, *Women in Jihad. A historical perspective*, ICCT Policy Brief, September 2018.

⁵² M. Bombardieri, *Le donne italiane dell’ISIS*, op. cit., pp. 143-145.

⁵³ G. Kepel, *Terreur dans l’Hexagone*, op.cit., pp. 44-50.

⁵⁴ O. Roy, *Le djihad et la mort*, op.cit., p. 16 and 73-78.

pivotal for whoever observes and debunks the network of radical mosques and *muṣalla* spread out in the North of Italy (Lombardy *in primis*), while Olivier Roy's works on the deculturation of religion match with the profiles of the "lone wolves" hastily trained and radicalized on Internet. However, the overwhelming and omnipresent use of the Web is perhaps the only common pattern of all profiles.

Other push-factors shouldn't be overlooked if we want to establish a comprehensive account of terrorists, whose description points out some heterogeneous identikit. As far as the social background is concerned, the latest researches seem to uphold the hypothesis about Muslims' marginalization in Western society: in fact, 44,8% of the total was employed in low-skilled profession, whereas 34,4% lacked an employment at all⁵⁵.

The thesis of Muslims' social rage⁵⁶ gained popularity during French *banlieue* riots in 2005. Overemphasized by leftists, the nexus "marginalization/radicalization" may provide some useful insights and help to adopt inclusive policies towards migrants and second generations, who experience a "diachronic gap" vis-à-vis autochthonous Italians in terms of socio-economic development, opportunities and material possessions⁵⁷. Nonetheless, dispossession and exclusion generated the radicalization of the abovementioned *foreign fighters* only to some extent. There is a higher likelihood, instead, that the huge gap between individuals with high-skilled education and the daunting capacity of western job markets to absorb their expertise might have worsened the resentment against society, fed in particular by young discriminated Muslims⁵⁸.

Another set of reasons often debated in literature concerns the post-colonial cleavage between Muslims residing in Western countries and the governments of the hosting States, blamed for the promotion of imperialist policies against the Arab-Islamic world, through marauding neo-liberalism, military hegemony and boots-on-the-ground deployed to support their allies in power. This kind of geopolitical line of thought has nurtured the discussions about Muslim communities in Britain, France and United

⁵⁵ F. Marone, L. Vidino, *Destinazione jihad. I foreign fighters d'Italia*, op. cit., p. 17.

⁵⁶ R. Leiken, *Europe's angry muslims. The revolt of the second generation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012.

⁵⁷ S. Tusini, *Percorsi di (dis)integrazione: dalla prima generazione migrante ai foreign fighters*. *Sociologia e ricerca sociale*, n. 110, 2016, pp. 116-118.

⁵⁸ The idea that radicalization is more connected with this kind of "expectations – capability gap" rather than with poverty is partially in line with the profiles of Arab terrorists who embrace jihad also because of their impossibility to climb up the social ladder. See D. Gambetta, S. Hertog, *Engineers of Jihad. The curious connection between Violent Extremism and Education*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2017.

States, but it partially falls short to provide an overarching framework for Italian case study.

Albeit the deployment of troops in Afghanistan and Iraq and the current involvement in Libya – which has been described as a possible multiplier of the risks⁵⁹ -, the Muslims' attitude about Italian foreign reputation is generally quieter in comparison to other countries' international posture (former empires like United Kingdom and France). Rome has been perceived historically as a less outrageous and more tolerant actor and as a supporter of partnerships and dialogue in the broad Mediterranean⁶⁰.

This hypothesis, which entails a strong tie between internal Muslim communities and Italian external foreign policy, is yet to be ascertained empirically and deserves further investigations. Part of literature confirms the more inclusive nature of Italian foreign actorness, for instance during the peacekeeping operations overseas, where Italy has always followed a soft approach⁶¹. Another recent fieldwork traces a statistical correlation between Muslims' justification of violence in the name of Islam and the feeling of revenge against actions seen as offensive against Islam and his tenets⁶².

To sum up, Italian way of dealing with Islamic mores, both in internal and in international affairs, is thus praiseworthy and might embody a counter-balance against radicalization and jihadi attacks, despite the longstanding international support to Western operations, the membership in NATO and the presence of Vatican.

Over the last extent, deeper investigations should be conducted too. The very high frequency of the name *Rumiyah* inside the propagandistic material of *Daesh*⁶³ leads too often to the logical conclusion that the capital of Christianity is with no doubts a

⁵⁹ L. Quadarella Sanfelice di Monteforte, *Perché ci attaccano. Al Qaeda, l'Islamic State e il terrorismo "fai da te"*, Aracne, Roma, 2017, p. 242.

⁶⁰ The historical literature is vast. For some very pregnant essays about Italian Mediterranean policies, see M. De Leonardis (a cura di), *Il Mediterraneo nella politica estera italiana del secondo dopoguerra*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2003.

