

Globalization vs. localization : anti-immigrant and hate discourses in Italy

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Globalization vs. Localization: Anti-immigrant and hate discourses in Italy

Introduction

In the context of globalization, national and transnational borders appear to have a new meaning in our times: they seem doubly important when discussion of immigration is concerned, but dismissed when the rhetoric of globalization of a world increasingly connected economically, socially and culturally is at stake. Discussions about globalization have abounded in recent years as many theorists and commentators have tried to make sense of these rapid economic, social, and cultural changes. More importantly an uneasy relationship has developed between the forces of globalization and those of localization. Migration movements and their media coverage have been at the centre of the discussion of an increasingly globalized world. In scholarly circles this movement of people has brought about a critique of the more 'celebratory' definitions of globalization. One can think about Featherstone, Giddens and Robertson who argue in turn that globalization should not be conceived as a homogenizing process (Featherstone, 1990: 2); that globalization-localization is a dialectical process (Giddens, 1990: 64) and that globalization is bringing about a more united world, although Robertson qualifies his statement by suggesting that this does not necessarily mean united in an 'integrated in naive functionalist mode' (Robertson, 1992: 18).

Conversely writers such as Ferguson, Mattelart and Sparks have been especially critical of globalization. Ferguson has described globalization as mythology with attendant problems of meaning, evidence and evaluation: 'Myth, in the context of globalization, is not used here in the sense of an untruth, but rather as a way of classifying certain assumptions about the modern world...[myths] taken together they explain and justify much about the topography of a shifting global political and cultural economy' (1992: 74).

Mattelart's criticism is particularly useful in unravelling some of the contradictions within globalization, and seems especially relevant to the reading of media discourses of 'migration flows': 'The world is a contradictory system made up all at once of interdependencies and interconnections, of schisms, fragmentations, and exclusions. If the new global configurations are marked by the logics of globalization and homogeneity, they also harbor contrary and interfering logics.' (1994: ix)

This 'contrary and interfering logic' is especially visible on the question of borders. The European Union and its members are an important example in this respect: on the one hand we have increasingly 'free-exchange areas' between countries and people which have signed the Schengen agreement¹ and on the other, a restoration of those borders for migrants and refugees. This is where the first major paradox of the

global economy unfolds: market deregulation and an opening to international investments clearly have come to invalidate more and more the role of national governments and the control of national borders. Yet, in terms of immigration controls and representations, the practices and discourses in place are still very much based on the traditional nation-state² even if as in the case of Italy national identity is generally characterized as 'weak'³. In this chapter I want to discuss some of the contradictions and tensions at the heart of the globalization-localization phenomena; in particular I want to look at representations of immigration and immigrants circulating in the Italian media, looking at examples from press and terrestrial national news broadcasts. In doing so, I will concentrate on one main theme which has surfaced regularly: the criminalization of immigrants, with special attention to the representations of hate campaigns against Muslims, one of the major immigrants group over the last six years.

New Political Formations and New Immigrants

Hate campaigns, examples of which will be discussed below, have been normally instigated by relatively new political formations such as the Lega Nord and Forza Italia as well as by more traditional right wing parties, such as Alleanza Nazionale (National Alliance). The latter was renamed from the former Italian Social Movement (MSI -Movimento Sociale Italiano), which in turn was the party born out of the ashes of the Fascist party, following the Second World War. The Northern League (Lega Nord) is a more recent political and cultural phenomenon which began in the 80s and refuelled debates around national identity vs. local and regional identity, debates which have often been at the centre of the history of Italy. It enjoyed high electoral support in the 80s (18%) mainly through its extreme populist politics and language but has since lost much of this support settling at 4-5% nationally.⁴ It has also abandoned its former secessionist claims in favour of a federalist model. Forza Italia was the title adopted by the party established by the media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi when he first entered the electoral political race in 1994, which he subsequently won in coalition with the Lega Nord and Alleanza Nazionale. Berlusconi's Forza Italia, in fact the very name⁵, stands for much of Italian contemporary culture: football, television, entrepreneurial spirit and free-market. Not surprisingly it has also been called a television party: 'Television breaks up the places where democracy is formed, it mixes candidates with porno-stars, comedians with members of parliaments, biscuits adverts with adverts of ideas, the electoral poll card is substituted by the remote control'.⁶ These political parties have often been active protagonists of the development of 'institutionalised racism' that Rusconi has described as the 'depository of democratic ethnocentrism....a soft surrogate of racism' (Rusconi, 1993: 11). Before the general election of 2008, Forza Italia and Alleanza Nazionale formed

a single party called the Popolo della libertà (Pdl). It went on to win the 2008 general election, again headed by Berlusconi, also in coalition with the Lega Nord.

