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Living in Italy in an Anti-Immigrant Scenario: New Challenges for Muslim Second Generations

Roberta Ricucci

Abstract

Analysing whether and how the transition from the first to the second generation transforms adherence to Islam in Italy, a Catholic country which is undergoing a lively immigration and Muslim-welcoming debate, is extremely interesting. The growing presence of Muslims in Italy stresses relations with 'diversity', especially in those areas where the incidence of migrants coming from Maghreb is higher and where there is an Arabic presence visible through ethnic shops, women wearing the *chador* and men wearing long robes. In these areas, the issues of control and safety have been on the agenda for many years. On the other hand, according to Muslim organizations there is a common interest in presenting a 'moderate Islam'. There is a specific will and interest of the youngest Muslim generations to demonstrate their propensity to promote integration, using both old (debates, meetings, etc.) and new (websites, blog, etc.) policy tools.

Keywords: immigration, religion, Italy, Islam, youth

1. Introduction

Assorted research [31, 48] has discredited the idea of the effectiveness of national models of integration and their unchangeableness at local level [10, 44, 46], so that attention has shifted towards territorial scenarios where scholars are attempting to understand in depth the dynamics which spring up among natives, migrants and second generations. Literature on the great models into which various ways of incorporating immigrants were subdivided (from assimilationism to multiculturalism, from Gastarbeiter to differentialism) puts us on our guard, however, against the illusion that national policies no longer play an important role in intervening on the insertion paths of non-autochthonous citizens [4]. At the same time, it warns us not to ignore (as sometimes happened in the past) the influence of the local context and everyday dynamics 'triggered by diversity in the management of daily life'.¹ The game of inclusion and social cohesion (of

¹ In this context management of immigration in Italy offers various examples of how national norms become declined differently at local level.

which religion is an important theme) is really played out on the field of integration policies at local level, including relations with Muslims, old and young, first and second generations. Obviously, cities and neighbourhoods differ as to the composition of the immigrant population, its socio-demographic characteristics, initiatives and opportunities available to them, and also as to modalities of relations with the general citizenry and consequent social-cohesion processes [2]. In other words, they differ as to the so-called 'local integration policies' [9]. Among these strategies, there are those pertaining to the management of religious difference, which—albeit in a multi-religious environment²—Concerns only our relations between cities and the Muslim presence [11, 12]. Among immigrants, religiosity is alive, as is evidenced by the existence of mosques, churches and prayer halls. Of course, these are not only places of worship but are also welcoming centres offering a kind of social-support system both for new arrivals and for irregular immigrants [37]. On the other hand, migrants feel at their ease in places of worship—there they find clergymen speaking their native language, sharing (or at least understanding) their cultural and ethnic background, aware of the difficulties of the meeting/clash between familiar ways of life and those expected by the host society.

If this is the situation for the first generation of immigrants, what happens with the second? Are they following the secularization process spreading among youth in Europe? Are they religious in the same way as their parents or are they embracing the European 'lay' way?

Research and studies have focussed on the growing presence of Muslims [7, 16, 33], through observations and insights carried out from different perspectives: religious beliefs and practices, hope for a certain type of society (secular versus Islamic), definition of identity (religious, Italian and cosmopolitan), orientation regarding the education of children and intermarriage and requests made to educational institutions (recognition of holidays and religious teaching in school). In addition, attention to the religious variable has often been correlated with that dedicated to labour issues (Are the Muslims discriminated against in the labour market, compared to other religious affiliations?), school (Does the increasing number of Muslim students give rise to claims against secularization and changes in education?), urban schedules and spaces, with specific requests regarding nutrition, places of worship and areas for the burial of the dead [36, 47, 49].