⁶¹ See F. Sanfelice di Monteforte, L. Quadarella Sanfelice di Monteforte, *Due secoli di stabilizzazione. Gli insegnamenti del passato per il peacekeeping del futuro*, Aracne, Roma, 2015, and F. Battistelli, *La sicurezza e la sua ombra. Terrorismo, panico, costruzione della minaccia*, Donzelli, Roma, 2016, p. 258.

⁶² M. Groppi, *An Empirical Analysis of Causes of Islamist Radicalisation: Italian Case Study*, Perspectives on Terrorism, vol. 11, no.1, p. 73.

⁶³ L. Quadarella Sanfelice di Monteforte, *Perché ci attaccano*, op. cit., p. 241 and p. 243 for an analysis of the propaganda against Rome in *Dabiq* (Issue 4, October 2014), the other major publication of Islamic State; F. Marone, M. Olimpio, "Conquisteremo la vostra Roma". *I riferimenti all'Italia e al Vaticano nella propaganda dello Stato Islamico*, ISPI, Milano, 2018, pp. 29-30, 32-33, for an assessment of the very few mentions of Rome and Italy in the videos and the messages published by IS.

privileged target for jihadi groups, were it not for the possibility, so far marginalized by scholars, that the religious background of Vatican and of Italian social tissue might partially dampen the seething rage of terrorists. Having gone or not through a religious radicalization process, jihadists who claim to act in the name of God would perhaps choose a secular target rather than somebody belonging to the “people of the book”.

This suggestive hypothesis should be checked empirically before running to conclusions. It would help, in any case, to reconsider the role of Catholic Church in tackling jihadism and to overcome the old-fashion rhetoric around the “clash of civilization” between Christianity and Islam. The Vatican and some religious non-state actors (like *Comunità di Sant’Egidio*) are already fostering true inter-religious dialogue and cooperation. This is indeed a comparative advantage for Italian foreign policy, more “religiously engaged”⁶⁴ than other countries and thus less targeted by who wants to firstly hit godless and materialistic societies – epitomized by French *laïcité*. Admittedly, as it was noticed in literature, even in France the catholic priest Jacques Hamel was killed in July 2016 by two young alleged militants of *Daesh*. In the wake of the tragic murder, IS called for more attacks against Christianity and the Pope and, therefore, against Italy⁶⁵. The future scenarios cannot be depicted as riskless.

6. A three-pronged prevention strategy

All else being equal, the absence of a major terrorist attack on Italian ground, so far, relies strongly upon the sound experience and capabilities of the national intelligence services. The hands-on approach championed by counter-terrorism practitioners has tackled the proliferation of networks and has acted as a deterrent. According to data, two thirds of Italian *foreign fighters* are first generation migrants whose ties with Italy were tenuous for some extents. This percentage casts a light upon the decision (strengthened by the two antiterrorism laws of 2005 and 2015) for the administrative deportation of non-EU citizens, and so far, prioritized, due to the non-Italian citizenship of the guilty⁶⁶.

⁶⁴ P. Ferrara, F. Petito, *An Italian Foreign Policy of Religious Engagement: Challenges and Prospects*, “The International Spectator. Italian Journal of International Affairs”, 51:1, 2016, pp. 29-31.

⁶⁵ Differently, Al Qaeda is not threatening Italy overtly. See L. Quadarella Sanfelice di Monteforte, *Perché ci attaccano*, op. cit., p. 241.

⁶⁶ L. Vidino, *Italy’s Lack of CVE Strategies and Initiatives*, in L. Vidino, *De-Radicalization in the Mediterranean. Comparing Challenges and Approaches*, ISPI, Ledizioni Ledi Publishing, Milan, 2018, p. 15.

It is highly remarkable that the Italian journal of intelligence affairs, *Gnosis*, directed by the domestic internal agency AISI (*Agenzia Italiana per la Sicurezza Interna*) has devoted a special number to the debate around de-radicalization. All the selected contributors state that the strides made by Italian national intelligence need to be assisted with a more comprehensive strategy, bearing in mind that repression alone exacerbates the fertile conditions for radicalization and might provoke over-reactions motivated by revenge, as underlined by part of literature in terrorism studies⁶⁷. At least three side measures should accompany the counter-terrorist set of tightening laws:

- 1) The establishment of de-radicalization and rehabilitation programs, as recently experimented by the Tribunal of Bari with the decree 71/2017⁶⁸. The intervention was tailored purposely for an Italian convert put under special surveillance because of his links to jihadi sympathizers and militants, interwoven completely on the Web, where the suspect shared some messages deemed as “integralist and fanatical, extolling the fight against the foe and justifying violent acts”⁶⁹. The court decided that all the apparent symptoms increased the risk of a terrorist attack on Italian soil, strengthened by the fact that he was a lorry driver. The man is thus going through a path of progressive de-radicalization whose goal lies in the eradication of the potential violent behaviour of the subject in question. I reckon the definition of “de-programming” to be more appropriate for this case study than “disengagement”, which would be suitable instead for an intervention designed for both terrorist militants and lone individuals who committed a real and material crime. Furthermore, the choice to dis-engage from a violent strategy doesn’t necessarily entail a sheer rejection of rigid and polarized ideologies⁷⁰. The program conceived by the judges consist of some

See also F. Marone, *The Use of Deportation in Counter-Terrorism: Insights from the Italian Case*, ICCT Perspective, The Hague: The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 13 March 2017.