In the last fifteen years, the immigrant population has grown exponentially in Italy⁷, as in other Western European countries. Immigrants in Italy now number at nearly three millions and the largest immigrant community is Romanian, followed by Albanian, Moroccan, Chinese and Ukrainian; these last two communities have grown at a greater pace in the last ten to fifteen years, in 1992 Chinese immigrants were only 15.000 while Ukrainians did not even appear in the first twenties.

Country	Foreign residents
Romania	625,278
Albania	401,949
Morocco	365,908
China	156,519
Ukraine	132,718
Philippine	105,675
Tunisia	93,601
Poland	90,218
Macedonia	78,090
India	77,432
Equador	73,235
Peru	70,755
Egypt	69,572
Moldovia	68,591
Serbia and Montenegro	68,542
Senegal	62,620
Sri Lanka	61,064

Table 1 – **Foreign residents in Italy by country of origins at 1st January 2008**
Source: ISTAT

The largest concentration of immigrants is to be found in Lombardy with over 800.000 residents, followed by Veneto (just over 400.000), Lazio (390.000), Emilia Romagna (365.000), Piedmont (310.000) and Tuscany (275.000). Over half of the total immigration is concentrated in the north, followed by just under a million in the centre and the rest in the south and the islands.⁸ In terms of occupation, the immigrant population is for the largest part employed on a permanent full-time basis (66.4%) and the rest on a part-time basis; a large proportion is employed in the service and tertiary sector (55.1%), mainly in three areas: domestic service, commercial, and catering. The other dominant occupation is concentrated in industry, which in the statistics includes the building industry, respectively at 23.3% and 16.8%. To

note here is how these manual occupations are dominated by immigrants in comparison to occupational statistics available for the Italian population, in spite of the fact that half of the immigrant population has attained tertiary education;⁹ a fact which indicates a highly unequal context of opportunities.

The increase in immigration in recent years in all countries of the European Union has also brought about new legislation on immigration. The most recent legislation passed in Italy is the Amato-Ferrero (April 2007) which has modified the Bossi-Fini, passed by the previous centre-right government, a legislation which had been unable to stop illegal immigration or to channel into a legal set up increasing migration flows. The Amato-Ferrero legislation includes the abolition of detention centres, the CPT (Centri di permanenza temporanea), formerly introduced by the right wing-coalition and the Bossi-Fini legislation. The Amato-Ferrero law is more liberal in its approach to immigration but also claims to be more realistic: in some ways, it adopted the measures and formulas first seen in the 1991 Maastricht Treaty, where discourses of 'reason and tolerance' (e.g. integration of immigrants legally resident in the European Union) were articulated alongside discourses of 'realism' (e.g. tighter controls on clandestine immigration from all member countries, especially from Mediterranean countries) (Cere, 2000: 67).

Sassen (1999) suggested that this kind of draconian legislative measures to stop immigration is not necessarily a new phenomenon as empires in Europe attempted to protect their borders from incomers before, with the distinctive difference that those were truly 'armies pressing at the borders' not metaphoric ones of small groups of individuals; as recently as two hundred years ago there were no frontiers' controls at the border within or around Europe. Therefore much has changed in recent times: firstly, through the construction of a myth about mass migration and secondly, in the way migration is perceived as threat:

Migration flows have always been limited in terms of space, time and numbers...collective fantasies from large sections of the host society evoke images of inundations, flows of immigrants and refugees from all over the world, which seem never ending. But these images do not correspond to contemporary reality as it did not in the past, when borders were not yet controlled (Sassen, 1999: 127).

This dual discourse of protection of and from is intrinsic to the ideology of the European Union and its member states: the EU is caught in the dilemma of retaining its liberal ideology, at the base of which is the concept of assimilation, yet proclaiming itself as a multicultural society. In short, the contextual background in which news discourses about immigrants are embedded is both global and local: it draws from contradictory ideas at the heart of European liberalism and the unresolved question of multiculturalism or assimilation (Modood and Werbner, 1997; Barry, 2001; Habermas, 2006).

The unresolved question about multiculturalism vs. assimilation is also increasingly present in discussion and writings about racism in the media as well as part of news discourses about immigrants, who have increasingly become target of racist discourses.