To some extent, the local dimension has been overlooked in that it means, on the one hand, that local policies intervene in managing Muslim communities' daily lives and, on the other, that it is the arrival on the scene of the second generation that modifies (strengthening or weakening, modifying or erasing) their fathers' and mothers' recognition demands which had sometimes provoked a public reaction on the part of the citizenry. Here we shall try to view these two aspects through the experience of the city of Turin³ which—in virtue of its history of immigration,

² In Italy, Christians constitute 56% of immigrants, Muslims 32% and oriental religions 7%. In order to define how many Muslims (and also Orthodox, Hindus, Buddhists, etc.) there are among immigrants, the method used consists of projecting the religious beliefs of their countries of origin onto those immigrants. In practice, we suppose that the religious composition of foreign communities is similar to that in their countries of origin. We do not take into consideration how religious behaviour might change over the course of time or how religiousness during migration can change, growing weaker or stronger [29].

³ Turin has increasingly experienced four various migration waves with differing thrusts and motivations. The first wave started in the early 1970s and included students, mainly from the Middle East, Senegal and Nigeria, and political refugees and opposition members from South America (Chile and Argentina), Eritrea and Somalia. The second wave, also in the 1970s, was composed mainly of domestic workers: initially Somali and Eritrean women, then Filipino and Cape Verdean nationals. The third wave occurred in

the volume of its Muslim population and policies for managing immigration—qualifies as a privileged observatory for seeing how the management of Islam takes place at local level.⁴ There are two elements which give pause for reflection. The first is that Turin is one of the few Italian contexts containing a mature Muslim community with children and adults, old and young, neo-Italians and converts [24, 34, 35]. Within the city's Muslim universe, the Moroccan (first-arrived and most numerous) and Egyptian collectives are examples of 'complete migratory cycles' [13]. The second is that the (negative) effects of the economic crisis are reverberating on the social fabric, bringing back to the fore tensions and unresolved knots driving from intercultural as well as interreligious cohabitation, two elements which may affect dynamics between local policies and managing Islam.

2. Exploring the landscape of discussions on Muslims in the country

On the national level, it is easy to observe the problems and internal tensions of the various souls of Italian Islam and political deadlock when faced with an issue touching the exposed nerve of identity. On the local level, however, specific requests forwarded by Muslim communities are weighed and debated, becoming the object of policies and administrative interventions.

Comparison between the central level, which issues general guidelines, produces fact-finding documents and develops advisory bodies, on the one hand, and, on the other, the local plane which intervenes, becomes part of the broad dialectic governing the integration process as a whole in Italy—of which religious integration is one of the thorniest issues. The local level is thus the privileged observatory from which to view how governing Islam is proceeding and whether/how it is modified in the passage from the first generation of immigrants to the second. It is at local level that one can analyse the specific recognition requests that Muslims address to public institutions in order to safeguard the culture they belong to and their life practices [50]. And it is at local level that young people start to become leaders of the life of mosques, make suggestions and measure themselves against the adults of their communities with regard to the management of Islam in a setting where they are a minority religion.

the period between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s: Turin witnessed a surge in the number of Moroccans and other Africans, Asians (Chinese and Filipinos) and Latin Americans (Peruvians). The last wave concerned Eastern Europe: Albanians first, then Romanians and others. Some of the main characteristics of the current immigrant population are as follows: high rate of families with plans to remain; high rate of pupils from migratory backgrounds attending school and increasing participation in the labour market, both as employers and employees. With regard to religion, Islam represented the main religious affiliation among immigrants until 2003: since that year, the increasing arrivals from Eastern Europe have gradually changed the religious scenario. Even if Muslims now represent the second largest religious group among immigrants, they continue to attract the attention of the media and Italians in general.

⁴ These issues will be discussed using 40 interviews with young people involved in ethnic and/or religious activities and belonging to Islam living in various Italian cities, carried out in 2016, divided equally by sex. The analysis will also be enriched by considering stakeholders' points of view and 5 Muslim associations' representatives. Respondents were reassured about the confidentiality of information and the ethical uses of the collected interviews. In the interview quotations, they are recalled in the following way: sex (F = Female; M = Male), age and citizenship.