⁶⁷ For the latest overview of the debate, see R. Jackson (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Critical Terrorism Studies*, Routledge, London: New York, 2016. For a partially critical assessment of CVE strategies in MENA region, see J. Consigli, *Countering Radicalization Efforts in the Middle East and North Africa*, in *De-Radicalization in the Mediterranean. Comparing Challenges and Approaches*, op. cit., p. 77.

⁶⁸ L. S. Martucci, G. De Stavola, *Deradicalizzazione e prevenzione del terrorismo religiosamente motivato. Un programma di contronarrativa costituzionalmente orientato (Trib. Bari, decr. N.71/17)*, “Gnosis. Rivista Italiana di intelligence”, giugno 2018, p. 65.

⁶⁹ M. Valente, *Misure di prevenzione e de-radicalizzazione religiosa alla prova della laicità (a margine di taluni provvedimenti del Tribunale di Bari)*, “Stato, Chiese e pluralismo confessionale”, 2017.

⁷⁰ T. Bjørge and J. Horgan, *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, Routledge, Abington, 2009, p. 28; A. Schmid, *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature review*, op.cit., pp. 29-31.

ethical and constitutional guidelines that should be gradually exposed to the man in collaboration with the Department of Law of the local university and with a selected cultural mediator. The rehabilitation should happen through *ad hoc* seminars which aim at de-constructing the sectarian ideology and switching it with the critical consciousness of a normal citizen who respect the rule of law⁷¹. Conversely, the path will not include a sort of counter-religious propaganda to detach the individual from his faith, as the European Court of Human Rights underlined⁷².

- 2) Will it succeed or not, according to some critical voices⁷³ this kind of program lacks clear rules and gives too much autonomy to prosecutors and academics: thereby, it must be preceded by some very preventive counter-radicalization and counter-violent extremism (CVE) strategies. In January 2016 two members of the Chamber of Deputies, Andrea Manciuilli and Stefano Dambroso, signed the first comprehensive bill which addressed the question. The project consisted in eleven articles and in three main pillars: preventing the radicalization in the key areas (prisons, school, Internet); corroborating the institutional architecture with a *National Centre on Radicalization (CRAD)*, twenty *Regional Coordination Centres (RCC)* and a monitoring parliamentary committee; working side-by-side with civil society⁷⁴. Transmitted to the Senate after the approval of the Lower Chamber, the *iter* of the bill was stopped by the new elections in March 2018. As such, the future of the proposal is still uncertain, while part of actors involved in national security call for its resumption in order to endow Italy with a suitable long-term solution against violent extremism.
- 3) Premising that the previous strategies cope with whatever sort of radicalism, it's unquestionable that Islamism represents the direst topic on the radar of national security agencies. Therefore, every attempt to counter Islamic radicalization cannot disregard the opportunity to design a new bilateral relation between Muslim communities and Italy. Firstly, by promoting grater strides towards a juridical agreement, which would be the framework for the recognition of Islam among the official religions of the State – pursuant to art.8.3 of the Constitution.

⁷¹ L. S. Martucci, G. De Stavola, *Deradicalizzazione e prevenzione del terrorismo religiosamente motivato*, op.cit., p. 71.

⁷² Ivi, p. 70.

⁷³ L. Vidino, *Italy's Lack of CVE Strategies and Initiatives*, op. cit., p. 17.

⁷⁴ A. Manciuilli, S. Dambroso, *Misure per la prevenzione della radicalizzazione e dell'estremismo jihadista*, Camera dei Deputati, Atto 3558, XVII legislatura, Roma, 26 gennaio 2016.

This aligns with one of the main goal of the former Ministry of Interior Marco Minniti, whose *National Pact for an Italian Islam*⁷⁵ tried to achieve some results in this direction. The negotiations were joined and signed by the most prominent associations of Italian Muslims communities. Nonetheless, there will probably be some room for disagreement among Muslims, as far as a couple of critical points are concerned: for instance, the dispositions about the “training of Imams” and the “efforts to guarantee that Friday sermons are delivered or translated into Italian” are likely to raise some critics.

