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RELIGIOSITY AND SELF-IDENTIFICATION PROCESSES AMONG YOUNG MUSLIMS IN ITALY

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The pages that follow could have not been written without the many young women and men I have had the privilege to encounter and talk with – young Italians with a Muslim heritage who wholeheartedly opened the doors of their lives to me. My first words of gratitude go to these youths, who so generously agreed to explain to me the significance of something so intimate and so delicate in their lives, such as religion, spirituality, identity and belonging. I will never forget the surprise and thankfulness they expressed at the idea that someone – "an Italian!", as they would say – was genuinely showing interest for them and was eager to learn about their quotidian world of desires and preoccupations in a in a country which they consider home, but still struggles to accept religious pluralism and cultural diversity. This work is about them and is dedicated to them, in the hope that "Italianness" will finally be able to encompass "Muslimness", too, among its many shades.

Over the duration of my PhD, I have come to realize that the dissertation is a continuous walk on a tightrope: while being a unique and exciting learning opportunity, it is also an incredible test for one's resilience. As I was once discussing with one of my sources of inspiration, Antonella, the doctoral project is made up of different phases: the initial feelings of enthusiasm and of self-confidence for having succeeded in getting in a PhD programme are quickly replaced by worries and insecurity. Luckily, these can be healed by the rewarding enjoyment of the fieldwork – however, such enjoyment may then sadly turn into moments of anxiety, darkness, and in the fear of failing, when it comes to data analysis and writing. I thought I was the only one – but I discovered this is the reality of most PhD students all over the world: the prestigious review "Nature" published a study on PhD students' mental issues problems in 2019! (yes, even in the acknowledgements I had to quote something – nerdish inclinations are difficult to tame!). I firmly believe that the PhD should not be like this, and that academia should provide "safe spaces" for a frank discussion about stress, pressure and lonesomeness – and I'm glad to see that, today, this is becoming a new subject of debate. Indeed, what I also realized is that, as solitary as the doctoral journey inevitably ends up being, the people one is surrounded by can really make the difference in reaching the desired destination of that journey. It is no coincidence that everyone who decides to embark on one such endeavour and ultimately reaches one's own harbour, feels the need to thank the companions of that journey, as well as the captains of that very boat they finally learnt to pilot.

I will start by thanking the captains I had at my home university. I am profoundly grateful to Marco Caselli, my supervisor, who has always reminded me to smile and who has always been there, "standing for my rights" and "equipping me" with the all the necessary tools and advice. And in terms of tools and resources, I wish to express my gratitude to Professor Cesareo: working in his beautiful office made my writing in the final review and wrap-up phase much more pleasant. Rita Bichi inspired me with the art of interviewing, and made me realize I could really leverage my talent for active listening and make it one of my strongest skills. Fabio Introini is one of the most brilliant minds that I have ever met in my life. I felt humbled – and lucky – by how much I learned from him, both scientifically and personally. Regardless of whom I will meet in the future, I am sure he is one of the persons I will always have admiration for and hold in highest esteem.

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glad of. Likewise, Marta Bivand Erdal's attentive reading of my thesis was at once enriching – with her numerous suggestions for improvement – and reassuring – with her kind words of appreciation: as they were coming from a person I hold in high regard, I felt truly emboldened.

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Now, moving on to the companions. Occasions such as those created by and with the IMISCOE PhD Network and at summer schools represented precious opportunities for mutual learning among peers – not only about our respective research, but also about our experiences of joy and struggle in "a safe space". My thoughts go to Meghan, with whom I had among my most meaningful exchanges in these regards. My year as PhD Representative of the IMISCOE PhD Network was incredibly instructive and rewarding: I am deeply grateful to those who voted for me. Though distant in time and space, Antonella was profoundly inspiring since I first met her at UNESCO in 2010: I was fascinated by her determination, her rigour and the genuine spontaneity with which she would do so many things at once. That is why I was so happy to meet her again at IMISCOE Conferences – besides being a great researcher, she is first and foremost a great person.

At the intersection between the professional and the private worlds are my PhD fellows: I feel lucky to have met Dario, Benedetta and Francesca – with whom I enjoyed moments of pure fun and relaxation. I am happy we created a wonderful, non-competitive ambience, although I think we could have benefited more from that.

On a personal level, my parents and my family at large have been proud and close journey companions. Taming the boat of my PhD journey also taught me that it is now time I finally gained the very same confidence in my capabilities that they have and tried to get rid of the thought of what should be "expected" of me. Among my old-time friends, Giulia was particularly close and perfectly understood and respected what I was going through. Without my partner Luca I would have never been able to access my doctoral programme: his full support and empathy while I was preparing for the entrance examination was simply determinant for attaining this dream of mine. He provided me with great inner strength, and my memories of that period are more of our great enthusiasm and optimism than of my fatigue. We then both suffered a lot from each other's mental and physical absence. Surely, the PhD experience risks fusing the private life and the professional one a little bit too much – something I, and we all in academia, should work more on.

Even in the solitude it entailed, this journey also had in store the surprising opportunity to meet new friends or to deepen old friendships. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Simona, who accommodated me in her beautiful London apartment, a place where I always felt positive vibes. Without her, it would have been impossible for me to spend the six-months-that made-the difference-for-my-thesis in London. And my stay in London would have not been the same without my lovely flatmate Susanna: we did not just share an apartment; we shared our hearts and our respective difficulties, which we managed to overcome with thunderous laughter and great fun. And last, but not least. During those months in London, Troels spoilt me with dinners, wine, music and theatres: indeed, his ability to distract me may have very well saved me from being washed ashore during my journey. To him goes an important part of the feelings of gratitude I have in reaching my harbour and concluding this chapter of my life.

INTRODUCTION

Considering religion as an obstacle to integration

The integration of Muslim migrants and of their descendants in Western countries has increasingly become a hotly debated issue in the public arena across Western countries. Particularly in European ones, it is precisely the *religion* of migrants that has come to be viewed as an obstacle to integration, due to some core and deeply entrenched traits of Western Europe's cultural, social and political identity. Indeed, European countries are characterized, on one hand, by relative religious uniformity, with a dominant, prevailing confession in each of them; on the other hand, by marked secularist attitudes, with continuously diminishing levels of religiosity among their populations - especially in Western Europe (PEW 2011). Hence, public discourses on migration and integration across European countries recurrently fixate on migrants' religiosity and degree of practice of religion as the most prominent features incarnating the "difference" between natives and migrants – a difference which is considered as a stumbling block in their incorporation into society (Alba & Foner 2015).

Admittedly, in in the eyes of European receiving societies, it has proven - and it still proves - difficult to imagine that religious, practicing migrants, belonging to a "new", non-autochthonous religion, can ever be integrated into the (secularist) mainstream. Yet, it is safe to affirm that this does not refer to "any" religious affiliation: in fact, these perceptions concern almost exclusively Islam. As countless studies have shown, Western societies, and particularly European ones, have developed tense and uneasy relationships with their migrant Muslim populations. That Muslims constitute (and will continue to constitute) a large part of the overall population with an immigrant background in Western Europe (PEW 2012) can only partly explain this phenomenon. In fact, the share of Christian immigrants in Europe actually outnumbers that of Muslim migrants, as the former account for 42% of the total immigrant population residing in the European Union, while the latter represent 39% (ibid.)[1]. However, the religious belonging of Christian migrants seems to get almost unnoticed, as their religiosity never recurs as a controversial issue in public debates and does not seem to represent a serious basis for contention. Indeed, migrants' religion is perceived as problematic and as an obstacle to integration only, or mostly, when it comes to Muslims (Kivisto 2014).

The reasons for this have been largely explored, and pertain to the fact that Islam has come to embody the West's "Other" *par excellence*, as a result from a tendency to portray Muslims in "Orientalistic" terms as the savage enemy of the civilized West, which is rooted in centuries-long confrontations, from Crusades to colonialism, as described by Said (1978). More recently, a revival of this process of Otherization took place in the context of the gradual settlement and visibilization of Muslim migrants in European societies during the second half of the XX century. According to Brubaker (2013), the complex intertwining between, on one hand, the Western representation of Islam as the paradigmatic Other (Allievi 2005) and, on the other hand, immigrant populations' claims for recognition and accommodation of their religion, based on the mobilization of "Muslim" as a category for collective

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[1] These figures refer only to immigrants from non-EU countries. At the same, it is true that the share of migrants originating from Muslim-majority countries is higher than other, non-European or non-autochthonous religions: for instance, Buddhism and Hinduism represent the religions of very low percentages of the immigrant population residing in European countries (PEW 2012) – something which accounts for quite low degrees of religious diversification among the European immigrant population.

self-identifications, facilitated the perception of Muslims as quite a "neat" bloc of "threatening" foreigners, which gradually induced an automatic association between "immigrant" and "Muslim". While until the end of the '80s immigrants' identifiers were traced either in their ethno-national origin (e.g. Pakistanis, Turks, Algerians), their region of origin (e.g. Maghreb, South Asia), their race (blacks[2]) or their legal status (e.g. guest-workers or temporary workers), these same populations have come to be defined primarily through labels referring to their religion, first and foremost in the case of Muslims (Yılmaz 2016). Such a shift caused Muslims to be singled out as a "group" whose religion has to be controlled or tamed (Mattes 2018).

That Islam represents "the issue" appears true even when we look at a "religious-friendly" context such as the North American one, whose cultural landscape is notoriously marked by a conception of religion as a civic value, which favours a generalized acceptance - or even encouragement - of the expression of religion in the public sphere. Indeed, in the US, migrants' religion has never represented a central dividing line separating native from immigrants and their offspring in the same terms as in Europe. Rather, migrants' religious participation has traditionally acted as a facilitator of their inclusion, in that it makes migrants more similar to a mainstream society which values the display of religious behaviors as something socially commendable and desirable (Alba & Foner 2015)[3]. Whilst in Europe religion is considered as an obstacle to integration, in the US it is considered as a resource facilitating the processes of migrant incorporation. Yet, when it comes to Islam, such differences seem to disappear, as this religion has been depicted in derogatory terms even in this context, which is not hostile to the public expression of religion.

It is true that, for a long time, such negative portrayals have assumed different tones and framings for a long time across the two sides of the pond: in Europe, concerns about Islam have taken the form of moral panics, regarding an alleged intrinsic non-integrability of Islam from the civilizational point of view ("Backward and traditional Islamic values are incompatible with Western enlightened democratic values"), while, in the US, Islam has been long been considered as an external enemy, and such concerns were framed as security issues ("Islam as the new enemy of the West at the global level") (Césari 2015; Frisina 2010). However, more recently, differences in the public perception and treatment of Islam between the US and Europe have further been erased by an increasing depiction of American Muslims as a civilizational threat in racialized and culturalist terms (Itaoui & Elsheikh 2018), which grew in the context of Trump's affirmations and policies targeting Muslims - such as the so-called "Muslim ban", or the proposal to create a Muslim registry - which were skillfully supported and amplified by the alt-right movement (Lean 2017; Yukich 2018).

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[2] Although the concept of "race" has been prominently featuring policies and public discourses only in the Anglo-Saxon contexts of the US and of Britain, whereas in continental Europe the concept of "race" is considered as an anathema or a taboo, given its association with the Holocaust and the Nazi past (Bleich 2003; Koopmans et al. 2005). With post-war immigration flows from former colonies, the British context developed a "color-coded" understanding of "race", by referring to immigrants from the Caribbean, Africa and South Asia as "blacks" (Alba & Foner 2015). However, over time, blackness has come to be associated only with people of Afro-Caribbean ancestry, with South-Asians being categorized more as Muslims. South-Asians themselves hardly consider themselves as "blacks" and have mobilised more around their religious identity more than on identities based on colour to claim recognition (Modood 2006).

[3] Even if in the US religiosity has been declining over successive cohorts (Voas & Chaves 2016), in the North American context religiousness tends to be exhibited and being religious is considered as the social norm: surveys concerning religious beliefs and services attendance demonstrate higher levels of religiosity of Americans as compared to Europeans (e.g. PEW 2011; Gallup, 2004). As Alba and Foner note (2015), Americans tend to overstate their church attendance and degree of religious practice; however, this very tendency testifies to the perceived importance attributed to religion on the American public *ethos*.

Either way, the Western socio-cultural context has come to view Muslims' religion as intrinsically troublesome. This translated to a treatment of Muslims aimed at controlling or containing the expression of their religion. By the same token, such a consideration of Islam as an obstacle to integration inevitably resulted in a generalized attitude by which the behaviors of the descendants of Muslim migrants are subjected to a closer scrutiny, especially in Europe.

Youths of Muslim background "on the watch list"

Western public debates about migration and integration-related issues do not simply target "Muslims". Indeed, many of the political expectations concerning migrants have concentrated on their children and descendants, that were born or have grown up since a very early age in the countries where they parents have settled – with a specific increase in attention towards the descendants of Muslims immigrants, especially in Europe. As discussed by Crul and Mollenkopf (2012), Crul and Schneider (2013) and Alba and Foner (2015), the conditions of immigrants' descendants represent a sort of "litmus test" for evaluating States' different integration "models" and policies, and often come to frame the debate on immigration in the public arena. Asking "how are youths with an immigrant background faring?" is indeed both legitimate and due, as it allows to assess the effectiveness of anti-discrimination and social inclusion policies. Arguably, it also represents an opportunity to reflect on the narratives that make up for a country's self-understanding and identity – and on their eventual or possible evolutions. However, arguments on immigrants' descendants "lack of" or "unsuccessful" integration have also been largely instrumentalized by those political actors who question the benefits of inclusive policies, with the ultimate goal of declaring the failure of multicultural models (Crul & Schneider 2013).

In the European context, such claims refer in particular to the children and descendants of Muslim migrants. Whilst the population of migrant heritage in the US presents high degrees of diversification in terms of ethnicities, migratory backgrounds and religious belonging, in European countries, as anticipated, migrant populations are perceived to originate mostly from Muslim-majority countries[4] – even if, while they represent a significant proportion of migrants residing in Europe, they do not constitute the majority of them. Therefore, in Europe, debates about the integration of migrants' descendants - the so-called "second generation" - and the compatibility of Islam overlapped in the public discourse:

> The riots in the *banlieues* in France, involving mostly Algerian and Moroccan second-generation youth, pitched the cherished republican model into deep crisis. In the Netherlands, arguments about the failure of the country's multicultural society have cited the relatively high number of Dutch Moroccan students who drop out of school and the high crime rate within the Moroccan second generation. In Germany, similar concerns about the Turkish second generation have triggered a debate about the existence of a separate *Gesellschaft*, composed of almost two million Turks living in a parallel world detached from the wider German society (Crul & Schneider 2013:1).

"Islam" and "integration" have become so intertwined, that all negative trends in this domain are easily attributed to Muslims' alleged lack of will to integrate (Alba & Foner 2015). The rise of jihadism at the global level could not but reinforce such negative representations of Muslims. Of high significance, in

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[4] According to the "Perils of Perception" study conducted by IPSOS in 40 countries (2015), surveyed populations in all Western European countries largely overestimate the presence of Muslims in their own nation, exposing a significant gap between perception and reality.

this regard, was the debate spurred by the London bombings in 2005, which were perpetrated by British-born sons of Pakistani immigrants (plus a convert of Jamaican origin), subsequently labelled as "homegrown terrorists". In more recent years, the creation of Isis in the territories between Syria and Iraq at the hands of jihadist groups, the departure of large numbers of "foreign fighters" joining Isis – many of whom are Western-born Muslims with a migratory background – and the wave of jihadist attacks perpetrated across Europe significantly worsened the situation. Debates about these issues compound and confound different aspects, resulting in a confusing mix of culturalist and socio-economic explanations: on one hand, the existence of large sectors of disenfranchised youths of migrant origin, who would not be integrated from the socio-economic point of view, is deemed to explain their need to "rebel" against the hostile Western societies where they have grown up; on the other hand, the presence of Islamic-Salafist enclaves where "parallel societies" would develop detached from and in opposition to mainstream society, is blamed for the expansion of jihadism. Either way, the radicalization of these youths is imputed to their "failed" integration and to their suspicious betrayal of the societies where their upbringing has taken place. While there may be some aspects of truth in these explanations, they cannot but reinforce the image of Muslims as a problematic group, first and foremost *qua* Muslims.

In light of this, youths of Muslim background find themselves caught in a crossfire: on one hand, their condition serves to prove whether integration-related policies have worked; on the other hand, the discursive context only concentrates only on dysfunctional phenomena - such as jihadism - that concern only minor fringes of this population, thus amplifying the perception of intrinsic troublesomeness of Islam while obliterating the slow, silent, gradual integration of the majority of these youths. Therefore, public discourses either consider them as potentially "disloyal", if not dangerous, citizens, or celebrates them or as the only possible "bridge" between migrants' cultures and receiving countries' cultures, due to their supposedly "innate" intercultural skills (Ricucci 2017) – albeit only occasionally so. Even when they are positively evaluated in these terms, the "burden" and responsibility of integration is placed on their shoulders.

However, they are not only on the dominant, non-Muslim society's "watch list". Muslim communities, too, "observe" their youths in the process of intergenerational transmission of religious values in a context – the Western one – which is often perceived by Muslim actors as morally decadent and condemnable. Indeed, winning their hearts and minds for the maintenance of a strong religious identity may prove difficult in a non-Muslim context: the family, peers, friends and relatives in the country of origin, religious leaders and organizations - as well as a galaxy of preachers online in what has been labelled as "cyber-Islam" (Bunt 2018) - all play a role in this process. Given the lack of a central authority imparting one, "legitimate" expression of religion, the Islamic religious field appears vast and heterogenous -probably more than that of any other religion. Many voices overlap in what has become a discourse, internal to the Muslim "world", across which a vast array of different actors claim what Islam is and should be, and how a "good Muslim" should behave. Youths of Muslim origin grow inevitably exposed to such an internal discourse, where it may become very difficult to orientate oneself among different sources of authority and regimes of truth. While some of these youths may find help and solace in these sources, others may perceive them as obstacles, or may feel lost. In any case, they can hardly ignore the existence of such a discourse.

Either way, these youths' self-identifications and their Muslimness are closely scrutinized and occupy center stage in discourses that develop both within Muslim communities and around them. Unquestionably, this barely offers them the possibility to speak for themselves and in their own right,

because their own understanding of their sense of belonging, religious identification and religious behaviors is never given proper voice. Such a gap motivates the interest in adopting a research stance that embraces the point of view of these youths, exploring with them the ways they live their cultural and religious heritage, articulate their system of belief, expose their faith, enact their religious practices. Such is precisely the aim of the present doctoral research, which was animated by the desire to shed light on their own religious experience, as individuals growing up with a Muslim and migrant background in the context of a Western society – particularly, the Italian one, which appears to be slightly underrepresented in the host of studies concerning Muslim youths in the West. However, for so doing, I wished to shift the focus away from the standpoint of the dominant society, as I did not intend to explore whether their religiosity or religious heritage represents a "problem", i.e. something that makes them so "different" that it prevents them from being successfully absorbed into mainstream society. Actually, when embarking on this research endeavor, I tried and exerted heightened levels of reflexivity, so as not to run into the possible pitfall of taking the "problematic nature" of religion in migrant integration processes for granted, as a starting point - contrary to what often occurred in European social sciences.

Social sciences and the study of Muslims in the West

As Weber [1922] (2003) pointed out in the inaugural phases of the development of social sciences, these are always rooted in and produced by the socio-cultural context where they unfold. Giddens (1990) adds that the categories developed by social sciences become resources and tools of social actors' conventional wisdom. In other words, social sciences can never be completely neutral, as they are influenced by commonsensical categories and perceptions as much as they do play a role in the complex dynamics that shape these categories and perceptions (Bourdieu 2000). This takes on a particular significance and a peculiar flavor when it comes to religion, Islam and integration processes.

Concerning the study of religion in general, we may affirm that social sciences have not been neutral, as they enthusiastically espoused the cause of secularization since the very beginning: the triumph of "science" over "superstitious beliefs" was seen as coessential to the emancipative project of rationalization and modernization, to which sociology was to contribute (Introini 2017). This means that any investigation of "the religious" - almost exclusively in Europe, where the expression of religion in the public sphere has come to be viewed as particularly troubling - is framed within the hermeneutic principle of secularization. Therefore, social sciences in Western Europe have been much less "sensitive" to treating religious matters and much more incapable to grasp their many shades, affected as they are by a "secularist bias". This obviously impacted the study of migrants' religion, for such a secularist bias caused research assumptions to be characterized by a structural blindness (Introini 2017; Kivisto 2014): while North American literature investigates religion as a facilitator of migrant integration, in the European tradition research questions hardly frame the role played by religion in the integration process as positive. Rather, these research questions often take for granted that religion represents an obstacle in the process of incorporation into mainstream society. This occurs even when such research endeavors try to deconstruct this very idea, and applies especially to the study of Islam.

With regards to Islam in particular, public discourses' negative framing of Muslim migrants' religion and religiosity had important consequences in the domain of social research. As documented by Nielsen (2013) and Alba and Foner (2015), the life of Muslims and of their descendants in the West has come to represent a compelling object of study for social sciences. However, the fact that public discourses

consider Islam at odds with modernity and democracy has significantly influenced the research agenda, which has heavily focused on what have been framed as the most unsettling aspects of the presence of Muslims – such as the difficult accommodation of Islam in the State's institutions, gender relations and gender-related issues like the *hijab*, or the positioning and the discourse of Islamic religious actors, especially with regards to freedom of speech and radicalization processes, and the like.

It is true that these studies often aim at - and succeed in - deconstructing the negative stereotypes about Islam fed by public discourses: indeed, they did contribute to dismantle the Hungtinonian view of Islam as an immutable, incommensurable and problematic religion. Nonetheless, there remain issues concerning the hermeneutic premises of these investigations, not only because, to a lesser or greater extent, they are marked by the above-described secularist bias, but also because, wittingly or unwittingly, they partly reflect the anxieties and fixations of public discourses on this topic: paradoxically, they have the unintentional consequence of reinforcing such negative representations of Muslims. According to Sunier (2014), this tendency would appear evident in the projects that explore whether Muslims "have adapted" to the West by "becoming like" the mainstream (i.e. have become secular or less religious), or whether "the West" has managed to "domesticate" its Muslim populations (e.g. concerning the institutional accommodation of Islam).

This is why Brubaker (2013) urges scholars to exert a heightened reflexivity when approaching this object of study, in order to not consider "Islam" as a "black-boxed" *explanans*. In other words, research should not treat the categories of "Islam" and "Muslim" as *tools* of analysis, as this can predictably lead to use a "cultural lenses" – i.e. provide culturalist explanations for phenomena that might be better explained by socio-economic factors. Rather than as tools of analysis, "Islam" and "Muslim" should be treated as *objects* of analysis. This means taking up Allievi's invitation (2005) to walk the thin line between avoiding the risk of reductionism on one hand - i.e. downplaying the importance of religion and the specificities of the religious experience - and avoiding the risk of essentialization on the other hand – i.e. overemphasizing religious and cultural aspects and explain all that concerns Muslims in light of Islam.

As will be thoroughly explained in Part I and Part II, this is the problematic aspect of studies that focus on conspicuously devout Muslims, who were made, and have made themselves, particularly visible *as Muslims* in the public sphere. Whilst it is certainly necessary to investigate their identification, claim-making and religiousness, this might contribute to underpin conceptions of Muslims as (troublingly) being "all about religion", playing into the very hands of the current negative discursive context. In response to this trend in research, an opposed approach gained ground in the relevant literature, focusing on those Muslims who do not visibly appear as such and who escape from the discursive construction of Muslimness, which sees "Islam" as an invariable, master status and the only relevant identifier for Muslims. Seeking to counterbalance the tendency to study only the most pious and vocal Muslims, who are often found in religious organizations, this second approach has "looked for" Muslims outside religious institutions and organizations – i.e. removed from the sites of production of "visible Muslimness" – with the aim of exploring how these "non-obvious" Muslims make sense of religion in their daily lives and what meanings they attach to the practice of religion in their own right, "far" from possibly taken-for-granted (self-)representations of Islam.

Indeed, this kind of approach proves to perfectly embody the research stance hoped for by Brubaker and Allievi, as it makes of Islam an object of study, without either essentializing or downplaying religion, by focusing on "non-organized" Muslim, as opposed to the prevailing trend to concentrate on forms of

organized religion. However, as Chapter 4 discusses in detail, I argue that religious organizations and institutions *too* can be studied through such a bottom-up perspective, from the point of view of their members' religious practices and understanding of an all-encompassing, religiously-informed moral framework – or that, even, it is solely in this perspective that religious organizations can be meaningfully studied. If we are to overturn the tendency to reify Islam, then we must adopt the same stance towards religious organizations, in order to not reify them. In addition, I maintain that this goal can be better achieved if we treat members of religious organizations and people who do not belong to any religious organizations *alike*, by studying their religiosity *in the same way* – that is, by including them in the same study and comparing them.

The present study

In light of the above, and with the awareness of moving in a minefield, the present research is animated by the precise intention to consider Islam as an *object* of study, and not as a tool of analysis, and explores how religion is understood, appropriated and personally experienced by youths of Muslim background, both among those whose Muslimness is too simply "taken for granted", by virtue of their membership in an organization, and among those who are too simply dismissed as "less Muslim", just because they do not partake in active expressions of religion by joining forms of organized Islam. The goal is to add a further piece to the depiction of the various meanings and shades of Islamic experience, which those studies that focused on "non-obvious" Muslims already contributed to enrich and nuance. By studying the modes in which Islam is understood and experienced in the everyday both by young people who are members of an Islamic organization - who might appear more self-aware and convinced about their religious identity (and its displaying) - and young people whose religiosity is not influenced by membership in an organization, I wish to go beyond this probably too simplistic or narrow dichotomy, so as to better appreciate how religion actually manifests itself, and with what meanings, in the daily life of individuals who are differently exposed to religious discourses.

For this purpose, I studied the "everyday lived religion" of some "non-organized" Italian youths of Muslim background (30) and of some "organized" Italian young Muslims (30) – where "organized" means member of an Islamic religious organization (Jeldtoft & Nielsen 2011). The organization that was chosen for this purpose is the Italian branch of Islamic Relief – one of the largest faith-inspired NGOs and certainly the biggest Sunni Muslim NGO at the international level. By "Italian youths of Muslim background" I mean individuals who were born in Italy or have grown up in Italy since a very young age. Seeking to take up the challenge of avoiding both reductionism and essentialism, I avoid using "second generation" or "young Muslims" as labels.

"Second generation migrants" appears inappropriate because it is a category that is often rejected by the very individuals which it tries to define: whilst these youths are aware of their migrant background and might even value it greatly, they do not consider themselves as migrants, as they did not move anywhere – or, if they did, it was not their decision. I think that for social scientists it is important to respect and duly consider the way the subjects of our enquiries perceive themselves. Moreover, this category inevitably encapsulates a dimension of otherness, foreignness and extraneity to our societies, as if these youths "still" had to integrate into them – while they were born or have grown up into them. In other words, "second generation" risks reflecting an exclusionary logic.

In a similar vein, "young Muslims" is a problematic definition, because it means applying a label to these individuals "at the outset", without taking into consideration how they self-identify: "Muslim" already designates them, without giving them the possibility to "speak for themselves" in their own terms, and imprisons them in a category that is all but neutral, while not accounting for other equally important components of identity (age, gender, status, place of residence...). Indeed, "Muslim", as category of practice (Brubaker 2013) bears a representation by which "Muslims" represent a monolithic, problematic "group". Since I precisely sought to provide a picture – albeit limited – of different facets and meanings of the experience of Islam, referring to the individuals who were kind enough to offer me a glimpse of their lives by simply calling them "Muslims" would mean reproducing the above-described scrutinizing attitude of the public discourse, which considers them automatically as Muslims because of their descent, and intrinsically dangerous because of their religion.

Therefore, in order to duly consider Brubaker's warning to not foreground religion in our studies - so as to avoid incurring in the risk of reifying it and transforming it into a tool for analysis rather than an object of analysis - I tried to start by making use of a proper language. In my view, the most neutral ways I could clearly designate the individuals who took part in this research was "descendants of Muslim migrants", "youths of Muslim background", "youths of Muslim heritage", "youths of Muslim origin", "Western-born children of Muslim migrants" - which I used interchangeably throughout the present text. I utilize the label of "young Muslims" only when referring to people whom I am sure would self-identify as such.

In the pages that follow, I will then describe these youths' relation to Islam - or the lack thereof - by not considering categories such as "Muslim" or "Islamic organizations" as self-evident. With a view to *not* take the supposed intrinsic problematic nature of religion - and especially of Islam - as a point of departure, as explained above, my aim is to treat their religion *as any other religion*, with the intention to avoid exceptionalisms and to de-exoticize and de-problematize Muslims, Muslimness and Islam. In order to achieve this, I adopted a bottom-up perspective for describing what religion is in the eyes of the protagonists of the present research, on the basis of their point of view and of their daily experiences, by looking at individuals' "everyday lived religion", through an approach that has already been successfully applied in the domain of the sociology of religion.

At the same time, this does not mean neglecting the significance of religion in terms of its social consequences and of the position(ing) of these youths as social actors. In other words, treating the religiosity of youths of Muslim origin in the same way in which the religiosity of youths belonging to a different confession would be treated, does not translate to naively overlooking the discursively-laden representations of Islam circulating in the West and within Muslims themselves. Indeed, the salience of Islam is such in contemporary debates about migration and integration that the definition of what Islam is and ought to be has become a battlefield: on one hand, power imbalances between a dominant non-Muslim society and a minority give rise to an unequal confrontation, whereby descendants of Muslim migrants are constantly reminded of their heritage by the scrutinizing look of public discourses; on the other hand, they are continuously told how a good Muslim should behave by various actors in the Islamic religious field – from community leaders to online preachers, from relatives in countries of origin to parents and peers in the country of residence. This complex web of power relations unpreventably conditions and influences their religious experience and the way they inhabit their "Muslimness" – at a personal level and vis-à-vis the gaze of the Muslim community and of the dominant society.

Therefore, the questions guiding this research evolve around, on one hand, how these youths translate their relation with their religious background and with Islam's moral and normative framework into their daily life and practices; on the other hand, they address the role played by complex social dynamics and power relations in influencing their religious experience, assessing how they manage the long, fixed stare they receive from non-Muslims, as well as from other Muslims. In so doing, I will also examine the potential peculiarities linked to being or not being a member of a religious organization.

In Part I, I explain the main theoretical foundations upon which the present study is built, after appraising the existing literature on Western-born descendants of Muslims. In Chapter 1, I illustrate the major trends that have been identified in the literature concerning the religiosity of youths of Muslim heritage and I argue for the need to complement these findings with a closer description of their actual religious practice, through an approach aimed at tracing the contours of individuals' "everyday lived religion" – a research stance that was developed by a number of sociologists of religion, which I thoroughly describe in Chapter 2.

In Part II, I develop the rationale of this doctoral project. In Chapter 3, I provide examples of how an "everyday lived religion" approach has been usefully applied to the study of Islam in the West, pointing to the dynamics of power relationships that shape religious experiences, and that can only be revealed through such a research stance. Furthermore, as already briefly mentioned above, I contend that it is possible to extend the study of "everyday lived Islam" also to youths of Muslim heritage who belong to religious organizations, precisely in order to deconstruct the power dynamics at play within such institutionalized contexts and their effects on individuals – something which can arguably be better achieved in the light of a comparison with "non-organized" descendants of Muslim migrants. The design of the present research is thus presented in full detail in Chapter 4.

Part III reconstructs the settings where the research was conducted. Chapter 5 details the constitutive elements of the external, negative discourse about Islam Muslims put forward by the majority society in a Western country – both the elements recurring across the West more generally and those which are specific to the treatment of Muslims in the Italian context and in the localities where the research has taken place - i.e. the cities of Milan and Turin. Here, I partly draw on the fieldwork I carried out, in order to show how contexts are crucial in shaping experiences. Chapter 6 completes the picture of the settings of the research by offering a description of Islamic Relief, the religious organization whose members compose half of the sample of the present research – the other half consisting in "non-organized" descendants of Muslim migrants. The Chapter starts by tracing the positioning of the organization at the international level in the realm of faith-based humanitarian NGOs and then focuses on the history and development of the Italian branch, concentrating on its successful recruitment and training of young volunteers among youths of Muslim heritage.

As anticipated above, the negative discourse is only one side of the power relations that shape the everyday religious experience of these youths. In fact, Part II explains how such a religious experience is forged, or influenced, by the dynamic intersection between not only the "external", negative discourse about Islam and Muslims upheld by Western societies, but also an "internal" discourse, consisting in communitarian narratives and theological disputes about the correct behavior of a "good Muslim", often mediated by religious institutions and organizations. In analyzing these youths' religiosity and relation to Islam, it is therefore important to consider both these sides, which is the task of Part IV and Part V. In both these Parts, I am interested at looking at the role that Islam, as a possible

"universe of sense", plays in the everyday life of these person, with what meanings and in which situations in daily, routine practices, in light of the discourses regarding Islam.

Part IV starts engaging more closely with the findings that could emerge from the fieldwork I conducted. It does by looking at the two parts of the sample - organized and non-organized youths of Muslim origin - separately. Chapter 7 provides a few significant portraits and vignettes documenting how religion may be lived, appropriated or kept distant by some "free-floaters", i.e. youths who are not involved in any religious or ethno-national organization, and are therefore not exposed to the religious messages that a religious organization imparts. By contrast, Chapter 8 precisely offers a full account of the religious discourses and of the self-representation that the Italian branch of Islamic Relief puts forward, of the orthodoxy it conveys and of the identitarian strategies it promotes among its affiliates. As a religious organization, Islamic Relief's religious message represents a powerful voice within the field of the internal discourse about Islam, which may impinge on its members to a greater or lesser extent.

Part V delves deeper into discussing the empirical material by analyzing the everyday lived religion of these youths, evaluating the strength of both internal and external discourses in shaping it. In this Part, the analysis of the findings does not treat organized and non-organized youths separately; on the contrary, they are all considered alike, allowing for a cross-cutting comparison across the two parts of the sample.