Work on media and racism (Balbo and Manconi) has brought attention to the way prejudice and racism operates in Italian society and media. The immigrant communities which have moved to Italy in the last twenty years are a central 'new subject' within the Italian background of different regional identities. Immigrants in Italy are often described by an inaccurate word 'extracomunitari' (external to the European community) which immediately defines the Italians as part of Europe and immigrants as 'extra', outsiders and external. In relation to the adoption of this term Balbo and Manconi asked whether the Swiss, the Scandinavians or the Canadians could also be addressed as 'extracomunitari'. Yet Italians use this term only to conote peoples from the East and South of the world (Balbo and Manconi, 1992: 60).

Balbo and Manconi's first study brought some evidence of the racisms/different kinds of racism (described in the plural by the authors) which were beginning to circulate in parts of Italian society. These racisms were studied and described as part of the 'white-centred' model present throughout western countries and in particular European ones. This model constructs a well-known process based on 'the hierarchies of periphery and centre, western culture and 'other' cultures, us and them' (Balbo and Manconi, 1990: 11). They argue that these discourses then sediment slowly within everyday life and become part of a potential discursive racist imaginary, what they term: 'i razzismi possibili' (latent racisms). Their second study, written two years after 'I razzismi possibili', entitled 'I razzismi reali' (Balbo and Manconi, 1992) examines how Italian society, which has often considered itself hostile to openly racist ideologies, has in fact changed dramatically and this is particularly visible in the discourses of political formations of recent years mentioned earlier on, such as the Lega Nord and Forza Italia (now Partito della libertà). Something that will become apparent in the next section where I am going to focus on one of the central theme mentioned in the introduction which is regularly covered and discussed in the Italian news media: the criminalization of immigrants and the emphasis on the strife between immigrant communities, law enforcement agencies, the Italian population and Islamophobic representations of Muslim immigrants.

The criminalization of immigration in the media

Although the news agenda in relation to immigration is still largely dictated by national-based events, the case of Italy (with the ongoing movement of people from parts of Africa, especially from Morocco and Senegal, and their often fateful attempt to reach the coast of Italy, principally Lampedusa and Sicily) indicates that global criminal gangs are now increasingly part of European immigration movements: 'The

creation of an impregnable outer border has given new scope for criminal fraternities like the mafia to add the traffic in human cargo to their traffic in drugs'.¹⁰ This has also resulted in the coupling of immigrants with criminal activities and a conflation between 'ethnic gangs' and 'ethnic victims'.¹¹

The romanticism often attached to earlier immigration movements, especially at the turn of the 19th century (often captured in photography and early documentaries) has now been replaced by the notion that immigration is not solely about deserting poverty and seeking a better life. This transformed view of immigration results in ambivalent representations of immigration: either to be 'tolerated' if economically useful or to be stopped and combated, both literally and legislatively if it is not. This transformation in how immigrants are viewed and represented has brought about increasingly tight border controls, which in turn has resulted in the increase of criminal activities around immigration movements and a consequent criminalization of immigrants themselves. This process has changed their status from people in search of a way out of poverty to people in search of a way out of poverty for equivocal purposes. In Italy these kinds of views are promoted regularly by the Lega Nord and the newly formed Popolo della libertà especially through their daily newspapers, respectively *La Padania* and *Il Giornale*.¹² Other media owned by the Lega Nord, the television station *Telepadania* and the radio station *Radio Padania Libera* also contribute further to the ongoing negative discourses about immigrants. These in turn, create a climate of intolerance and harassment. An example of this kind of intolerance is evident in the clashes between the Chinese community and the municipal police in Milan (Thursday 12 April 2007), sparked off by the maltreatment of traffic wardens towards Chinese shop owners using trolleys to deliver goods during daytime. The Chinese business community has argued that restrictions have been applied exclusively in the area where they operate and not in other business areas of Milan, thus accusing the police of discrimination. A particular violent altercation between a traffic warden and a Chinese woman sparked off tensions and protest ensued. The protest in Milan provided some of the conservative media with a pretext to criminalize the Chinese community, and many more themes other than the more specific one about the incident in Milan surfaced as a result. Arguments ranged from rules not being followed to a perceived lack of commitment to the host community. In an article from *Il Giornale* entitled 'L'autoisolamento di una comunità' (The self-isolation of a community)¹³ an argument is made about absolute 'cultural difference' alongside a provocative coupling of Chinese and Muslim culture: 'Chinese and Muslims, although so different, have in common a sense of superiority. For Muslim, the Koran guarantees them that they are the best nation in history. Among the Chinese there is a belief that the word 'culture' is only meaningful if applied to Chinese culture'.