7. Conclusions

This short essay tried to address the current state of Italian Muslim communities and of the few cases of Islamic radicalization experienced in Italy. After a short introduction, in the section two I mapped out the sociological, ethnical and geographical distribution of Muslims in Italy. This first step is crucial to deconstruct the mediatic narration of a homogeneous Islamic bloc, which is often described and “covered”⁷⁶ as it was devoid of internal nuances. I underlined that different voices speak on behalf of Italian Muslims and only a minute percentage among them embraced radical opinions and behaviours. Beyond this matter of fact, much apprehension rose after the massive disembarkation of thousands of migrants and refugees, deemed as possible vehicles of violent ideologies and terrorist plots. I suggest that the nexus “migration-terrorism” is hard to be disentangled and it will bear a negative clout on Italian Islam as a whole. Nowadays, the securitization of the flows ends up in the indiscriminate criminalization not only of all the people fleeing to Italy, but also of all Italian Muslims, wrongfully associated with the turmoil in Arab world and with jihadism.

As I highlighted in the article, the total amount of Italian jihadi sympathizers and of *foreign fighters* is very modest. No terrorist plot on Italian soil has succeed so far, thanks firstly to the brilliant capacities of national security and intelligence agencies. Furthermore, from a more sociological point of view, I sketched a thorough picture to explain why radicalization happens (radicalization of Islamic thought, Islamization of

⁷⁵Ministero dell’Interno, *Patto Nazionale per un Islam Italiano, espressione di una comunità aperta, integrata e aderente ai valori e ai principi dell’ordinamento statale*, 2017 (http://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/patto_nazionale_per_un_islam_italiano_en_1.2.2017.pdf).

⁷⁶E. Said, *Covering Islam. Come i media e gli esperti determinano la nostra visione del mondo*, Transeuropa, Massa, 2012 (orig. ed. 1996).

nihilism, social and economic marginalization, post-colonial rage, sense of injustice against Islam) and in which privileged ways (Web, mosques, prisons). We ascertained that a pluri-causal framework is the most appropriate to deal with Italian radicals and that, in terms of methodology, the virtual meetings and contacts on Internet outscored the other locations. By the way, a constant surveillance of mosques is mandatory, as it cannot be excluded that they will host criminal activities of jihadi networks, like in Milan during the Nineties.

As far as prisons are concerned, the authorities are already in a state of alert, aware that the 22,5% of the detained population comes from countries of Islamic religion⁷⁷. That goes without saying that every investigation and control from the *National Police* should aim at balancing between security concerns and the respect of human dignity and religious freedom. In terms of prevention and interventions against the radicalization of Italian Muslims, I hold that the correct strategies pursued so far should be integrated with a comprehensive juridical reform of the relation between the central State and Islam, following a holistic approach and recognizing the specific rights of Muslims.

The essay will hopefully contribute to a further understanding of the main features of Italian Muslim communities and of the possible keys to interpret the cases of radicalization. An original way which hasn't been taken duly into account, in my opinion, deals with the mutual interconnection between Italian foreign policies vis-à-vis Islamic universe, on one side, and the behaviour of Muslims (above all the Italian communities) towards Italy, on the other. The internal-external nexus has already been deeply explored in International Relations and in Security Studies, and some scholars draw upon this toolbox to explain the post-colonial anger of Muslims against former colonial empires. Admittedly, in the case of Italy, if there is a Muslim resentment, this is of course minor compared to other contexts, due to two main set of reasons:

- Italian historical openness towards Arabic people and Islamic countries in the Mediterranean, embodied by the longstanding quest for partnerships and dialogue with its Southern and Eastern neighbours. This feature should not be overemphasized. Italy is still blamed of interventionist policies in part of its modest former colonial possessions (namely Libya and Somalia). In addition, the moderate and inclusive attitude which I am mentioning can be easily

⁷⁷ A. Zaccariello, *Il carcere e il suo paradosso. Bacino di reclutamento per aspiranti mujaheddin e garanzia di riabilitazione per i detenuti*, "Gnosis. Rivista Italiana di Intelligence", giugno 2018, p. 61.

disparaged by the realist assumption that a middle-power with limited regional projection and without consistent human and material resources cannot search for imperial expansion.

- Italian religious *façade*, thanks to the presence of the Holy See and of non-state religious bodies who encourage inter-confessional dialogue, inclusive policies for migrants and a foreign policy of religious commitment. Again, a *caveat* is needed. Christians are still slaughtered by jihadi groups in MENA region, while the common belonging to the “people of the book” doesn’t erase the fact that Rome represents one of the major targets in *Daesh* propaganda.

Having said that, it’s worth concluding that Italy might perhaps save herself through a wise combination of security operations – preventive surveillance, criminal prosecutions and deportations of the most dangerous profiles –, cooperation in all the fields and mutual respect and dialogue with Muslim communities.

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