More in particular, Chapter 9 sets to examine how organized and non-organized Muslims' Western-born descendants understand and appropriate the "grand scheme" of the all-encompassing religious moral framework and "make it work" in their daily lives, negotiate their religious identities against a backdrop of intertwining internal discourses about their religion and translate their relationship with religious normativity into their everyday practices. My interest is not that of constructing a typology distinguishing between "less practicing" and "more practicing" Muslims, or between more "orthodox" or more "progressive" believers, as I try to focus the attention on the different forms of "religious reflexivity" displayed and enacted by these youths in their relation to religious normativity. In analyzing how religion informs their daily lives, it is also possible to assess what is entailed by closeness to, or distance from, a religious organization.

Chapter 10 engages with categories linked to the concept of "visibility". As briefly pointed out above, the urge to study Islam in the West by not focusing exclusively on its "visible" expressions - i.e. those instances in which the "Muslim" component is vocally put in the foreground - served as the basis to justify devoting attention to other expressions of religiosity, by examining the everyday lived religion of "invisible Muslims" - i.e. people found outside these visible manifestations. However, conceiving of "visibility of religion" in these terms means applying a top-down perspective, that conflates "visible" with "organized Islam", without considering religious subjects' subjectivation processes and embodiments of visibility – i.e. without duly taking into account their own ways and intentions of being visible about their religion. Visible articulations of religion may be found outside of the more obvious forms of "visibility" (such as those represented by religious organizations), while not all those that at a first glance fall within these more obvious forms of visible religion (e.g. due to their membership in an organization) may subscribe to that very visibility that such forms of organized religion promote.

The Conclusions take stock of these research results and discuss their implication for social science's consideration of the multifarious shades of the religiosity of nowadays' Western-born descendants of

Muslims, in light of some of the main theses established by the existent literature on this topic, and by suggesting further directions for future research.

As I hope will result from this analysis, I would argue that adopting an approach aimed at tracing the everyday lived religion of youths of Muslim descent, and applying this approach to both those who, on the surface, might look "more devout" and those who might look "less devout" can precisely help deconstruct this probably too artificial distinction. Only a closer examination of their religious practices – and the meanings attached to them – of all these actors, especially when considered *indistinctively*, can tell whether there are commonalities and differences, and to what these may be imputed. What we can gain from such an approach is a more nuanced understanding of lived experiences of religion and of practices of religious visibility, in a context that considers Islam in highly contentious terms. This means not taking membership in an organization - or the lack thereof - for granted, positing *a priori* that similarities and differences between those inside religious organizations and those outside are to attributed to an "obvious" higher religiosity in the first case, and to an "obvious" lower religiosity in the second case. Furthermore, this "bottom-up" approach allows to understand the dynamics at play within organizations, showing that their members might not be "all the same".

Indeed, this study pleads to consider both religious actors' agency in appropriating and giving personal meanings to religious orthodoxy, and the force of religious normativity and grand schemes in shaping their lives in the everyday. In the case of the study of Islam, studying processes of subjectivation as these result from the performance (or the non-performance) of religious practices in daily lives may help respond to two exigencies identified by scholars in this field: the first consists in the need to not apply typically Western categories to the study of a religion whose orthodoxy, belief system and trajectory cannot be assimilated to that of Christian traditions. This means not looking at whether there are tendencies of "protestantization" of religion – which are often implicitly wished-for (Mahmood 2005; Barylo 2017), as the distinction between private and public, religious and non-religious do not work in the same way for Islam as they do for Christian denominations. The second is represented by the need to de-exoticize and de-orientalize our gaze in approaching Islam, which means ceasing considering Muslim believers as completely, passively and backwardly subjugated to a set of immutable religious norms and communitarian traditions (Pepicelli 2015). This modest contribution seeks to show the fluidity of religiousness and of identifications, in the hope of contributing to denaturalize the idea of Islam as a monolith and go beyond easy and damaging representations of a *homo islamicus*.

PART I

THE NEED AND MEANING OF STUDYING ISLAM
AS AN EVERYDAY LIVED RELIGION

Chapter 1
MAJOR TRENDS IN THE RELIGIOSITY OF MUSLIM MIGRANTS' DESCENDANTS

The two last decades have witnessed a considerable growth in the studies devoted to Muslims in Western countries. In this Chapter I will briefly review the most significant trends that such a deal of research has highlighted with regards to the religiousness of Western-born descendants of Muslims. The aspects on which such literature has focuses – and the modalities with which research was conducted – seem to have neglected or only partially accounted for the many existing "ways of being Muslim. Hence, the conclusive paragraph of the present Chapter argues that the different shades of the experience of "Muslimness" can be illuminated by approaching religion as it unfolds in the everyday – the meaning of which will be thoroughly explained in Chapter 2.

1. Muslim youths' religious vitality? The salience of Islam as an identifier

Descendants of Muslim migrants born and raised in Western countries have represented the increasing object of attention of social sciences over the past three decades at least. This population was and still is the protagonist of a consistent number of both qualitative and quantitative research projects, conducted on both sides of the Atlantic (see the review compiled by Voas & Fleischmann 2012). Some of these studies are comparative in nature[1], other focus on single countries. Either way, their findings show the existence of common major trends concerning the relationship of Muslims' descendants to Islam, which recur across national contexts.

The first of these trends, highlighted especially by quantitative studies, concerns the stable salience of religion among descendants of Muslim migrants. The descendants of those who migrated from Muslim-majority countries often show significant adherence to their religion and, especially, consider it as a central as a source of identification (Duderija 2007, 2008). High levels of religious attachment among *first-generation* Muslim immigrants have been widely documented and described as "not surprising", considering that they tend to come from countries where religious commitment is particularly strong and that their networks are mostly composed by co-ethnics, which contributes to the maintenance of religious beliefs and practice (Voas & Fleischmann 2012). In addition, more generally across immigrant groups and not just in the case of Muslims, religion has been documented to provide a source of moral guidance to which migrants might want to resort in order to cope with either the disorientation

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[1] A cross-country survey of Muslim populations in Europe has been run by Bertelsmann Foundation in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the UK and France (2017). Jacob and Kalter (2013) used data from the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study in Four European Countries (CILS4EU – the surveyed countries are England, Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany) to compare the religiosity of both first-generation migrants and of their descendants by studying adolescent-parent dyads. Other comparatives studies are based on surveys conducted at the city level in different countries, and not on surveys administered at the national level. The TIES project (TIES – The Integration of the Second Generation) compared children of immigrants from Turkey, Morocco and countries of the former Yugoslavia in fifteen cities across eight European countries (Crul, Schneider & Lelie 2012). A part of this survey specifically concerned their relationship to Islam (Phalet, Fleischmann & Stojčić, 2012). The "Muslims in Europe" project, conducted at the initiative of the Open Society Institute, consisted in a survey and focus groups in eleven European cities, located in seven different European countries. A section of the study was devoted to religion, identity and belonging (OSI, 2010). The only transatlantic study based on city-level survey data compares the TIES project results with surveys run in New York and Los Angeles with the same methodology – also in this case, a section of the study analysed the role of religion in the identities and sense of belonging among immigrants' descendants (Crul & Mollenkopf 2012).

generated by the encounter with societies with different behavioral and ethical norms, often disproved of and considered decadent[2], and/or the distress caused by the often difficult and demanding experience of migration, both in emotional and material terms[3].

However, with regards to their descendants, the "secularization" and "assimilation" hypotheses have been challenged by a wealth of evidence suggesting that the adoption of Western-style a-religious behaviors or agnostic attitudes may be one of the trends investing youths of Muslim heritage, but certainly not the only one. In other words, while they were projected to simply converge to the mainstream's generalized disenchantment with religious worldviews, which appear as predominant in the West[4], survey results consistently show that, contrary to expectations, religious attachment does not linearly decline among the sons and daughters of Muslim migrants[5]. Moreover, these studies consistently contradict the hypothesis that education and upward mobility would automatically lead to a decrease in religiosity or in the salience of religion as an identifier (Portes and Zhou 1993[6]): religion seems to be relevant also for those who are on a trajectory of successful educational integration and labor market inclusion.

Nonetheless, the religious vitality of Western-born youths with a Muslim background does not simply follow or emulate that of their parents. Indeed, a host of studies - resulting especially from qualitative

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[2] A process labelled as "immigrant Puritanism" by the American historian Hansen (1936).

[3] Indeed, Smith describes "uprooting, migration, resettlement, and community-building" as a "theologizing experience" (1993: 1181). Hirschman (2004) has famously argued that religious organizations in the United States, often set up by immigrant themselves, provided them with psychological solace from discrimination, hostility and in general from the traumatic experience of emigrating (refuge), access to opportunities for economic mobility (resources) as well as social recognition (respectability).

[4] Although plain secularization is by no means the dominant model or trend in Western societies (Pollack & Rosta 2017). Whilst factual evidence points to a prevailing decline in "traditional" religious attendance and behaviours (Hunt 2005), religion has all but disappeared, neither in public life nor in private lives (Ammerman 2007). This seeming paradox has been the object of a vast sociological and philosophical debate that has taken place over the past three decades and which problematized the classic "secularization theory", positing the transition to a post-secular society. These debates were triggered, inter alia, by the seminal writings of Casanova (1994) and Habermas (2008). Wohlrab-Saar and Burchardt (2012) use the concept of "multiple secularities" to make sense of the different understandings and forms of secularizations across societies in various parts of the world.

[5] Concerning the UK see Lewis & Kashyap 2013a, 2013b; regarding France, see Simon & Tiberj 2013, Lagrange 2014 and Institut Montaigne 2016; with reference to the Netherlands see Malieepard, Gijsbert & Lubbers 2012; with regards to the U.S. see PEW 2017. For a comparison of Germany, Switzerland, Austria, the UK and France see Bertelsmann Foundation 2017. Güveli and Platt (2011) compared the UK and the Netherlands. For a comparison of England, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden see Jacob & Kalter 2013. A comparative analysis is also provided by the Gallup Coexist Index 2009 which surveyed the Muslim populations of France, Germany and the United Kingdom, but without providing results specific to the cohort of Muslims migrants' descendants. This finding is partially contradicted by elaborations of the European Social Survey results, which show weaker religious tendencies among youths with a migrant background, although this analysis only refers to the wider group of immigrants' descendants in Europe, without breaking down results by their religious faith or affiliation (Van der Bracht, Van de Putte & Verhaege 2013). In general, scholars in this field lament the lack of longitudinal or panel surveys, which could help grasp a more complete picture of these trends. However, these surveys often seem problematic not only due to their cross-sectional character: indeed, Césari (2013:29-39) warns against two major recurring flaws in these studies. The first is that they compare the religiosity of "Muslims" to that of an undifferentiated group clustering all "non-Muslims", as the latter were homogenous. Not only does this reiterate an ideological bias by which Muslims are depicted as "something different" than "us", but is also poorly informative: Muslims should be compared to other religious groups. The second flaw concerns the survey questions that investigate religiosity (in terms of self-identifications, importance of religion in life, observance of rites and practices), which can be very different across surveys and mean very different things. This makes the results hardly comparable across different surveys and can lead to very different outcomes even in the same surveyed populations.

[6] Portes and Zhou's classic "segmented assimilation" theory (1993) postulates a negative relationship between successful structural integration and attachment to ethnic identity, which is imagined in general terms as encompassing all the markers of ethnicity, including religion *inter alia*.

research projects[7] - suggests that there may be various ways of "being Muslim" among the descendants of Muslim migrants, with Islam being experienced and appropriated in different ways, with different meanings. Such variety reflects the different shades along the continuum between "simple" *attachment* and "actual" *practice*: for some, Islam might be attributed primary importance in one's identification, without this being necessarily translated into religious observance and practice; others, on the contrary, not only show great religious attachment, but also high levels of practice and commitment, geared to an attentive study and enactment of religious tenets.

Indeed, Césari (2013: 29-49) remarks that surveys, as they have been conducted thus far, do not help make a clear distinction between "Islam" as a marker of if identity group or a marker of personal faith. As qualitative studies have made clear, the fact that many youths with a Muslim background declare themselves to be religious does not necessarily reflect religious practices that are more intense than those of the general public. Across all denominations in the West a disjunction between the three "big Bs" that have always been considered to be constitutive of religion - believing, belonging and behaving - is taking place (e.g. Davie 1994 – see Chapter 2). According to Césari (2013: 29-49), this same trend is seemingly occurring among Muslim migrants' descendants, who reportedly strongly assert to *belong*, even in the case of weakness or lack of *belief* or of *behaving* (in terms of religious practice). This leads to hypothesize that probably intergenerational change is not so much about the level of average religiosity (more attachment in the first generation *vs* less attachment in the second generation): rather, it would consist in the degree of variation in the ways religion is lived and understood (less variety in the first-generation *vs* more variety among the second-generation) (Voas & Fleischmann 2012). Such variation may also be further enhanced when looking at the role possibly played by gender or by different migratory backgrounds in different national contexts, with youths with a Maghrebian background in France or with a Turkish origin in Germany attributing different meanings to their religious heritage. At the same time, as high as religious involvement among youths of Muslim heritage might be, it should not blind us to observe that there are also individuals among them that may abandon religion altogether and do not consider it a component of their identity.

At the heart of such variation lies a distinctive conception of the relationship between religion and culture experienced by Muslims migrants' descendants. "Simple attachment" and "actual practice" point to the complex entanglement – or disentanglement – between *culture* and *religion*. For those who are *not* practicing Muslims, but nonetheless self-define as such or consider Islam a relevant component of their identities, religion is often perceived in terms of a "received" cultural heritage, towards which they feel a sort of genuine affection. Researchers usually apply the concept of "symbolic religiosity", elaborated by Gans (1979, 1994) and Waters (1990) to describe the relationship to religion displayed by those for whom a more or less heartfelt attachment to religion does not necessarily correspond to practice. For them, Islam is part and parcel of their more general inherited culture, and do not consider religion and culture separately, nor do they devote themselves to the study of Islamic scriptures (Jeldtoft 2011). On the contrary, for many of those who feel devout and wish to be observant and practicing Muslims, a very different trend has been invariably observed, consisting in the decoupling between "religion" and the parent's "culture", linked to their country of origin. This tendency has been described by the literature as resulting by two interrelated phenomena: the "deculturation" of Islam in the West and its "individualization".

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[7] In the following paragraphs I will refer to the literature reviews compiled by Duderija (2007, 2008) and again by Voas & Fleischmann (2012).

2. An individualized and culture-less Islam

Olivier Roy (2004, 2008, 2016) provided the most thorough - and the most referred to - account of the processes of "deculturation" and "individualization", which represent a further dividing line between first-generation Muslim migrants and their offspring. According to Roy, the kind of Islam practiced by the former is that of their country of origin, where Islam "naturally" belongs to the cultural and social environment of the place where they were born. This is not the case for the latter, for whom, on the contrary, holding religious beliefs and practicing religion are not at all a taken-for-granted. The reason is that Islam as a religious worldview does not have a "monopoly" in the West: Muslim migrants' sons and daughters simply have not encountered the Islamic "sacred canopy" present in their countries of origin - or have, but only partially so, through their transnational contacts and their trips to their parents' homeland. Thus, to them, Islam is not socially or culturally "obvious" or "self-evident", as it does not belong to the cultural and social landscape of Western countries. The process of "deculturation of Islam" precisely refers to "its complete disconnection from [the] concrete and contextual culture [of migrants' countries of origin]" (Roy, 2004: 20 – my translation).

Moreover, ambient religiosity is lower in Western countries, which are more affected by secularization trends. Mainstream society provides little support for being religious - let alone for being Muslim. The surrounding environment is not only less religious: it is also more plural, with different worldviews coexisting. Being exposed to other religions and, possibly more importantly, to atheism or agnosticism, further undermines the taken-for-grantedness of Islamic faith and practice. This makes the intergenerational transmission of religious values and practices between first-generation migrants and their descendants more difficult in the context of emigration – a trend that is also mirrored by the difficulties encountered by natives' older generations in passing on religion to their children (Garelli 2016; Bignardi & Bichi 2015; Giordan 2010). According to Roy, collective instances and traditional agencies of religious socialization (parents, social pressure or control, imams, the State's laws) cannot work in the context of emigration *as much as* they do in countries of origin: they cannot simply transmit the practice of Islam as a natural "social fact", as a given. Migrants' culture and religion lacking self-evidence and social support, the teaching of norms and habits faces significant obstacles. Thus, their active practice of religion cannot derive from simple conformism or traditional habits, as there is no Islamic social "obviousness".

Therefore, being religious and practicing cannot be but the result of a more explicit choice: youths with a Muslim background seem to be forced to gain consciousness of something that was otherwise obvious for their parents. Therefore, any interest in religion stems from the single individual's effort and from his/her will to "know more" about Islam. As a result of such an "individualization"[8], the practice of religion is consciously *chosen* and re-appropriated, re-elaborated and entrusted with a personal meaning. It is not the result of a "tradition"; on the contrary, it is interiorized and experienced on a voluntarist and individual basis (Roy 2004: 87-95).

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[8] In Roy's interpretation, "individualization" of religion does not equal "privatization" of religion. As Peter suggests (2006), other authors, on the contrary, consider them as intrinsically associated. I would add that one may argue that the two terms are often even used interchangeably, with "individualization" being conflated to "privatization" in a seemingly automatic manner. By "individualization", Roy only designates the process by which Muslim youths are compelled to reflect upon their faith, start questioning the "taken-for-granted" about their religion and consciously choose to practice their religion (2004: 87-95). In my view, this does not necessarily entail, and in any case is not the same as living one's own faith privately, without taking part in public manifestations of religion. Quite the contrary, many Muslim youths, who choose to practise and re-appropriate their faith, do so publicly and take part in religious organisations or associations, attend the mosque regularly, etc.

This often leads to a rejection of elements of the practice of Islam of their parents', for whom, on the contrary, culture and religion are inextricably interwoven. In first-generation Muslim migrants, Islam is imbued with their country's local traditions and cultural connotations. Indeed, each "universal" religion is practiced differently in different local and linguistic contexts: over centuries, religions gained local cultural anchoring, acquiring some of the locally specific cultural habits, and, in turn, becoming a part of the local cultural landscape. To Western-born Muslims, these elements simply cease to make sense in a Western environment, where they inevitably lack the "plausibility structures" (Berger 1967) they have in their parents' original cultural ambience (Mandaville 2001). Sons and daughters of Muslim migrants precisely refuse these cultural habits and despise them as defects or "encrustations" to be expunged from their own practice of Islam; some even sanction such habits as "superstitious" or "not religious" or "not correct" according to "pure" Islamic rules (Kibria 2008; Arslan 2010). This, in turn, leads to a "rediscovery" of a "pure", "culture-less", allegedly more authentic Islam (Roy 2004: 20-22). In an attempt to isolate only what is deemed to be "true" about their religion, practicing young Muslims seek and reformulate a "universal" Islam, deprived of any cultural trait.

In Roy's account (2004), echoed also by Jensen's (2008) findings[9], this process may lead in turn to different outcomes. For some, deepening one's own knowledge about "what Islam is" may mean adopting a practice aimed at reaching dignity, plenitude and self-fulfillment within on one's own relation with God, in a spiritual quest for meaning, self-knowledge, salvation and transcendence. For others, it might mean adopting a very different stance, which originates from the need of an authoritative tradition and from a "rational" quest for order, truth and proof. While the first case has more to do with explorations, emotions, feelings and results in a more spiritual and meditative practice, the second one culminates in resorting to an Islam understood as a rigid set of rules – e.g. what is "licit" (*halal*) and what is "illicit" (*haram*) – and placed on the same footing as science. Roy labels the first type of religiosity as "Muslim humanism" or "ethical Islam" (2004: 113-124) and the second one as "neo-fundamentalist" (2004: 101-103, 145-178). By "neo-fundamentalism", Roy refers to any movement advocating the "return to the sources" and a strict literal reading of the texts. Indeed, feeling compelled to reflect upon "what the real Islam is", for many Western-born Muslims the following step is very often that of resorting to the "sources", adopting a completely literal reading of the scriptures, in order to be faithful to their presumed "exact" meaning. "True", "pure" Islam is equated with "literal": any interpretation successive to the revelation of the Quran is perceived as a betrayal of the authentic meaning of the scriptures and of what God prescribed to do. This is the reason why an ultra-orthodox preaching yields great success among "born-again Muslims", who wish to rediscover what they consider a "pure" Islam.

Schmidt as well has found that these youths describe their path to religion as a "reversion" to Islam - a term that can either mean that embracing Islam meant "returning to their true human nature" or that they chose to "return to pure and genuine practice" of their faith (2002: 43). However, Jensen (2008) underlines that these two modes of religiosity represent ideal-typical descriptions, that probably do not exist in "pure" forms in reality[10]. In fact, other studies have found that such a reformulation of Islam,

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[9] Jensen's research (2008) did not concern Muslim migrants' descendants, but Danish converts to Islam. However, the trajectories of conversion to Islam are often found to present striking similarities with the path of "rediscovery" of a "pure Islam" by Muslim youths with a migrant background – in fact, Roy's analysis of "born again" Muslims discusses both descendants of Muslim migrants and Western converts (2004).

[10] Actually, Jensen's findings seem to point to the existence of a continuum between these two poles, instead of a stark either/or opposition: the converts she studied (2008) go to and from these two stances, feeling both the need for order and rules concerning the "correct", "pure" practice and the need for emotions, feelings and self-discovery, "shopping around" and "choosing" eclectically among different – often opposing – sources of authority.

"freed" from parental homeland culture, may also result in a very contemporary "consumerist" approach to religion, with the adoption of just those practices and doctrines that look more appealing, in a "mix n' match" fashion that cherry-picks what is considered more suitable to one's own preferences and needs (Césari 1998, 2002). This is linked to a more "personalized" practice of religion, favoured by the ambient institutional deregulation of religion in secular societies (concerning all religions and not just Islam) and by the fragmentation of authority structures (a trend that also concerns the Muslim world in general, not just in the West - Mandaville 2007). In the face of the declining influence of classic Islamic institutions, on one hand, and of the multiplication and the availability of sources of religious authority on the other hand (e.g. the sheer number of religious websites and fora on the internet is just an example of how wide is this religious offer), for some western-born Muslims individualization of religion means a privatized, "bricolage" practice, in which individual beliefs are self-validated. Indeed, the diversification of religious authority seems to be at the origin of two opposing trends: while some feel disoriented by such fragmentation and thus ultimately resort to a literal reading of the only "original", "reliable" sources (the Quran and the Hadiths), others feel freer to draw what they "like more" from the multiplicity of sources and interpretations available[11].

Such sources and interpretations are essentially consulted on the internet, where a plethora of discussion forums about Islamic tenets and their correct application has literally burgeoned over the past two decades (Roy 2004; Césari 2013). Indeed, the fragmentation of authority has caught young Muslims in a crossfire between a range of different actors: from local imams to leaders sent in Western countries by migrants' countries of origin such as Turkey or Morocco, from Muslim Brotherhood's offshoots to Salafi preachers, they all claim to embody the "true" version of Islam. According to Césari (ibid.), then, it is not surprising that young Muslims resort to the internet (something which they are much more familiar with than place of worship) to seek answers to their doubts. Their questions most often concern the *behave* dimension (and not the *belong* or the *belief* ones) – see Chapter 3. More specifically, they look for clarifications concerning the right religious practice they should adopt in order to be considered a "good Muslim". Salafi websites represent by far the largest share of the "Islamic offer" on the web, providing precisely that kind of very pragmatical answers regarding what to do and what not to do in the conduct of life based on a strict (alleged) literal reading of the Scriptures – of the kind referred to above. As argued by Césari (ibid.) and Kepel (2012), the increasing visibility and activism of the global Salafi movement on the internet, aiming to address especially Western audiences, represent one of the major developments affecting the Muslim word in generally, and especially Muslims in the West.

3. The role of context: Islamic identity in non-Muslim societies

Crucial to these developments is the context where they occur. In Western countries Islam is generally stigmatized as problematic and essentially non-integrable. There certainly are huge differences between American and European cultures in the ways immigrants' religion is associated with integration into mainstream society: in the United States religion is seen as facilitating the adaptation process, while European countries, by far more affected by secularization tendencies, perceive religion as a barrier to inclusion, rather than as a bridge (Hirschman 2004; Alba 2005; Foner & Alba 2008).

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[11] Roy is however persuaded that such trajectories of personalized re-elaboration of a "patchwork" Islam do not represent the prevailing trend: according to him, at the general level, this "rediscovery" of Islam by Muslim youths does not generate significant changes in the dogma (2004).

However, when it comes to Muslims, this needs to be reassessed, in the light of the fraught relationship entertained by "the West" with what it perceives to be its number-one enemy, i.e. Islam - it suffices to recall here the long-standing success, in the public arena, of Huntington's thesis concerning a "clash of civilizations" between Islam and the West, or the recurring portrayal of Muslims solely in those orientalistic terms denounced by Said (1978)[12]. Whilst the United States may frame Islam more in the terms of a security concern, European countries depict as problematic from the cultural point of view, pointing to its alleged intrinsic incompatibility with the claimed democratic, liberal values of "the West" (Césari 2013; Alba & Foner 2015). In any case, receiving society's general sentiments of distrust and hostility towards Islam constantly remind Muslims of their "difference", often with result of making them feel as alien "others".

While this stigmatization applies to both first-generation Muslim immigrants and their descendants, it is the latter that perceive it more painfully. Indeed, the humiliation of marginalization and exclusion often cause them to not be able to feel as fully-fledged citizens, as the country they feel they belong to rejects them by virtue of their cultural and religious heritage. It is often this "otherization" that pushes Muslim youths to interrogate themselves about their belonging, their religion and their religiosity. Thus, the above-described processes of "individualization" and "rediscovery" of a purified Islam often assume a proud reactive meaning, with the precise intent to re-valorize what the "majority" devalorizes, overturning the stigma. Evidence in quantitative studies linking perceived discrimination with religious practice and self-identification only partially confirms this trend (Voas & Fleischmann 2012); however, the occurrence of such a "reactive religiosity" has been documented by qualitative studies (e.g. Arslan 2010; Shirali 2007; Kapko 2007; Khosrokhavar 1997). As empirically demonstrated, this type of recourse to religion often follows difficult moments in life, which youths with a migratory background experience in many occasions, due to their living conditions and the racism and discrimination they endure. For these persons, choosing and appropriating Islam builds upon the need to construct a positive identity. This is also in line with the thesis of "reactive ethnicity", in which group consciousness increases in response to perceived exclusion and discrimination (Portes & Rumbaut 2001).

However, "reactive religiosity" is not to be framed necessarily in conflictual terms. It is true that, for some, reacting against a hostile environment means assuming an oppositional identity (Foner & Alba 2008), with the adoption of ultra-orthodox, uncompromising, intransigent religious behaviors and the choice to live in closed-off communities, in the attempt to avoid any contact with what they consider "impure", "immoral" and "lascivious" Western societies. The proof is the above-mentioned spread of Salafism across Western countries, especially among youths (Inge 2016), who respond to rejection *by* mainstream society with their rejection *of* mainstream society (Adraoui 2010). However, the "success" of Salafism in gaining new proselytes notwithstanding, these oppositional trends of self-segregation concern only a fraction, and by no means the majoritarian one, of Muslim youths. Actually, despite the widespread sentiments of frustration and humiliation generated by exclusion, what has been largely documented is a will to act as citizens and to participate in society (DeHanas 2016; Mustafa 2015; Johns 2014; Césari 2013) - as opposed to the withdrawal from mainstream society displayed by Salafi communities. Arguably, it fully attests to their integration into society that Muslim youths often show the intention to politically participate in the public arena with the very aim to affirm their identity as Muslims, putting their religious identity in the foreground in order to claim their rights *qua* Muslims. Although this should not blind us to the fact that there is a clear asymmetry compared to the other citizens, as young Muslims are only *granted* access to the public space by a majority society which

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[12] This aspect will be more thoroughly treated in Part II – Chapter 3 and in Part III – Chapter 5.

sanctions the extent to which they can voice their concerns and express themselves (Amiraux 2006), their sheer will to make room for themselves testifies to their desire for inclusion – and not to their refusal of a society which nonetheless marginalizes them.

More generally, it has often been found that youths with a Muslim heritage, even observant and devout ones, successfully seek ways to make their religious and national identities coexist in a rather balanced manner[13]. Some research - often informed by the theoretical framework of postcolonial and cultural studies developed by British thinkers such as Hall and Bhabha - has shown how, in many cases, they hybridize elements of the culture of the country where they live - especially aspects of peer and youth culture (e.g. hip pop) - with elements of their cultural heritage, and often in conformity with the religious tenets of the "universalized" Islam they seek and try to enact (Franceschelli & O'Brien 2015; DeHanas 2013a; Sheikh 2007; Eade 1997). In other words, cultural influences are creatively combined in syncretic manners - especially (or probably only) in certain multicultural contexts such as mixed neighborhoods in large cities (where a great deal of such research has been conducted – see also Baumann 1996; Alexander 1996; Les Back 1996).

The above-described major trends concerning descendants of Muslims' religiosity and processes of self-identification have been found also with regards to Italy. For instance, Frisina (2007) has described the conscious effort that youths with a migrant background who self-identify as Muslims carry on in striking a balance between their identity as Italians and their identity as Muslims, reflecting on what it means to be a Muslim in a non-Muslim context, both at the public level and among themselves. This has been occurring in a discursive context marked by heated political debates about the change in the current Italian citizenship law[14]. By claiming their right to citizenship, the sons and daughters of Muslim migrants – together with their peers with other migratory backgrounds – have been demonstrating their genuine attachment to the Italian component of their identity, illustrating how it can coexist with the Muslim one – also through a lively presence *online*, and in some cases, mobilization through the internet, especially with reference to political causes (Palestine) or countries of origin (in the occasion of the "Arab springs") (Premazzi 2010; Premazzi & Scali 2013a, 2013b). Beyond their Muslim identity, they have shown how they can valuably make their contribution by participating as active citizens to the public sphere (Frisina 2006, Ricucci 2016, Premazzi, Ricucci & Scali 2013).

With regards to religiosity more closely, "deculturation" processes as depicted by Roy, with the re-appropriation of Islam in a neo-orthodox manner, have been reported to occur also for Italian Muslim youths (Cigliuti 2015). However, it is important to highlight there seem to be significant differences based on the parents' countries of origin. The tendency to resort to an individually "rediscovered" Islam, purified from any inherited cultural trait and adhered to in a neo-orthodox fashion, seems more recurrent among youths with an Arab descent (i.e. whose parents originate from North-African or Middle Eastern countries). On the contrary, youths with a Pakistani or Bangladeshi migratory background do not necessarily mark a distinction between their religion and their parents' culture and acknowledge the latter as part of their heritage (Pepicelli 2015; Cigliuti 2015). In other words, these youths see culture, religion and community's practices as "obviously" intertwined, forming a compound that is often referred to in national-regional terms (the culture or the religion of Pakistan, Bangladesh, South Asia…) (Cigliuti 2015; Giuliani 2012; Regalia, Gennari, Giuliani 2012). Only a fraction of young

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[13] Although among the highly devout ones the religious component of their identity "comes first", above all the others – e.g. DeHanas 2013a, Franceschelli & O' Brien 2015.

[14] The Italian "discursive context" and the public debates that have affected children of immigrants' integration will be illustrated in Part 3 - Chapter 5.

Muslims whose parents originate from South-Asian countries seek a purified Islam, deprived of cultural "defects" (Pepicelli 2015). Interestingly, this seems to be in contrast with findings concerning British young Muslims with a Pakistani, Indian or Bangladeshi migratory background, who often do elaborate a purified, universalized Islam (Kibria 2008; DeHanas 2013a).

4. The need to study Islam as an everyday lived religion

To summarize the major trends on the topic, religion - understood either as a source of identity (i.e. an identifier) or in terms of observance and practice (or both) - proves to be salient among the descendants of Muslim migrants. However, their ways of being Muslim and of living Islam usually differ in significant ways from that of their parents. Such differences have most often to do with a process of individualization by which Islam and the parental culture are made the object of a reflection, especially for those who wish to practice their religion. Recurrent (but not necessarily majoritarian), in this regard, is the recourse to a purified, culture-less and universal Islam, which some might adopt in a neo-orthodox version, with the rigid observance of rules and principles, often in reaction to a context that is hostile to Muslims and Islam.

Nonetheless, with reference to the "deculturation" thesis, the picture seems to be more complex. However influential and useful this theory might be in explaining the "disorientation" lived by youths with a migrant-Muslim background, torn between their community and parents' traditions and religious practices and a non-Muslim society that, at best, reminds them of being different by virtue of their religion or, at worse, sanctions such a difference even harshly, a closer look at their daily experiences seems necessary, in order to complete the portrayal of their religiosities and processes of self-identification. For instance, Koning (2008) rightly suggests that a differentiation has to be made between the *intention* to resort to a literal reading of the sources and the actual translation into *practice* of this intention. Western-born Muslim youths have to navigate and negotiate between multiple settings, each of which is regulated by a set of social - often tacit - norms. Muslim youths' quest for a purified Islam has to be conciliated with a context in which the practice of an orthodox Islam may not be so easy. A deeper ethnographic insight into their actual daily practices is thus necessary in order to properly account for the manifold complex implications of the phenomena of deculturation and of individualization. Whilst these phenomena have been amply documented to exist, it remains unclear how they concretely unfold from a more experiential and phenomenological point of view.