There are three knotty problems in the debate:

1. Representation: As Ronchi reminds us, ‘The state and public authorities should be able to “relate to” one or more interlocutors who represent and reveal needs—primarily cultural—of their members’ [40]. In other words, it is essential to understand ‘who represents whom’. Grasping the real significance of religion-inspired associations, and their bond with the whole community of the faithful, is no trivial matter—especially locally, where negotiations take place in a climate of increasing competition among civil-society organizations for ever-diminishing public resources. Numerousness, historical presence, diffusion throughout the socio-economic fabric of various contexts, active participation in cultural and charitable initiatives promoted by institutions and associations, all contribute to giving a hearing to Muslim demands, even in the absence of formal representation, to the extent that they are not Italian. This, however, is only one side of the coin. The other concerns informal means of representation, translated into encouraging organizational systems which are closer to the public: from neighbourhood round-table debates to gathering in the communities’ meeting-places, from bringing together natives and immigrants to relations with ‘stakeholders’ [42]. It is not easy to identify these last. Are they to be found in places of worship? What kind of relations do they develop with ethnic-national associationism? And what is the role of other meeting-places, important for first generations, such as butchers’ shops, other shops and ethnic Premises? In this scenario, do cultural mediators play a privileged part because of their special position, often within institutions, relating to Italian operators and citizens while, at the same time, being capable of noticing the facets and cultural-identity implications of requests forwarded by Islamic communities? These questions condition actors in the local context, influencing the attitudes of citizens and administration policies.
2. Freedom of religion: Guaranteeing the right to practise one’s own religion is an apparently simple matter, seeing that it is inscribed in Articles 8 and 19 of the Italian Constitution. In practice, the rhetoric of those opposing the presence of Muslims in Italy stresses two reasons why such freedom should be denied to followers of Allah. The first has to do with the lack of reciprocity: since it is not permitted to open non-Muslim places of worship in Islamic states, why should Muslims in Italy be granted such a right? The second concerns safeguarding public order, so that “as much religious freedom as is compatible with the needs of maintaining order and safety” [18] should be allowed. The debate is wide open and belongs to the realm of jurists.⁵ Here, it would be interesting to show the social implications of these considerations. Both form part of arguments that are used by citizens’ committees, political exponents and parties in reaction to both free profession of faith and request made to practise their religion in public (it is sufficient to recall the polemic over granting spaces suitable for the feast of the end of Rhamadan). In these group’s perspectives, freedom of religion becomes entwined with the country’s Catholic identity—an identity which Muslims would call into question—so it should be limited and a public referendum held on the construction of places of worship [1, 26].
3. ‘Immigrant’ places of worship: it is proving hard to lose the label. The connection is clear for first generations, which bore it in mind while it influenced their recognition requests. For the second generations born and living in Italy, the

⁵ In order to study this theme in more depth, see [5, 14, 20].

matter becomes a paradox: although they are not migrants themselves, they are considered (and sometimes treated) as such. The Muslim-foreigner binomial leads public debate to specific topics (e.g., concession of cemetery spaces) of the wider immigration discussion: employment competition, welfare forecasts, socio-assistential guarantees. In other words, there is a cognitive postponement which revives the position of those who wish to defend strenuously Italy's identity as monolithic and to be taken for granted once and for all and who, above all, consider Muslims as unwelcome guests who should be sent home [21]. These aspects, which in some cities concerned only certain neighbourhoods, have in other places become important to the political programmes of mayors and parties active at local level, uniting with the aforementioned themes of reciprocity and safety [43]. Quoting Mazzola again: 'The mayor and city council could be negatively influenced by those who, on the ground, are not favourably disposed towards public manifestations of a religious nature, particularly those held by certain religious minorities' [32]. This discourse recalls communes where islamophobic entrepreneurship-politics gave rise to ordinances hostile to the Muslim population [27, 41]. Specifically, attention focussed on places of prayer: indeed, the thermometer of irreconcilability between Italian society and Islam reaches its highest point, according to some, when it comes to discussing the building of a mosque. The mechanism of N.I.M.B.Y. reaction⁶ is again under the spotlight in Milan, where debate about building a mosque for EXPO2015 drew attention to the Islam-city relationship [8]. This is nothing new for Lombardy's capital city which, together with Piedmont's (Turin), finds that a conspicuous part of the resident foreign population can be labelled (at least as far as country of origin goes) as Muslims. But compared with the 2011 debate and subsequent polemics, the clash in these first months of 2014 sees a passion on the part of the young generations—girls in particular—which has never been experienced before.