Emphasis on 'cultural difference' brings to the fore issues which have been core to the ideology of exclusion, often converging on notions of legality and illegality. The anti-spitting legislation introduced in Prato (Tuscany), where the largest

Chinese community resides¹⁴ is another example of this and is clearly rooted in what Sibley called 'spatial purification' (quoted in Gabriel, 1998: 97). This concept justifies the basis of white fears about territory and identity and about 'defilement and pollution'. For Gabriel it is also important not to underestimate how such fears 'work at a number of levels, including the personal or local, national and the global' (1998: 98). The Chinese community has argued that it is exclusively and solicitously asked to follow rules which are not imposed on Italians in the same way, and that this is tantamount to racist practices.

The worst criminalization discourse has undoubtedly been addressed towards the Roma groups. Roma have always being singled out as 'objects of prejudice, hostility and persecution' (Gatti et al, 1997:114). If stereotypes about the Chinese in the West often revolve around them being entrepreneurial and very successful in their business (Cohen, 1997), the opposite is true of the Roma. The latter, like the Muslim immigrants discussed below are undoubtedly the groups of migrants most caught up in the negative dynamics produced by the forces of globalization and localization. Roma and Muslims are very rarely mentioned in the mainstream conservative media except in connection with negative events and crime.

Islamophobia and the media in Italy

Muslim communities have diversified in recent years with the Moroccan community still the largest group. There are however many other Muslim nationalities resident in Italy; in numerical order, Albanians, Tunisians, Senegalese, Egyptians, Algerians, Somalis, Pakistani and Bangladeshi (Cesareo, 2006). Their occupational data is very similar to that of other immigrant groups. Muslim immigrants are now a third of the total immigration population in Italy, and they have become increasingly targets of political right-wing graffiti. Political graffiti on public walls have always being part of Italian culture; this 'tradition' has often combined the irreverence of radical politics with a poignant ideological message. These have been used widely by the left in the 60s and 70s as well as by the extreme right. Some Lega Nord's members have adopted graffiti (although clearly not an official policy) right from the beginning of the party's formation. Touring Northern Italy it is impossible not to come across graffiti in support of the Lega Nord and their slogans about 'Padania libera'. These kinds of sub-cultural activities are in recent years increasingly addressed towards immigrants and their places of worship. Recent anti-Islamic graffiti have appeared near a building which doubles as mosque in Milan's Viale Jenner.¹⁵ This mosque and the incorporated institute of Islamic Studies have been at the centre of attention for considerable time as suspicion has spread about its alleged terrorist activities. As the example below of 'Anno Zero' highlights, little proof has emerged about these so-called terrorist activities, and to date only one individual has been successfully prosecuted.¹⁶

Prejudice and stereotyping have reached new proportions in the constant association between Islam and terrorism and the consequent criminalization of Muslim. Immigrants from Muslim countries, or mixed faith countries (Kurdish people from Iraq and Turkey, Northern and Sub-Saharan Africans, especially Senegal, Eritrea, Somalia and in recent times more frequently from Asia, especially Bangladesh) make up the largest immigrant group in Italy. These communities are often in the news due to anti-Islamic feelings constantly been whipped up by the Lega Nord and other centre-right forces alongside sections of the Catholic Church. The phenomenon of the 'War on Terror' led by the United States has undoubtedly compounded the problem. Issues covered often revolve around the building of new mosques and activities in mosques, what may appear to be 'non-events' in news and informational culture. The opposition to mosque building is an ongoing trope in Italy as mosques are increasingly seen as terrorist centres rather than places of worship. Over the years research has shown that in Italy as elsewhere much news coverage has centred on 'fears of mosques', 'Islamic invasions' and 'threats to civilization' (Cere, 2002; Macdonald, 2003; Triandafyllidou, 2006).

Television News, the Catholic Church and Islamophobia

One important case of this kind of reporting was in 2000 (well before 9/11) for the building of a mosque in Lodi.¹⁷ The news item selected by the public service channel RAI1 at this time is very significant for the understanding of new alliances being forged between conservative Catholicism and new right-wing xenophobic movements such as the Lega Nord. Paradoxically the Lega Nord, at least in its earlier history declared itself to be an anti-clerical party, and many of the earlier campaigns not only were they directed against the power of Rome in the state sense but also against the power of the Vatican.