Moreover, it has been underlined that research on the implications of the deculturation of Islam, especially regarding the spread of neo-orthodox Islam, has been driven to concentrate almost exclusively on the most visible and conspicuously devout - frequently neo-orthodox - young Muslims[15] (Selby 2016; Jeldtoft 2013a; Brubaker 2013; Woodhead 2013; Jeldtoft 2011; Jeldtoft & Nielsen 2011; Schielke 2010 – see Chapter 3). Whilst this has been motivated by the need to "make sense" of the "sudden" - and visible - re-Islamization of young western-born Muslims (Roy 2004; Laurence & Vaisse 2006; Kepel 2012), who were showing to be increasingly interested in a revivalist neo-orthodox Islam

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[15] Even with reference to quantitative research projects, Voas & Fleischmann (2012) underline that a common problem with studies seeking to explore the hypothesis that perceived discrimination leads to an increase in religious practice or sentiment is that they are based on samples often recruited through Muslim organizations. This hampers the generalizability of the results to the wider population of Muslims in the West and makes it difficult to establish the direction of the causality. They suggest that populations for these kinds of surveys should be sampled on the basis of ethnic rather than religious background.

(Kibria 2008), this actually translated to a heightened focus *solely* on them. Such a trend has also to do with the fact that the deculturation thesis, with its ramification explaining the success of ultra-orthodox forms of Islam, has become central to any account of radicalization processes among Muslim youths (Koning 2008). In other words, research on young Muslims in Europe has come to fall within the broader spectrum of studies that analyze the Islamic presence in the West from the point of view of integration and security issues – i.e. from a point of view that looks at the extent to which the West has been able to "domesticate" Islam (Sunier 2014). While these studies were important in sketching some important issues and trends, there is the risk of offering an incomplete picture of the self-identifications of youths with Muslim heritage and of their relationship with religion – a picture that, wittingly or unwittingly, tends to consider Muslim individuals as misfits whose "incomprehensible" religiousness deviates from the West's (supposed) secular normality.

As it has been argued, such a focus only on those who appear as more "visibly" Muslims might overshadow other equally significant manners of relating to Islam. It is true that deculturation processes have been widely documented to occur with frequency: however, they do not necessarily concern the majority of practicing young Muslims (let alone of Muslims' descendants in general). Among them, there are also those who accept and adopt the "ready-made" cultural - religious "package" or "compound" transmitted by the parents, perform religious practices devoutly, without reflecting too much about their religion. "Deculturation" does not seem to concern the entirety of youths with a Muslim background[16]. In addition, processes of "deculturation" should not blind us to the above-mentioned presence also of persons that self-identify as Muslims, but do not practice. They have been often described as conceiving of Islamic rituals and tenets more in cultural or ethical than in religious terms. However, a closer look at the actual meanings attached to such "cultural" understanding of religion in daily, concrete lives seems to be missing: how and when such a relationship to religion is reflected in everyday practices, or in significant life transitions? Thus, with reference to these scenarios, what seemed to be lacking was a more rounded account of how Islam is concretely and practically experienced, and with what meanings - both from those who separate religion from culture and seek a purified Islam and from those who do not perceive the intertwining of religion and culture as problematic, or are more flexible about it. Hence, several scholars (Sunier 2015, 2014; Toğuşlu 2015; Jeldtoft 2013a, 2013b, 2011; Otterbeck 2013, 2011) argued that only a more phenomenological perspective, able to look at everyday practices, can properly "do justice" to the numerous ways religion is lived, or referred to, or resorted to, in daily lives.

For these scholars, such a plea translates to the study of the ways Islam is felt and/or practiced daily, interacting and mingling with the many other "schemes" that operate in everyday life - gender roles, work, education, work, hobbies, etc. In this sense, this plea arguably also means treating Islam *as any other religion*: rather than looking at how Muslims, "despite" their religion, are becoming integrated – read, are adapting – to presumed homogenous Western cultures and habits, we should be observing their stronger or weaker religiosities, as they unfold, tracing how Muslims, in their own terms and in

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[16] Roy himself underlines this. According to him, some ethnic groups are subject to this process of deculturation of religion more than others, i.e. those for which the transmission of a common national language and of strongly rooted traditional cultural and religious practices is more problematic. This seems to be the case of Maghrebians, who do not have a common language, due to the different and competitive dialects spoken in the Maghreb region (such as Berber) is spoken only by a part of the population in their home country and is subject to the possibility of disappearing among those who emigrate elsewhere. On the contrary, Turks maintain a strong ethnic belonging within their communities and keep robust links with their native country, which enables the cultivation of a more "culturally rooted" practice of religion (Roy 2016). Still, these appear as rather speculative or hypothetical remarks, which actually reinforce the call for analysing these mechanisms more closely.

their own right, make sense of religion in their lives[17]. According to these scholars, such an approach represents an opportunity to enhance our understanding of the many shades of the religious experiences of Muslims and of their descendants and to grasp the complex dynamics of self-identifications, allowing to go beyond the too simplistic and often-implied dichotomies such as religious/non-religious, practicing/non practicing, which presuppose a "a fixed entity called Islam" against which to evaluate people's behaviors – something that regrettably leads us to neglect religious change and individual variations (Otterbeck 2011:1169; Sunier 2014).

The call for studying Islam as "lived in the everyday" consistently draws from an approach that has been emerging over the past two decades in the sociology of religion, which focuses on the analysis of the everyday, banal and mundane dimension of religion, looking at how it (e)merges in daily routines and mundane practices. Therefore, in order to better appraise the studies that have been conducted on "everyday lived Islam", I will now turn to the literature that developed on "everyday lived religion" more generally, so as to appreciate the theoretical underpinnings and the potential of this approach.

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[17] In this regard, Sunier (2014) argues that even those surveys that have been conducted among individual Muslims in Europe on identity and religiosity from an experiential perspective suffer the problem that they are mainly designed to address the question of how integration into society proceeds – thus, always from the point of view of the "domestication" of Islam.

Chapter 2
THE STUDY OF RELIGION AS LIVED IN THE EVERYDAY. A RESEARCH STANCE

As has been widely debated, the political secularism characterizing Western nations' institutional arrangements, involving the separation between Church and State and the erasure of the Church from political affairs, is strongly intertwined with the cultural secularism that has been permeating today's Western societies, and particularly European ones (May *et al*. 2014), where affiliation to major denominations and religious attendance have been diminishing over successive decades (PEW 2011; 2018). Yet, religion does not seem to have perished: indeed, the decline in participation in classic, institutionalized religions did not necessarily entail a disappearance of religious practice and of forms of spirituality. Simply, they cannot be traced in "traditional" religious behaviors. To account for the new forms taken on by religiousness in contemporary societies, a research strand developed in the realm of sociology of religion, aimed at carefully observing how religion may – unexpectedly – unfold in modern, daily lives, and at appreciating the meanings attached to such expressions of religiosity. The present Chapter seeks to reconstruct this research stance, as well as the tools it uses to study individuals' everyday lived religion. The discussion will also show the usefulness of such an approach not only for analyzing the religiosity of contemporary youths', but also for treating Islam as *any other religion*, i.e. by studying Islam in a "de-exoticized" manner, as explained in Chapter 3 and 4.

1. Personalized and de-institutionalized religion

The stream of research devoted to the study of "everyday religion" or of "lived religion" has emerged as a response to a number of challenges encountered by scholars in the field of the sociology of religion. Religious strength and diffusion being mainly analyzed through quantitative research, researchers have found it increasingly difficult to explain two seemingly opposing trends occurring in Western societies: on one hand, survey results attesting to a significant decline in religious practice and attachment in Western countries, and, on the other hand, an apparent "return of religion" with explosions of religious fervor, which appear to contradict or undermine the classic "secularization theory". For instance, demonstrations of the enduring presence and influence of religion are traceable in how religion rivals commerce and pornography for dominance on the Internet, or in the abundance of so-called spiritual movements, or in the mobilizations of religion-based networks during electoral campaigns (Ammerman 2007:4; Hjelm 2015).

This paradoxical simultaneous presence and absence of religion is at the center of a broader philosophical and sociological debate on a "return of religion", which has led to rethink the relationship between society, religion and modernity. Whilst the imagined "triumph" of the latter has been thought of going hand in hand with a gradual and inevitable loss of importance of religion in people's life since early sociologists' first theorizations (Durkheim 1893 [2016]; Weber 1919 [2014]), most of today's theorists are persuaded that the "secularization thesis" can no longer account for the tendencies observable in present times. This has led many to reconceptualize secularization and to label the

current phase as that of "desecularization" or of a "post-secular society"[1]. On one hand, in the context of modern nation-states, religions have been shorn of their role as "grand legitimators", responsible for integrating and regulating society as a whole; on the other hand, and perhaps precisely because of this, religions "reincarnate" as movements and pressure groups acting in the public sphere (Casanova 1994, 2006), but, more importantly, have become manifest in new fashions at the individual level, with the need for and the expression of "spirituality(ies)" increasingly gaining center-stage. As explained by Hunt (2005), today's sociological accounts demonstrate how belief and practice are now largely observable at the individual – or, better – at the *individualized* level.

Such individualized religious stances entail - or correspond to - the patent decline of institutionalized and organized forms of religion, which seem to have benefited from centuries of ecclesiastic inertia until the "advent" of modernity. Indeed, the privatization of religion had been attested to occur already in classical accounts of the "secularization thesis" and was described as the process by which religion was increasingly transferred from the social context as a collective experience to the private realm, thus becoming "invisible" (Luckmann 1967). The culprit for this reduction of religion to the private was to be found in the numerous irreversible transformations taking place in modern industrial societies: high levels of social and geographical mobility were leading to a breakdown of "community", and this in turn affected the nature and the effective strength of social control (Wilson 1976). Davie (1994) further confirmed this tendency to privatization in identifying a decoupling between belief and practice: belief, in *private*, resulted more resilient than practice as performed in *public* (e.g. by observing the decline in churchgoing) – a circumstance that she captured with the phrase "believing without belonging". This concept represented an important contribution to this debate, which has been ultimately evolving around the long-term tenability of religion itself, in the face of its declining public expression. In other words, it has been argued that detached belief is unlikely to sustain itself in the long run (Davie 2011).

Indeed, as Ammerman (2007:4) argues, if we were to trace today's religiousness in "classic" demonstrations of religiosity, such as regularity of church attendance, orthodoxy of belief and ability of religious institutions to enforce their norms, then we would miserably fail. In this regard, the "secularization" thesis seems to hold[2]. However, the fact that traditional religious authorities have lost their grip on society does not mean that religion has disappeared from individuals' lives. Quite the contrary: it simply seems to have found different ways to manifest itself. This was actually anticipated by Luckmann himself. In his view, the decrease in institutional and conforming pressures have left individuals free to seek their "ultimate meanings" and follow their spiritual quests in private, on their own. He was not persuaded that religion would have waned completely: forms of spiritualities and of religiousness would have somehow still represented a feature of the human condition. According to Hunt (2005: 31-32), Luckmann (1990) seems to have pre-dated much of today's theorizations about cultural and religious change in post-modern times, as he also noted the emergence of new forms of religiosities that appear to be oriented less towards "great transcendences" of life, death and the other-

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[1] This concept was put forward by the prominent philosopher and sociologist Habermas (2003, 2008), but debates about the "validity" of the secularization theory were already well underway (Casanova 1994; Berger 1999). It is out of the scope of the present chapter to review the multifarious directions taken by such a broad discussion. "Post-secularism" or "de-secularization" indeed still represent controversial concepts. For an appraisal of the debate, see Gorksi *et al.* (2012), Beckford (2012), Knoblauch, Davie, Knibbe, Vásquez & Casanova (2011), Gorski & Altınordu (2008).

[2] Provided that this is the right question to ask. Instead, Gorski and Altınordu (2008) argue that what we should be enquiring about is not *whether* religion will survive, but *how*: instead of seeking to validate or contradict the "secularization thesis" by posing a "yes or no" question, we should be looking at the *variety* of secularization(s) - i.e. at the different forms secular settlements may assume, where, when, and in relation to what.

world, and more towards the "little transcendences" of "modern solipsism" centered on self-realization through concepts of wholeness and personal autonomy.

These are precisely the characteristics of today's manifestations of religious vitality in the West, according to many contemporary sociological accounts, with particular reference to post-modernist perspectives, focused as they are on the "end of meta-narratives" (Lyotard 1979). To be sure, the force of post-modernist relativism has even more eroded the perceived plausibility, or tolerance, of all-embracing, "traditional" theological constructs (especially when religious hierarchies or organizations mediate them). At the same time, post-modern Western relativism is the product of an expanding disillusion with rationality, which consists in a declining trust in the emancipatory character attributed to scientific knowledge and method. Precisely such a confidence in scientific and technologic progress, which provided a sense of mastery over fate, represented one of the most dominant meta-narratives of the modern era - one that significantly undermined the credibility of religious interpretations of the world (Wilson 1966). However, in the context of "risk society" (Beck 1986, Giddens 1990) and of the crisis of the "project" of modernity, the Weberian disenchantment of the world seems to have morphed into a disenchantment with rationality. In other words, the "end of grand-narratives" has not only meant the demise of the tenability of religious worldviews that had historically claimed a monopoly of the "truth", demanding allegiance from the people, but also the dissolution of an uncompromising trust in rationality (Hunt 2005: 29-31).

The disenchantment with rationality hints to the need to construct a meaningful self in reaction to a society that can hardly provide one. After the dissolution of "community", in a society deemed to be unable to offer moral direction, the individual is left alone in constructing his/her own identity. Having to deal with "the risks and uncertainties of contemporary society, which, precisely because it is post-traditional, deprives the individual of the support and behavioral guidance of traditional social structures", the individual can only rely on his/her own "ability to reflect" on him/herself to try and establish an integrated concept of self (Berzano 2012:75). A reflected-upon pursuit of identity can then turn to religion and spiritualities, as sources of sense and meaning. Therefore, such a disenchantment with rationality and "grand religious narratives" could open a door for religion to return on the scene of social life. Nonetheless, its comeback does not seem to completely take the form of a "re-enchantment of the world" – meaning the re-appearance of all-embracing, over-arching religious worldviews or systems of belief, as the "classical" ones. To use Luckmann's precursory language, the quest of meaning in "great transcendences" simply appears to not make sense any more in a (Western) world where relativism prevails, the production of worldviews grows de-monopolized, religious authorities are increasingly fragmented or appear significantly weakened. Today's de-institutionalization of religion is more pronounced than ever and has to do with the non-tenability of classical religious structures and doctrinal systems of belief: individuals' religiosity walks away from the "dry" rituals and norms as they are enforced by "traditional" religious actors and organizations. But more than just privatized, religion has become *personalized*.

There is nothing new in observing privatization and remoteness from religious institutions: as pointed out above, these trends had already been noted in past decades. But whilst for a long time they have been considered unquestionable proofs of secularization, more recently they have been associated with the re-emergence of new, personalized - customized - forms of religiousness. What seems to be new is the content of belief and the meanings attached to an inner cultivation of some form of religiosity: initially, privatization had simply meant keeping a passive, remote attachment to traditional, inherited systems of belief; now it appears to mean personalization and re-elaboration. Instead of being

transmitted, religion in Western societies has now become explicitly adopted: religiousness is lived by choice, and not by destiny (Berzano 2012), or, to use Wuthnow's language (1992, 1998), people have moved from a religion of "dwelling" in an *ascribed* religious space to an *achieved* religion of "seeking". Indeed, present-day religiosity is just but one of the contemporary manifestations of what has been defined as "reflexive identity", "reflexive project of the self" or "self-reflexive biography" by today's theorists such as Giddens, Berger and Keller, Beck. Individuals today enjoy "the freedom to discover their own spiritual 'truths', their own 'reality' and their own 'experience', according to what is relevant in their lives: in this reflexive process, religion can provide a means by which to create a new self. Religion, in the post-modernist account, thus "aids the construction of identity and lifestyle preferences as a subjective act of becoming what the individual aspires ideally to be" (Hunt 2005: 35). In this sense, religious behaviors and preferences themselves may come to be considered a *lifestyle* (Berzano 2011) with religious activity almost being experienced as a *loisir* activity (i.e. a hobby) in conjunction with other *loisir* activities (ibid.). New Age, yoga, meditation and related forms of spirituality lend themselves well to this description.

This personalization of religious beliefs and behaviors is facilitated by the typically Western cultural context of "consumer choice". According to post-modernist accounts, individuals are encouraged to pick and choose from a wider offer on the "spiritual marketplace", until they find what they feel is most appropriated to them (Miller 2005)[3]. Being religious is a matter of choice and of reinterpretation, entailing a "capacity of self-confrontation", in "bearing in mind others' and new life-contexts", that is, taking into account the resources and tools made available by an environment that globalization has made pluralistic (Berzano 2012). This has to do with broader developments occurred in today's cultural sphere, where consumerism has become a cultural expression on its own, able to forge lifestyles (and does not just represent a component of the economic system). Contemporary individual religious life may thus be characterized by consumption and syncretism, with a "razzmatazz" combination of symbols and creeds from a plethora of different frameworks of meaning. At the ordinary, mundane, everyday level, people can live what has been called a "patchwork religion" (Wuthnow 1998), or a "religious bricolage" (Hervieu-Léger 1999), or a "mix 'n match spirituality" (Hunt 2005). By eclectically tapping into different sources, one can piece together his/her own personal religion suited to answer his/her quest for meaning – a trend facilitated by the internet and the easier contact with religions and philosophies from other parts of the world (with Indian and far-Eastern religious forms such as Buddhism, yoga meditation or Reiki gaining most success in the West). In place of grand, unitary and universal narratives, the single individual constructs his/her own "small narrative" entrusted with the task of self-enhancement and of authentically reflecting him/her personality, preferences, needs.

So, even if religion can still represent a link to a "grand scheme" – i.e. an all-encompassing moral framework, system or life-program - this tends to become personalized, expressing one's own re-elaborated system of beliefs; void of collective forms, these religiosities appear remote from the traditional authority of institutions. As it has been argued, it is precisely such de-institutionalization and the fluid personalization of religious contents that require novel, more "imaginative approaches" (Davie

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[3] Exponents of rational choice theory (e.g. Iannaccone, Finke, Stark, Bainbridge) also argue against the secularization thesis, conceiving of religious individuals as consumers and describing today's religious landscape in terms of a marketplace, where a wide and pluralistic religious offer leads to an increase in levels of religious participation. Despite the great difference between the theoretical underpinnings of the rational choice paradigm (that originates from an approach applied in the field of economics) and of post-modern theorisations, the emphasis on the individual and on his/her capacity to choose in a marketplace partly overlaps with post-modern accounts. However, rational choice theories are not included in the present review as they do not inform the theoretical approach of "everyday lived religion" which is here considered (Ammerman 2007:6; 2007:22; 2013: 24).

2011) to the study of the forms taken by religion today. With regards to the topic of the present research, it is important to underline how these trends of personalization may concern the youth, possibly more than any other social group, in light of the declared disaffiliation with classic religious institutions declared by young people, even in a country permeated by a significant presence of religion and of religious organizations in the public sphere such as Italy (Giordan 2010; Bignardi & Bichi 2015; Garelli 2016). Among Italian youths, it appears interesting to analyze whether tendencies leaning towards the "customization" of religion exist among those holding a Muslim background. Indeed, this research stance seems well-suited to study whether and how "self-reflexive" biographies unfold among individuals who seem to maintain a stronger religious attachment, as compared to their "secularized" non-Muslim peers (as discussed in Chapter 1), to a confession - Islam - that has never been as institutionally centralized and structured as other Western religions, and is characterized by an extremely wide and varied "offer" - especially on the internet.

2. What does it mean to study everyday lived religion?

Such "imaginative approaches" attempt to go beyond the "usual" procedures that sociology of religion has traditionally employed – i.e. either the use of surveys or the study of religious institutions (Berger 2007). According to a number of scholars - David Hall, Nancy T. Ammerman, Meredith McGuire, Abby Day, Robert Orsi, Linda Woodhead to name only a few[4] - these procedures seem no longer capable of properly accounting for the complexities and the varying intensities and forms taken on by religious experiences nowadays.

On one hand, believers' declining institutional involvement points to the need to expand the scope of action of research in religious phenomena, by looking beyond institutions and organizations, because religious life today happens mostly outside of institutions. Indeed, as Ammerman discussed (2007, 2013, 2014), sociology of religion has long been too narrowly focused on looking for "coherent arguments about the nature of God and salvation and scripture, membership in a recognized religious body, attendance at officially recognized religious events" (Ammerman 2013: 24), thus revealing its biases about a "real religion" (ibid.). While these are useful indicators, they "do not exhaust the range of ideas, memberships and practices that bring the spiritual and the mundane worlds into conversation with each other" (ibid.). As efficaciously stated by Berger, to limit the study of religion to institutional locales "would be like studying politics by only looking at the activities of organized political parties" (2007:vi). Gorski and Altınordu also highlight such a "pastoral perspective" in research about religion, by which religion has been framed only in priestly and Protestant terms: "in the pastoral perspective, real religion is necessarily churchly religion, and real religiosity is manifested in individual orthodoxy" (2008:61-62). According to them, this view strongly influenced the research practices of sociology, having become a foundation for collecting data. On the contrary, they call for using pastoral definitions of religion as *objects* of analysis, and not as *category* of analysis (ibid. – see also McGuire 2008:11-12).

On the other hand, surveys' questions that enquire about religious self-identifications generally assume that identity is something fixed, given, once and for all. On the contrary, as argued above, identity and self-identifications are "reflexive projects" today, subjected to continuous revisiting. Religion and a quest for spirituality represent an integral part of such reflexivity – both because the construction of an

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[4] See the review compiled by Edgell (2012: 253-255) on a number of studies based on a "lived religion" approach.

"integrated" self can resort to religious sources, and because these sources in turn are object of reflection, being selectively chosen and cobbled together in new, "customized", ways. Moreover, based on the assumptions about "real religion" previously mentioned, surveys often ask questions on belief in the "classic" tenets of traditional, institutionalized religions, without taking in due account the changing nature of the act of believing and of the contents of beliefs themselves (Day 2013; Ammerman 2013). In other words, by presenting identity and religiosity as static facts, surveys cannot capture how these are fluid, blurred and changeable in reality (Day and Lee 2014).

Whatever the importance of these two *foci* of research, they need to be complemented by further perspectives from the theoretical, epistemological and the methodological points of view. Therefore, the growing dissatisfaction with the limited effectiveness of these procedures motivated a shift in the study of religion, centered on the analysis of religion as observable in daily lives, through mundane practices. In order to make sense of the simultaneous "presence and absence of religion" in the contemporary world, scholars had to start framing - and researching - the relationship between religion and society in new ways.

From the *theoretical* point of view, dissatisfaction with the study of religion solely based on analysis of institutions translated to a study of religion based on the analysis of religious lives as they unfold in the everyday of ordinary people, outside of institutions. As Ammerman puts it:

> To start from the everyday is to start from the nonexperts, the people who do not make a living being religious or thinking ad writing about religious ideas. […] Everyday implies the activity that happens outside religious events and institutions. […] We are interested in all the ways in which nonexperts experience religion. Everyday religion may happen in both private and public life, among both priviliged and nonpriviliged people. It may have to do with mundane routines, but it may also have to do with the crises and special events that punctuate those routines. We are simply looking for the many ways religion may be interwoven with the lives of people (2007:5).

McGuire too pleas for the study of "lived religion", which she describes as a useful notion "for distinguishing the actual experience of religious persons from the prescribed religion of institutionally defined beliefs and practices" (2008:12). By recalling Luckmann's work (1976), she underlines that individuals do not simply "commit, or refuse to commit, to an entire, single package of beliefs and practices of an official religion" (2008:16); therefore, researchers should not limit themselves to a mere description of the congruence - or the lack thereof - between individuals' religion and religiosities and that standard package. On the contrary, precisely because "religion […] is about how people make sense of their world – the 'stories' out of which they live" (2007:187), "at the level of the individual, religion is not fixed, unitary or even coherent. We would expect that all persons' religious practices and the stories with which they make sense of their lives are always changing, adapting, and growing" (2008:12). Indeed, Luckmann (1976) anticipated that, for their religious practices and beliefs, individuals draw from a variety of resources that exceeds the activities and the teachings of official religions. Actually, what he defined "invisible religion" precisely consists in a vast array of non-religious resources, most of which would not even be considered as properly "religious" according to standard theological or sociological definitions.

This entails, for instance, looking at what people define as religious or spiritual and what difference, if any, they make between the two (Ammerman 2007; 2013); it means asking where do we see symbols and assumptions that have spiritual dimensions, even if they are not overtly defined as such

(Ammerman 2007:5). However, the study of everyday lived religion does not *only* deal with the unconventional practices of "exotic religious wildflowers" (Ammerman 2013:2), i.e. the hyper-personalized, customized, "mixed 'n matched" forms of religiosities referred to above. On the contrary, this approach looks at religion as it plainly happens, takes place or makes room for itself in ordinary people's daily lives, asking both where are these *new* religiosities gaining a foothold and where are *traditional* religions present beyond institutional walls (Ammerman 2007: 5). Indeed, this research stance is by no means entirely dismissive of the role of religious institutions – however residual this might have become - and, more importantly, it acknowledges the enduring influence exerted by the normativity of grand religious "narratives" or "schemes". This perspective requires recognizing that there often exists a *gap* between such normativity and the ways people actually live religion. As Schielke and Debevec (2012) noted, "many of the most powerful religious traditions and practices around the world [...] have a strongly normative character, offering compelling ways to act, to live, to be and to perceive the world – and yet how people actually live religious lives appears to be a very different business" (2012: 1-2). This is because, even when they do commit to an official religion, individuals do not *simply* reproduce, in their microcosms, the grand narrative of that official religion (McGuire 2008:12).

Therefore, the study of everyday lived religion is entrusted with the task of looking at what is "inside" that gap: besides taking into account the packages of religious narratives supplied by institutions - "religion-as preached" - we should attentively consider "religion-as-lived" (McGuire 2007:187). This means accounting for the numerous ways people relate to grand, systematic religious frameworks (or "grand schemes"), how they appropriate and make sense of them, when and how they make use of (parts of) them and with what meanings (Schielke & Debevec 2012). As noted by Ammerman (2007:5), "official" ideas are still important, but "they are most interesting to us once they get used by someone other than a professional". In other words, recognizing the existence of pluralism and trends of "bricolage" and personalization should not be the same as ignoring historic religious traditions altogether; it precisely means looking at how, when, where, why religious traditions can still matter in people's lives, or observing how new and old religious ideas or practices appear (often intermingled) in today's religious lives and can even become of original patchworks and personalized re-elaborations. Studying today's religiosities this way allows, for instance, opening the black box of what it means to be a nominalist Christian (Day 2013) or provide qualitative "substance" to concepts such as "fuzzy fidelity", i.e. the seemingly casual loyalty to tradition emerging from survey-based studies (Voas 2009). Indeed, Ammerman started theorizing everyday religion by investigating what she later defined "Golden Rule Christians", i.e. members of churches who define religion by referring not to contents of creeds or articles of faith, but to practices. They would describe a Christian as someone who seeks to do good, that has a "Golden Rule" morality, feels compassionate about those in need and demonstrates such compassion by caring for others. For these people, it does not matter what you say you believe in or how much you attend religious services: what is relevant is how you live your life. To them, faith means living by the Golden Rule (Ammerman 1997, 2013).

The reason why such an approach "recovers" the role of religious "grand schemes" and traditions in the everyday lies in its *ontological* and *epistemological* underpinnings: whilst bearing in mind how post-modern individuals can fabricate their own religion, this perspective does not treat merely them as isolated, atomized "consumers" in a spiritual marketplace where they are always free to easily pick, mix

and choose (while post-modernist theorizations probably tend to overstate such boundless freedom)[5]. On the contrary, in explaining how the study of everyday religiosity should focus on personal religious stories and narratives as important sites of analysis, Ammerman underlines how religious stories present both a private and a public dimension:

> People develop individual life stories that are guiding internal scripts but are intertwined with public shared stories. They contain memories of "how I always behave" but also provide shared situational narratives of "how people like us behave." Our implicit narrative sense structures the everyday meaning-making that forms what Bourdieu might call a "habitus." We live inside a range of socially constructed stories. [...] Listening to stories of everyday religious life means listening both for the canonical storylines that come from shared religious traditions and for the way they are improvised in new circumstances (Ammerman 2013:8).

Every religious story is situated in a context. However personalized (probably more than simply privatized) religion might be nowadays, people might still want to share their religious experiences with others (McGuire 2008:12-13) and religious stories can be partly shaped by localized religious communities, as settings that can provide relationships, practices and ways of thinking. Edgell (2012) underlines the insights offered by those studies that intersect the analysis of lived religion with that of religious institutional fields, in that they demonstrate how these fields represent a source of cultural coherence that can contribute to shape everyday religion. Lived religiosity is thus shaped by personal and public (or social) forms of meaning-making. Among these, existing traditions can still play an important role, even if in very personalized fashions.

In other words, this approach acknowledges that individuals do not live in a *vacuum* and deems it crucial to adequately account for the *social and cultural* patterns in which individuals find themselves embedded in, as these patterns often include the long-lasting *cultural* impact of existing traditions. For fabricating their own religion, individuals can borrow, adapt or resort to (parts of) existing traditions. While individuals might indeed walk away from established, "old" institutions, they might still feel the influence of these traditions. Thus, the role of grand schemes that are present "in the background" cannot be grasped if we limit ourselves to ask people simply about what they believe in, as it can manifest itself in many other subtle, even unreflected, different ways. This is why a closer look at everyday practices and experiences is necessary.

Hence, from the *methodological* point of view, this translates to using qualitative and ethnographic methods to capture how religion plays out in the everyday world of material culture and spiritual practice, investigating attitudes, needs, expectations, individual action strategies, preferences, lifestyles (Berzano 2012). The very incomplete picture of the status of religion resulting from surveys thus called for an enhanced use of qualitative methods. Day and Lee (2014) underline the importance of qualitative methods as necessary complements to survey data for understanding the reflexive, fluid and changeable nature of self-identifications and of religious identifications. Day (2013) proved just how "tick-box talk" of questionnaires needs to be sided by "real talk", because the selection of categories in the section of a questionnaire that concern religion and identity is never a neutral exercise; besides carrying personal meanings, this selection is a relational action, connected to sets of cultural expectations that only qualitative methods can uncover. According to Berzano (2012), it is precisely because identifications and religiosity have become reflexive projects that the sociology of religion

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[5] Not to mention rational choice theorizations, which are squarely rooted in a conceptualization of the individual and of his/her choices, regardless of his/her social context.

needs to concentrate on its *hermeneutical* vocation more than on the task of explaining through fixed sets of variables. He explains further that this would mark a "return of the subject" in the sociology of religion, motivated by the necessity to liberate this discipline "from economicistic positions", which "had forced even the theory and social research on religious phenomena to depend on objective variables such as social class, the division of labor, the relationship between production and income distribution, ascribed cultural variables and the religious tradition of the family and local community of belonging. The image of sociology which emerged from these research sectors was […] that of a 'sociology without a subject' and a 'religion without the faithful'" (Berzano 2012: 71-72).

On the contrary, reframing the study of religion in terms of "everyday lived religion" means looking at

> *the myriad individual ways by which ordinary people remember, share, enact, adapt, create, combine the 'stories' out of which they live*. […] each individual's religion-as-lived is constituted by […] often mundane practices for remembering, sharing, and creatively assembling their most vital religious needs (McGuire 2007: 187 – emphasis in the original text).

This entails paying attention to religious practice, experience and emotion in everyday life across many arenas of activity, being open to find religion in unexpected ways. For Ammerman (2007, 2013, 2014) the analysis of "everyday lived religion" has to be conducted by analyzing narratives about one's own daily practices or by directly observing mundane, ordinary, daily practices, as religion can "appear" anywhere, anytime, intertwined with any aspect of life. Indeed, religion is not relegated to a "special", separated and distinct sphere of life, just like any other activity: the study of modern social life recognizes the influences that flow back and forth across spheres of life (Ammerman 2007, 2013). Therefore, lived religion can be found in bodily practices such as what we eat and how, what we wear, or how we deal with sexuality, the place we reserve to the sacred in the spaces we inhabit (e.g. domestic shrines), the activities we do in our spare time, but even preferences concerning cultural consumption (i.e. music). Forms of spirituality may appear in defining moments of life, or when moments of rupture or of crisis occur. Through all of these ambits, religion may emerge as helping people making sense of their worlds and construct the "stories" that they live.

For McGuire, the "stuff" of practices is our ordinary, material existence, of which the human body is a particularly salient component: "practices – even interior ones, such as contemplation – involve people's bodies as well as their minds and spirits" (2007:198). The study of religion, she argues, has reflected Western religions' biases that privilege the cognitive dimensions of religiosity, focusing almost exclusively on beliefs and disregarding bodily and material expressions of religion (ibid. – the same point is made by Woodhead 2013: 10-11)[6]. This is mirrored in survey questions, which do not generally enquire about these kinds of practices, and has induced a thinking by which Western religions are "mentalist" and "pure", while the Other's religion is "exotic" because it is characterized by "bizarre" practices, magic, superstition (2007:198).

More in general, this approach means putting aside merely propositional, cognitive or doctrinal perspectives, in order to look at how religion is *enacted*, through the analysis of how faith is *performed*

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[6] McGuire further argues that this vision actually reflects Western traditional religious institutions' negative consideration of people's bodily practices – dubbed as folk, pagan, superstitious, or dangerously "magic". Thus, religious authorities have always attempted to tame adherents' religious practices addressing or involving the human body, but without success. In response, people have always selected, borrowed and blended diverse cultural elements into their own material and corporeal expressions of religiosity – thus making of embodied religious practice a site of contestation (2007: 189).

through language and embodiment – something which, according to Day (2010), points directly to the intrinsic social and relational nature of lived religiosity and of belief. In this sense, modes of belief as uncovered through the studies of practices show how faith can become a marker of cultural identity, an expression of significant networks of belonging or a conscious "cultural project" aimed at creating "a sensory, material and relational environment" through "a sustained attempt to shape thought, emotion, body and practice in accordance with an explicitly stated sets of beliefs derived from experiential, textual, or institutional sources of religious authority" (Day & Lynch 2013: 201-202). Examples can be religious-based forms of cultural production such as Christian punk or Muslim hip pop (ibid.). Thus, the study of everyday lived religion comes to be enmeshed with the study of performance, aesthetics, self-styling and of contemporary (popular) cultural production which, by no coincidence, often involve and concern *youth people*. This brings back into the analysis the contemporary trends of commoditization of religion, but in the contexts of the emergence of new forms of community (Sunier 2014). Indeed, as it has been argued, the overall discipline of the sociology of religion would benefit from a cultural analysis of religion, as such an approach would allow overcoming the sterile secularization account by broadening the scope of inquiry, and by conceptualizing religious identities - and the role of religious authorities too - in richer and finer ways (Edgell 2012).