Are we witnessing a generational shift? A changing of the guard in the Islamic community, at least on a local level? Even if it too early to detect signs of what would be a Copernican revolution, there is no doubt that young children of immigration bound to Islam are moving centre-stage [23]. It is one possible result in the context of processes triggered when the children of immigration grow up: from this point of view too, Italy is following a path already familiar to other European countries with a less recent immigration history [15]. Even if Frisina, in 2008, revealed a cautious, softly-softly attitude, behind the lines, on the part of young Muslims towards putting forward their point of view, things no longer seem to be so: second generations' visibility and self-promotion have grown. This evolution makes us aware of organizational skills and a widespread territorial presence, but above all it demonstrates the children of immigration's need for—even religious—expression and identification [30].

3. Generational passage: new actors growing up

The generational passage can be noted from the relationship which young people develop with religious belonging even more than practices and dynamics in the

⁶ "NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) conflicts have as their aim the public use of spaces considered undesirable by those who live there. Following a law-and-economic approach, giving it a 'neutral' interpretation, they can be described as potential imbalance between widespread benefits and concentrated costs for local populations, linked to the realisation of infrastructural or social-type settlements" (see [38]).

public arena [16, 25]. To synthesize and simplify, young interviewees can be divided into two groups.

First, there are those for whom religion is little more than education received in the family: Guolo would call them secularized young people who take part in some rituals, maintaining a collective Muslim identity in the face of relative indifference on the level of faith [28].

'It is easy for boys and girls not to follow their parents' teachings. Some who have come here—especially those who have married Italians—have forgotten Islam. Perhaps both parents work and the children go out and about with their friends, so they don't even speak Arabic. Fortunately there are now antennas so that you can watch television from all over the world, which weren't there before. This allows the children to know Arabic and religion better. In our days it all depended on us, but that was not enough. Now it's easier, partly because there are more Muslim young people. We brought our children up to be like ourselves, but they have their own ways. They have more Italian than Egyptian friends. When they ask my permission to do something, I leave them to it because they know their religion so they know what they can and cannot do'. (M, 53, Egypt)

The interviewee has stressed an important element of the relationship between young people and religion: the force of numbers. An increasing visibility of Muslim families, of the number of schoolchildren declaring themselves to be Muslim, girls wearing the veil and associational activity linked to religion may therefore become fertile terrain for the sprouting of latent religious identities which the fear of stigmatization or discrimination previously prevented from appearing. In this sense, prayer rooms in the city seem to carry less weight, although they remain a point of reference for the old pioneers and new arrivals alike, serving not only the typical purposes of religious organizations in emigration but also—and primarily—an identity rather than merely religious function [17].

For the second group, on the contrary, religion is a key element of identity, sometimes even in contrast with their parents' generation which has developed a more private, less visible, religiosity.

'My mother does not wear the veil. I decided to put it on after a trip to Egypt. Even though we were born in Italy, we cannot deny our roots. And religion is part of those roots. I am not afraid of saying that I come from a country rich in culture, important in Mediterranean history. I'm proud to be the daughter of Egyptians, proud to be Muslim. My mother has made a different choice. She has stopped struggling. We know that life is not so easy for Muslims here in Italy. Today it is a little different: many of us now wear the veil at university, and nobody makes smart cracks or looks askance when we go round and about, to the cinema, shops and pizzerias. Twenty years ago it was different so, to cut a long story short, my mother stopped wearing the veil so as no longer to be always a target'. (F, 22, Egypt)

Compared with a few years ago, the girls – whose behaviour seems to be an interesting weathercock in the complex reality (including religious) of the children of immigration—are more visible. Their adherence is convinced, visible, proud and active: being Muslim is bound to associational involvement where the religious theme joins those of social cohesion, discrimination and citizenship.