The news item in question concerned a statement made by Cardinal Giacomo Biffi about Muslims and how they are not 'part of our humanity': 'Muslims are strangers to our humanity. Catholicism remains our historic religion and we need to worry about our national identity'. This public statement was covered in some details by the national public service news broadcast, Tg1, on their main evening news at 8pm.¹⁸ The selection of the story was undoubtedly linked to the news event about the building of a mosque in Lodi which was happening concurrently and which was fiercely opposed by the Lega Nord, although that was never stated directly in the news item itself (Rai 1, Tg1, 30.09.00). The structure of the news item appears to be 'balanced': it is framed in such a way that we are provided in turns via indirect interviews with the views of Cardinal Giacomo Biffi, the views of the leader of the Muslim Community and at the end of the news item with a different view from the Catholic camp. Nonetheless, the role of the journalist/reporter is never critical; rather he acts as a 'paraphraser' of the Catholic views. The contextual background of this

news about Muslim immigrant communities in Italy is interwoven with nationalism, Europeanism, theologocentrism, ethnocentrism, and at no point throughout the item does the journalist attempt to unravel some of the contradictions. Biffi's statement to TG1 is extremely problematic in suggesting that there is a vast difference between Muslims and the rest of humanity, as well as in its assumption that Catholicism is the state religion. It is the contradiction at the heart of Biffi's statement which is commented on by Hamza Piccardo, the leader of the Muslim Community in Italy. His emphasis is particularly in relation to the Italian Constitution which states that people are free to practice different religions, and Catholicism, although the majority religion cannot be equated with being a state religion. This statement is worth quoting in full:

Truly this refuelling of the controversy with Cardinal Biffi as its protagonist does surprise me. The Cardinal seems to forget some important things, firstly that Italy is a secular state, secondly that Italy is not only made up of Catholics but also of Jews, Protestants and now of Muslims; the fact remains that our community has full rights to live in this country and experience the best relations of communal life and reciprocal respect with all the other communities. Biffi's insistence on our inability to fit in, to homogenize with Italian society, I think represents a huge problem on the part of certain sections of the Catholic Church. (Tg1, 30 September 2000).

In terms of the item's 'apparent' objectivity what is very important is the final interview of the news item with another member of the Catholic Church, Vinicio Albanesi, religious leader of Capodarco Community,¹⁹ not a conservative but an ecumenical representative this time, which nonetheless seems even more ideologically problematic, in its historical reference to the crusades: 'I think Cardinal Biffi articulates fears we all have, but we have an evangelical rule which tells us to welcome rather than discriminate. The Church has had many challenges, in the year thousand, and today has a challenge from new populations, maybe we can resort to Jesus' evangelical words which tell us to have courage and not fear'. The reference to 'fears we all have' is extremely problematic in its assumption that these fears exist in the first place and are at the same time collective fears. Very little evidence is presented about these presumed fears. This kind of discourse is a good example of anti-Islamic views receiving airtime on the main Italian public service channel. A recent controversy surrounding the comments made by the new pope Benedict XVI on Islam at the University of Regensburg has compounded this view about Islam as a religion to be feared (for a full critical discussion of the Pope's speech see Coury, 2008).

Lega Nord and Popolo della libertà against Islam

In fact, discussions of anti-Islamic views recur regularly in the news; one was particularly well known at the European and international levels as it involved former

Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi on a trip to Berlin on 26 September 2001 when he publicly claimed that western culture was superior to Islamic culture: 'We should be conscious of the superiority of our civilisation, which consists of a value system that has given people widespread prosperity in those countries that embraced it and guarantees respect for human rights and religion...this respect certainly does not exist in the Islamic countries.'²⁰ Other discourses have ranged from calls to close mosques mentioned above, to extreme suggestions always by Lega Nord politicians to bar Muslims from entering the country.²¹ What is important to consider about many of these news events and respective representations is that they are not unconnected single incidents but a clear example of how ideas continue to circulate in the west and in this case in Italy about 'the clash of civilisations'. Berlusconi used the term 'clash of culture', adapted from Huntington's original phrase (Huntington, 1996), a thesis which provided Americans with a new explanation on 'the new phase' of international politics' and which Said described as the 'Clashes of Ignorance'.²² After news of this kind, a host of claims and counter-claims are set in motion, but there is little analysis of the specific context in which such racist views originated, a context which in Italy is linked to fears about religious identity especially from the Catholic quarter. As Eco has argued, it would not even be of much importance if these views were not based on 'lengthy and passionate articles, which have legitimated them'.²³ Many published in the mainstream Italian press as well as in more specialised publications such as the *Quaderni Padani*.²⁴