This research stance, therefore, can reveal extremely apt for studying Muslim religiosities, as Islam is marked by a significant *performative* character, as we shall see in Chapter 3. Such performativity blurs the divisions between what is private and public, or what is religious and what is not religious. As observed in Chapter 1, youths of Muslim origin may declare to strongly *belong*, even when they *believe* or *behave* not so intensely. What is the meaning attributed to that *belonging*, then – especially in the light of the pervasive performative nature of Islam? This cannot be grasped by survey questions that inevitably reduce the many different shades and flavors that the Muslim religious experience may take on. On the contrary, an approach such as the one here described may equip us better with the conceptual and methodological tools to explore the possible religiously-reflexive lives of Western-born young Muslims.

From the point of view of the concrete translation into research practice, the lived religion approach lends itself well to any kind of research technique in the realm of qualitative methods that can capture the phenomenological nature of lived religion – from participant observation (e.g. McGuire 2008, 1990) to interviews (e.g. Ammerman 2012, 2013; Jeldtoft 2011, 2013; Otterbeck 2011, 2013), diaries (Ammerman 2012, 2013) or photo elicitation (Ammerman 2012, 2013) or other tools in visual sociology (Otterbeck 2011, 2013). Williams (2010, 2015) argues for the use of visual sociology research techniques as better instruments for grasping the deeper meaning of religious emotions, experiences, practices and beliefs in daily lives. The same argument is made by Cipriani and Del Re (2010)[7].

3. The social relevance of everyday religion: strategies and tactics

As highlighted above, the study of religion as lived in the everyday is not merely focused on the individual, as it seeks to uncover also the intersubjective reality of everyday religiosity. Nonetheless, this approach might eventually run the risk of appearing quite irrelevant for understanding broader

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[7] An example of how visual techniques can be used to investigate the place and meaning of religion in people's lives is provided by Bichi and Bignardi's research (2015), concerning young Italian adults' relation to the Catholic religion.

dynamics in society, as everyday religion might be considered to concern more the private than the public spheres of life. On the contrary, as has been shown particularly by Woodhead (2013), such a perspective can reveal the transformative aspects of lived religion, as well as the workings of power relations, which are extremely relevant for social, public and even political life.

The focus on this everyday dimension of individuals' lives did not just occur in the sociology of religion – it arguably reflects an overall re-centering of sociology on the study of everyday life. While it is true that everyday life has been important to social theory since the initiation of the discipline, and that a concern with everyday life has punctuated the main sociological traditions that developed both in Europe and in North America (Adler et al. 1987)[8], it is only in recent times, with the "postmodern turn" in sociology (Susen 2015), that everyday life has become an object of research on its own within the discipline (Sztompka 2008; Kalekin-Fishmen 2013). A significant impulse to the study of the everyday came from a number of by French theorists, such as Lefebvre, Barthes, Maffesoli, Perec and De Certeau, who introduced new ways of thinking about everyday life, in the firm conviction that, since the everyday is all too often taken for granted, its inherent performativity needs to be "revealed" by activating a suitable attentiveness, capable of bringing into light the forms of resilience or resistance that are engrained in the commonalities of human experiences (Sheringham 2006: 15, 82, 398; Abruzzese 2001: ix-xvi).

The study of everyday religion has particularly drawn from the theorization of the everyday offered by De Certeau[9], whose work lends itself well to the treatment of individuals' religiosities, in that it allows accounting for "the complex duality of religion as an everyday practice and a normative doctrine" (Schielke & Debevec 2012: 1). In his classic *The practice of everyday life* (1984), De Certeau was interested in the dynamics of production and consumption as experienced in daily lives, with the aim to uncover how, in their quotidian, automated or unreflected routines, ordinary people - the "weak" - actually make use of what is produced by institutions and structures - the "powerful" (corporations, governments and the like). The former have very limited choice and scope of action, as they can only "move" within the spaces and with rules defined by the latter; however, they are not completely deprived of agency. On the contrary, in showing how people experience and appropriate spaces in the city, or how people work or read or cook or rework religious creeds (De Certeau 1984; De Certeau, Giard, Mayol 1998), his analysis reveals the multiple ways in which individuals' behaviors are not fully determined by what is institutionally planned: the weak can use what is produced by the powerful in different and unexpected ways than what is foreseen by the powerful.

He thus articulated his own notion of the everyday by introducing a distinction between "strategies" - those of the powerful - and "tactics" - those of the weak. It is true that a tactic can only "react, rather than command, machinise, rather than strategize" (Woodhead 2013:13), but in can do so in highly creative, constructive and skillful ways, finding "countless ways of 'making do'" (De Certeau 1984:29). This way, ordinary people's tactics may resort to trickery and deception, thus dodging the logics of the strategic. Even refusing to engage with the logics of the strategic exposes the very limits of the strategic: a factory worker who works for himself under the guise of doing work for his employer (*la perruque*, 1984:25) defies the overarching logics of the strategy without confronting it (Colebrook 2002).

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[8] Eminent examples - although highly divergent in their framings of "everyday" - are the works of Simmel, Bourdieu, Foucault, Goffman, Garfinkel, Berger and Luckmann.
[9] The theoretical framework laid out by De Certeau informs the collective efforts of the collection of essays edited by Fadil (2009), Schielke and Debevec (2012) concerning religion as practiced in various parts of the world, and the collection of essays edited by Dessing, Jeldtoft, Nielsen and Woodhead (2013) and Toguslu (2015) which both focus on Islam in Europe.

Although tactics do not have the purpose of disrupting the social whole that the strategy (attempts to) regulate(s)[10], they nonetheless will always leave their impress in the strategical, becoming inherent to it. Thus, even if they stand in an unequal exchange, strategies and tactics entertain a dialectical relationship continuously shaped by underlying power relations.

Applying this conceptual apparatus to the study of religion, then, means bringing to the fore the dynamics of power that affect everyday religiosity. Woodhead (2013: 9-22) elaborated the concepts of "strategic" and "tactical" religion: the former is the religion of the "powerful" – institutions, authorities and "guardians of the sacred" (ibid.) - while the latter is the religion of ordinary, lay, "weak" men and women. With their tactical behavior, they can appropriate, supplement, reinvent the space and the time controlled by the strategic. Thus, the tactic might attempt to re-enchant places, bodies or objects that the strategic has designated as mundane or unworthy, or subvert the patterns of fasting, feasting, sleeping, waking, worshipping, relaxing that many religions regulate with their tenets – whose enforcement is controlled by the strategic. While submitting to this strategic control of the spatial and temporal boundaries of the sacred, the tactical might add its own shades of meaning to such boundaries, or overturn these meanings. Moreover, it can annex its own sacralized practices to the ones endorsed or regulated by the strategic – examples concern new life course-rituals on pregnancy, birth, death, marriage and divorce. Thus, this dialectic allows for "creative change and modification" in religion (Woodhead 2013:17). In this sense, re-elaborations, adjustments, additions or subtractions in religious practices and beliefs, as much as difficulties in enacting religious prescriptions or forms of skepticism towards its tenets, can all become or be framed as tactics.

In this sense, the "everyday lived approach" enables us to see how religion is a social construction, to which both experts and non-experts dialectically contribute, though in a non-equal manner. Indeed, as Shielke and Debevec point out, religion as enacted by ordinary people should not be conceived of as "popular religion," as a watered-down, impure version of a "proper", pure religion articulated in normative doctrine: "there is little use in distinguishing between religion proper and religion popular, be it in terms of institutions vs. laymen or in terms of doctrine vs. enactment. If there is such thing as religion proper, it involves all these" (2012: 2). Analytically acknowledging that there are strategic actors, who benefit from vantage points in defining religion, allows to understand the underlying issues of power, contestation or conflict that shape "the religious field" (Edgell 2012: 251-253), but this does not mean establishing a hierarchy between the religion produced by strategic actors and ordinary people's enactment of religion. The fact that some actors claim what religion should be does not mean that sociologists should take these actors' definitions of religion as the standard against which to evaluate ordinary people's religious behaviors. In other words, assessing this power differential is not the same as sanctioning or endorsing a hierarchical distinction between a "real" religion and a "proper" religion. These more powerful actors just contribute to construct religion as much as ordinary people do through their practices.

It follows that studying religion as it is lived everyday means looking at religion as it actually *is* – and not as it *should be*. How ordinary people relate to religion – and to these strategic actors – and what they make of religion in their daily lives is not at all secondary, because theologies are *embodied* and *enacted* by individuals, "not made exclusively in official venues by religious experts, but at a multiplicity of places and occasions" (Sunier 2015:13). Ultimately, "common knowledge and everyday practices are not just

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[10] Indeed, if tactics had the stated intention or goal to openly challenge or confront the master logic of the strategy, they would actually end up being another strategy, or, better, a counter-strategy.

a way to manipulate [religious] grand schemes, but are constitutive of them on every step" (Schielke & Debevec 2012:9). The tactical becomes engrained in the strategic, leaving its impress on it; the uses people make of religion become sedimented in communities and traditions in ways that, "in the long run, make up a religion in its historical continuity and geographic spread" (ibid.).

Hence, Woodhead (2013) calls upon sociologists to study everyday religion in people's lives not only to reveal power relations within religion, but also as a way to counterbalance the focus on "official" or "strategic religion" that has dominated the sociology of religion, as testified by the vast literature on institutions or organizations *qua* purveyors of "real religion". In her view, this accounts only for "one side" of the whole story, while such an approach allows to give voice to "the unheard". Studying religion-as-lived means ultimately studying how people appropriate and make sense of religious grand schemes by concretely translating them in their life, and how people possibly (tactically) relate (or do not relate at all) to strategic religious authorities as mediators of these grand schemes - however marginal the role of religious institutions and of existing traditions may have become.

With reference to the study of Islam and Muslims in the West and not only, this translated to a plea for shifting the attention from the most visible and organized forms of "strategic Islam" to the non-visible, everyday lives of "ordinary", non-institutionalized Muslims. We will explore this more in detail in the following Chapter, where I will turn to examine how Muslims in the West have been studied through the lenses of their "everyday religiosity". In particular, I will review what research has observed concerning their relationship with religious grand schemes, narratives, orthodoxies and authorities - as these are pragmatically (and tactically) experienced in daily routines and practices - thus identifying what is still missing in this picture. Indeed, the research stance here described is not only specifically appropriate for studying contemporary religious lifestyles of Western-born descendants of Muslims, as highlighted earlier, but also for revealing broader social dynamics of power relationships that affect this category of individuals: Islam is perceived in such a stigmatized and essentialized way, that the different ways in which people actually live this religion remain largely unnoticed. As underlined in Chapter 1, studies on Islam and on Muslim youths often presuppose the existence of a "fixed identity called Islam", against which religious practices and behaviors are evaluated, by resorting to rigid dichotomies such as "religious/non-religious" or "practicing/non-practicing". This lives only little space to observe how Muslims in general – and youths with a Muslim background particular - really enact, embody and appropriate the religious grand scheme and make sense of it on a daily basis and in their daily struggles, thus contributing to shape and "make" religion. Within the present research, therefore, the "everyday lived approach" will be applied to investigate how Western-born descendants of Muslims *appropriate* and *make* religion in their own right, in relation to how "real religion" is defined by "the powerful" – i.e. religious authorities, but also the Western dominant society, with its stereotyped view of Islam.

PART II

THE PRESENT RESEARCH

Chapter 3
THE EVERYDAY LIVED RELIGION OF YOUTHS OF MUSLIM BACKGROUND

After having described in the previous Chapter how the study of "everyday religion" has become an established paradigm more generally in the sociology of religion, I will analyze in detail what it means to apply such an approach to the study of descendants of Muslims in the West. More specifically, I will illustrate recent developments in the literature, which are geared towards the analysis of these youths' everyday social, cultural and religious practices, ultimately indicating possible ways to further expand this approach through the present research.

By analyzing how the exploration of "everyday Islam" has been conducted thus far and what it has revealed, we will be able to appreciate how the "everyday lived religion" approach, which constitutes the theoretical framework informing the present study, can provide us with a more refined understanding of the actual meaning of religion in the day-to-day lives of Western-born youths with a Muslim background. It is argued that this approach, by looking at "daily" Islam, enables to examine the religious behaviors of people with a Muslim background in the same way we could examine those of people belonging to other confessions, thus treating Islam not as something inherently different and exceptional.

At the same time, though, this does not mean overlooking what is peculiar about one particular religion. Actually, it is precisely through the close observation required by this research stance that what is specific about a religious faith can emerge and be analyzed. Indeed, Islam makes for a particularly apt case-study for analyzing everyday religion by virtue of its eminently performative nature, whose traits are recalled at the beginning of the present Chapter (par. 1). As shall be explained, such performativity is intrinsic to Islam's orthodoxy and normativity. Therefore, since studying religion-as-lived means discovering how religious orthodoxy normativity is experienced in the everyday - be it performed unreflectedly, reformulated, denied - I will seek to retrace the elements making up religious normativity in Islam (par. 2.), with specific reference to the kind of normativity that Western-born Muslims have to relate to, in the contexts they are embedded in (par.3). I will then consider how this kind of normativity may shape their everyday religiosities and their different ways of appropriating a religious background (par. 4), by appraising the heuristic value of a research strand that, so far, has attentively studied the "Islam-as-lived" of "non-visible" Muslims. In connection to this, I will point to what still remains unexplored in this area, and could be fruitfully investigated (par. 5).

1. The performative character of Islam

The "everyday lived religion" approach appears particularly suitable to the study of Islam in particular in the light of Césari's above-mentioned remarks concerning the three "big Bs" of religion - Believing, Belonging and Behaving - as manifested by descendants of Muslim migrants in the West (2013: 29-49). *Belief* obviously refers to holding a faith in a creed and in religious tenets; *belong* indicates the will or inclination to share a collective identity; *behave* means religious practices. These three Bs have long been reckoned as compounding the dimensions of a person's religiosity. However, as already explained,

they appear more and more decoupled among today's manifestations of religiosity: many Christians believe without feeling the need to express a belonging and/or without behaving, or, on the contrary, may feel to "belong" in cultural more than in spiritual terms, without necessarily believing or behaving.

According to Césari, most youths of Muslim heritage reportedly consider "belief" as a given, without discussing its contents and validity - as opposed to trends observable among Western Christian expressions of religiosity, which are more focused on debating theological issues and the core of beliefs. Thus, the truthfulness of the Islamic creed is never questioned or is less subject to doubt. Instead, they seem much more concerned with issues pertaining to what Muslims (should) do, in terms of practices – the "behave" dimension. Indeed, as has been highlighted (Mahmood 2005; Spini 2015) the study of Islam cannot be conducted with the categories developed through the study of Western Christian denominations, as Islam is characterized by a pronounced *performative* dimension, in contrast to the privatized and "mental" character taken on by especially Protestant versions of Christianism. Religious norms, in Islam, pervade a whole range of daily activities (e.g. eating, clothing) and prescribe the carrying out of a number of tasks and rituals (e.g. prayers at fixed times during the day to be performed according to a set of rules concerning bodily movements) in ways that inevitably make the mundane acquire sacred meanings. This blurs the usually strictly marked boundaries between what is religious and what is not religious: daily life is religious, and religion is lived daily (Fadil 2006).

In many respects, Islam is an all-encompassing system, and, for Muslims, the meaning of numerous everyday actions or routines can (or should) be traced back to Islamic traditions or prescriptions (even if they may not necessarily know the exact source of that tradition or rule). As shown by Barylo (2017a; 2017b), Muslims may perceive mundane actions as religious and vice versa depending on the circumstances and the individual. Incidentally, this might be one of the reasons why even non-practicing Western Muslims do declare themselves as Muslims when responding to survey questions enquiring about self-identifications and/or personal religiousness (as problematic these surveys might be – see Chapter 1): Islam is anyhow part and parcel of their everyday environment, even if they might not subscribe to some of its tenets or do not intend to observe rituals and practices[1]. In other words, Islam imbues everyday life due to its constitutive complex entanglement of ethics, faith, practice, rituals and daily routines (Barylo 2017a; 2017b).

Therefore, a focus on how religion is experienced in daily, "banal" life, seems all the more appropriate in order to grasp how, when and why youths of Muslim heritage entrust with a religious meaning mundane actions, to appreciate how they concretely relate to the religious grand scheme by translating their doubts or certainties about the correct performance of rituals and practices in their routines, to observe how "the religious" appears in their everyday environment and actions and with what intentions. As explained above (Chapter 2), an approach aiming to investigate "everyday lived religion" allows to understand how religion is referred to and "made" daily, by "ordinary believers", from a bottom-up perspective, as an embodied theology. Islam lends itself particularly well to this kind of phenomenological analysis precisely due its strong performative character. This seems especially to be the case given that even surveys about Muslims in the West that inquire about practices and experiential dimensions do so by merely checking the congruence of individual behaviors and convictions with a set of narrowly-defined Islamic "orthodox practices", in a top-down manner (Sunier

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[1] According to Brubaker (2013), the tendency of non-practicing Muslims to declare themselves as "Muslims" can also be seen as another manifestation of a "reactive" religiosity affirmed in terms of subscribing to a collective, threatened identity – thus, as an effect of the above briefly described stigmatization of Muslims in the West. However, this is probably a too speculative explanation.

2015). This kind of research moves from assumptions on religion as it should be, and do not allow to comprehend religion as it actually is.

Moreover, such a research stance poses two problems. First, by casting all those that do not conform to these "rules" as simply non-religious, it applies to Islam a rigid distinction between "religious" and "non-religious" (or between "the sacred" and "the profane") which does not exactly suit the character of this religion, as just explained (Barylo 2017a; 2017b). Second, it risks perpetuating somewhat orientalistic depictions of practicing Muslims as completely and passively subjugated to rigid, "backward" rules concerning their orthopraxis, preventing from assessing the ways they engage with or appropriate religious normativity. On the contrary, Muslims, just as other religions' followers, do confer personal meanings to religious practices and interrogate themselves about them. Indeed, acknowledging the performative dimension of Islam and the ways it imbues the quotidian should not translate to conceiving of Muslims as "culturally programmed" individuals, as all that they did automatically depended on religion. It is by observing the complex interweaving of Islamic practices with everyday aspects of life that one can appraise the multifarious and personal ways in which the religious grand scheme is adopted or adapted, and made to coexist with other equally relevant everyday grand schemes, such as broader societal expectations, but also personal preferences and choices concerning one's own life trajectory. In sum, analyzing how religion is lived daily also permits to account for the agency that the individual can show in referring to a religious grand scheme and concretely transferring it to his/her life.

Situating his sociological approach to Islam in the perspective of Morin's theory of complexity, Barylo (2017a:16-20; 2017b) describes the role of religion in young Western-born Muslim believers' lives as a "matrix", that is, "a system, a referential, an analysis grid […] enabling the creation of ideas and generating practices in everyday life […] a generative environment of visible and invisible references" such as "beliefs, scriptures, written and oral traditions, rituals, actions, values, ethics, a vision of life, people (whether they are scholars or family members […]), places of worship, spaces, times, symbolic items (prayer mats, perfume)" (2017a:18). Indeed, following Latour's Actor-Network theory (2005) and the agency it attributes also to objects, it is possible to claim that material artefacts too do have a role in mediating or recalling religious prescriptions, and we might add to this list also the very Quran, the hijab, food… As Barylo underlines, this pool of elements is open to continuous expansions and additions operated by those who are exposed and adhere to the "matrix", because it is an "ever-subjectively redefined environment" (ibid.). The agency of individuals is thus safeguarded within this environment: "as opposed to single-sided and linear approaches (cultural systems define societies), the idea of a matrix is double-sided and cyclic (it defines society, which redefines it in return and so on…)" (ibid.). The "matricial system" is not given once and for all, as subjective interpretations contribute to modify it and make it malleable (ibid.).

Even if I do not necessarily subscribe to the depiction of a religious grand scheme in terms of a "matrix", I find Barylo's description of such a system useful as I deem that it captures the very concrete nature of Islamic religious normativity, its multiple manifestations and its multi-layered character, the web of interwoven and heterogenous elements it is made of and its pervasiveness in different ambits of life. In my view, it represents a convenient starting point for understanding the role of religious normativity in daily life.

But this now requires asking "What exactly are Western-born Muslims presented with, when they relate to a normativity?", "Who upholds such a normativity?", "Is there just one?". In the two following

sections I will try to reconstruct the discursive character of the Islamic normativity which descendants of Muslim migrants deal with in the Western context.

2. Islamic orthodoxy as a discursive tradition

Central to Islamic normativity is the relationship between orthodoxy and orthopraxis, which, according to Talal Asad - one of the major anthropologists of Islam - is constantly subjected to forms of reflection by its practitioners. He coined the concept of "discursive tradition" to capture the process by which Muslims, over time, have been engaging in defining what should be an "apt performance" of orthodoxy in correct practice (1986:20), trying to identify the proper aims and shapes of practices by discursively referring to multiple sources such as founding persons and texts, and a living tradition of debate. As Asad puts it, "a *tradition* consists essentially of *discourses* that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice. […] the discourses in which the teaching is done, in which the correct performance of the practice is defined and learned, are intrinsic to all Islamic practices" (1986: 20-21, emphases added). This points to

> the centrality of the notion of 'the correct model' to which an instituted practice - including ritual - ought to conform, a model conveyed in authoritative formulas, in Islamic traditions as in others. And I refer here primarily not to the *programmatic discourses* [emphasis in original] of 'modernist' and 'fundamentalist' Islamic movements, but to the *established practices of unlettered Muslims* [emphasis added]. A practice is Islamic because it is authorized by the discursive traditions of Islam, and is so taught to Muslims whether by an '*alim* [a pundit – emphasis in original], a *khatib* [an imam-emphasis in original], a Sufi *shaykh* [an expert - emphasis in original, or an untutored parent (1986:21).

In his view, not just "religious professionals" but also ordinary Muslims are exposed to and partake in the discursive construction of tradition, of which argument, reasoning and conflict over the significance of practices are constitutive:

> Reason and argument are necessarily involved in traditional practice whenever people have to be taught about the point and proper performance of that practice, and whenever the teaching meets with doubt, indifference, or lack of understanding. It is largely because we think of argument in terms of formal debate, confrontation, and polemic that we assume it has no place in traditional practice. Yet the process of trying to *win someone over* for the willing performance of a traditional practice, as distinct from trying to demolish an opponent's intellectual position, is a necessary part of Islamic discursive traditions as of others (Asad 1986: 22-23, emphasis in original).

Muslims are induced into practices whose institution has been progressively and discursively justified. Asad underlines that these discourses, while rooted in theological explanations, concern the enactment of practices and not so much the contents of the doctrine - thus the *behave* dimension, more than the *belief* one. For instance, Mahmood (2005) describes how training and education of one's own *body* were central to discussions about the correct performance of practices among pious Egyptian women.

Depicting religious tradition as "discursive" means underlining its constructed character - thus, also its openness and contestability. But this points to questions of power in defining orthodoxy. If orthodoxy is not just a compilation of judgements on what is to be considered orthodox, but the "reordering of

knowledge in order to construct a relation of discursive dominance" (Asad 1993:210), then it is necessarily power-defined, and potentially conflictual: a "central modality of power" might encounter resistances, because "the process of arguing, of using the force of reason, at once presupposes and responds to the fact of resistance. Power, and resistance, are thus intrinsic to the development and exercise of any traditional practice" (Asad 1986:23). At its core, orthodoxy can be framed as a political question, as it has to do with "the capability to credibly claim to represent the true, correct reading and practice of a tradition" (Schielke & Debevec 2012:6). The "contents" of orthodoxy are at the center of contestations, power relations and struggles, where different actors may substitute others, thus generating change in what is to be considered the "doxa of Islam" (Césari 2013; Peter 2006).

As described by Césari (2004;2013), the doxa of Islam at the global level – and particularly so in the West – is now more than ever multi-layered and conflictually constructed by a variety of different actors, all the more so given the fragmentation and multiplication of Islamic religious authorities (not only in the West, but also in Muslim-majority countries). In Western countries, such a conflict takes place among a plethora of (often self-proclaimed) authorities: Islamic local leaders such as imams and heads of small organizations, preachers sent by countries of origin that adopt diaspora-engagement policies (e.g. Morocco, Turkey) but also by Gulf states pursuing a strategy of hegemonic control over the expression of Islam, traditional theological authorities (al Azhar in Egypt), large transnational movements (e.g. the Tabligh), organizations (such as Islamic charities), or Islamist political networks (e.g. the Muslim Brotherhood) but also foundations, institutions or places of worship aiming at spreading "progressive versions" of Islam… To this, we should add single individuals who propagate their own versions of Islam or even simply start discussions about Islamic tenets by setting up facebook pages or intervening internet fora. The Islamic religious field[2] is decidedly crowded by strategic actors – to use De Certeau's categories (see above). Indeed, the numerous ways Muslims are engaged in debating and enacting their religious "grand scheme" confirms that making a hierarchical distinction between a "proper religion" and a "popular religion" is highly misleading (Mahmood 2005).

3. Internal and external discourses

As we have just seen, the believer articulates his or her understanding of Islam inside the power structures (Peter 2006) described above. What Césari describes can be defined as Islam's *internal discourse* regarding what Islam should be and what Muslims should do in order to be "good Muslims": all of the previously listed actors purport their vision about it. These internal representations of what "Islam" means and of how it is to be translated into practice hold ordinary believers *accountable as Muslims* on a daily basis, as they are summoned by other Muslims to an identity they are presumed to hold or to sets of behaviors they are presumed to display (Brubaker 2013). The (contested) doxa of Islam is implicitly and explicitly mediated, transmitted and filtered by a series of "relevant others" that are both proximate and distant: both the close, "material" community structures – family members (in the country of origin and in the country of immigration), friends and local imams – and the more "virtual" (but not less real) presence of journalists, intellectuals, television preachers, prestigious scholars based in the Muslim world, internet-based purveyors of religious instruction and advice

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[2] This approach is arguably very similar to Bourdieu's theorization of "the religious field", where elites, as interpretative communities sustained by certain credentials, engage in symbolic struggles for the production of "official" versions of orthodoxy and orthopraxis. Power, contestation and conflict are central to Bourdieu's notion of "field" (1977).

(Brubaker 2013:3) concur to construct these competing *internal* representations of religious normativity or of the religious grand scheme, and act as "strategic" actors – in De Certeau's language.

However, Muslims are not held accountable for how they act only by other Muslims. Just as importantly, they are held accountable qua Muslims also in their experience with non-Muslims in Western societies: they respond to the experience of being called upon to account not only for *themselves* as Muslims, but also for what *others* [i.e. other Muslims] say or do as Muslims" (ibid., emphases in original). Because they are perceived as the contrary of the "secular normality" (Jeldtoft 2013) that (allegedly) characterizes the West, Muslims are continuously "cast, categorized, counted and queried" (Brubaker 2013:3), if not stigmatized and discriminated against, both in public discourse (at the political level and in the media) and in private interaction. The West's reiterated depiction of Islam as a backward, medieval religion, incompatible with (claimed) modern and progressive Western values, or of Muslims as potential terrorists, generates a reified, objectified or essentialized (Baumann 1996) vision of "Islam". The consequence is that, because Islam is seen as a monolith and a homogenous religion, all Muslims are assumed to behave in the same way. Not only are Muslims *blamed* for what they are and do, but they are all also *expected* to "naturally" conform to that standardized, negative vision of Islam (Fedele 2015). For instance, according to this negative representation, it is taken for granted that a Muslim woman will "obviously" wear the veil, or that a Muslim is necessarily highly devout. The dominant discourse *would not want* Muslims to be religious or would prefer them to hide or privatize their "threatening" religiosity, but at the same time *expects* that, when they show their religiousness, they behave *only* in according to its stereotyped representation of Islam as "backward", without acknowledging that the sociological reality of Muslims is multifaceted and varied across countries and localities (just as the sociological reality of any other religion is). Therefore, this "external" discursive articulation of Islam represents another equally relevant "strategy", in De Certeau's terms: non-Muslims too have agendas and pursue interests concerning the representation and instrumentalization of Islam in the West.

In this sense, the external discourse contributes to shape the religious normativity of Islam as much as the internal discourse does. These sets of competing internal discourses and competing external discourses can be said to share a boundary in defining the "doxa" of Islam. Perhaps, more than that, as Jeldtoft (2013a) sharply explains, these representations co-construct each other in a game of mirroring and reflection. Indeed, it appears that Muslims are engaged in self-conscious struggles to represent Islam not only to Muslims themselves, but also to national (and transnational) publics (Brubaker 2013), very often as ways to position themselves in relation to majority societies. However, given the imbalance in power relations between a Western majority society and its Muslim minority, not all the ways of being Muslims are granted the same possibility to "speak" and represent themselves in the public arena vis-à-vis majority societies' dominant gaze (Amiraux 2006): indeed, it is very often the case that only those ways of being Muslim which "fit the stereotype" are allowed to gain currency in the interlocution with majority societies (Jeldtoft 2013a). That is, only those forms of stereotyped Muslim religiousness get more visibility in or access to the public realm. But this also means that they are possibly given a vantage position in defining how Muslims should behave vis-à-vis Muslims themselves. While the Islamic religious field is internally a highly conflictual one, as described above, the most widespread image of Islam in the West today is mainly the result of discourses in the media and among Islamists which both generally present Muslims as extremely devout and Islam as a legalistic, totalizing and unchanging religion (Otterbeck 2011; Schielke 2010).

Indeed, this dialectic relationship between an internal discourse, which circulates within Muslim communities at various levels (as seen above), and an external discourse, which permeates the ambient environment of Western societies, both set and construct *expectations* about how Muslims should act as Muslims. They both contribute to shape the religious normativity or the religious grand scheme to which Muslims have to relate to. As hinted at in Chapter 1, this crossfire among competing normative expectations concerns descendants of Muslim migrants in particular, because, on one hand, they are exposed to the pain of an exclusionary rhetoric of stigmatization more than their parents[3], and, on the other hand, they live the experience of a de-territorialized Islam, by which they cannot develop a taken-for-granted identity as "Muslims" in the absence of the whole cultural and religious institutional environments of their families' countries of origin. As stated by Brubaker, in Western societies descendants of immigrants cannot inhabit the category of "Muslim" in neutral or completely unreflected manners: while their parents and grandparents grew up in a world in which "Islam" is a *medium* of social, cultural and religious life, they have grown up in a setting where Islam is chronically made an *object* of debate – "a world which is thick with self-conscious and explicit discussions about Islam" (2013:4).

This echoes the description provided by Social Identity Theory (Tajfel 1978; 1982) of the sources of a person's social identity in relation to collective identities. According to this approach, a person's social identity consists in his/her awareness of membership in a group and his/her emotionally-laden attachment to that membership. Members of a group develop a cohesive narrative of their belonging to that group by constantly drawing comparisons with, or by tapping into multiple referents of identification provided by the in-group (values, customs and ideals of their ethnic, national and religious background). In the case of migrants' descendants, such referents are transmitted or mediated not only by family and peers but also by community elders and leaders and by the bounds kept with the country of origin. In addition, a group defines the boundaries and markers of its shared identity (the in-group) with reference to or by drawing constant comparisons with one or more different out-groups along various valued dimensions. Thus, self-identifications and other-identifications are interdependent (Barth 1969; Jenkins 2008; Yuval-Davis 2010) and social identity, both at the individual and at the collective level, is continually influenced by *intra-* and *inter-group* comparisons and by groups' representations of each other. For instance, low-status groups (such as Muslims in this case) are devalued by high-status groups, and this shapes the latter's self-consciousness and might generate different responses to this situation among its members - ranging from internalizing and accepting these hierarchies to challenging them antagonistically or to negotiating them by re-signifying identity boundaries and markers (Tajfel & Turner 1986; Berry 1997; Hopkins 2011).

In sum, according to this conceptualization, the single individual's social identity derives from both intra-group "points of supply" and comparisons, and inter-group comparisons. Such "comparisons" within groups and between groups can be assimilated to the sets of *competing internal* and *competing external* discursive articulations of identities and categorizations outlined above. Although it may risk treating group too rigidly, as quite "fixed" and distinct entities – a danger which Brubaker warns us against (2002 – see also Barth 1969), Social Identity theory may valuably offer a further perspective for

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[3] This is due to two main reasons. The first is that first-generation migrants tend to claim to "belong" to the country they migrated to less than their children, who, on the contrary, do feel a sentiment of belonging – a belonging they are nonetheless denied, which in turn impedes them to consider themselves as fully-fledged citizens. The second reason pertains to the fact that first-generation migrants did not grow up subjected – at least not as much as their descendants are – to the extremely polarized post 9/11 climate, which seems to witness a struggle between an essentialized West and an essentialised Islam at the global level and in international relations.

conceptualizing both the game of mirroring and reflection between internal and external discourses, and the relation between the individual and the "grand scheme" – in this case, the religious normativity of Islam as shaped by internal and external dynamics. While this perspective might appear to depict attachment to the in-group as probably too static or taken for granted, it can prove useful in showing which groups are taken as points of reference for drawing comparisons, both in negative and positive terms, for defining self-identifications. For instance, Scuzzarello & Carlson's study (2018) of young Somalis in Britain and Sweden reveals that these youths shape their social identification by referring to three main groups: Somali elders living in the same city; Somalis in Somalia or in the diaspora; the British/Swedish majority society. Vis-à-vis the elders, they engage in processes of "creativity", by adding new and different meanings to "being Somali" and "being Muslim", valorizing new different traits of their inherited identities; vis-à-vis peers in the country of origin and in the diaspora, they engage in a process of separation through the reinforcement of differences pertaining to the experience of "having grown up in Britain/Sweden; vis-à-vis majority societies, they live a relationship of competition or antagonism.