Those who are involved with religious associations are aware of the distance separating their generation and their parents' with regard to living and interpreting their faith as well as relations with Italy and their country of origin. Intergenerational comparison of religious aspects shows up a deep reflective

capacity on the part of the young, especially those with a higher level of education, in understanding the challenges facing them as children of immigration.

‘Your idea of a Muslim is someone who is always going to the mosque, who does only what the imam says, who observes Rhamadan. To me and many of my friends being Muslim means coming from a family which is attached to Islam. By now many of us young people only observe Rhamadan and take part in feast-days such as that of the Ram. We are Muslims in our own way. We live here, not in Morocco or Egypt, so we should try to adapt’. (M, 21, Morocco)

They also perceive the differences with regard to their parents’ education and socialization, which took place in environments permeated with religion where cultural, religious and national belongings were forged together into a unique affiliation—without distinctions within the local community, distinctive vis-à-vis interaction with the world outside.

In every migratory experience, at the generation shift, parents’ associationism faces up to that of the young, whom they would like at their side to give new energy to their activities—without, however, letting go of the reins of command or calling into question the associations’ philosophy or objectives. Is this true also for Muslim associationism?

An initial point of difference concerns the characteristics of the associationism. Among young people, it is a matter of a reflection and commitment path transversal to their origins: the criterion of access is that of recognizing Islam as their cultural-religious point of reference [22]. As one of them recalls: *‘We don’t ask our members for a certificate testifying that they are good Muslims. Our association is called ‘Young Muslims of Italy, so the access criteria are clear. We are not bound to any particular country: Italy is our common reference and that of our section is Turin’* (M, 22, Morocco).

Another point of difference attains to leadership. Young people choose election-type mechanisms whereas their parents relied on consensus: in one case, we find elections, directives, pre-established deadlines; in the other, reputation (as a good Muslim above all, but also endowed with elevated cultural and social capital) is the determining criterion in choosing.

A third element of difference has to do with the gender component: girls are an active part (although they have not yet reached the presidency), sometimes leading in organizing activities; mothers, on the other hand, keep a low profile.⁷ Here, we see not only a generational but also a gender revolution.

4. No longer recipients but protagonists: the active-citizens strategy

What positions, then, do young people belonging to Islam adopt when facing the demands cited above: do they stand alongside their parents or do they keep their distance by offering their own vision/interpretation of the questions under debate?

The mosque question may serve as a prism dividing the positions of first and second generations. As a young interviewee reminds us, the mosque represents—in a context of mature immigration, for backgrounds firmly settled—a request which may no longer be postponed:

⁷ There are obvious exceptions appear, above all in the world of ethnic-national associationism, whenever women become stakeholders.

'There is no religious life here. It doesn't exist. If I am religious and want to practise, I can't. Italian mosques are the ugliest places in the world... This is one of the main reasons why I want to go back to Egypt. Here I can't practise the way I would like to: there are neither instruments nor structures... Relationship with religion is difficult here because you are in a different society. Islam is a religion for the whole world but if you have no mosque, you suffer because it's hot and smelly with people shamefully packed together. If they close the mosques it would be extremely hard to practice one's religion and develop one's religious ideas'. (M, 26, Egypt)

Parents and children are in agreement about this demand, but with a different approach and attributing different meaning to it. For the latter, a mosque is now only a religious point of reference, and it should be considered as such in its structure and in its décor. For the men, above all, it is also for 'recovering status'. Parents, seeing their authority under threat as their children rush into integration and social insertion, try 'to recover status as members of the mosque and find the symbolic motivational strength to transfer it within the family' [19]. This different approach implies a logical evolution from one generation to the next: all the younger interviewees reduce the mosque to a mere religious function, thereby creating clear discontinuity with the first generation.