When councillors from the former Forza Italia and Alleanza Nazionale called on the closure of two mosques in the centre of Naples because, according to them, 'mosques in the centre of Naples are a public danger' and 'people are frightened, there are too many Muslims around here',²⁵ they are calling on centuries-old prejudices, but also prejudices which have global resonance in contemporary times. More problematically these assertions are claimed to be made in good faith and in 'trying to avoid any clashes between the two communities' (the Muslim and Neapolitan), which in fact have been coexisting quite peacefully for centuries (Salierno, 2001). As a way of 'reparation' to Muslims, these publically elected officials suggest moving the mosques to the countryside ('meglio creare nuovi luoghi di culto in provincia'), where according to them, there is less tension and less possibility of conflict. These anti-Islamic views which echo others around Europe based on the same notion of the mosque as 'troubled space' where 'images of men at prayer in the mosque, together with shots of its external architecture, constitute one of the most frequently iterated visual tropes of Muslim separatism, matched in audio form by the repeated 'call to prayer' (adhan) (Macdonald, 2009). Another frequent anti-Islamic view, which was first aired on the Lega Nord's own television station, Telepadania and subsequently on TeleLombardia (a regional television station) was that Muslims should be denied entry into countries of the European Community. Speroni, a Lega Nord's Member of the European Parliament, then proceeded to circulate and expose his racist idea at a meeting of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, and in addition added what could

appear as a 'folkloric and spectacular' element (Lega Nord members are much inclined to these kind of excesses) but is in fact a degrading parallel; he suggested that we should treat Muslims the way we have treated the 'Fiorentina': 'The European Community has decided that we cannot eat 'Fiorentina' (a thick steak on the bone of cows from the Chiana area banned by the European Union during the BSE crisis), not because it tastes awful or because it is harmful, but because there is a danger. In the same way we should behave with Muslims'. This particular news item was picked on by different countries' news media and represented as a folkloric feature of Italian politics rather than as a more serious suggestion that Muslim people should be barred from entering Europe, simply on the basis of their religious identity. Even more dubious is the final part of Speroni's argument, again picked on by the news media in the same way, which states that 'Muslims' already in Italy (and Europe) who are good and well behaved ('buoni e bravi') can stay, emphasising the other racist development described by Taguieff (1994) as 'tolerant racism'. In his book on prejudice and racism Taguieff explains that xenophobia, of the kind practiced by the Lega Nord, is a form of latent racism and it never manifests itself directly, either in the rejection of one particular group, or stranger or immigrant, but it operates by creating a myth about identity with an obsession about hybridity ('mixofobia') alongside the construction of a hierarchy of the groups rejected (Taguieff, 1994: 426). The above mentioned discourses are of course symptomatic of the direction the Lega Nord has taken over the years, further and further into right-wing racist and xenophobic ideology, to encompass not just Southern Italian people, their original hate target, but all immigrants, and now especially Roma and Muslims, thus confirming Taguieff's explanation of the hierarchical ordering of xenophobic discourses.

Television and Islamic Terrorism

More recent discourses analysed in the Italian news have concentrated increasingly on Muslims and terrorism activities. 'Anno Zero',²⁶ a current affair program on public service television channel RAI 2, dedicated one of its episodes to domestic violence against women within Muslim communities in Turin; however, alongside it also introduced the topic of presumed Jihadist activities in a Turin mosque. Although this program is generally considered a serious attempt to report on events in Italy, in this particular instance there was a clear 'sensationalist' approach to the topic partly due to lack of evidence about the Jihadist activities. The only evidence about these subversive activities was based on the finding of some pamphlets and magazines perceived to belong to Al Qaeda. In addition all the guests invited although more qualified to comment on the section on violence against women, were not in any way qualified to comment on the second part about Islamist extremism. The guests were writer Veronica De Laurentis, Fehrat Wael, president of the Islamic Community in the province of Venice, Khalid Choucki, member of the youth section of the advisory

body on Islam, Marco Pinti, member of the youth section of Lega Nord, Samira (no surname provided), a young Muslim woman of Moroccan origins who has suffered domestic violence and whose son was abducted by her husband; other guests included the parliamentary political representatives Katia Belillo from the Italian Communist Party (Comunisti italiani) and Carolina Lussana of the Lega Nord. The choice of guests seems also somewhat problematic, as there are a disproportionate number of guests from the Lega Nord, given their very small political constituency, in comparison with other Italian political forces. To insert a badly researched news report about Islamic extremism alongside a programme dedicated to violence on women in the Islamic community, apart from the direct association which it conjures up, it also shows a polemical and sensationalist approach to journalism.