In conclusion, the religious normativity Wester-born Muslims relate to (whether they decide to adhere to it or engage critically with it) is constructed by internal and external discourses aimed at defining the definition of what a Muslim should be and should do. Therefore, if orthodoxy is discursive – at the internal and at the external levels, at least in the West – it can never be given once and for all and can never be the starting point for the study of Islam (in terms of its contents and prescriptions). Instead, what we should be looking at is the way religious practitioners relate to, reflect about, appropriate, construct and embody such a normativity by observing how religion is *made* every day through their practices. In other words, we should be looking at how normativity is understood and dealt with through the performance of practices. In other words, we should be looking at the ways youths of Muslim heritage daily understand, relate to and manage religious normativity and its entanglement with other aspects and spheres of life. The following section will precisely discuss findings from studies that have applied an "everyday lived religion" approach to the investigation of Western Muslims' practices.

4. Engaging everyday with internally and externally-defined religious normativity

The study of the everyday Islam reveals exactly how it is especially descendants of Muslim migrants that experience this sort of "double(d)" normativity and set of expectations concerning the practice of their religion and their "correct" behavior as Muslims. In her study about dietary practices of youths with a Muslim background in France, Fedele (2015) describes their religiosity as constantly affected by a "double bargaining" between two "competing narratives": that of the community and that of the broader society. Dietary practices being at the intersection between the private and the public, they represent a sort of "litmus test" for the performance and the expression of Islam in the public space, even for those who define themselves as not particularly observant Muslims, but nonetheless prefer to eat *halal* food or avoid pork and alcohol. Indeed, practices related to food consumption are among the most followed ones even by less religious Muslims. The choice to abide by religiously-prescribed dietary restrictions signals the presence of Islam in one's life in a way that both points to cultural and religious continuity with family and community in the private realm, and is exposed to the dominant gaze in the public domain - something which confers simultaneous religious and sociological meanings to these practices.

As Fedele explains (2015:71), the community's gaze intersects with that of the surrounding society, which expects the Islamic *difference* to be expressed through dietary practices, that are irreducible to the private and represent one of the most well-known aspects of Islam for non-Muslims. For instance, one of her interviewees shrewdly remarks that while it is considered normal for a "European" to be abstemious, it is never the case for "Arabs", because in their case, "it is religion that forbids it! Arabs can't be abstemious!" (ibid.) – a dominant attitude which reduces all differences to essentialized religious markers. In order to avoid this constant questioning and reductionism, this interviewee explains that "when they ask me why I don't drink, I say 'I took the antibiotic'!" (ibid.). The account of another interviewee shows the extent to which communitarian expectations can be internalized: "I have some Muslim friends who sometimes drink, but don't do it in front of me. I don't know why … they know what they do … it's not to me to teach them religion" (2015:70). More generally, her work demonstrates just how such a double bargaining generates different, situational accommodations, depending on the person's will to manifest his/her "Muslimness" in accordance with the specific context in which he/she finds him/herself.

Analogous findings are illustrated by Otterbeck (2011; 2013) who illustrates how young Muslims follow norms concerning food consumption in a compartmentalized manner: these forms of "ritualization" make sense for them in some situations, contexts or stages of life, and not in others. Hence, at school, they might decide to not display their religion in public "too much" (so as to avoid the risk of being insulted or criticized or laughed at), and limit the exhibition of Islamic behaviors or compliance with religious norms to the space of "the home" – where they nonetheless feel compelled to compensate for their lack of practice "in public" by showing a certain mastery of religious knowledge "at least" in private. These alternative self-presentations of oneself in front of different audiences are emotionally laden as they have to deal with sets of diverging emotional (normative) regimes (Jeldtoft 2013a), which pertain to expectations as to what is "legitimate" religion" – i.e. the "quantity" of religion that can be expressed in public according to majority society's standards - or "bottom-line religion" - the minimum amount of religious observance to be obligatorily performed according to the communitarian internal narrative's standards. They show the multi-layered micro-negotiations of identity performed on a daily basis, which, in de Certeau's sense, can be described both as tactical manifestations of religiosity (selecting what religious behavior to display, when and with whom) or a compliance with dominant strategies – either the internal or the external one depending on the situation (abiding by religious norms in the presence of the family/hiding one's own religious background in public).

The handling of different emotional regimes and expectations is also illuminated by Fadil's study (2009) of two groups of Muslim women in Belgium: one is composed by women who do not fast during Ramadan, and the other one is composed by women who do not shake hands. The first non-practice is considered as highly transgressive by the internal discourse; the second one is perceived as highly problematic by the external discourses. Nonetheless, these women are able to navigate the "multiple affective layers" (2009:452) attached to these different sets of expectations and to appropriate the related narratives, thus proving capable of showing traits of tactical agency, without having to act as subordinates or antagonists. For instance, one interviewee would explain that, while she prefers avoiding to shake hands, she often finds it difficult to respect this norm, especially when meeting new people, in new situations, where her refusal would not be understood: in these cases, she shakes hands so as not to be perceived as unpolite. At the same time, she would recount of how she slowly managed to explain to her colleagues at work that she preferred avoiding shaking hands by resorting to a cultural explanation: "it's like the Chinese. They also don't shake hands […] They greet by bowing" (2009:444). Another interviewee, who does not practice and does not fast, decides to employ the "tactic" (in her

words) of not eating in front of her family during Ramadan, which would allow her to not encounter misjudgment while at the same time remaining true to herself – "without changing who I am" (2009: 449).

Similarly, Jeldtoft (2013b) describes very privatized and personalized forms of religiosity experienced by a number of Western Muslims she interviewed. For instance, a young man coming from a fairly religious family who started becoming sincerely interested in Islam only in his adult life and after having learned oriental techniques of meditation, eventually associates the performance of prayers with meditation breathing exercises; or a woman who is keen on esoterism in general and also reads the Quran through an "esoteric" interpretation, conceiving of Islam and of all religions as ultimately expressing the same universal truth; or the case of another woman who knows only a few lines from some prayers and recites them within herself, never publicly or by following the canonical times of the prayer. According to Jeldtoft, these are examples of minority tactics which allow to appropriate Islam in ways that make the grand scheme of Islam relevant for one's own life, and, at the same time, permit to fit the normative secular regime. However, the specific cases she analyzed do not just tell a story of subordination to majority norms: while these certainly play a role, the personalized religiosity of the persons she interviewed was felt as empowering precisely because it is privatized. In these cases, fitting the grand scheme of the majority society – that of a secular normality - is turned into a way for re-appropriating the religious grand scheme in ways perceived as true to oneself and meaningful in daily life. Again, hyper-privatization can be seen as simultaneously a form of compliance with the "rules" of a secularized majority - which define the degrees of legitimate expression of religion - but also as an expression of agency, insofar as minority actors fell that they are inhabiting their re-formulated religious normativity.

DeHanas (2013a) shows how a deculturalized and purified version of Islam (see Chapter 1) can be tactically used by young Muslims to counter certain communitarian expectations they do not agree with – e.g. some youths with a Bangladeshi or Pakistani migratory background would argue against intra-communitarian arranged marriages by appealing to "pure" Islamic tenets according to which it is possible to abstain from marriage or, in the case of marriage, the minimum requirement is to choose a partner that is Muslim, regardless of his/her ethnic, national or class origin. In these cases, it is the very reworking of Islam and of religious normativity in a more rigorous fashion that allows for forms of empowerment and tactical agency in relating to the communitarian, internal narrative.

Akin to these findings are those of El Bachouti's (2015), who, referring to young Muslims studied in Spain, coins the concept of "contextual" or "bounded creativity" to depict the individual's adaptation and reformulation of religious practices in the face of the constraints imposed by the host society and by "accepted", "conventional" Islamic practices. Such a creativity is exemplified by how modifications or exceptions are applied to the "correct" enactment of practices: an interviewee finds its own way to accommodate the ritual prayer in the daily routine and especially while at work, by murmuring the words of the prayers, instead of taking a break and finding a separate place to perform the whole sequence of movements prescribed by Islamic tenets. Another hangs out with friends even if they go to places where alcohol is served, choosing to just have a juice: "if my friends drink or not, that's their problem. I am a Muslim. I do not drink. I am sure God wants me to meet people and learn from them more than staying home or jailing myself in one neighborhood" (2015: 106). Here, meeting up with

friends is prioritized over the avoidance of places where alcohol is served[4], and such a priority is religiously-justified. In these cases, the grand scheme of religion and religious normativity is made to coexist with other grand schemes - such as cultivating friendships and relationships or simply striking a balance between the need or the obligation to pray and carrying out daily activities.

In the same vein, Mescoli (2015) concentrates on practices related to food consumption in Islam among Moroccan women and found that one might choose to prepare traditional dishes even when the migration context makes their preparation difficult, or to avoid this, even if the concrete possibility of complying with religious norms is provided by the presence of *halal* butchers. For some of these women, the refusal to consume *halal* food was related to their subjective need to distinguish themselves (in Bourdieu's sense) from their fellow Moroccans, conceived as "ignorant" (even if they declare themselves as Muslims); for others, it signals their need to fulfil their belonging to the community by shopping at *halal* butcheries.

Depending on cases and situations, the enactment of these practices might present tactical traits insofar as these "insinuate" within the boundaries set by the strategy and expectations of communitarian narratives, and by the strategy and expectations of the majority society, possibly adding personal adjustments and shades of meanings. All of the above-summarized findings derived from literature on "everyday Islam" reveal that only an attentive and close investigation of practices can open our eyes to the manifold manners in which individuals may relate to religious normativity, the "grand schemes" of both the community and the society and other equally important dimensions of daily life. These manners might comprise unreflected behaviors that mirror what one considers to be religiously-prescribed, showing the degree of internalization of community expectations (e.g. taking fasting or abstaining from pork or alcohol for granted). But they might also include varying, tactical forms of engagement with religious normativity ranging from difficulties, doubts (and even suffering) encountered in the enactment of practices (e.g. finding it impossible to *not* shake hands with newly-met persons even if one would prefer not to) to conscious and reflected-upon appropriations of normativity (e.g. adapting the meaning and times of prayer to one's spiritual and practical needs or deciding to go to a place where alcohol is served to meet friends anyways). In other words, narratives of justification of practices are derived from different ways of navigating among grand schemes.

As we have seen, the religious normativity that Western-born Muslims have to relate to - the doxa of Islam - is shaped by both internal and external discourses, which have become inextricably intertwined. But these ways of relating to and making use of religious normativity also show that there is some room for leeway and personal agency, through which the individual, by adding its own modifications and meanings, contributes to that heterogenous pool of elements which constitutes the "generative environment" of the religious grand scheme itself - or the "matrix "of religion - to use Barylo's terminology referred-to above. What the discussed examples also teach us is that it is only through the observation of the performance (or non-performance) of practices that we can appreciate individual *processes of subjectivation*. Only by investigating practices or by listening to the "narratives" or "stories" that justify them, can we account for the *multi-layered*, *situational*, *processual* and *relational* character of religious subjectivity and of self-identifications[5]. Indeed, individual subjectivation emerges out of the

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[4] For the purpose of the present analysis, it does not matter whether attending places where alcohol is served is "really" forbidden. What counts is the individual understanding and relation to religious norms.

[5] The situational character of self-identifications is also highlighted by Colombo and Semi (2007) who observe the various uses that social actors can make of *difference* – be it ethnic, racial or religious – in tactical or strategic ways, depending on the daily

open-ended dialectic between personal autonomy and religious authority (Jensen 2006) which ultimately results in an enactment of practices at the ongoing intersection of what is ascribed (i.e. inherited) and what is achieved (i.e. personally established or reformulated) in one's religiosity and identity (Jenkins 2008). Borrowing from Levitt and Glick Schiller's theorization (2004), exploring the deeper experience of practices also allows to distinguish between simple "ways of being" – engaging in social relations and practices without referring to the associated identities – and "ways of belonging" – i.e. practices that signal or enact an identity which demonstrates a conscious connection to a particular group – as this might situationally depend on the different public one is addressing or the different "grand schemes" one is trying to make coexist.

As explained in Chapter 2, central to the study of practices are those related to the body – particularly so in the case of Islam. Due to the particularly performative character of Islam, bodily practices assume particular relevance: on one hand, the body is disciplined by rules concerning what is *halal* and what is *haram* (e.g. eating, veiling, gender relations); on the other hand it is the medium of the feeling of religious emotions, for attaining transcendence, self-knowledge and self-fulfillment (Jensen 2006) – e.g. as we shall also see in the following chapters, the very bodily movements involved in the "correct" performance of the ritual prayer are often described as means to achieve full concentration and to relieve stress. Thus, the body becomes crucial in the experience of subjectivation processes and for fulfilling a quest for personal authenticity (Sunier 2014) – precisely an embodied one, rather than a cognitive or propositional one (DeHanas 2013b; Mahmood 2005). As El Bachouti explains, "banal practices of everyday life are central to discovering the subjectivity of Muslims or, in other terms, a sense of the self, a way of embodiment. These daily practices are inextricably linked to the problematic of subjectivity. The meaning, discourses, arguments and reasoning behind the daily life practices are detailed experiences of the self" (2015:107).

However, the study of religion as lived in the everyday has to be open to the observation of religion wherever it may "appear". Arguably, it is also probably in the most unexpected areas of life that religion can emerge as salient, i.e. precisely at the intersection between the religious grand scheme - as defined by both internal and external discourses - and other important everyday schemes (such as the conduct of healthy life, the cultivation of friendships, simply having fun…), as we have just briefly seen. Therefore, relevant areas of inquiry for the study of everyday lived Islam, as for other religions, range from the domain of food and eating to that of aesthetic expressions in clothing or in refurbishing a house, concern minutiae such as salutations or defining life moments such as marriage or death, or might concern individual choices as consumers, free time activities, preferred fun spaces, and so on. Indeed, the study of Western-born Muslims has recently focused on religious practices in the domain of cultural production (Soliman 2017; Herding 2014,) such as Muslim hip-hop (Khabeer 2016; O'Brien 2013; Mushaben 2008) or modest fashion (Tarlo & Moors 2013; Frisina & Hawthorne 2017), as sites where the creation of a distinct religious lifestyle (and self-styling) is intermingled with broader trends in youth and popular culture – such as fashion and music, and the related communicative spheres (e.g. social media). These domains of life are susceptible to reveal how different "grand schemes" are conciliated or matched with Islamic religious normativity, which, in turn, appears to be subjected to the same trends of post-modern commoditization (Sunier 2014) that concern also other religions in the Western context (see Chapter 2) - it suffices to think of "modest fashion".

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contexts of interaction and the power relations regulating them. Their approach, too, is informed by De Certeau's categories - uses, strategies and tactics.

In conclusion, while not everything that Muslims (or followers of other religions) do is "dictated" by Islam, as if they were automatons (Schielke 2010), the way in which Islamic references and norms prescribe the daily, concrete enactment of behaviors permeates the quotidian and blurs the boundaries between religious and non-religious, making practices a privileged site of observation of processes of subjectivation and of religious self-making. It is precisely along the blurred and variable boundaries between religious and non-religious, discovering how intersecting "grand schemes" and "strategies" are navigated, that we can understand the role of religion in daily lives and in self-identifications. By showing how identifications and religiosity are never fixed, it become possible to overcome unfruitful dichotomies between "practicing/non-practicing", as well as simple representations of Islam as supposedly unchangeable and univocal by virtue of established definition of "mainstream", "regular, "proper" religion. Arguably, this approach allows accounting for the many shades assumed by the "doxa of Islam", as it is understood by those who are caught in the crossfire between competing internal and external discourses more than others – i.e. descendants of Muslim migrants.

5. Power dynamics and scholarly research: organized vs non-organized Islam

After having analyzed what it means to study religion as lived in the everyday and having reviewed how this approach has been applied on research on Muslims in the West, I will turn to highlighting the social relevance and added value of this approach precisely with reference to the case of Islam in the West. At the end of Chapter 2, we could see that the "everyday lived religion" approach has the potential to reveal the workings of power dynamics in the religious field. As already explained, a co-construction has taken place between a Western external negative view of Islam and an internal discourse, both evolving around what Islam is or ought to be. Strong power relationships regulate the Islamic religious field in the West. Therefore, the use of an "everyday lived religion" approach appears all the more relevant for the study of Western-born Muslims, precisely because it aims at unmasking and assessing the role of strategies and tactics.

As clearly discussed by Allievi (2005), Brubaker (2013) and Nielsen (2013), and as we shall see in Chapter III, a shift has occurred in public debates by which migrants form Muslim-majority countries started being identified only as Muslim and ceased to be categorized on the basis of their ethno-national origins. From being labelled as Turkish *gastarbeiter* in Germany, or *Algériens* in France, or Pakistanis in Britain, they started being framed as Muslims. This is due to a series of factors pertaining to Islam becoming the enemy of the West at the global level after the end of the Cold War and to incidents in European countries originated by Muslim minorities' activism in the public sphere in order to claim recognition and religious, "communitarian" rights. Islam has thus been cast a threat to security and, more importantly, to claimed democratic and cultural values. Since this shift took place, the point of departure of debates on these issues is the superiority of the West's "secular normality", on the basis of which Muslims are identified and singled out as a homogenous group by virtue of their "threatening" heightened religiosity – something which makes them radically different than the "secular us" (Jeldtoft 2013a:26-27). Thus, Muslims are reduced to their religion, as public debates produce them in *hyper-visible* terms, focused as they are only on evident expressions of religion such as wearing the *hijab* or constructing mosques.

Questioned *as Muslims*, Muslim actors could not but answer back *as Muslims* – thus, ending up enhancing their "Muslimness". Certain Muslim actors often respond to such stereotyping and

stigmatization, even with the intention to challenge these depictions, precisely by organizing and presenting themselves essentially qua Muslims, foregrounding their Muslimness, in manners that fit the dominant gaze: "public representations […] and Muslim identifications seem to share an imaginary of Muslims which enhances the ways in which they are visible – vocal and involved in social conflict – to the 'West'"(2013a:29). The majority society, in turn, grants legitimacy only to those who correspond to its stereotypes and selects its Muslim "counterparts" on the grounds of their patent "Muslimness". Therefore, Muslim actors who present themselves as "especially Muslim" in more visible ways gain a sort of monopoly, or are given a chance to impose their hegemony, in the public realm. This is the *strategic* level, where both majority and minority actors *produce* a certain image of Muslims and Islam is *made* "hyper-visible" (ibid.). Nielsen makes the same argument: on one hand, it is "a matter of the European-dominated discourses taking control and determining the categorizations which minorities have to fit into"; on the other hand, it is also "ideological Islamic movements [having] themselves encouraged and welcomed this shift in public perception ('there is only one Islam')" (2013:170).

However, this had important consequences also on scholarly work. The portrayal of Muslims *only as* Muslims inevitably influenced the way researchers have conceptualized their object of study and affected the directions taken on by academic studies in two ways. First, research has reflected the preoccupations of the public debate concerning Muslim's otherness. Scholars too have contributed to forge the meaning of the term "Muslim": "researchers have adopted the focus on Islam across ethnonational origins, ironically often because they wish to deconstruct and counter […] crude generalizations" (Nielsen 2013: 170). Even if such research was precisely animated by the positive – and often attained – goal of mythbusting stereotypes about Islam as "an enemy", and considerably added to our knowledge about the condition of Muslims in the West, it is argued that it nonetheless concurred, wittingly or unwittingly, to stress the image of Islam as "something different" (Brubaker 2013). Second, and related to the first point, research ended up privileging visible manifestations of Muslimness as sites of observation – which, again, resulted in the reinforcement of the dichotomous relationship between "us" and "them" (Jeldtoft 2013a:27). Indeed, research has over-focused on forms of Muslim life that are constructed as subordinate or antagonistic vis-à-vis the majority, and by choosing its interlocutors among visible, practicing, vocal, devout, pious, active, even militant, Muslims. This is the case of studies that concern *visibilities* such as the *hijab*, Muslim organizations and groupings, Muslim places of worship, Muslim's claim-making and relationship with authorities, youth groups, Quran classes, translational religious movements, and so on. Indeed, much of the existing literature has focused on organized forms of Islam, in which a substantial effort was concentrated on investigating how "these" Muslims challenge their minority status by leveraging primarily on the "Muslim component" of their identity in order to put forward demands for recognition *as Muslims* (to name just a few, see Mandaville 2001; Silvestri 2005; Klausen 2005, 2009; Kepel 2012; Bolognani & Statham 2013, etc.)

While there is nothing strange or wrong in the fact that researchers have busied themselves with issues circulating in public debates – it is precisely the duty of sociology to explore societal questions – there should also be awareness of the contexts and the ontologies that shape and inform epistemologies and determine research questions and who is to be investigated. In this sense, the research stance adopted by scholars who focus on "everyday lived Islam" represents an invitation to an increased reflexivity in the definition of objects of study and to a heightened awareness of the never-completely-neutral role that researchers have, as any other social agent, in producing public representations. As applied to the study of Islam, this entails acknowledging the instances in which we might reinforce *strategic* constructions of religion, neglecting other equally important manifestations of religion. Indeed, the

study only of more "visible" Muslims might end up focusing too narrowly on religion, by interpreting everything through the prism of Islam and overemphasizing the religious component of identities. While there are vocal Muslims who identify primarily as "Muslims" and wish to show their "Muslimness" in daily lives as their first defining feature, this might not be true for the rest of Muslims – and extending these observations to them would be artificial and simplistic. In other words, studying only visible Muslims might result in a reification of Muslims and Islam, thus falling into the pitfall of essentialization and culturalization and playing into the very hands of the dominant discourse, which portrays Muslims, in their entirety, as being "all about religion".

On the contrary, Muslims are not only or always concerned with "being Muslim", and their ways of being Muslim might significantly vary according to contexts and situations, as just explained. It is only through the observation of religion as it unfolds in the everyday that we can uncover these multifaceted and more complex realities. As shown above, an approach that looks at how Muslims make sense of Islam in their immediate everyday lives, by observing how and with what meanings religion "appears" in daily routines, can highlight ways of being Muslim that are alternative, different or complementary to the already very visible ones, offering a more diverse picture of Islam, showing its inner heterogeneity against generalized descriptions that view "Muslims" as a homogenous group or "Muslim practices" as invariable. Shedding light on the everydayness of Muslim religiosity also means recognizing the strategies at work as well as exploring the room that is left to tactics.

Hence, a number of researchers in this field (Schielke 2010; Jeldtoft & Nielsen 2011; Bectovic 2011; Dessing, Jeldtoft, Nielsen, Woodhead 2013; Brubaker 2013; Sunier 2014; Fedele 2015; Selby 2016) has expressed the need to go beyond investigating on Islamic organizations and collective units, arguing that a great deal of research has been conducted on these objects of study. Indeed, focusing on organized Muslims was not only easier for scholars (as the field is more accessible when investigating identifiable, visible organizations and associations – Dessing 2013; Schimdt 2011); it was motivated by the fact that precisely Muslims' organizations were "attracting attention", due to their very visibility and their claim-making, which was transforming Islam in a public (and sometimes political) identity. Such research endeavors reflected and challenged at once the preoccupations of the negative dominant discourse about Islam, with the risk of "becoming hegemonic 'evidence' of political and public understandings of Muslims as particularly (and dangerously) religious" (Schmidt 2011:1217) and of reinforcing "strategic religion" (Woodhead 2013) as defined by internal and external actors.

In response, these same researchers have pleaded for studying Muslims *outside* of visible or obvious Muslim visibilities, focusing on less obvious, *non-organized*, *non-institutionalized* forms of Muslim religiosity, which are not dependent on religious associations or groupings and are not immediately traceable to organized, vocal, devout pious religious formations, in order to provide a richer and wider picture of "Muslims". Explicitly borrowing from Ammerman, McGuire and other scholars' theorizations in field devoted to the study of "everyday lived religion" (see Chapter 2), this stream of research[6] calls on research to concentrate on "non-experts", that is, people who do *not* belong to and are not interested in Muslim organizations or institutions – e.g. mosques, Quran schools or study groups, youth associations, representative bodies or instances within national or local institutions, charities, etc. – in order to avoid the biases involved in the study of more visible, self-aware or strategic forms of "Islam".

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[6] A group of scholars has coalesced around this approach, made explicit in particular through a special issue of the journal *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (vol. 34, n. 7, 2011) titled "Methods in the study of non-organized Muslim minorities" (edited by Jeldtoft and Nielsen), the volume "Everyday lived Islam in Europe" (edited by Dessing, Jeldtoft, Nielsen, Woodhead 2013) and the volume "Everyday life practices of Muslims in Europe" (edited by Toğuşlu 2015).

As we have seen, religious institutions should not be seen as the purveyors of a "real religion", as opposed to ordinary people "popular religion". However, these authors argue that this is precisely what has happened in the study of Islamic organizations in the West.

Indeed, this research stance has the merit of drawing our attention to and stimulate our reflexivity about the risks of reification we might be running in carrying out research about Islam at a time in which heated debates about it take place on a daily basis. Moreover, it has allowed to fruitfully illuminate Muslim religiosities in much more nuanced and finer ways, by treating Islam as any other religion and showing how individuals use or resort to Islam in their everyday to make sense of their lives. However, as we will show in the following Chapter, this approach might have itself run the risk of reifying "some" Muslims – i.e. the organized ones, by depicting those who are active and visible as all uniformly devout and pious. While a call to move our gaze from more "obvious", organized and active Muslims to less evident ones was necessary in order to enhance our understanding of how Islam is actually and daily lived by Western-born Muslims, this plea has probably taken visible forms of Islam and membership in an organization too much for granted. In other words, in rightly arguing against a study of Muslims *solely* based on visible and organized ones, this approach seems to be relying on under-problematized assumptions about what it precisely calls "visible", organized Muslims. Moreover, it seems to conflate "religious visibility" with "membership in an organization" in a too straight-forward, constructing a probably too rigid opposition between organized and non-organized Muslims.

So far, studies on "everyday lived Islam" have essentially concerned non-organized Muslims, but, as we shall see in the following chapters, this approach can be applied also to organized Muslims, with the very intention to understand how the discourse and the life of the organization they belong to impinge on them, which seems all the more suitable precisely for deconstructing the seemingly obvious distinction between "organized" and "non-organized" Muslims. Indeed, precisely by drawing on the lessons learned from the study of everyday, it may be possible to find ways to study "visible" forms of Islam such as those provided by organizations without reinforcing the *strategic* logic of the actors involved in such a "visibility".

Chapter 4
COMPARING ORGANIZED AND NON-ORGANIZED YOUTHS OF MUSLIM BACKGROUND

As explained in the previous Chapters, the theoretical framework informing the present study is based on an "everyday lived religion" approach, as it has been developed in the realm of sociology of religion and has subsequently been applied to the study of Muslims' religiosity in the West. This approach posits the necessity to shift the focus of enquiry from recognized religious "professionals", institutions and groupings, to religion as it is experienced by ordinary people in their daily lives, looking at what they "make" of religion. The goal is to counterbalance and overcome representations of religion anchored in a dichotomy between a "real religion" as provided by religious institutions, and a "popular religion" of ordinary people, by finally acknowledging that the latter contribute, as much as the former do, to the very "making" of religion.

As far as the study of Islam is concerned, this translated to the investigation of non-organized Islam, in order to outweigh the great deal of research that, for a long time, has overprivileged most committed Muslims, by focusing in particular on Muslim organizations. Such a focus has arguably resulted in a too narrow depiction of "Muslimness" and contributed to the "strategic" production of Islam only in visible and, possibly, oppositional terms – as "different" than the secular "West". By seeking alternative ways to frame the object of study, enquiring into Muslim "invisibilities", the "everyday lived Islam" research stance has aimed at shedding light on forms of Muslim religiosity that are not constructed in these antagonistic terms and at uncovering tactical enactments of religion, as opposed to strategic definitions of religion. For many authors in this stream of research, this translated to studying non-organized Muslims, i.e. Muslims who are not members of religious organizations or institutions of any kind (e.g. Jeldtoft 2011, 2013; Otterbeck 2011, 2013; Fedeli 2015, El Bachouti 2015, Mescoli 2015; Selby 2016).

However, while it was important to call upon researchers' reflexivity concerning the ontology informing their investigation, and to draw attention to less-known and underexplored "ways of being Muslim", I contend that this viewpoint is probably based on a too simplistic and rigid consideration of religious organizations. Indeed, as I shall discuss in the following pages, the "lived religion" approach can prove particularly apt to study the everyday lived Islam not only of non-organized Muslims, but also of organized Muslims. Moreover, I will explain that comparing organized and non-organized Muslims can help deconstruct common mis-representations about both "categories" - as if these referred to inherently homogenous groups (Brubaker 2002). The present study aims at treating organized and non-organized youths of Muslim background *alike*, by looking at and comparing their everyday lived religion.

1. What is the present research about, and why. The rationale of the present study

Why study members of Islamic religious organizations?

It seems worthwhile to include Muslim organizations - and specifically their members - in the study of "everyday lived Islam" for at least two principal reasons. Both reasons pertain to the ways the religious

messages and the kinds of religious normativity advocated by organizations are concretely interpreted, enacted and used by their members in their daily lives. As explained by Edgell (2012), the study of religious organizations and institutions can be fruitfully combined with that of an "everyday lived religion" perspective.

The first reason for including Islamic organizations and their members in the study of "everyday lived Islam" has to do a with a set of issues that authors in this stream of research seem to have ignored or neglected thus far. Indeed, decentering researchers' gaze from institutions has entailed an overemphasis on the individual, leading to a relative neglect of the vital role that institutions can otherwise play as providers of different types of meaningful resources to their members. According to Edgell's literature review (2012), research integrating the analysis of institutional fields with that of lived religion has revealed how religious organizations act as purveyors of both material resources, such as organizational infrastructures for meeting and carrying out activities (which can become meaningful also for reasons other than the religious ones) and of symbolic resources, which are linked to the workings and the contents of the "organizational culture" of a religious institution. Considering this particular aspect, research in this field has shown how organizations become *loci* of production of a "cultural coherence" (e.g. norms and doctrines), which provides people with *scripts* or *repertoires*. These can foster routine forms of religious practice, able to influence individuals in deep ways "by providing cultural models that inform initial, rapid, automatic forms of cognition, including the making of moral distinctions" (Edgell 2012: 255; see also Chapter 2) and can act as *toolkits* that can be used, consciously or unconsciously, to solve problems (Swidler 1986). The scripts derived from a religious organization's culture and its embedded practices can shape the moral habitus of its members in profound, unaware ways, but also become something which they may tactically and consciously need to resort to, in order to better articulate themselves as individuals. Indeed, as demonstrated by DeHanas (2013; 2016) such scripts and symbolic resources - in the forms of discourses, self-representations and religious knowledge - can endow individuals with agentic (even tactical) capacities. At the same time, however, by supporting specific forms of lived religious practice, institutional fields may make other forms more costly or difficult to pursue, thus exerting forms of social control that can be more or less explicit and need to be duly accounted for.

As Edgell points out, all of these different facets can be illuminated by a research stance situated "at the intersection of lived religion and institutional analysis", which can help us "to get past the idea that the analyst must choose between understanding religion as operating on the surface (as tools that people use to solve problems or position themselves strategically) or as being deep (formative of preconscious or automatic habits and dispositions)" (Edgell 2012:255). Indeed, the study of "everyday lived religion" as formulated by Ammerman (2007; 2013; 2014) does not at all dismiss the role of traditions and of the institutions that mediate them, as we have seen above (Chapter 2). While representing an invitation to analyze how religion is experienced by "non-professionals", in order to counterbalance depictions of religion solely based on "religious professionals", this approach does not exhort to simply "do without" or completely neglect institutions and their role – however residual they may have become in Western religions. On the contrary, the study of ordinary people's "everyday lived religion" offers new perspectives for analyzing how religious non-professionals relate to religious institutions and professionals. As Ammerman puts it, "lived religion does often happen on the margins between orthodox prescriptions and innovative experiences, but religion does not have to be marginal to be 'lived'. *What happens inside religious organizations counts, too*. Those who wish to 'de-center' congregations and other traditional religious communities will miss a great deal of where religion is

lived if those spaces are excluded from our research endeavor" (Ammerman 2014: 190 – emphasis added). In other words, "lived religion" takes place also within religious institutions.

Arguably, this call to not eschew religious institutions is even more compelling with reference to the study of Islam, if we consider the multiple sites of production of the religious "doxa" that characterize this religion (see Chapter 3): these many competing authorities and organizations are religious institutions in all respects, seeking to influence Muslims' everyday lived religion. Therefore, it seems interesting to examine the everyday lived religion of their members or affiliates. However, on the basis of Edgell's review, it appears that studies which fuse an "organizational perspective" and a "lived religion" one, focusing on the everyday religiosity of organizations' members, have mainly concerned Christian denominations in different parts of the world thus far, and not Islam in the West[1].

Nonetheless, at the same time, individuals are not just culturally-directed automatons. The study of organizations' members religiosity as shaped by the institutional field they are embedded in can also be revelatory of how they appropriate the organization's cultural coherence and religious discourse in ways that make sense for themselves. This points to the interest of observing *the extent to which*, *how*, and *why*, in what situations the religious normativity and the discourse promoted by a religious organization influences its members. A closer look at these aspects might uncover variety and change among its members concerning the ways scripts and repertoires are interiorized and used by different individuals. This leads us to consider the second main reason for studying the everyday religion of Muslim organizations' members.