How do they intervene in the local arena? How do they participate in the life of the city and promote associationism's socio-cultural role?

For the parents' generation, the cognitive framework within which this relationship is set is that of immigration, which levers the dialectic between a community whose cultural-axiological roots are sunk deep in various elsewheres but are one as to religious reference and a hostile environment with which they are having trouble communicating. Their children would like to drop the references to immigration and diversity: the game is played among equals, between (almost) citizens, residents committed to the common good of the collective and the city. The change of tone is meaningful: as Scholten [45] and Borkert and Caponio [6] claim, the passage is from being destined to be the object of interventions to being fellow-actors in developing policies. In this sense, the intercultural variation, in the meaning (which we shall see in the following section) of 'inclusive intercultural policies', drives relations between Islamic associationism and local institutions to abandon the explosive, reductive immigrants-versus-citizens dichotomy. What is more, for second generations it is no longer a matter of forwarding demands which limit Islam to a question regarding immigrants looking back nostalgically towards the past but of inserting the religious debate into the broader discourse of religious pluralism, unchaining it from its nexus with immigration. Energy is spent on constructing relations of partnership, on gaining credibility and recognition: in other words, on becoming trustworthy interlocutors of institutions and schools. Indeed, often the new actors have no experiences of migration, and are often Italian citizens, which is to say, young people of another religion trying to find space who express the desire to participate in their city's intercultural and interreligious politics [39].

5. Who's got the power? Something is changing at a local level

Turin was one of the first Italian municipalities to develop initiatives and projects to manage the increasing flows of migrants. In the last 30 years, the municipality has shifted from 'action on demand', generally multiculturally oriented, to a more coherent and specific intercultural policy.

This evolution has undergone four phases: the emergency policy (1980–1990); the creation of a network of specific services based on interaction between the municipality and the third sector (1990–1995), implementing an interesting

‘welfare mix’ model; the initial development of intercultural activities (1995–2005) and the development of intercultural policies (2006–2011).

In the first two periods, the policies can be defined as ‘multicultural’, i.e., aimed at helping and promoting the first insertion of the various migration flows with special attention to each ethnic background. The interventions supported in that period have been defined by the city administration as an ad hoc approach—that means that municipal initiatives were explicitly directed towards immigrants in specific difficult conditions, reacting to emerging social problems by mobilizing all the main local actors, public and private, interested in the issue (e.g., language courses, information offices, shelter centres, accommodation activities addressed especially to minors and women).

Attention to the second generations emerged mainly in the last period of the policy evolution, as will be described below. In fact, recently a new era seems to have come about: the consolidation of the intercultural discourse has taken place in tandem, generating a large number of practices, projects and experiences mainly based on the notions of dialogue, mutual exchange and social interaction [3]. The centrality of this policy was confirmed by the creation, for the first time, of a Department for Integration (2007), dedicated to defining a coherent intercultural policy for promoting integration. Other municipal departments have to discuss and collaborate with this new department on each project, initiative and decision concerning integration issues. The goal is to insert the discourse on integration in all city policies, reinforcing the shift from special initiatives and ad hoc projects for migrants to policies capable of considering the various facets of the city’s residents.

This shift was part of the last two mayoral programmes (2006–2011; 2011–2015), where it was considered necessary to develop the intercultural dimension as an approach affecting all policy areas and to promote the involvement of immigrants in the city’s life in various fields: social, cultural and economic. Immigrants should be metamorphosed from being (or being perceived as) recipients to being pro-active participants promoting activities.