These kinds of unfounded information instigate a climate of fear and fuel further tension between immigrant communities and what has been described by Younis Tawfik (a Muslim writer and university lecturer resident in Italy), president of the cultural centre Al Hikma, in an interview by Cassarà of L'Unità, as 'la caccia al musulmano' (the hunt for Muslims). In this interview Tawfik has also pointed out that there is no such thing as a journal for Al Qaeda (discussed in the programme); what does however exist is a website in Iraq from which some of the material found at the mosque may have been downloaded. Tawfik's final comment was especially critical of the presentation of the news item; this was constructed as an exclusive journalistic document about the propaganda distributed by the Islamic Jihad in a mosque of the city of Turin while in fact it was a poorly researched and executed journalistic piece (L'Unità, 1 April 2007). This programme, although having much of value in terms of the main investigation, was nonetheless problematic in his coupling of violence against women in the Muslim world with Jihadist activities; it was also a clear example of negative stereotypes being reinforced by the media, and which are today part of both a local-global circulation of ideas about Muslims and Muslim culture.

Conclusion

Many of the themes which surfaced above take us back to questions of 'assimilation' vs. 'multiculturalism' and the problems associated with it which Taguieff defined as 'the substitution of the much discredited racial superiority with the acceptable version of difference between traditions' (Taguieff, 1994: 423). Although for Taguieff this is just as problematic, as he sees differentialism as a new clandestine racism, he nonetheless asserts that western tradition is nonetheless seen as superior. News about immigrants are often covered either in the context of 'spectacular news', such as those above instigated by extremist utterances by members of the Vatican hierarchy or by the former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi or of 'deviant' activities such as the graffiti by supporters of the Lega Nord: extremist views seem very palatable to

the news machinery world over, and Italy is no exception. Positive news about immigrants is still rare in the news media, with some notable exceptions as the corrective article about Anno Zero published by L'Unità mentioned above exemplify.²⁷

When it comes to Islam, the 'classical' polarisation of orient vs. occident, Islam vs. Christianity is much in evidence, a polarisation discussed at length by Said (1991) in his book *Orientalism* and subsequently in *Covering Islam*: 'Insofar as Islam has always been seen as belonging to the Orient, its particular faith within the general structure of Orientalism has been to be looked at first of all as if it were one monolithic thing, and then with a very special hostility and fear' (1997: 4). Said does not think Orientalism and the sentiments of hostility and fear are as severe today as in the 'Middle Ages and the early Renaissance, when in Europe Islam was believed to be a demonic religion of apostasy, blasphemy and obscurity' (1997: 5), nonetheless many uncritical news media pronouncements evoke similar judgements towards Muslims today. These are reinforced by political forces such as the Lega Nord, which harps back to an earlier anti-Islamic culture (that of the Crusades for example). Muslim culture as a whole is in turn seen as a threat to Italian national identity and to Italian customs, with the inevitable conflation of Catholic identity with Italian identity. This is much in evidence in the word of Cardinal Giacomo Biffi discussed above: 'Catholicism remains our historic Italian religion and we have to worry about safeguarding our national identity' (Tg1, 30 September 2000). This conflation is especially problematic in relation to immigrants' rights as citizens and its particular role in forging alliances between conservative forces within Italian society, and the contradictions which surface as a result. After all the Lega Nord is promoting a northern regional identity which stands in opposition to the Italian nation-state identity and certainly in opposition to global or cosmopolitan identity formation.

Rodinson argued when he wrote about nineteenth century imperialism and attitudes to Islam that: 'The campaign against Islam became as fierce as ever, fortified as before with arguments dating back to the Middle Ages, but with modern embellishments' (Rodinson, 1981: 66). In Italian terms it reintroduces the old problem of whether the Italian state is a truly secular state, whether the media are in fact still the same 'Christian videocracy' as it was first defined in a 1970s study²⁸ and whether a multicultural society, with all the distinctions that the concept entails, is actually in existence in Italy: 'If similarities and assimilations are often valuable by and for themselves, and if one must be careful not to exalt the role of diversity and differentiation, one must nevertheless recognize the reality of differences' (Taguieff, 2001: 308-9).

Since September 11 we can detect two different and antithetical positions in the media in Italy: on the one hand, more caution in reporting negative views of Islamic cultures and, on the other, an exacerbation of the racist essentialism seen above. In the intensive global circulation of news some sections of society and the media are cautious about promoting and representing Muslim immigrant groups as anti-modern while centre-right political forces, parts of the press and an uncritical televisual me-

dia have already laid the ‘ground’ for further prejudiced views against immigrants. Thus migrants become both ‘victims of globalism’ as well as ‘nationalism’ (Jordan, 2003:60) and are increasingly caught in the tension between local-national and global interests.