This second reason has to do with the all too often taken-for-granted representation of organization's members as a uniform group. It is true that Islamic organizations - and their members - have long been considered, also by researchers, as representatives of a supposed "standard Islam", thus running the serious risk of casting all non-organized Muslims as "less Muslims", or "secular Muslims" or as "less representative" (Bectovic 2011). Indeed, as explained in Chapter 3, a series of authors have rightly underlined that this is a partial and artificial conclusion, which erases Muslim multiplicity. These authors demonstrated this point by illuminating alternative or less obvious forms of "Muslimness" - perceived as sincerely religious by those who live and embody them - which they found outside of organizations and institutions. However, I argue that, as much as non-organized Muslims should not be considered homogenously as "less authentic" Muslims, so organized Muslims *too* should not be considered as a uniform "bloc". In other words, the research stance animating the "everyday lived Islam" approach denounces a risk of reification towards non-organized Muslims, but, in so doing, it runs the very same risk of essentializing organized Muslims, by considering them as being all equally pious, devout, vocal and visible about their religion. While Muslim organizations, by foregrounding Islam as (one of) their most salient identifiers, inevitably partake in the construction of a "visible Islam" and, wittingly or unwittingly, may contribute to a narrative that fabricates Muslims as "other" (either in subordinate or antagonistic terms), it appears all too artificial to extend this representation to their members, whose "Muslimness" may not necessarily or straightforwardly converge, in all respects, to that expressed by the organization they are members of. Indeed, this portrayal arguably equates or conflates "visibility"

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[1] Except for Winchester (2008) and Jensen (2011)'s works, which regard converts to Islam in Western countries (the USA and Denmark respectively). However, both these studies are more focused on the making of a moral selfhood as influenced by institutional fields, than on the use of these fields' resources for tactically positioning oneself or for the resolution of problems. Frisina's research (2007; 2010) about the Italian association named "Giovani Musulmani d'Italia" (Young Muslims of Italy) focuses on this latter aspect – how the resources provided by the organization are tapped into by its members for tactically or strategically positioning oneself – but not on the organization's influence on the religious self-making of its individuals.

with "membership in an organization" and describes organizations' members as all "visible Muslims", as if they were all identically and consciously willing to contribute to or engage with the narrative that singles out Muslims as something "(visibly) different".

Moreover, it depicts members of an organization as all indistinctively adhering to the kind of "Islam" put forward by that grouping, while, on the contrary, "the ways in which members of these groups link themselves to Islam or social norms is in no way uniform" (Dessing 2013:40). Whilst they are surely interested in the kinds of messages – religious, and not only – conveyed by the organization, they might be so at *different extents*. Indeed, as explained by Jensen (2011), there is a difference between *religious discourses* and *religious practices*. In her study of converts to Islam who "shop around" different Muslim organizations and are not aware of the profoundly divergent religious orientations of these organizations, she demonstrates that the ideology of an organization or the kind of internal discourse it puts forward does not always shape the thinking and the actions of its members in automatic ways. The discursive knowledge promoted by an organization is not necessarily reflected in the practical knowledge of its members in its entirety (Bourdieu 1990); this means that we should not conceive of them as behaving *all the time* in compliance with the religious norms set by the institution or organization. In fact, organizations embody the kind of "strategic actors" which Woodhead refers to in depicting *strategic religion* in De Certeau's terms (see Chapters 2 and 3): as such, they lay out a certain religious normativity, a certain orthodoxy, a certain doxa – a strategy. However, members of an organization, just as ordinary people, while subscribing to this overall "strategy", might express forms of tactical agency which can temporarily subtract them from that strategy or that can even oppose some aspects of that strategy.

Furthermore, individuals may have a number of different reasons for joining a religious organization, besides the religious motivation (and maybe the religious motivation turns out to be not the most important one). In addition, commitment to an organization can vary over time and across its members (Jensen 2011). These aspects point to the fact that, probably, also organized Muslims are not *all* and *always* about religion – just as non-organized Muslims are. Both have multiple and simultaneous sources of identification. Whilst the religious component of identity can be one of the most important to them, it is by no means the only one (Brubaker 2013; DeHanas 2016). In their lives, members of organizations are not only, and not all the time, members of organizations. Therefore, it becomes interesting to observe how their experience of taking part in an organization merges with or influences other aspects of life. As Dessing underlines (2013:40), it is particularly by focusing on how members' religiosity is put to use or constituted in daily life both *inside* and *outside* the context of these forms of participation that we can offer a more nuanced picture of organizations and a richer understanding of the many forms everyday Islam can take. This means precisely also considering "the ambiguities and inconsistencies in what people say, do an experience" (ibid. – see also Ammerman 2014:195), because organizations' members, too, can show doubts and uncertainties in living religious normativity and in enacting the religious message of the organization they are members of. They, too, have to make sense of religious grand scheme as it is promoted by their organization - and not only by it, as we have seen above - and have to make its demands coexist with those of other spheres of life – just as any other religious person.

In conclusion, while appreciating the role of religious institutions and organizations in providing different kinds of useful resources to their members – not just from the material point of view, but, more importantly, in terms of religious knowledge, symbolic narratives and representations - we should not forget that organizations are not closed, entirely coherent units or "black boxes". Following Berger's

claim (2007) that studying religion only by looking at religious institutions is like studying politics only by looking at political parties, it is possible to add that it would also be like studying political parties as if their members *were all the same* – while, for instance, we know how harsh can the confrontations within parties' members be, and not just over the control of power, but also over the party's very ideology and positioning. Translated to our field of enquiry, this means that just as it would be wrong to limit the study of religion to religious organizations and institutions, it would also be wrong to neglect them on the grounds of a superficial conceptualization of their members as an undifferentiated group.

These two reasons may be said to represent two sides of the same coin, as they both concern the ways and the extent to which the religious normativity and scripts - as mediated by a religious institution - shape its members' behaviors, and how such religious messages and such repertoires of action are personally appropriated by the same members. Indeed, the same questions that can be posed for enquiring about the everyday lived religion of non-organized Muslims, concerning the ways they relate to religious grand schemes, can be posed also for organized Muslims. This lays the foundations for conducting a comparison between them by observing the lived religion of organized and non-organized Muslims alike – i.e. not treating them as two discrete and radically different entities, as I shall argue in the following section.

Why compare organized and non-organized youths of Muslim background? What to compare?

Directly related to the necessity pointed out above to observe the role of organizations in shaping the everyday lived religion of its members while not treating them as a homogenous bloc, it appears interesting to conduct a study of lived religion among both organized and non-organized Muslims.

On one hand, including both in the same study can precisely help debunk the homogenous representations of these "groups" as self-contained and substantially distinct essences (Brubaker 2002). While in the case of non-organized Muslims, what is to be deconstructed is their apparent lack of religiousness - it is not true that they are "less" Muslims, they simply show or live their religion differently when they do - in the case of organized Muslims what is to be deconstructed is that they are only "about Islam" simply because they adhere to a religious organization. If we are to unmask homogenous representations (such as those that considered organized Muslims as all equally "less authentic" Muslims), than we have to better "look inside" religious organizations. In other words, studying also organized Muslims with the same approach that has been adopted to study non-organized Muslims means "completing" the very "mission" of this stream of research – that is, not falling into the trap of easy, uniform representations of Muslims in the West (see Chapter 3).

This might deconstruct the probably too rigid, binary, perhaps even caricatured distinction between those who are automatically considered as "less visible" Muslims by virtue of their non-membership in any organization, and those who are automatically treated as "visible" and "vocal" Muslims by virtue of their membership - as if members of organizations/institutions were the most devout and pious Muslims, who uncritically adhere to the organization's discourse and identitarian strategy, while those who do not take part in organizations or institutions were all non-interested in religion, or non-religious. After all, as Bectovic underlines, there cannot be plausible criteria to establish the differences between organized and "non-organized" Muslims, besides formal membership in an organization:

> Is it possible to draw a clear line between these two groups? […] one could say: yes, it is possible to distinguish between organized and non-organized Muslims but only on a formal level and taking into account the type of membership in the organization. Otherwise it may be impossible to designate boundaries between organized and non-organized Muslims. A parallel to this would be if one attempted, rather absurdly, to determine whether a Muslim was 40, 55 or 90 percent organized or not, or whether he or she was 40 or 75 percent collectively or individually involved. Consequently, we cannot determine the extent to which a Muslim is organized or not" (Bectovic 2011: 1124).

While it is acknowledged that none of the two "groups" can be portrayed as composed by people who all "look" the same (Jeldtoft & Nielsen 2011), too little seems to have been done so far to nuance or deconstruct this binary opposition between "organized", "visible" and "non-organized", "invisible" Muslims, and show the richness and variety of positions in both "worlds".

Only research encompassing *both* these supposedly homogenous "groups" can tell if there are differences or similarities between them. We can legitimately expect that there are even significant differences between those who choose to join an organization and those who refuse to do so; however, until now, these differences have been simply taken for granted, almost posited as an axiom, and imputed to a generic and not investigated variable such as "membership in an organization". For instance, Otterbeck (2011:1175) claims that, in enquiring about organized Muslims' religiosity, it appears impossible to scratch the normative surface, because organization's members are "in the middle of a project trying to Islamize themselves, [they] are far more inclined to repeat normative statements about Islam than discuss their individual ways of practicing". I contend this point and argue that, on the contrary, it is possible to discuss with them the normative statements they make about religion and to ask them about how they personally relate to them. Even if they appear to be all telling "the same story" or to repeat the same script provided by their organization, I maintain that, while this can be considered a research result in itself, it is still possible to investigate what that "story" or "script" means to them.

Exploring convergences and divergences in religious attitudes and behaviors between those who choose to get involved in an organization, and those who prefer not to, can only be achieved by studying their everyday lived religion *in the same way* – that is, by treating them all as "ordinary" religious people. Looking at how religion unfolds in the everyday life of Western-born descendants of Muslim migrants inside and outside religious organizations can reveal the extent to which this sharp distinction is justified. The purpose of the study is precisely to break this distinction open. This entails that, if differences will emerge between organized and non-organized Muslims, as it is likely to be the case, it is necessary to trace exactly what they derive from, exploring in detail what "membership in an organization" means, without taking it for granted.

Concretely, such an intention translates to studying how religious normativity is referred to and appropriated by both these kinds of youths, observing what issues they share and what, on the contrary, is less of a concern for some in comparison to other; it means asking how internal and external discourses over what a Muslim "ought to be" (see Chapter 3) are experienced and managed by individuals across both "groups", analyzing how religiosity and self-identifications are situationally negotiated at the micro-level. Such a comparison can reveal whether they face the same problems or show similar or different tactical capacities in dealing with a dominant, negative perception of Islam, and it can illuminate how religion is present in their daily lives. In particular, it appears interesting to observe how both organized and non-organized youths of Muslim heritage navigate the many layers

and sources of the religious "internal discourse": while members of an organization are certainly exposed to a "heightened" religious normativity deriving from their organization's religious narrative, we should bear in mind that, at the same time, *both* organized and non-organized Muslims are immersed in a crowded religious field, where a multiplicity of actors and authorities have a say on "what is Islam". As we can hypothesize, this has consequences on the shaping of a religious moral habitus and on the possible exercise of what we may define a "religious reflexivity", be it either in the form of doubts and uncertainties vis-à-vis the enactment of the religious "grand scheme", or in the form of a conscious critique of religious tenets. If we do not take membership in an organization as self-evident, we can legitimately ask if and how *both* organized and non-organized Muslims critically engage with religious normativity, and the extent to which they embody and enact this same normativity in unreflected, automatic manners. They might share commonalities, having to cope with the same kinds of difficulties in performing their religiosity, and - or- they might present sharp differences in the ways they appropriate narratives and discourses about their religion; but both similarities and differences have to be properly accounted for.

But this precisely means treating membership in an organization not as a black-boxed and self-explanatory variable; on the contrary, by acknowledging that there is a fundamental difference between *religious discourses* and *religious practices*, we should "look inside" this black box, problematizing what membership in an organization means for one's own religiosity and self-identification. Indeed, there is a need to investigate the very ways members of organizations relate to the normativity and the "discourse" heralded by organizations themselves (within the realm of the "internal discourse" about Islam), why they find it interesting, how they make sense of it in their daily lives, the extent to which they consider it a "perfectionist ideal" to conform to, or if they critically engage with it. Justifying her research about non-organized Muslims, Jeldtoft affirms that her intention is to analyze how Muslim minorities appropriate religion in their own terms, by "looking at forms of Islam that are not *dependent* on institutionalized settings" (2011:1138 – emphasis in the original). But this is exactly what needs to be more closely looked at (and possibly deconstructed): to what extent is the religiosity of members of organizations *dependent* on the organization they are members of? How is it influenced by the organization's religious narrative?

Indeed, organizations appear as ideal "microcosms" for studying *strategic* and *tactical* religion (Woodhead 2013 – see Chapter 2). If members of organizations do not necessarily entirely espouse the organization's discourse regarding religious practices and orthodoxy, then their tactical agency must be uncovered, looking at how they selectively or situationally abide by the organizations' norms and identitarian strategies. At the same time, members' recourse to their organizations' material and symbolic resources - the religiously-informed repertoires of actions and the identitarian scripts that their organization provides - has to be carefully observed. Conversely, it is equally important to analyze the workings of social control and the pressure to conformism within organizations, looking at how members' behaviors are shaped by the organization's internal rules. As Dessing underlines (2013:41), religious organizations constitute sites where "the dispersed, tactical and the makeshift creativity of groups or individuals [who] are [...] caught in the nets of 'discipline' (De Certeau 1984: xiv-xv)" may come to light. We can better determine the role of religious normativity precisely where it appears more explicit, such as within a religious institution.

However, the salience and strength of religious strategies and the possibility to elaborate tactics among an organization's members can emerge with greater clarity *if they are compared* to individuals who are not involved in any organization: while they both are confronted with one same overarching strategy –

that of the negative external discourse about Islam - they have to deal with different "degrees" and "layers" of internal discourses - with organized Muslims being exposed to a more univocal narrative concerning their religion. It is by studying the daily religiosity of both organized and non-organized Muslims that we can better appreciate, for instance, whether organized Muslims benefit from comparative advantages or disadvantages in countering a dominant negative discourse or in cultivating a religious life. Only such a comparison can tell whether, or when, an organizations' resources can become opportunities or obstacles for the religious self-making and identity-building of its members. In other words, drawing a comparison between organized and non-organized Muslims allows accounting for the functioning of power relations within the multi-layered Islamic religious field, observing the many dynamics at work in the creation, the diffusion and the reception of a religious doxa, thus appraising the social relevance of everyday lived religion.

Lastly, this kind of comparison, rooted in study of "lived religion", has a further added value. Precisely because it aims at questioning and de-essentializing two allegedly self-explanatory categories, it shields from the risk of reinforcing both the very strategy of organizations - because it avoids taking them as representatives of "standard" Islam - and the usual narrative by which Muslims are "inherently different". As we have seen, these representations are often mirrored in academic research, which, even if it is animated by with the best of intentions, ends up somehow sustaining them. This is the risk which the stream of research on "everyday lived Islam" approach has warned against (see Chapter 3); however, I argue – and will seek to demonstrate in what follows - that it is possible to study Muslim organizations without running into this risk. The reason is that the present research seeks to operate a twofold "deconstruction": the first one consists in looking at "what's inside" a religious organization and see whether its members are all the same; the second one consists in comparing these individuals with peers who are not involved in any organization, by scrutinizing the daily religious practices of all of them in the same way. In turn, looking at the everyday religious practices and at their situational and relational character (as explained in Chapter 2 and in Chapter 3), and more importantly, at the meanings that social actors attach to them, might allow revisiting the meaning of "visibility" and the dichotomy that has been posited between "visible" (organized) Muslims and "invisible" (non-organized) Muslims.

After having motivated the interest in carrying out a comparison between "organized" and "non-organized" youths of Muslim heritage, I will summarize the research questions guiding the present work in the following paragraph.

2. Research questions

The overarching, leading question for exploring the religiosity and the self-identifications of these youths concerns the way they relate to the "religious grand scheme" in their daily life, as it is conditioned by internal and external discourses, as explained above (Chapter 3). This means asking how they manage the "double bargaining" (Fedeli 2015) between competing internal and external definitions of religious normativity – i.e. the communitarian narrative about how a "good Muslim" should behave, on one hand, and a dominant negative discourse that holds Muslims accountable for their "dangerous" religion, but at the same time imprisons them in that reified representation of what Muslims are and do. I pose this question for all of the youths involved in the present research, indistinctively.

In the case of organized youths, I do not consider their membership into an organization as a fixed, self-evident variable: their relation to the organization represents in itself an object of analysis and offers the possibility to explore how they relate to religious normativity as directly mediated by a religious institution.

As the starting point of this research is these youths' everyday lived religion, it appears relevant to start by reconstructing how specific, proximate contexts may matter to the very quotidian experience of religion, by reconstructing the discursive and material contexts to which organized and non-organized are exposed, asking, more specifically:

o In light of the external discourse to which descendants of Muslim migrants are exposed to in the West and in Italy, how do specific *local* contexts influence the experience of religion and of "Muslimness"? Do external discourses at the local level assume different meanings and "flavors"? Does locality matter insofar as religious difference may be managed differently by local administrations?

o With regards to organized young Muslims, how does the context of the religious organization they are members of look like? How does this organization position itself?

Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 are precisely devoted to the depiction of these *contexts*, providing the coordinates of lived religion across the two different local, urban contexts considered in the present study (Milan and Turin - see par. 3) in the perspective of the wider external discourse affecting Muslims in the West and in Italy, and describing the religious organization that was chosen to enquire about organized young Muslims (Islamic Relief Italy – see par. 3).

In order to analyze how the experience of religion may take place outside and inside the institutional setting of a religious organization, it appears necessary to compare and contrast the following aspects:

o What does it mean to live Islam remotely from organizations, as "free floaters"? What causes some to be disinterested in or unwilling to join religion-related associations, groups, movements or activities?

o Conversely, how may religion be mediated by an organization? What kind of normativity and orthodoxy can a religious organization convey, or even enforce? What kind of "strategic religion" and of identitarian resources does it offer? What kind of grip do these have on its affiliates, and what motivates them to become members of a religious organization?

Whilst Chapter 7 will provide some portrayals of non-organized youths of Muslim background, illustrating how religious experiences may be some different among them, Chapter 8 will examine in detail the "organizational culture" of the religious organization considered for the present study, analyzing its religious discourses and narratives, hinting at how they may forge the religiosity and self-identifications of its members.

This allows us to consider how youths of Muslim heritage both navigate and make sense of the complexity in which their religious practice is embedded in – a complexity that is made up of traditions, relations of power, social dynamics, as we have seen (Chapter 3). Regarding organized and non-organized youths of Muslim background alike, we may pose the following questions concerning their relation with an "internal discourse" and its translation into their practices:

o How do they understand orthodoxy and normative claims, from a bottom-up perspective?

o How do they practically translate the demands of religious normativity in their daily lives? And how do the demands of other relevant everyday schemes are managed and balanced with those of religion? What narratives of justification of practices do they put in place? Is it possible to observe forms of "tactical religion"?

- o What similarities or differences emerge between organized and non-organized youths of Muslim background?
- o What role does the immediate, proximate community - or a religious organization - play within this religious field?

And with regards to their relationship with the "external discourse":

- o How do these youths perceive the dominant negative discourse about Islam? How does this impinge on them and what reactions does it trigger, if any?
- o What relationship is there between "identity from the inside" (what religion means to those who practice it) and "identity from the outside" (how religion positions them) (Dessing 2013:46)? How "visible" about their religion may organized and non-organized youths of Muslim heritage be? How does this relate to their religiosity? What actually counts as "visible" or "invisible"? Does visibility only depend on organized forms of Islam? To what extent is that manifested and what motivates it?

These larger questions about these youths' religious practices and self-identifications are addressed in the conclusive Chapters, which reconstruct and comment their accounts and reflections about their own everyday religiosity (Chapter 9) and about the ways they show - or not - such religiosity (Chapter 10), in the light of the conditioning represented by the combination of internal and external discourses.

The following paragraph explains how I designed the present research in the attempt to answer these research questions, by detailing how organized and non-organized youths of Muslim background were identified and selected and how I interacted with them.

3. Research design

Who: characteristics of the sample

For the above-explained reasons, the present research seeks to investigate the "everyday lived religion" of both organized and non-organized descendants of Muslim migrants, uncovering possible similarities and differences among them by comparing how religious is lived, felt and practiced by and across:

- a group of youths who are not active or involved in any religious or ethnic/national organization;
- a group of youths acting as volunteers or staff members in the Italian branch of Islamic Relief (one of the largest faith-inspired international humanitarian NGOs).

Islamic Relief Italy is the "Muslim organization" that was chosen for the present research. The reasons that make Islamic Relief Italy for an interesting case-study will be thoroughly accounted for in Chapter 6, where the story and the positioning of this organization at the international and at the Italian level will be illustrated. Chapter 8 will also extensively describe the "religiosity" of Islamic Relief, detailing how religion permeates its modus operandi and organizational culture, and reconstructing the type of "religious normativity" that is mediated by this institution. The activities of Islamic Relief recently-established Italian offices constitute an extremely interesting opportunity to meet youths of Muslim background, as the fund-raising strategy of this organization significantly relies on its large network of young volunteers, which it recruits first and foremost among Muslim communities. The involvement of these youths represents a unique chance to examine a form of participation and visibility into society that is situated at the crossroads between humanitarianism, volunteering, religion - and fun. Therefore, how these dimensions intersect and contribute to shape this form of (faith-based?) youth mobilization appears worthy of analysis.

For the group of "non-organized" Muslims, I recruited persons who are not current members of any association, be it religious or ethno-national (e.g. Moroccans' associations or Egyptians' associations). While the reason for excluding religious associations is obvious (my comparison group is formed by "non-organized" Muslims as opposed to Islamic Relief's volunteers and staff members), ethno-national associations were also ruled out because membership into them is arguably comparable with membership in a religious association with regards to the role that such organizations can play in shaping individual self-identifications. Being an active member of an ethno-national association (just as of a religious association) is both the result of and a source of influence on one's own self-identification: the participation into an association of this kind might over-shadow or prevail over other components of self-identification. Necessarily, then, my comparison group had to be formed by people who are not engaged in associations or organizations having a marked "identitarian" focus, such as religious or ethno-national ones. Moreover, I was interested in investigating forms of non-participation or alternative forms of participation.

Stratified purposeful sampling was the strategy employed to create the sample of the research (Bichi 2002: 80-83). This sampling method operates by stratifying, or subdividing, the population to consider on the basis of characteristics which the researcher deems pertinent and discerning with regards to the object of study. This allows to study in depth themes regarding determinate subsets – such as "organized and non-organized" youths for the present research – and to compare them. In this case, membership or non-membership in a religious organization was one of the three criteria for composing the first two sub-samples, the other ones being gender and place, as the study was conducted in two different urban settings – Milan and Turin. In the hierarchy of criteria, "place" comes after "membership" or "non-membership", and gender comes after "place". Therefore, both "the organized" and "the non-organized" were subdivided in two sub-groups – one for each of the two cities – and these sub-groups were further subdivided in two sub-groups, by gender, in a 2x2x2 structure (see Table 1). As is clear, the present research is of a qualitative type. Therefore, this sample cannot be representative in statistical terms; indeed, qualitative research pursues a different type of representativeness – one that aims at reflecting not the numerical dimension of the population investigated, but at reproducing its categorial and thematic dimensions, in connection either to specific issues or to defined social groups – such as in the case here considered. The goal of the research design in qualitative studies, therefore, is to attain a *social representativeness* of a certain phenomenon or of (a) social group(s) (Bichi 2002: 78-79).

As a result, the group of non-organized youths of Muslim background includes 30 individuals: 16 females, 14 males. Likewise, the group of volunteers and staff members of Islamic Relief Italy includes 30 individuals: 16 females and 14 males. Among them, 7 are staff members, 20 are active volunteers and 3 are former volunteers, who decided to quit the organization. Among the "active volunteers", though, there is a certain variation in the degree of involvement and participation in the organization's undertakings: some constantly take part in setting up large and small events, as well as in recreational activities devoted only to volunteers (see Chapter 6); others only occasionally do, with lower or variable levels of constancy. The "formerly active" quit for different reasons: one was simply not interested in the organization anymore; two had no time anymore, having decided to focus their energies on other occupations such as working while still attending university. Besides, one of these two latter persons deemed that he had already "had his experience" within the organization and that he had already "given enough". Having included different degrees of involvement – from maximum involvement (staff members) to no involvement at all (those who quit) – allowed me to dispose of a "gradient" and thus to observe different shades of "membership" in a religious organization, as well as the meanings this

can assume with the passing of time (especially in the case of staff members or of those who quit the organization).

The choice to conduct the research in two different urban areas was motivated by the interest in observing how local contexts may shape experiences, especially with regards to the local management of religious diversity and of Islam, which may take very different forms, due to the absence of a national framework regulating the accommodation of "new" religions in Italy. Milan and Turin, with their surrounding areas, were chosen for their sizeable immigrant populations and in light of the fact that, over time, these two cities have provided divergent "political opportunity structures" (Koopmans *et al.* 2005; Morales & Giugni 2011; Cinalli & Giugni 2013) for migrants to express forms of public participation, and, in particular, for Muslim migrants to establish places of worship and publicly active organizations. This will be explained more in detail in Chapter 5.

A fundamental criterion for inclusion in the sample was the amount of time that my informants have spent in Italy: since my aim was to investigate how descendants of Muslim migrants relate - and have been relating - to their religious heritage in a Western context, I looked for people who were either born in Italy, or had come to Italy at a very early age (i.e. who were not older than 10 at the moment when they moved to Italy). Most of the components of the sample were born in Italy; all of them hold the Italian citizenship – something not to take for granted, as the Italian citizenship law is extremely restrictive and for many descendants of immigrants it may still very difficult to obtain naturalization, as it is based on the *jus sanguinis* principle and not on the *jus soli* one.

Because of the age of the Islamic Relief's volunteers and staff members is comprised between 14 and 30 (with a few exceptions above the age of 30), the group of non-organized youths of Muslim background is composed by people belonging to the same age range. However, for both groups, I decided to not include adolescents, i.e. individuals under the age of 18. The reason is that the topic I investigate - religiosity and self-identifications - is extremely sensitive and I preferred avoiding the "fuzziness", the "instabilities" and the "vulnerabilities" that adolescents experience during their journey into adulthood. Therefore, the age-range, for each of the two groups, is comprised between 19 and 30, with the exception of three individuals who are aged between 30 and 35. Most of the interviewees, however, are aged between 20 and 25.

The majority of my informants is in higher education – 33 across the entire sample. Most are enrolled in a BA (26), some in a MA (7). Among them, 12 also work while studying. Among those who work and study at the same time, 2 are Islamic Relief staff members, working either full time or part time for the organization. Other 25 individuals are employed: 16 of them are medium- to highly- skilled position holders, of which 10 have obtained these positions after having completed either a BA or a MA, 2 have small businesses and 4 do not hold academic degrees. 5 out of these 25 employed individuals work for Islamic Relief. 9 have low-skilled jobs (one of them even after having obtained a degree in informatics). Lastly, 2 informants are jobseekers and are not attending university.

I tried to reproduce the wide variety of countries of origin and ethnicities of the Italian Muslim population (see Chapter 5) in the two groups, however with some limitations. Across the whole sample, descendants of migrants from Morocco and Egypt are predominant – as these two countries represent the top nationalities among Muslims in Italy. 31 informants have a Moroccan background and 27 have an Egyptian background; North Africa is also represented by an informant with a Libyan background. However, I tried to include as many different migratory backgrounds as possible, recruiting

interviewees whose families originate from Sub-Saharan countries (2 Senegalese, 1 Somali), South-Asian countries (2 Pakistanis, 2 Bangladeshis), and Middle Eastern countries (2 Syrians). It was easier to include more variability for the group of the "non-organized" Muslims as compared to the Islamic Relief's group, as some ethnic groups are decidedly more represented than others among volunteers and staff members.

The characteristics of the whole sample are summarized in Table 1.

	MILAN	TURIN	Totals
Islamic Relief members	*Gender* 7 females, 7 males (tot. 14)	*Gender* 9 females, 7 males (tot. 16)	*Gender* 16 females, 14 males (tot. 30)
	Nationalities 6 Egypt, 6 Morocco, 1 Somalia, 1 Libya	*Nationalities* 10 Morocco, 5 Egypt, 1 Pakistan	*Nationalities* 16 Morocco, 11 Egypt, 1 Somalia, 1 Libya, 1 Pakistan
	Statuses ○ Studying: 4 ○ Working and studying: 2 (one of whom is employed as an Islamic Relief staff member) ○ Working as medium/highly skilled position holders: 4 (all of them are employed as Islamic Relief staff members) ○ Working in low-skilled positions: 3 ○ Jobseekers: 1	*Statuses* ○ Studying: 7 ○ Working and studying: 4 (one of whom is employed as an Islamic Relief staff member) ○ Working as medium/highly skilled position holders: 3 (two of whom are employed as Islamic Relief staff members) ○ Working in low-skilled positions: 1 ○ Jobseekers: 1	*Statuses* ○ Studying: 11 ○ Working and studying: 6 (two of whom are employed as Islamic Relief staff members) ○ Working as medium/highly skilled position holders: 7 (five of whom are employed as Islamic Relief staff members) ○ Working in low-skilled positions: 4 ○ Jobseekers: 2
Non-organized youths of Muslim background	*Gender* 8 females, 7 males (tot. 15)	*Gender* 8 females, 7 males (tot. 15)	*Gender* 16 females, 14 males (tot. 30)
	Nationalities 6 Egypt, 4 Morocco, 2 Pakistan, 2 Senegal, 1 Syria	*Nationalities* 11 Morocco, 2 Bangladesh, 1 Syria, 1 Egypt	*Nationalities* 15 Morocco, 7 Egypt, 2 Pakistan, 2 Bangladesh, 2 Senegal, 2 Syria
	Statuses ○ Studying: 5 ○ Working and studying: 3 ○ Working as medium/highly skilled position holders: 6 ○ Working in low-skilled positions: 1	*Statuses* ○ Studying: 5 ○ Working and studying: 3 ○ Working as medium/highly skilled position holders: 3 ○ Working in low-skilled positions: 4	*Statuses* ○ Studying: 10 ○ Working and studying: 6 ○ Working as medium/highly skilled position holders: 9 ○ Working in low-skilled positions: 5

Table 1: Characteristics of the sample

In recruiting non-organized interviewees, I sought to avoid the traditional biases involved in "snowball sampling", that is, similarities between recruited interviewees in terms of status, and, in this case,

possibly in terms of religious practice. Therefore, I aimed at diversifying my sample as much as possible by spreading my contacts across a wide variety of different "entry points": referrals obtained through my personal network and other persons' networks of acquaintances and friendships, mailing lists of university professors, cricket clubs (namely for meeting people with a Pakistani/Bangladeshi origin). As opposed to Jeldtoft (2011), I did not ask my potential interviewees if they self-defined as "Muslim" from the outset in order to recruit them, precisely because I was interested in analyzing if and how "Muslim" is an important component in their self-identification and if and how religion is significant in their daily lives and practices. My aim was to attempt to include different ways of being and feeling Muslim: eventually, my sample ended up being composed by people who self-define as Muslims and do practice (while not belonging to any Muslim organization), people who would not define as Muslims in the first place but practice, people who define themselves as Muslims but who do not practice, and people who do not define themselves as Muslims, do not believe and do not practice. Had I asked my potential informants whether they self-defined as Muslims while recruiting them, it would probably have been impossible to reach such a variety of "profiles".

Methodology

In line with an "everyday lived religion" approach and its methodological translations (see Chapter 2), the fieldwork was conducted through qualitative methods: interviews and participant observation (Ammerman & Williams 2012; Woodhead 2013; Dessing 2013).

More specifically, in-depth, biographic interviews (Bichi 2002) were conducted with members of both groups. Building on the initial classic life-story interview question about the interviewee's story ("I'd like you ask you to tell me about your story, starting from wherever you want"), I used non-directivity as much as possible through probing questions, following up on what people told me, with the aim of exploring various domains of the interviewees' daily life and, most importantly, his/her daily practices in various areas. Therefore, topics covered during the interview would typically include the interviewee's story, but also his/her family, friends, his/her work, or his/her time at university, his/her spare time and hobbies, his/her relationships with the country of origin, his/her use of media and of social media, his/her musical tastes, his/her food or clothing preferences, etc. Indeed, as we have seen (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3), studying lived religion entails being "ready" to observe religion appear even in the most unexpected ambits of life: "it is not just that people take religion into everyday life; they also take everyday life into religion" (Ammerman 2014:205).

After investigating all of the aspects that emerge from the person's account during his/her reply to my first question, I would pose questions like "what is your typical week" and "what is your typical day", "what do you do in your holidays" etc. When religion emerged in any of the areas covered, I would ask probing questions in order to "delve deeper" by exploring the aspect(s) related to religion that the interviewee mentioned (for instance, the inter-generational transmission of religious values, the knowledge of Arabic) and then follow up on that. If I felt that some relevant issue for my research was being left out from the conversation, at the end of the interview I would pose specific, focused questions on these issues in a more directive way, in order to include the areas/topics that I needed to cover for the purpose of my research.

Thus, I designed the interview in order to never directly pose questions on religion and self-identification from the beginning, in order to avoid potential abstract answers as well as ex-post,

potentially artificial rationalizations, as my wish was to let my interviewees' religiosity and religious experience emerge from the accounts of their concrete practices. Starting with the life-story question and then speaking about daily life in a loosely structured setting allowed the interviewee to feel that he/she was leading – or contributing to lead - the interaction (Frisina 2010). The initial life story question represented a useful starting point, as in many occasions I felt that starting from "the beginning" sort of reassured the interviewee and helped him/her to feel less intimidated by the very act of being interviewed. As has been countless times discussed, the setting of an interview is a very peculiar one, where it is essential to establish a reliable "pact" between the interviewer and the interviewee about the aims and scope of the meeting (Bichi 2002); yet, however clear might that pact be and however friendly can the interactions preceding the interview be, the situation of the interview can still make the interviewee a little uncomfortable. The life story question, then, often times helped the person feel more at ease, because it provided the possibility to "fix" some specific points of reference in time and space. Moreover, the activity of reconstructing in retrospect one's own course of life often proved to be significant not only for reflecting on one's own most relevant components of identity, but also on the evolution of a person's relationship with religion over time.