In this phase, attention to second generations and their civic involvement came to the fore. These young people are considered as the drivers of the integration process on both sides: on the one hand, supporting immigrants to be better inserted in the city and, on the other hand, helping Italian citizens in understanding the multiple aspects of immigration in the city. This new approach towards juvenile activism has been supported financially in the framework of two calls for projects that the municipality developed in agreement with a bank foundation. The initiatives admitted concern, mainly about second generations grown up in Turin to whom the city turns in order to develop its own intercultural policies. The activities carried out in order to train second generations to become active citizens may be divided into three groups according to their functions:

1. Initiatives directed towards useful or practical assistance: concrete help by offering services of orientation and counselling.
2. Gathering together emotional support activities, which may at times be defined as assistance towards self-expression and the formation of one’s own personality. In this sense, we should also recall improving youths’ communicative and expressive capacities and the consequent development of relational skills in free time.
3. Activities directed towards information and educational support to offer moments of updating, reflection and education on subjects relevant to minors

and young people, to cope with educational challenges posed by adolescents, as well as to provide both young people and adults with useful information about educational and training paths.

The result of all these initiatives is the active involvement of young people as organizers, animators and educators of other foreign minors who are following insertion and growth paths in the city of Turin. Meantime, these activities strongly involve second generations in the city's life by considering them active citizens of Turin, even if their citizenship is not Italian.

6. Conclusion: a new generation on the move

To sum up, a diachronic perspective allows us to reveal points of strength and weakness in the city's relationship with first- and second-generation associationism. In the former case, the rapport was mainly on demand: associations, organizationally weak and ill-prepared to interact with administrations, belong to a prevalently 'by request' dimension, whether for spaces or funds for small initiatives. With younger people, the relationship shifts towards partnership: better prepared both linguistically and about how administration mechanisms function, new generations aim to be recognized as reliable interlocutors. They make a point of being present and active in the city's cultural events, and to intervene—whenever possible—in decision-making processes in order to reinforce their thesis that Islam is compatible with being active citizens. Even in an immigration laboratory city like Turin, their aspirations clash with reality because, no matter how much appreciated they are by the majority of political groupings, second-generation associations are not yet seen as being capable of replacing their parents associations as reference points for institutions. But we should be careful not to confuse absence from the decision-making process with absence from the debate inherent to questions of interest: children of immigration broadcast their view of how they define Muslim belonging by taking part in congresses, organizing public events and—above all—the Web.

The Turin experience seems to reveal a change of tone and capture the signals of a break between first- and second-generation associationism. Demands are more general, connected as they are with recognition as actors in, and an important part of, the city's socio-cultural environment. Concerns are related to sensibilization and updating of the citizenry as to generational changes taking place in the Muslim community.⁸ One seems to be moving on the ground of 'symbolic religiosity', where second-generation religious identities are only tenuously connected with beliefs and practice, and are rather designed to strengthen common belonging to an association. By means of symbolic religiosity, belonging to Islam can be translated into recognition of a common Muslim identity which is shared and practised within associational activities but is not necessarily tied to the observance of practices. There is thus a distancing between a practising Muslim and one who sees Islam as an identity and cultural marker. On the basis of this distinction, new demands and new relations (on the side of collaboration and sharing rather than that of breakdown and contrast) with local realities take shape. The objective is no longer simply recognition of one's practices and specificity so much as that of one's right to be different and the promotion of intercultural policies where religious diversity is but one element of the city's social fabric and not a cause of conflict.

⁸ In this connection it is worth reading the theatrical work developed by a local section of Young Muslims of Italy: "Richiami Lontani" (Distant Echoes), aimed at introducing possible modalities of integration and intercultural dialogue to the Islamic public.

What is at stake is the ability of second-generation Islamic associationism to move on from its condition of eternal youth and learn to conjoin the needs of the neo-Italians with those of the older generations. Once the time of falling back on their origins has passed, the future beckons. It is a future in which they are already on the threshold of becoming adults, adopting family responsibilities once again, and the appearance of an elderly generation which once more questions religious associationism and the city about needs which go well beyond caring for the soul.

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Conflict of interest


The empirical material has been already used in other publications written by the author.

Author details

Roberta Ricucci
University of Turin, Turin, Italy

*Address all correspondence to: roberta.ricucci@unito.it

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