1. Britain is the only country which has not signed the agreement.
2. Saskia Sassen, *Migranti, coloni, rifugiati. Dall'emigrazione di massa alla fortezza Europa* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1999), 16-17, my translation.
3. What Ginsborg has called ‘nazionalizzazione debole’ (weak nationalization) in Paul Ginsborg, ed. *Stato dell'Italia* (Milano: Mondadori, il Saggiatore, 1994), 643-4.
4. In 2006 national elections the Lega overall vote was 4.6%. *The Economist*, 30 July 2007.
5. Forza Italia is the slogan used in football grounds when the national team is playing. It means Go on Italy.
6. G Corsini, “Non pronunciare invano il nome degli USA. Antidoti americani alla telecrazia”, *Il Manifesto*, 27 febbraio 1994 (my translation).
7. Vincenzo Cesareo, ed. *The Eleventh Italian Report on Migration 2005* (Monza: Polimetria International Scientific Publisher, 2006).
8. For more detailed statistics as at 1 January 2008 see Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, *La presenza straniera in Italia: caratteristiche socio-demografiche* (National Statistics Institute, *The Immigrant presence in Italy: socio-demographic characteristics*), <http://demo.istat.it/altridati/ri/bilstra/>, accessed 12 April 2009.
9. Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, *La partecipazione al mercato del lavoro della popolazione straniera* (Employment in the immigrant population), I-IV trimestre 2008, http://www.istat.it/salastampa/comunicati/in_calendario/forzelav/20090320_00/, accessed 15 April 2009.
10. Liz Fekete and Frances Webber, “The human trade,” *Race and Class* 39, no.1 (July-September 1997): 67.
11. Fekete and Webber, “The human trade”: 72.
12. *Il Giornale* is owned by Silvio Berlusconi.
13. *Il Giornale*, 14 April 2007.
14. Anonymous, “Prato, quei laboriosi rivali. Dialogo e lamenti. Gi imprenditori: ‘Non rispettano le regole’”. *L'Unità*, 14 April 2007.
15. The Milan Council, run by Il popolo della libertà and Lega Nord has yet to grant permission to build a mosque.
16. Many myths circulate about Abu Omar as he resided at the centre for a short time, before he disappeared under mysterious circumstances. Abu Omar is an Egyptian Imam who had sought political asylum in Italy. He was kidnapped in 2003 by covert CIA agents with the help of the Italian security services.
17. Lodi is geographically is very close to Milan and at the heart of Lombardy, which along with Veneto and Piedmont is one of the richest regions in Italy with its strong ideology of industriousness, hard work, etc. normally posited against southerners (Italians and immigrants).
18. To date Tg1 (Telegiornale) has still the largest audience of all news provision in Italy.

19. The Capodarco Community is a religious voluntary organisation established to help people with disabilities with employment and social integration, <http://www.comunitadicapodarco.it/>, accessed 22 February 2008.

20. G Luzi, "Berlusconi a consulto da Prodi 'Niente scontri tra due civiltà'", *la Repubblica*, 11 October 2001; Scorn poured on Berlusconi views, *The Guardian*, 28.09.01.

21. G Passalacqua, "La crociata di Speroni 'Via tutti i musulmani'", *La Repubblica*, 17 October 2001; also "Tutti contro Speroni 'No alle frontiere chiuse'", *La Repubblica*, 16 October 2001.

22. E Said, "Lo scontro delle ignoranze", *La Repubblica*, 1 November 2001.

23. U Eco, "Le guerre sante. Passione e ragione", *La Repubblica*, 5 October 2001.

24. The Quaderni Padani is the 'academic' journal of the Lega Nord.

25. P Russo, "Guerra santa del Polo 'Chiudere la Moschea'", *La Repubblica*, 12 October 2001.

26. 'Anno Zero' is a current affairs program broadcast on the second public service channel Rai2 every Thursday at 9pm. It is led by a longstanding journalist/talk show host Michele Santoro. It began broadcasting in 2006 and the very first program on the 14th of September discussed the issue of immigration in Milan. 'Anno Zero' is generally considered a serious and critical political program.

27. *L'Unità* is the daily founded by Antonio Gramsci and aligned today to the Democratic Party.

28. *A Bianco* (1974) *La Videocrazia Cristiana*. Rai-Tv, cosa, chi, come. Rimini, Guaraldi. A term widely used in Italy, in the past it used to refer to the political control of the Christian Democratic Party over the public service broadcaster RAI (Radiotelevisione italiana).

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