I would explain this "pact" through the first contact I established with my informants – usually over the phone, more rarely via email. When advancing my request for an interview, I would present myself as a doctoral researcher from the Catholic University of Milan, who was carrying out a research on descendants of immigrants in general. I avoided to introduce the topic of "religion" form the outset, during the first contact, as I had the feeling this would "distort" the interviewee's perception of my intentions. In other words, I sought to avoid inducing the possible thought in the interviewee that I was investigating the "exoticness" of Muslims' religious "difference", which would have ultimately compromised the interview setting. As I explained above, my aim was to let "religion" emerge spontaneously in the conversation. However, when approaching some of the Islamic Relief members – especially staff members – I would explain that I had previously learnt about Islamic Relief and that I was interested in getting to know this organization better in the context of my research area. With most of my interviewees, I would add some details about my long-lasting interest and research experience about migration-related issues in general and about Muslims in particular; for instance, I often recounted that I had previously studied the "case" of the mosque to be established in Milan, to show that I was acquainted with the Milanese Muslim community(ies). This considerably helped me gain credibility and legitimation, as, through these words, they would understand that they would not have to fear any negative anti-immigrant or anti-Muslim attitude on my part. I often added that I had started studying Arabic – and this would further make them feel they were in a "safe environment" with me, where they could be at ease.

Interviews could occasionally include discussions and contestations, which gave the chance to the interviewee to clarify or reflect more on what he/she was telling to me. In three occasions, interviews took place over two meetings, in different moments, which gave the opportunity to reinforce the trust relationship and to explore more in detail issues that had been touched upon during the first meeting and to and reflect together on them. With some interviewees I kept in touch and we would exchange updates via social media, or by occasionally meeting: this represents a unique opportunity to get to know their points of view as well as their daily joys or struggles. Interviews would take place in quiet spots found in bars, parks or at their university, be it in Milan or Turin; in a few occasions, I arranged the meeting at my university; in three cases, I was received by the interviewee at his/her place of residence, which represented invaluable opportunities to explore the possible "ambient religiosity" within the intimate space of their homes; lastly, three interviews with Islamic Relief staff members took

place in the premises of the organization in Milan, which allowed me to have a glimpse of the material presence of religious references in the offices where the staff performs its everyday tasks.

Life-story interviews or variations of this kind of interviews were also employed by Frisina (2010), Jeldtoft (2013), Otterberck (2011; 2013), Selby (2016) and DeHanas (2016) to investigate about individuals' religious practices and self-identifications. Undoubtedly, there are limitations in conducting only interviews, as they cannot exhaust the entire spectrum of a person's daily practices. Yet, as it has been discussed (Ammerman & Williams 2012; Hitchings 2012), practices can be discursively talked about, and interviews can be usefully employed to learn about what people actually do and why, or what meanings they attach to their practices. As Ammerman explains, "looking for lived religion does mean that we look for the material, embodied aspects of religion as they occur in everyday life, in addition to listening for how people explain themselves" (2014: 190).

In the case of the group of young people involved in Islamic Relief, a part of the interview was explicitly devoted to their experience as volunteers or staff members: how they learned about Islamic Relief, why and how they decided to join, what they do as volunteers/staff members, what they like about it, what do they think about Islamic Relief's projects in the world and activities in Italy, etc. Moreover, I employed participant observation to learn more about Islamic Relief as an organization (how it is structured, how it works) and about the "messages" it conveys. I carried out participant observation at public occasions, seeking to balance participation in events that were directed at the audience constituted by the local Muslim community with participation in events that were aimed at reaching out to different, non-Muslim audiences:

o 2 "open days" for volunteers – meetings where Islamic Relief would present itself and its activities to which both those who are already active as volunteers and potential new recruits were invited;
o 1 "street collection" – a fund-raising activity which consists in choosing a neighborhood of the city (Milan or Turin), stop passers-by or enter shops in order to sell tickets for the organization's charity events or to simply collect money for the organizations' projects;
o 1 charity dinner in a mosque;
o 1 large fund-raising event - "La Notte della Speranza" ("The night of hope") which hosted a Saudi shaykh and a singer of "halal music";
o 1 charity dinner organized with the Anglican Church community in Milan, which had invited Islamic Relief to present itself and its projects - the presentation was followed by a dinner with Syrian and Moroccan dishes prepared by Islamic Relief volunteers' mothers;
o 1 charity dinner organized with a private and elite Catholic school of the center of Milan (Suore Orsoline), with the presence of the school pupils and of their parents - Islamic Relief was invited by the school's headmaster to present itself and its projects, and, again, the presentation was followed by a dinner with Syrian and Moroccan dishes prepared by Islamic Relief volunteers' mothers
o 2 charity "aperitivo" (informal dinners);
o 1 presentation of the organization at one of the most elite high school in Milan (Liceo Parini), where Islamic Relief was invited to present itself and its projects.

The observation grid I used for compiling field notes in these occasions aimed at collecting as many elements as possible for tracing the "ambient religiosity" of the organization and its religious messages and discourses, as well as its self-representation vis-à-vis different publics and within the realm of humanitarian NGOs.

I complemented these observations with a documentary review that included various materials form different sources: reports published by the organization, newsletters, posts on social media (the Italian Facebook page of the organization), videos shown at charity events, videos and slide-shows used for the training of volunteers. Lastly, I met two representatives of the Islamic Relief Worldwide headquarters (based in Birmingham, UK), who are members of the Policy and Strategy unit organization, and I met one of the former chiefs of the Italian office of Islamic Relief, between 2008 and 2010.

The empirical material I collected was then transcribed and analyzed through NVivo, a software designed for carrying out qualitative data analysis. The software proved particularly valuable for letting themes emerge, as I was proceeding through an attentive reading of the interviews. These themes and sub-themes were coded under labels ("nodes", in the NVivo language). Moreover, it allowed to me perform a cross-cutting analysis across the two subsets of "the organized" and "the non-organized"; therefore, under one "label", or "node", I coded the information provided both by "the organized" and by "the non-organized" – although, obviously, the interviewee is always clearly identified as a member of one of the two subsets, so that the characteristics of each interviewee can never get "lost" in the analysis. Treating "the organized" and the "non-organized" alike throughout the analysis enabled similarities and differences between them to surface more clearly. At the same time, the functions of the software also allowed me to regroup the interviews of each subset, in order to better explore homogeneities or recurring traits within one subset.

A note on the researcher's positionality

As I could myself experience, this kind of study requires exerting a heightened reflexivity on the part of the researcher, who must take into account at least two major aspects: a) the place and time where the research takes place – i.e. a discursive context at the international and at the Italian level in which a rhetoric of hate against immigrants and Muslims keeps mounting; b) the possible influence of the researcher on the terrain and on the findings. Indeed, the ways Muslims present themselves and their self-understanding and how they speak about their religion and religiosity is highly dependent on the surrounding political and social "climate", which wittingly or unwittingly shapes both the expectations of the *researcher* and the expectations of the *researched*. "Muslims in the West" has become the topic of a script that strongly influences their self-representations both at the collective and at the individual level. In the dimension of the personal interactions of a research of this sort, this might have meant that the persons I met would tend to already imagine "what kind of questions I would ask them", or "what I wanted to hear from them". I hope I managed to avoid this risk by demonstrating my informants my genuine interest, without taking for granted anything of what they would tell me; through the way interviews were conducted, I think I have managed to establish the necessary trust and confidence able to make them feel free enough to let me "take a peek" at their lives, without being perceived as too intrusive.

Furthermore, I deem it noteworthy to underline that, in general terms, most of my informants were happy to discover that someone was interested in "learning more" about the lives of Muslims and of their descendants, beyond commonplace portrayals. At the time during which the fieldwork was carried

out, a dominant topic in the Italian public debate was the reform of the citizenship law[2], aimed at easing the acquisition of the Italian citizenship for children of migrants, who currently have to face significant barriers and wait for long periods of time before obtaining the Italian citizenship. This debate assumed very harsh, if not violent, tones, and merged with heated debates on the "migration crisis" and the reception of migrants or with debates about Islam and the "deservingness" of citizenship. Within such a context, many of my informants subscribed to the kind of work I was carrying out and even thanked me for what I was doing - something which, hopefully, has positively influenced the interaction and the data I could collect.

At the same time, the way I was perceived as a white, Italian, female, non-Muslim researcher, might have influenced self-conscious presentations in ways that could potentially reveal if and how they tactically deploy their identities (in De Certeau's sense) with reference to a non-Muslim, "external" social actor like me. As DeHanas points out (2013:75), this too is a valuable research result. I had the feeling that some of them made use of the initial question of the interview - "tell me about your story starting from wherever you want" – in this manner, recounting about the "canonical" storyline of "the (Muslim) immigrant family" as they thought I would expect, but in ways that would show they belong to "normal families", like "anyone else", in order to counter negative stereotypes about Muslims' "backwardness" and to prove they are "loyal", "deserving" citizens. The need to prove such a deservingness was very often expressed through the very opening sentence of their answer to my first, life-story question: "I was born in Italy, I did all of my schooling here in Italy…". Indeed, the then-debated reform to the citizenship law also contemplated the possibility to grant citizenship to immigrants' children also on the basis of the number of years of schooling undertaken in the Italian education system.

Yet, this did not exonerate me from exploring more these tactical answers and their meaning. This was especially the case for Islamic Relief's members, who tended to conceive of me as a representative of the Italian audience which the organization is seeking to reach out to. As I will explain in Chapter 6 and in Chapter 8, one of Islamic Relief's long-term objectives is to increasingly get known by non-Muslim Italians with the aim of expanding its public of potential donors, and, more importantly, with the stated intention to offer a positive and reliable image of Islam through the organizations' activities, in order to challenge the common misrepresentations of Muslims. Inevitably, Islamic Relief's members took the exchanges they had with me, consciously or unconsciously, as further opportunities to showcase themselves and their activities as members in these terms, following the organization's agenda; while this is certainly a research result in itself, my awareness of these dynamics at play proved crucial for understanding how they would relate to me.

However, as Carling *et al.* (2014) and Ryan (2015) explain, reflections about researchers' positionalities in migration studies must go beyond the too simplistic insider/outsider divide, which often only conceives of distance between the researcher and the researched only along ethnic lines. This essentializes ethnicity as the only feature characterizing their "difference". Rather, the reflexivity of the researcher should duly take into account that the positionalities of social actors are multiple and layered, and so are their possibilities to interact: empathy and rapport through numerus other aspects, such as professional and parental status and migratory experience, as well as nationality (Carling *et al.* 2014; Ryan 2015). In the case of the present research, it is true that I do not share the same heritage

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[2] The law was eventually not reformed during the previous legislature (2013-2018). The newly elected Parliament has no intention to reform it: the same obstacles for the acquisition of citizenship will likely remain in place for a long time.

and cultural-religious background with my informants – in this regard, I am a fully-fledged "outsider". However, other pertinent dimensions shaping the relationship between the researcher and the researched were represented by age and gender.

In fact, although I am a little bit older than the average of my interviewees, our age makes us more similar than different - for instance, in terms of cultural consumption patterns. While my age helped creating of a relatively friendly and relaxed climate during the interview, my gender certainly helped me establish trust especially with my female informants, who would feel quite confident to speak about gender-related issues. Conversely, my gender might have hampered the possibility for male informants to speak openly with me; while in some cases this surely happened, I do not have the feeling that this was a generalized problem and, indeed, I had very long exchanges and interviews with boys as much as I did with girls. A further aspect shaping the relationship between me and the persons I interviewed was my religiosity: during the interaction, whenever I self-identified as Catholic (as it could emerge in the course of the interview), the interviewee seemed to feel much more at ease. As many of them recounted, they often don't feel understood not just because they are Muslims and thus considered "different", but because they are simply religious in the first place. In a context – the Western one – where participation in classic denominations is on decline and where it has become commonsensical to define oneself "non-religious" when "religious" is considered in the "traditional" sense (see Chapter 2), these youths live their religiosity cannot be comprehended. On the contrary, when they "found out" that I "knew things" about *my own* religion, they were at once surprised and reassured, as this would make them feel less "strange", because we had something – the act of believing – in common. This opened new avenues in the exploration of their religiosities during the conversation. Such a feeling of ease would obviously increase when I demonstrated to have some familiarity with some core principles of Islam. Religion, then, may act as a further bridge along the insider-outsider continuum, as also other researchers experienced (Carling *et al.* 2014).

Nonetheless, I remain an outsider to "Islam" and the Muslim community. Yet, my externality to the field helped me uncover what actors in a given social field completely consider for granted, as I was taken by "surprise" by things that I did not know (Schwartz Sea & Yanow 2012), which I learned about only through my direct interaction and participation in that field. For instance, I was explained by some of the Islamic Relief's volunteers about the organization's rules concerning gender relations only after having made some "mistakes" in this regard, i.e. greeting a male volunteer with a hug instead than with a simple handshake. While this error of mine was catalogued as one of the classic, recurring "incidents" that happen with "non-Muslims" and did not cause too much embarrassment, it represented the opportunity to explore in detail the norms presiding over relationships between male and females within the organization.

PART III

THE SETTINGS OF THE RESEARCH

Chapter 5
THE TREATMENT OF MUSLIMS IN ITALY AND THE DIFFERENT CONFIGURATIONS
OF ISLAM IN MILAN AND TURIN

As we have seen in the first two Chapters, the relationship with religious normativity and the tactical micro-negotiation of identity and of religiousness meet the intersecting strategies of an external and an internal discourse. The present Chapter seeks to trace the contours of the external discursive construction of "Muslims": the dynamics at play in the current representation of Islam are common across Europe (par. 1) and affect the Italian context, which nonetheless presents some peculiarities (par. 2). Among them, the uneven management of the presence of Islam throughout Italy is particularly striking and is also demonstrated by the cases of Milan and Turin (par. 3), where the research was conducted. This generates different configurations of Islam at the local level, which, in turn, affects the "religious offer" available to young Muslims in those contexts.

1. The tropes of the "external discourse": securitarian and culturalist framings of Muslims in the West

As many scholars have amply demonstrated (e.g. Césari 2004, 2013; Modood, Triandafyllidou & Zapata-Barrero 2006; Massari 2006; Bowen 2007; Celermajer 2007; Foner & Alba 2008; Fredette 2014; Beaman 2017; Alba & Foner 2015; Bowen, Bertossi, Duyvendak & Krook 2015) Western societies, and particularly European ones, have developed a terribly fraught relationship with Muslims migrants and the practice of Islam over the past decades. The first manifestations of this uneasy relation date back to the late '80s, when the polemics aroused by the "Rushdie affair" in the UK and by the *affaire du foulard* in France marked the beginning of heated and enduring controversies that brought to light the gradual rooting of Islam in European countries. Indeed, both these events highlighted the presence of a new generation of Muslims, brought up in Britain and France, who were "making their presence felt in public" (Nielsen 2013:168). For instance, in her study about the internal conflict between older Pakistani immigrants and their descendants over the public expressions of religion and attachment to the country of origin, Werbner (1996) explains that, on the occasion of the Rushdie affair, within Pakistani communal discourses a shift occurred

> from being a 'British Pakistani' to being a British Muslim', from a stress on national to a stress on religious identity. This shift was linked to a growing realization by immigrants from Pakistan that their stay in Britain is permanent, that the most pressing need is to fight local battles for religious rights [...]. Initially, on arrival in Britain the problem seemed to be one of combating racism and gaining recognition as an ethnic minority. The publication of the *Satanic Verses* [the Rushdie affair] revealed, however, a deep clash between Islam and British nationalism. 'Islam' was now a term to be defended at all costs, a matter of personal and communal honor. British Pakistanis 'became', officially, in the media, and in their own eyes, 'Muslims' (Werbner 1996:72)

This, in turn, challenged the institutional framework of "race relations" that, until that moment, had been applied to immigrants from former colonies (Modood 2006) while spurring discussions about the limits of freedom of expression. In France, the request of wearing the veil at school suddenly sparked harsh debates which would last until – and continue past - the approval of the ban of the veil from

public schools (2004) and that have been fusing a number of different issues such education, *laïcité*, gender equality, feminism, individual freedoms, national identity and the fear of "communitarianism" (Gaspard 2006).[1] This episode, too, was revelatory of an increased self-awareness of Muslims and of their rights in a prominent European country (Kepel 2008).

Such incidents contributed to originate a mirroring dynamic, by which Muslims in Europe ceased to be defined based on their national, regional or socio-economic origin. As already anticipated (see Chapter I – par.4), they were not "Maghrébins", "Pakistanis", "gastarbaiter" or "immigrants" any more: their religion became the only identifier, or label, used in public discourse to designate this part of the population, which was increasingly being perceived as problematic due to its "disturbing" claims (Allievi 2005). Because these incidents were considered to be "questioning the nature of secular state and society" (Nielsen 2013:168) and to threaten the national identity, they paved the way for an increasingly distrustful depiction of Muslims, who have been regarded with suspicion as potentially disloyal citizens ever since. Thus, it is not only that Muslims gained a self-consciousness as Muslims: whilst it is true that self-identifications and other-identifications are mutually dependent (Jensen 2006), where major asymmetries of power are involved between a majority and a minority, as in this case, the *other*-identification becomes prevailing, and reifies the identity of the minority.

However, this shift in public discourse only *partly* reflected the shift in Muslims' collective *self*-identification. This discursive construction of Islam in negative terms had its own sources and dynamics and had been proceeding "independently of the ways in which the populations so categorized identified themselves" (Brubaker 2013:3). It suffices to think of the sphere of international relations in the immediate post-Cold War era, when Islam has been cast as the new, primary "enemy" of Western powers (Nielsen 2013). Since the publication of his article in 1993, Huntington's theses about the existence of a "clash of civilizations" between the West and Islam have been gaining currency in most public debates worldwide. These tendencies have been inevitably further reinforced by 9/11 events, the killing of Theo Van Gogh, the Jyllands-Posten Muhammad cartoons controversy in Denmark and the string of jihadist attacks perpetrated in Europe and the US, often by so-called "homegrown terrorists".

As a result, a double framing (Goffman 1974) informs any discussion about Islam: a *securitarian* one and a *culturalist* one (Frisina 2010). The first casts Islam as security threat; the second one views Islam as intrinsically incompatible with claimed Western democratic and cultural values, such as the (alleged) separation between the State and religion, or gender equality. Even if they are both evoked jointly, according to Alba & Foner (2015) the securitarian framing characterizes more the American debate, while the culturalist framing is more a feature of discourses about Islam in Europe. A significant example of the securitarian framing is represented by the so-called "Muslim ban" enforced by the Trump administration in 2017, concerning the suspension of travel visas to citizens of selected Muslim-majority countries on the grounds of their likely links to radical terrorist networks. Overt examples of the culturalist framing are represented by France's treatment of Islam as a direct menace to *laïcité* and the Republican citizenship[2]; here, debates have particularly fixated on a gradual "Islamicisation" of

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[1] These tones and the topics continually recur, as illustrated by the violent polemics generated by the election of Maryam Pougetoux, a Muslim student who wears the hijab, as representative of UNEF, a national students' union at Sorbonne university, in Paris. Her veil is not considered appropriate, given her public role and function: being a representative, she could be doing "proselytism". See for instance "Maryam Pougetoux, symbole de 'la confusion de la classe politique et des médias à l'égard de l'islam'", *Libération*, 27.05.2018, https://www.liberation.fr/debats/2018/05/27/maryam-pougetoux-symbole-de-la-confusion-de-la-classe-politique-et-des-medias-a-l-egard-de-l-islam_1654525 (last accessed: 27 September 2018).

[2] France's political tradition has historically been wary of the development of communitarian allegiances and identities, as there should be no intermediaries between the *République* and the citizen, who is depicted in universalistic terms, deprived

society, which would be allegedly made evident by a presumed increase in women who wear the hijab – the last instance of this kind of polemics dates back to 2016, with the eruption of polemics around the donning of the burkini on French beaches. Similar discussions surrounding Muslims repeatedly take place in other European countries.[3] Interestingly, strong anti-Islam sentiments are fueled not only by the inflammatory rhetoric of far-right politicians and movements - Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, Pegida in Germany, the Front National in France, etc. - but, at times, also by left-wing intellectuals - the socialist Thilo Sarrazin in Germany, feminist advocates, writers such as Michel Houllebecq, etc. These actors all find themselves strangely allied in a fight against what they perceive as the advancement of an obscurantist and repressive religion. This culturalist framing of Islam as inherently backward and incompatible with modernity has been labeled as "cultural racism": Islam becomes so essentialized that Muslims are seen as inherently inferior on the basis not of a biological feature, but of their anti-modern culture and religion (Alba & Foner 2015; Modood 2018[4]).

Others commentators (Testa & Armstrong 2012) also claim that the mechanisms by which this discursive framework has come to structure any representation of Muslims can be described as a modern example of a "moral panic" - the social phenomenon described by Cohen in his classic *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972), by which a public fear develops over a perceived threat to the cohesion and the values of a community imputed to specific groups that are typically considered as different and at society's margins. This fear is fed into and amplified by media, which offer stereotypical portrayals of the groups that allegedly represent the threat and thus reinforce the same negative stereotypes, while generating a public concern and thus fabricating the need of policy responses, that usually increase social control. This is a dynamic illustrated by Massoumi, Mills and Miller (2017) who show how Islamophobia results from concrete and political actions undertaken at various levels by institutional apparatus and by public actors, political movements (left-wing parties, right-wing parties, Zionist movements, atheist advocacy groups) and policy circles (e.g. counter-terrorism experts and networks) who all contribute to the definition and implementation of political agendas. Some of these movements share the argument that Europe risks an "ethnic substitution" – i.e. that Muslims will outnumber non-Muslims in Europe (Laurence 2012), which some conspiracy theories even describe as a carefully devised plan (Kepel 2012).

These shifts in the consideration of migrants from Muslim-majority countries assign them an *a priori* negative, "Muslim" identity, as if they constituted a threatening, monolithic and undifferentiated Other by virtue of their "problematic" religion. This is manifest, for instance, in all those instances in which politicians or intellectuals demand that Muslims in the West "disassociate themselves" from events such as massacres perpetrated by Isis in Syria or by jihadist terrorist attacks in Western countries – as if, simply because of their Muslimness, there was a continuum linking them to what other Muslims say or do, and should be therefore held accountable in the same way. Whilst many people with a Muslim

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of any cultural or religious affiliation or belonging. In French political culture the citizen's religion has no room or legitimation within the political arena: it is to be strictly confined to one's private sphere and should not form the basis for communitarian claims, which are perceived as particularistic, contrary to the universality and equality of rights – see for instance Fredette, 2014, Kepel 2008.

[3] A constantly updated review of the issues and the debates about Islam in Europe is available on the website www.euro-islam.info.

[4] More specifically, Modood claims that "Muslims" have been progressively racialised – a process by which an ethno-religious group started being treated and inferiorized like a race: while biological racism is the antipathy, exclusion and unequal treatment of people on the basis of their physical appearance or other imputed physical differences, saliently in Britain their non 'whiteness', cultural racism builds on biological racism a further discourse which evokes cultural differences from an alleged British [Western – or white], 'civilised' norm to vilify, marginalise or demand cultural assimilation from groups who may also suffer from biological racism (2018:3).

background – especially young ones – feel compelled to respond with campaigns such as the "Not in my name" one, other denounce the undue connection made between them and other Muslims.

Where Muslims are ghettoized and concentrate in urban, peripheric and more disadvantaged areas, Islam is perceived as responsible for their allegedly "failed" integration and their presumed desire to live "parallel lives", separate from and in opposition to the rest of society. This is a common trope of public debates in Britain and in France – in the latter case, the strong symbolisms associated to the image of the *banlieue* is paradigmatic in this regard[5]. While it is true that religious movements such as Salafism are on the rise in European societies (though they remain strongly minoritarian in absolute terms), the debate tends to exaggerate or generalize to all Muslims these mistrustful depictions. This widespread essentialist conception of Muslim migrants as being "all about religion" has meant that their self-identification - and, more importantly, their religiosity - have come under a particularly severe scrutiny, as if being religious (or better, being religious in an "Islamic way") and belonging to the nation were mutually exclusive. Under this double securitarian and culturalist framing, "Islam" has become equated with "danger" and "backwardness", and Muslims now find themselves imprisoned in this negative other-identification: they cannot easily resort to other identity options.

Indeed, this constructed image of Islam as the "public enemy" or "the enemy within" has allowed for its rejection from the *civitas*. In other words, as affirmed by Césari, Islam has not been granted "symbolic integration" into Western societies (2013). By symbolic integration, we may refer to Penninx's definition of integration as "the process of becoming [- or not becoming -] an *accepted* part of society" (2014:6, emphasis added), based on natives' (mis)perceptions and boundary-making strategies and practices. For Césari (2013), such a lack of symbolic integration means that Islam as a religion has been outcast from the main public secular cultures of Europe, as well as securitized.

Across European countries in general, a malaise in "accepting" the increasing diversification of societies concretely manifests itself in controversies over those symbols that would definitively mark the presence of Islam in the European cultural landscape - as testified by the numerous recurring local conflicts over the establishment of mosques (Allievi *et al.*, 2010) or by the emblematic Swiss ban on minarets voted through a referendum. This kind of dynamic is particularly at play also in the Italian case, as we shall see below.

2. The perception and the management of migrants and of Islam in Italy

In this framework, Italy is no exception. The above-described narratives are largely shared across European public opinions, and equally affect the Italian public debate – albeit with some peculiarities.

In order to grasp how immigrants' descendants experiences are conditioned by the context they are embedded in, It is useful to resort to the concept of "political opportunity structure", which was

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[5] In the case of French *banlieues*, even events that were not related to religious demands have been tellingly interpreted under the prism of Islam: the riots that took place in the peripheries of French cities during autumn 2005 were initially linked to a supposed "Muslim rage". While the riots certainly channelled rage at and contestation against discriminatory institutions, they did not express any demand concerning Islam or religion: actually, they represented a massive demand for citizenship, recognition and inclusion (Kepel, 2012; see also the special issue of *the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, n.5. vol. 35, 2009 entirely devoted to this topic).

originally coined in the literature on social movements and contentious politics, to describe the conditions that favor or discourage social actors – migrants in this case - to organize and mobilize, get recognized and advance demands – so as to account for variations in migrants' political incorporation across settings (Koopmans et al. 2005; Caponio, 2005; Morales & Giugni 2011; Pilati 2016). Although political participation or mobilization is not the object of the present research, this concept proves extremely useful to describe and demonstrate how different contexts matters to actual experiences. Indeed, the treatment of migrants and Muslims has direct consequences for their descendants – at the national and at the local level. Indeed, Islam assumes different configurations at the local level, as we will see in the final part of the present Chapter.

As Cinalli and Giugni explain (2013), political opportunity structure (POS) is articulated in *institutional* and *discursive* opportunities. On the institutional plane, opportunities are shaped by citizenship rights (and the related restrictions for non-citizens), conditions for family reunification, voting rights, anti-discrimination provisions, access to cultural rights – in the case of a religious minority such as Muslims, the existence of State-level Concordat regulating the guarantee of religious freedom, which translates to the possibility to build places of worship, access to public funding for Muslim schools, teaching of Islam in state school as an alternative to Christian religion, the possibility to wear the headscarf in public buildings or to have state-paid imams in prisons and in the army. The varying combination of these "components" determines the degrees of openness or closeness of the institutional setting and of the policies enacted by political authorities. However, discursive opportunities matter as well, insofar as discourses legitimize certain interlocutors as such, constructing them as actors in the public arena. In other words, discourses "determine which collective identities and substantive demands have a high likelihood of gaining visibility in the mass media […] and of achieving legitimacy in the public discourse" (Cinalli and Giugni 2013:150). Discursive opportunities have thus to be traced in claims made by politicians and other public figures such as intellectuals, in the representation of Islam provided by the media and in the more general public perception of Muslims.

With regards to *national-level institutional opportunities*, Italy has one of the most restrictive citizenship and immigration regimes (Pilati 2016). Citizenship rights, in particular, are understood on an ethnic basis (Brubaker 1992) and in terms of kinship relations – Zincone defined such a system as "legal familism" (2006). The current Italian citizenship regime is one of the most restrictive in Europe, as it is based on the *jus sanguinis* principle and conceives of citizenship as a "reward" for those who "deserve it", i.e. those who qualify as having completed a path of integration into society (EUDO 2010). The law dates back to 1992 and clearly results inadequate for today's situation – one in which Italy has morphed into an immigration country. A non-EU national who migrates to Italy can obtain the Italian citizenship only after a minimum period of ten years of continuous legal residence.

The toughest obstacles, however, concern migrants' descendants, who are allowed to apply for the citizenship only after they turn 18: they have one year of time for filing the application between the ages of 18 and 19 only if they have lived *continually* in Italy since birth.[6] This restriction, and the tortuous and at times discretionary steps involved in the bureaucratic process, have made the acquisition of citizenship extremely complicated for children of migrants. The result is a widespread sentiment of exclusion, both in symbolic and in material terms (Premazzi 2018) - as not having the citizenship

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[6] However, children of migrants who have acquired the Italian citizenship are exempted from waiting for the end of this procedure, as they automatically inherit the Italian citizenship from their parents.

prevents from doing a number of things, from voting, to applying for jobs in the public administration, or even participating in school trips in other European countries.

Today's widespread anti-immigrant discourses have generated vast polemics about the reform of the Citizenship Law. As briefly-mentioned above (Chapter 4), in recent years a large mobilization has taken place, demanding for a reform of the law and especially of the provisions concerning migrants' children. It was backed by a coalition that included associations of second-generation migrants, advocacy groups, NGOs working on integration-related issues, trade unions, political parties and Catholic organizations. Numerous events such as a nation-wide campaign, named "I am Italy too" (*L'Italia sono anch'io*), public demonstrations and flash mobs were organized between 2012 and 2017. This mobilization managed to push for the discussion of the reform in the Italian Parliament: the Chamber of Deputies approved the modifications to the law in 2013. However, these modifications were never approved by the Senate, as a counter-mobilization to prevent the approval of the reform was successfully orchestrated by right-wing movements and newspapers, with the League party at the forefront. Petitions and counter-demonstrations were organized against the reform; the related propaganda centered on the need to defend "Italianness" and the "jus sanguinis", which reinforced a representation of "us" vs "them" along cultural, and possibly racial, dividing lines.

This confrontation assumed extremely harsh tones and was also linked to security and terrorism-related issues – as in the same period other European countries were debating whether to strip their nationals who had joined terrorist organizations such as Isis of their citizenship (Premazzi 2018). As a result, the law was not reformed and will not certainly be modified in the coming years. In sum, the provisions of the current law, as well as the heated debates concerning its reform and the arguments that have been used, considerably added to the feelings of frustration and marginalization that many children of immigrants have already to cope with – especially those of Muslim heritage. As it has been argued, having missed the opportunity to reform such a law might generate even more exacerbated resentful sentiments, with potentially negative consequences in terms of social cohesion (ibid.).

With regards to the institutional accommodation of Islam, the halo of suspicion that has been cast on immigrants and Muslims was epitomized by the patent lack of political will to grant them the freedom to exercise religious rights through clearly-defined institutional arrangements. According to the Italian Constitution (art. 8), relations between the State and a given religion are to be regulated by a Concordat - i.e. a joint bilateral agreement (*Intesa* in Italian) between the confession's representatives and the Italian State. The Concordat sets out all the provisions concerning the public manifestation and organization of a religion – e.g. with reference to the establishment of places of worships, the validity of marriages celebrated through religious ceremonies, the allocation of spaces for the burial of the dead in cemeteries, the recognition of religious ministries, chaplaincy in jail and hospitals, fiscal advantages, religious education in schools, etc. Thus, a Concordat accommodates all the specific demands that a religious community might formulate in order to be fully able to perform its rituals publicly while respecting all other Italian laws and norms. Despite years of attempted negotiations, Muslims and the Italian State have not been able to reach a Concordat yet.

This is due, on the one hand, to the fact that Muslims themselves failed to organize themselves internally so as to find a consensual representation, able to negotiate with the State. On the other hand, governments have always been wary to grant full institutional recognition to Islam, especially in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the increased emphasis on the need to "control" Islam on its territory. Right-wing governments' relationships with organized Muslims were framed exclusively in

these securitarian terms and the internal divisions among Muslims' representatives were exploited as an excuse not to reach an agreement. In particular, UCOII (Unione Comunita' Islamiche Italiane), the largest federation of Muslims' associations based in Italy, was not considered a legitimate interlocutor due to its alleged links to the Muslim Brotherhood. Left-wing governments have been more proactive and sought a more productive dialogue with Muslim representatives, which culminated with the signing of a "Pact for an Italian Islam" in 2017, which was meant as a prelude to the *Intesa*. Still, even if the Pact represents a step forward, no Concordat is likely to be reached in the near future (certainly not with the newly installed government co-led by the *League*) and, in general, regardless of the political nature of the ruling government, the whole process has always been managed only through top-down steps at the initiative of the Minister: no relationship of real partnership has ever been established between the State and its Muslim interlocutors (Silvestri 2012).

In the absence of an *Intesa*[7], single Muslim organizations are left to voice their demands and settle relations with local administrations, at the municipality level – e.g. concerning the creation of places of worship or the request for a large public area where to celebrate the end of Ramadan. This inevitably leads to a differential - and unjust - treatment of Muslims across the country, according to the political will of single administrators to grant Muslims the right to publicly express their religion. Sometimes Muslims' representatives are eventually recognized as legitimate social actors in the public arena and their concerns are taken into careful consideration: this happened in Florence, where such an acknowledgement finally led to a settle the local controversy over the mosque – albeit after long and at times very tense processes (Conti 2016), or in Turin, where the administration has always sought to accommodate the demands of the Muslim community, while encouraging its leaders to "open up" to the rest of the city and to start a dialogue with other civil society actors. However, it is safe to argue that this is rarely the case: conflicts over mosques remain often unresolved, when they do not exacerbate.

Indeed, Italian State-religions institutional arrangements are characterized by a "weak legal secularism" (Salih 2009:418), as the right to publicly express freedom of religion is subjected to the totally discretionary political will, both at the national and at the local level, to grant the material possibilities to exercise such a fundamental freedom. Political commitment, in turn, depends on a discursive context that sees the predominance of harsh depictions of Muslims put forward by a series of actors in the public arena who have been greatly amplified by the media. So far, it seems that grating Muslims official recognition would mark a point of no return, which would mean the final and decisive acknowledgement of the increased diversity of the Italian population and of its religious pluralism – a "Rubicon" that local and national administrators have not dared to cross up to now. At the same time, the cultural and juridical privileges accorded to the Catholic church - whose relationships with the State are regulated by an entirely different, more advantageous regime - have made it difficult for Islam (and also for other confessions, such as that of the Jehovah's Witnesses) to gain recognition and to advance claims. In the last paragraph of the present Chapter we will see how these conditions have differently played out in Milan and Turin.

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[7] Relationships with religious communities that have not reached an Intesa with the Italian State are regulated by the 1929 "Law on Admitted Worships" (Legge sui Culti Ammessi), which was passed in 1929 by the then-installed fascist regime - an epoch which was certainly not characterized by today's religious diversification and pluralism. Apart from the clear inadequacy and obsoleteness of such a law, its applicability is hampered by the fact that it can only concern "religious legal entities" by public law (enti morali di culto). However, the Law establishes that, in order to be granted this specific juridical personality, a religious organization has to fulfil numerous and strict conditions, and the procedure can be very long and arbitrary (Ferrari 2012). With the exception of the Great Mosque of Rome, no Muslim organization has been granted the status of a "religious legal entity" and cannot therefore benefit from the official acknowledgement deriving from the "Law on Admitted Worships".

With regards to *discursive opportunities at the national level,* the first consideration to be made is that concerns about Islam are often overlapped with immigration and control-related anxieties. This is due to the fact that, contrary to other European countries, in Italy the arrival of immigrants from Muslim-majority countries (e.g. Morocco, Egypt) was not gradual, but took place over a relatively short period of time (mostly during the second part of the 90's) and consisted of relative high numbers. In addition, the timing of Muslim immigrants' arrival and settlement in Italy has coincided with the growth and the spreading of a feeling of mistrust towards Islam at the world level, which peaked after the 9/11 attacks, when a real process of demonization of Muslims took place, as Islam started being perceived as a "disruptive element". Thus, even if Islam is not the religion of the majority of newcomers in Italy[8] – as Christian Orthodox immigrants from Eastern European countries are actually more numerous than newcomers from Muslim-majority countries (ISMU 2018)[9] - "immigrant" has come to be associated with "Muslim" in the public debate, in a moment when "Muslim" started being increasingly depicted as the incompatible "other".[10]

Survey data well illustrate these trends. The results of the "Perils of perception" poll conducted by Ipsos Mori (2016) about people's perceptions of the quantity of Muslims in their own nation show that Italy is the country where the gap between reality and perceptions is one of the widest. Whilst in all surveyed countries there is tendency to overestimate the presence of both immigrants and Muslims, Italy ranks second at the European level (after France) and fourth at the world level for its significantly distorted perception of the size of its Muslim population: while this amounts to 3,7% of the total population[11], Italians think that Muslims represent 20% of the country's population. This figure is associated with an underestimation of the presence of Christians – something which, according to the survey authors, would hint at a feeling to be "sieged" by an invasion of cultural aliens. This seems to be further confirmed by a Pew Research Center survey (2015:21), according to which, among all polled Europeans, Italians show the most unfavorable attitude towards Muslims. Such phenomena appear even more interesting in the light of the fact that Muslims are not massively concentrated in specific zones,

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[8] No census on religious affiliation has ever been conducted by national organs or authorities in Italy. Estimates on the country's overall Muslim population are based on a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center - Global Religious Future Project. According to this survey, Muslims in Italy would amount to 2,6 millions, corresponding to 3,7% of the entire Italian population (http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/countries/italy#/?affiliations_religion_id=0&affiliations_year=2010&region_name=All%20Countries&restrictions_year=2016 – last accessed: 27 September 2018). Other estimates are based on data concerning immigrants' countries of origin and indicate that foreign citizens legally residing in Italy who declare to be Muslim amount to 1,7 million (Menonna 2016). The difference between this datum and the estimate provided by Pew Research Center is to be attributed to former foreign citizens who have recently acquired the Italian citizenship, to Italians who have converted to Islam and to Italians who are children of interfaith couples. Unfortunately, it is not possible to dispose of precise figures concerning these three categories. Contrary to other European countries where Muslims mostly come specific regions or countries (Maghreb in the France case, South-Asia in the British case, Turkey in the German case), the Italian Muslim population is more varied in terms of migratory backgrounds and ethnicities (Menonna 2016). The predominant origin is the North African one, making up for 44% of the Muslim presence in Italy - with Morocco being the number one country of origin (504.000 people), followed by Tunisia (111.000) and Egypt (105.000). Muslims from Eastern European countries amount to 24,8% of the entire Italian Muslim population - two third of them are of Albanian origin (271.000 people). South-Asian diasporas are quite conspicuous as well: migrants from Bangladesh (117.000), Pakistan (101.000) and India (12.000) represent roughly 13% of the Italian Muslim population. Concerning Sub-Saharan countries, the Senegalese community (97.000) largely outnumbers those of Nigerian (13.000), Somali (9.000), Ivorian (9.000) and Ghanaian (9.000) origin. Among Middle Eastern countries, the most represented one is Turkey (22.000), while the presence of Syrians or Lebanese people is significantly lower. These data result from elaborations that do take into account the self-declared religious belonging of immigrants originating from these countries (Menonna 2016; ORIM 2016).

[9] However, as mentioned in Note 4, these data refer to foreign citizens residing in Italy and cannot account for former foreign citizens who have acquired the Italian citizenship, as these "disappear" from statistics concerning foreign citizens.

[10] Following the so-called "refugee crisis", which resulted in the arrival of large numbers of asylum seekers form Sub-saharan countries between 2014 and 2018, the association between "immigrant" and "Muslim" is certainly less immediate. Still, attitudes towards Muslims in Italy remain strongly negative.

[11] See Note 5.

contrary to what happened, for instance, in French *banlieues*, or in many British cities. Whilst there certainly are higher concentrations of immigrants in urban areas (Milan, Turin, Rome) and in Northern regions, the Italian immigrant and Muslim population is more dispersed across small provincial towns, as residence is linked to the typically Italian dispersed industrial setting. What is striking, then, is that Muslims are significantly overestimated, even if they are not imprisoned in deprived "ghettos" at the margins of big cities.

This mistrustful perception has been largely fostered by the negative construction of Islam provided by media, intellectuals and politicians (Allievi 2005, 2009). Indeed, contrary to the above-cited examples of France and Britain, where the public visibility of Islam has also been due to Muslims' activism, in the Italian context such a visibility is mainly the product of the socio-political mobilization of which Islam has been made the target (Saint-Blancat 2014). Immediately after the 9/11 attacks, a prominent left-wing Italian journalist, Oriana Fallaci, published a series of books which harshly depicted Islam as the West's antithesis and sold millions of copies. Another high-profile political scientist, Giovanni Sartori, who nonetheless had no expertise on the subject, published a pamphlet in the same period, arguing against multi-ethnic societies. As Sciortino (2002) demonstrated, there existed a profound divide between empirical evidence and the even violent rhetoric displayed by both these authors. Yet, because they both were considered as well-respected figures of the Italian left-wing culture, their arguments were considered all the more "legitimate", therefore paving the way for the social construction of Muslims as the paradigmatic Other. Furthermore, since these two authors often wrote as columnists of one of the leading Italian newspapers (*Corriere della Sera*), their positions benefited from a significant echo, which strongly influenced the ways media have been treating the issue. Triandafyllidou (2006) systematically analyzed how the press and tv talk shows have largely contributed to coordinate and amplify the negative portrayal of Muslim communities in the public debate.

The other major actor in shaping this representation of Muslims has been – and still is – the "Northern League" political party – now renamed as simply "League". This party, which was born out of a (minoritarian) independentist push spreading across Northern regions at the beginning of the '90s, soon coupled its negative consideration of the South with a strong xenophobic rhetoric. According to Saint-Blancat (2014), this party largely owes its electoral success to its attentively architected instrumentalization of fear of immigrants (as was clearly evident in the 2018 electoral results). One of the major themes of the Leagues' campaigns has traditionally evolved around its violent anti-Muslim sentiment (Testa & Armstrong 2012), mobilized in repeated occasions. For instance, in order to protest against the construction of mosques- or, better, of small places of worship – members of the League would perform a grotesque ritual, by taking a pig to the area allocated to the mosque, in order to make the place "impure". Other examples concern the safeguard of Christian religious symbols: Leagues' representatives would become "scrupulous defenders of the presence of the crucifix in schools and other public spaces, or […] of the display of the nativity scene during the Christmas period [in schools]" (Saint-Blancat 2014: 277).

These two last examples are indicative of another peculiar aspect of Italian debates surrounding Muslims. In fact, whilst in France the discourse has become fixated on violations of the principle of neutrality of *laïcité*, in Italy what is recurrently invoked as the major issue at stake in the confrontation with Islam is the Christian Catholic nature of the country (Salih 2009; Spini 2015). Indeed, Italy's historical heritage made it an extremely homogenous and neat country from the cultural and religious points of view. Catholicism has always been by far the dominant faith across its territory, and religious minorities have always been very small and have been kept at the margins of the socio-political setting.

Additionally, we must take into consideration the powerful symbolic load represented by the physical presence of the Vatican on the territory of the peninsula, and the consequent influence that the Church has always exerted on Italian identity and politics, being Rome the millenary capital of Christianity and the political capital of a relatively "young" country. Notwithstanding declining church attendance and religious practice (Bichi & Bignardi 2015) Catholicism is still considered to perform a public role beyond ideological divides as a master of public ethics and as a guardian of shared national values (Saint-Blancat 2014; Garelli 2013).

However, this Catholic identity is purposefully exploited by political actors such as the League, according to whom Islam would "pollute" the Catholic landscape and would represent a threat to the Christian cultural heritage. Moreover, in this narrative the inferiorization of Islam is often constructed on the basis of a hierarchy between Christian civilization and Islam, drawing heavily on gender and women: in this view, Christianity is heralded as the civilized religion that supported women's emancipation, as opposed to Islam (Salih 2009). As Marzouki, McDonnell and Roy (2016) explain, this appropriation – or hijacking, to use their language - of the Christian identity by so-defined "populist" movements such as the League is a cynical move for narrowly political objectives.

Yet, except for the declarations and writings of two Cardinals (Cardinal Biffi and Cardinal Maggiolini), who voiced a forceful anti-Muslim stance between the end of the 90's and the early 2000s, the Catholic Church has always distanced itself from the "use" that has been made by these political actors of the Christian-Catholic identity and has always firmly condemned discriminations against Muslims. On the contrary, the Church has generally always adopted a position of openness towards inter-faith dialogue at all levels of hierarchy – from inter-faith meetings organized by local parishes, to high-profile initiatives promoted by Cardinals and the Pope himself. Thus, the Church seeks to occupy the role of mediator between other faiths and Italian civil society, which in turn allows it to be considered as a reference point for all actors in the public arena, in a move to preserve its monopoly at the heart of the Italian religious space in an increasingly less observant and devout society (Saint-Blancat 2014; Allievi 2010). These opposing trends are reflected in paradoxes by which strong inter-faith relationships with Muslims have been established at local levels, but, at the same time, Muslims are denied full institutional and symbolic recognition; so far, Italy has not experienced any "headscarf affair" yet, but the establishment of a mosque can never take place through an appeased process.

Still, the harsh rhetoric displayed by these political actors translated to concrete discriminatory measures introduced at the local level by Northern Leagues' administrators, which modified local police regulations, urban planning guidelines and norms concerning trading and commercial activities. As a result, Pakistani youths were prevented from playing cricket in some public parks across Lombardy, and kebab shops were closed across Veneto and Lombardy (on the pretext that they did not meet hygiene standards) or could not even be opened, with the stated reason that the municipality had to preserve Italian traditions related to food and culture (Ambrosini & Caneva 2012; Ambrosini 2013). These forms of "institutionalized intolerance" have been documented especially in Northern regions, where the League gained more rooting and can perhaps be said to have further fostered distrustful attitudes towards Muslims. In fact, according to another survey on Italians' perception of immigrants, Muslims are considered more negatively in the Northern regions - i.e. paradoxically where immigrants are better integrated compared to other parts of the country, with good rates of labor-market insertion (Martino & Ricucci 2015).

3. Islam in Milan and Turin

In the final paragraph of this Chapter, I will focus more closely the characteristics of the local context where the present research has been conducted, with regards to the presence of Muslims and to the management of Islam. Indeed, Milan and Turin represent two very interesting settings for the study of Muslim migrants' integration processes. The two urban areas share important similarities – namely, a comparable economic and industrial development and a long-standing presence of immigrants, which comprises a sizeable Muslim community in both contexts. However, as a result of the lack of a homogenous treatment of Muslims across localities described in paragraph 2, over the past decades the municipal administrations of the two cities have shown striking differences concerning the handling of migration and integration-relation issues, with specific reference the accommodation and the visibility of Islam and the kinds of relationships forged with the local Muslim communities. In following sections, I will firstly provide a few figures on the composition of the immigrant populations of the two urban areas and, secondly, I will describe the municipal policies that governed (or not) the local presence of Islam, exploring their implications especially for young Muslims.

Local policies on migration and integration-related issues

As already mentioned, the two cities have developed clearly different attitudes to the presence of immigrants over the decades between the 80's and the late 2000's; only recently Milan's approach has been somehow converging with that of Turin.

Milan never developed clear policy guidelines for the integration of migrants between the '90s and the 2000s. During these two decades, the city had been governed by right-wing mayors (the first of whom belonged to the then newly-born Northern League), who framed immigration-related issues chiefly in negative terms, heavily drawing on the topics of security and criminality. The integration and the involvement of immigrants had to occur "in a context of legality", according to the electoral program of the right-wing mayor candidate in 2006 (Letizia Moratti). At the end of the 2000s, however, after winning the bid to host the 2015 World Exposition, the administration sought to pursue a strategy of re-branding of the city image at the international level, aimed at stressing the positive value of cultural diversity (Caponio 2014a), in line with the theme of World Exposition which evolved around cultures, food and cuisines around the world. In this perspective, migrants' associations were re-evaluated as an asset in this branding strategy. However, while the establishment of a consultative body made up of migrant groups was mentioned in the electoral program of the same Mayor, this practically only translated to the organizations of three meetings between the Mayor and migrant associations, but no official consultative organism was created. Moreover, the continued emphasis on security somehow overshadowed these timid attempts to facilitate migrants' participation and value cultural diversity (ibid.).

The situation changed in 2011, when the then-newly elected left-wing Mayor (Giuliano Piasapia) adopted a markedly different approach to these issues, making use of a rather different language, underlining an appreciation of migrants' cultural diversity and positive contribution to the life of the city and explicitly rejecting the association between immigration and criminality. In his electoral program, migration was treated under the heading "Milan: International city" and immigrants were defined as the "new citizens" (ibid.). In pursuing the re-branding strategy hesitantly initiated by the preceding administration in view of the 2015 Expo, it put a stronger emphasis on migrants'

participation, which led to the established of a body gathering representatives from 500 migrants' associations – the so-called World-City Forum (Forum della Citta' Mondo). Yet, the Forum is only called upon to contribute to the organization of cultural activities and events on the city and does not serve as a consultative institution voicing migrants' say on local policies. At the same time, the city created an Anti-Discrimination center, with a branch explicitly devoted to countering ethnic and racial discrimination.

This branding strategy, focusing on the richness of Milan's diversity and on the inclusiveness of the city, marks also the current administration' approach, whose attention to migration and integration-related issues is embedded in polices aimed at fighting poverty and marginalization[12]. However, the "World City Forum" is no longer active, and no other attempts have been made to create other consultative bodies. Indeed, as argued by Pilati (2016), when it comes to steering migration-related local policies, the city administration has always showed continuity in preferring to deal with the Italian third sector organisation that advocate for migrants' rights and cater for their needs – such as Caritas (depending from the Catholic Church), as Italian organisations are deemed more trustworthy due to their stability and professionality. As a consequence, native organizations crowded out migrant organizations from the local arena, meaning that "migrants are endowed with fewer civic skills, fewer chances to develop identities sustaining political action and fewer social capital" (Pilati 2016:37), which, in turn, contributes to explain why Milan shows among one the lowest rates of migrant participation among the main European cities (ibid.).

Migrant's descendants have been the object only of limited attention. Between 2011 and 2016 the city's government set up a small office which included second-generation representatives to be involved as consultants in the implementation of relevant measures. However, except for a project started in 2013 (then interrupted due to lack of funding), called G.Lab. and conceived as a one-stop shop for children of immigrants and a cultural festival named in "Rigenerazioni" (2015), no other significant project explicitly targeting second generations has been implemented.

By contrast, Turin's approach showed a genuine pioneering approach in handling migration-related issues, geared towards inclusion and participation (CLIP 2009; Caponio 2014b), which has progressively been reinforced with increasing coherence. This was also possible due to the stability in terms of local governments, which, until 2016, were always upheld by left-wing majorities; however, despite the fact that the Mayor elected in 2016, Chiara Appendino, has a different political orientation (Five-Star movement), the city's stance towards migration continues to show an open and inclusive attitude.

The local administration started elaborating explicit integration and intercultural policies already in the '80s (when the settlement of migrants was still at its early stages); subsequently, integration policies have been constantly renewed and expanded by all subsequent administrations up to now (CLIP 2009;

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[12] A significant episode in this regard is the organization, in June 2018, of the "multiethnic lunch", a large event that took place in the main park of the city and saw the participation of roughly 10.000 people. The lunch was aimed at displaying the rich cultural and ethnic diversity of the city and was jointly hosted by the municipality, migrants' associations, NGOs and cooperatives involved in the reception of asylum seekers and refugees. In his opening remarks, the Mayor directly addressed the then newly-appointed Minister of the Interior, Matteo Salvini – leader of the League party, famous for his virulently xenophobic stance – advocating for the inclusion of migrants, instead of their rejection or *refoulement*. Many commentators have interpreted this move as the Mayor's self-positioning strategy as the "anti-Salvini" figure in the Italian political landscape. See "Milano, Sala: 'migranti, sono l'anti-Salvini. Il modello Milano funziona'", *Corriere della Sera*, 23 June 2018 – available at https://milano.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/18 giugno 23/milano-sala-migranti-sono-l-anti-salvini-modello-milano-funziona-efcaf942-76e4-11e8-b055-7e55445aba73.shtml (last accessed: 08 October 2018).

Caponio 2014b), testifying to the centrality assumed by the topic of migrant inclusion in the city's agenda. This was further consolidated by the creation, in 2007, of an ad hoc "Department for Integration", tasked with mainstreaming integration measures across all policy fields (ibid.).

Forms of participation and involvement in the definition of local polices have been sought for since the early '90s, until the policy-making of the city has been squarely rooted in the framework if "interculturalism" starting in the early 2000s. Over the decade 2006-2016, the administration considered it necessary to develop a so-defined "intercultural approach" to promote migrants' participation in the social, economic and cultural spheres. Such intercultural approach aims at the promotion of dialogue among different groups and at the prevention of conflicts, especially at a neighborhood level (Caponio 2014b): in this perspective the requests of immigrant groups have to be considered legitimate, and have to be properly taken into account, in that they are expressed by what has become a conspicuous part of the city population.

A further feature of this approach is the consideration of migrants not just as mere recipients, but as proactive promoters of activities, in a participatory framing. Indeed, over time, the administration more and more committed to steer migrants' integration processes by means of a bottom-up approach, in which the municipality and partners with migrants' associations in order to promote integration initiatives.

A pillar of this intercultural strategy has been and still is the special attention devoted to the inclusion of migrants' descendants, who have been considered as key actors in the city's intercultural discourse. One of the previous Deputy Mayors used to define them as the "new citizens", who needed become an active part of the socio-cultural life of Turin (Caponio 2014b). In fact, the administration considered these youths as key to integration, in that they can act as "bridges" between the first-generation and the majority society (ibid.). Immigrants' descendants, indeed, have been involved in numerous initiatives, from cultural events and festivals, as well as in the fashioning and the implementation of specific projects. Moreover, their associations benefitted from financial support and significant capacity-building from the administration. Indeed, this increased focus on the positive role of children of migrants is the result of a shift by which second generations' associations and representatives, from being consulted "on demand", based on the administration's occasional needs, have come to be considered as partners and active protagonists by the city officers (Ricucci 2014).

In conclusion, the two cities have developed clearly different political opportunity structures for immigrants' participation. Although Milan's approach has been somehow converging with that of Turin, at least in terms of "narrative" and self-representation, there have been no dramatic, concrete shifts concerning the actual measures of measures explicitly devised for migrants' participation – especially with regards to migrants' descendants. While these youths seem to be regarded as an "added value" for Turin's intercultural policies, in Milan they were never taken into proper consideration.

Immigrant and Muslim populations in Milan and Turin

In terms of migrant population, Milan has been defined as an example of "super-diversity" (Phillimore 2014), because 21% of its population has a foreign origin, with a great diversity in terms of nationalities (ORIM 2017). Due to its attractiveness in terms of job opportunities, Lombardy, where Milan lies, is the Italian Region with the highest presence of immigrants: noticeably, 25% of the total number of

immigrants that live in Italy resides in Lombardy (ibid.) - they amount to 1.314.000, representing 13% of the total population of the Region. Migrants residing in Milan and its province are 525.000 in total; among them, 289.000 live in Milan (ibid.). Moreover, Milan is home to one of the largest Muslim communities in Italy: people originating from Muslim-majority countries who reside in the municipality of Milan and its province amount to roughly 150.000, corresponding to almost to one third of the overall immigrant population residing in the area (ibid.). The most represented nationality among Muslim migrants is the Egyptian one. This constitutes a distinctive feature of Milan's Muslim population, as the first nationality among Muslim migrants in Italy is the Moroccan one. Indeed, Milan's Egyptian community is by far the largest one in Italy.

Turin is a slightly smaller than Milan but is comparable in terms of economic development. However, Turin and Piedmont (the Region were Turin is located) have lower percentages of immigrant population than Milan and Lombardy. Migrants make up for roughly 15% and 10% respectively of Turin and Piedmont's overall population (Città Metropolitana di Torino 2017). Migrants living in Turin and its province are 219.000; among them, 134.000 live in Turin, of which an estimated 33.000 are Muslim (Bossi 2017). Morocco is the most represented country of origin among Turin's Muslims. The Moroccan community in Turin is one of the oldest and certainly the largest in Italy – the Turin Moroccan community possibly even represents the greatest urban concentration of Moroccans across European cities. Moreover, it is known for its activism through associations and places of worship (Bombardieri 2011).

This has considerable implications for the configuration of local religious activism and for Muslim communities' relationships with the cities' administrations. for the configuration of the local Muslim community and its relationship with the city's administration. In fact, Morocco's religious institutions have sought to maintain strong links with Moroccan communities established in Western countries, seeking to influence them. This has always fallen within precise policies designed by Moroccan governments to engage with their diasporas by financing places of worships, sending imams abroad, offering training to religious leaders and summer schools to children of Moroccans, etc. Moroccan authorities have also established partnerships with the University of Turin for the organization of study visits and semesters in Morocco for students of Moroccan heritage. The maintenance of ties with their motherland has greatly facilitated Moroccans in Turin. For instance, Morocco provided them with financial resources to establish a mosque (although tis eventually was not built during to internal disputes). PSM - Partecipazione e Spiritirualita' Musulmana (Muslim Participation and Spirituality) is one of the main religious organization in Turin and is strongly tied to Moroccan religious and political networks.

This has never been the case in Milan, where the prevalent nationality, among Muslim migrants, is the Egyptian one. Egypt never had a clear "diaspora policy" and never engaged with its nationals residing abroad from a religious point of view. In Milan, this "void" was filled by a totally different – and arguably unexpected – configuration of actors, whose leaders are Italian converts or Muslims with a migratory background that does not correspond to that of the majority of Muslims in Milan (Syrians, Jordanians, Algerians). Moreover, as shown by Pilati (2016), Egyptians have the lowest level of organizational engagement among migrant communities in Milan. Therefore, the Muslim community of Turin has traditionally been more structured and could count on institutional and material resources to achieve a stronger representation, thanks to the support it received from Morocco, whereas the Milanese Muslim community has been more fragmented and conflictual at the internal level. This considerably impacted the possibilities of success of a dialogue with institutions in the two settings.

The management of local Islam

The two diverging structures of political opportunities that took shape in the two cities, as well as the different configurations of local Muslim communities, greatly influenced the relationships that the two cities developed with their respective Muslim communities, especially with reference to the settlement of mosques-relates issues. As we have seen, the attitude of the two cities has been converging over the most recent years, with Milan seemingly "catching up" with the well-advanced intercultural approach adopted by Turin. Yet, when Muslims are concerned, the "legacy of the past" still appears to condition the handling of the matter in Milan. Let us see this more in detail.

The construction of a purpose-built mosque in Milan has become a long-standing and highly controversial issue - even after the changes occurred in the administration's' approach to migration and integration. This issue was highly politicized by the previous right-wing administrations, with Northern League representatives exploiting it. For instance, the peak of the polemic was reached when the level of attendance at one of the prayer halls of the city became so high that the people had to pray on the street on Fridays, due to lack of space on the room. This obviously created problems to the local traffic and the residents' resentment kept mounting. However, while these was one of the many instances demonstrating the clear need for a mosque, the administration never resolved to settle the issue. The Northern League, for its part, showed an ambivalent – and cynical - attitude: on one hand, it would denounce the deplorable situation that local residents were enduring every Friday: on the other hand, it would block any initiative to overcome these problems, so as to capitalize on the residents' anger. Allievi (2014) describes Northern Leagues' representatives as "entrepreneurs of fear", i.e. as conscious producers of problems.

Moreover, mosque-related issues were also made more contentious by the fact that, in the early '90s, active clandestine jihadist networks were fund to be linked to one of the city's Muslim centres, which, according to the investigations, had become a hub for the recruitment of foreign fighters joining jihadist insurgencies during the Bosnian conflict (Vidino 2014). While these networks have been clearly identified and dismantled (or their members joined different jihadist groups elsewhere), and concerned small, covert cells comprising limited numbers of individuals, this brought Milan and its Muslim community in the spotlight as a potential "hotbed" for jihadism. Inevitably, this has made the added to the already tense situation and was used as a motivation to prevent the construction of purpose-built mosques by right-wing exponents.

The left-wing city administration pledged to abandon such a hostile attitude, and at the beginning of its mandate promised to take the Muslim community request into account. The incumbent 2015 Expo served as a justification: the argument went that Milan could not welcome such a high number of visitors from around the world without being able to offer appropriate places of worship for each confession. In 2012 the administration approved a deliberative act establishing an official register of Religious Organizations present in the city. The aim was that of fostering a greater knowledge of the various communities that are present in the city area, which should have represented a first step towards the undertaking of more structured forms of intercultural dialogue (Caponio 2014a). At the same time, the register was meant to serve as a basis to allocate three lots of public land for the building of new places of worship - two lots for two Muslim organizations, and one for an Evangelical one - through a transparent and fair procedure, which started with a call for bids and invited contenders to present projects for the foreseen religious edifices (Bombardieri 2017). However, the allocation has been blocked due to problems found in the applications received.

Polemics also aroused around the issue of funding, as the construction of one of the mosques to be built through the bid would be financed by Gulf-States – namely, Qatar, which sponsors an extremely conservative version of Islam. Notwithstanding the more "inclusive" attitude shown by the city's administration since 2011, the issue has not been resolved yet: a plan concerning the recognition of existing religious buildings (including some of the current makeshift mosques) and the construction of new ones (comprising one new mosque) has been approved in March 2019 and should be realized in the coming years. It remains to be seen whether actual implementation will take place, as the issue has been further complicated by the approval, in 2015, of a Regional Law regulating the construction of new edifices, which introduced a set of specific requirements that were explicitly aimed at impeding the creation of mosques.

Muslims, on their part, responded to this two-decade long deadlock by organizing themselves in a more efficient way. In order not to let their internal divisions be exploited by the local administration as an excuse not to reach an agreement over the opening of an official mosque, a number of Muslim organizations (each managing a different prayer hall) federated into a dingle umbrella organization, named CAIM – Coordinamento Associazioni Islamiche di Milano. Whilst some important Islamic centers decided to not join this umbrella organization, Muslims have undoubtedly gained a stronger voice through this body, that can better represent their demands. CAIM's first designated spokesperson was an Italian convert - Davide Piccardo. The choice of an Italian was made with the explicit intention of facilitating the dialogue with the city's institutions. Several polemics were triggered by some pro-Erdogan, pro-Morsi and anti-Israel claims he had made, which led the Jewish community to interrupt its relations with CAIM. Other Muslims expressed concern as to the "political" Islam that, in their view, characterizes CAIM's stance towards Islam, as well as to its allegedly obstructive hegemonic strategy, which would suffocate the voice of other associations. In fact, some Islamic centres decided to not join this umbrella organization.

While Muslims have undoubtedly gained a stronger voice through this body, with CAIM having become an inescapable interlocutor for the administration, the municipality has had difficulties in dealing with these differences within the Muslim community: on one hand, it would like to respect them and to provide room for all; on the other hand, the debate risks assuming even more confrontational tones[13]. In any case, the mosque-related issue is still considered an extremely sensitive one, also despite the fact that the 2016 municipal elections saw the first ever Muslim female candidate - Sumaya Abdel Qader - be elected in the municipal council in 2016. Noticeably, she received a massive number of votes, despite having been the object of repeated fierce attacks during the entire electoral campaign pointing to her alleged belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood. One of the reasons she fielded in the elections was the resolution of the mosque controversy. She stood in the elections also with the stated aim to fight for Muslims' right to a mosque – or assist the municipality in dealing with the issue - depending to the different narratives put forward either by her constituency or her party.

The whole issue has been made even more contentious by the fact that the leaders of Islamic organizations are all first-generation migrants: the youths have no representation. This facilitated some distrustful depictions of these leaders by some media, which would cast a halo of suspicion around the real "loyalty" of these Muslims to Italy. In particular, CAIM is repeatedly accused of being an emanation

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[13] See "Milano, l'Islam si divide sulla moschea: 'Tutte le comunità devono essere ascoltate'", *La Repubblica*, 14 March 2014, available at
https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2014/03/16/news/milano_l_islam_si_divide_sulla_moschea_ascoltate_tutte_le_comunit-81103695/ (last accessed: 08 October 2018).

of the Muslim Brotherhood, or somehow close to fundamentalist Islam. Significantly, these portrayals did not just appear in local newspapers, but on the national edition of mainstream Italian newspapers, which testifies to the national amplitude taken on by this Milanese controversy. Moreover, the migratory background (Syria, Jordan, Algeria) of CAIM's leaders does not correspond to that of the majority of Muslims in Milan, among whom the prevalent nationality is the Egyptian one (followed by the Moroccan one). These two communities failed to organize themselves effectively, as we have seen. This means that CAIM as an umbrella organisation may be somehow disconnected from, or have weak ties with the community it should represent: its legitimacy is granted by the recognition of local institutions and is therefore more of a socio-political nature (Vermeulen & Brunger 2014) than of a cognitive one (i.e. legitimacy that is rooted in its immigrant constituency).

Despite the numerous demands (dating back to at least the early 2000s) to create official mosques and the more recent attempts to respond to them, and notwithstanding the more "inclusive" attitude shown by the city's administration since 2011, the problem is still pending. As a consequence, with the exception of one large prayer hall, Muslims keep praying in former warehouses and makeshift places of worship – something which, on one hand, causes a vast discontent and a feeling of frustration within the local Muslim community, and on the other hand, offers far-right parties further opportunities to exploit this controversy by spreading negative propaganda against the local Muslim organizations. As is clear, the topic of mosque-establishment in Milan dominated the entire agenda concerning the local management of Islam. Since it caused such a heated debate, this issue completely overshadowed – if not erased- all other possible topics concerning the inclusion of Muslims, such as the role of voice of youths: as we have seen, young Muslims have never been involved and have arguably been hidden by the generation of their "parents", who monopolized the attention of the local arena – without generating great results for that matter, with the mosque controversy remaining unresolved.

Turin's attitude to Islam has been quite different than that of Milan's municipality. As in Milan, there are no purpose-built mosques in Turin: discussions about the idea of building a "Great Mosque – one for all", date back to the early '90s. However, the aftermath of 9/11 made the administration more cautious about the issue (CLIP 2009). The idea was also opposed by a part of the residents, and the public discussion of the topic was also made difficult by the contentious declarations of a self-proclaimed imam Bouriqi Boutcha in defense of Bin Laden's actions. This person would portray himself as the representative of the entire Muslim community, but in reality, had no legitimation among local Muslims, who distanced themselves by this figure, who eventually was expelled from Italy (CLIP 2009).

Still, after a long process of mediation, the administration managed to reach a consensus on the establishment of a mosque the possibility to build a "proper" mosque. According to the then-Mayor Sergio Chiamparino, the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, the creation of a platform of dialogue between them, and the invitation to keep different kinds of issues separate (e.g. lack of parking space as an excuse to prevent the building of the edifice) were all necessary ingredients in order to make a compromise possible (Galeotti 2009). In this framework, the handling of the mosque issue was not as controversial as it was (and still is) in Milan, and it resulted in a rather non-conflictual decision-making process. This mosque was to be financed by the Moroccan government; eventually, however, it was never built due to internal disputes concerning the management of the Moroccan funding. Yet, the local administration considered the Moroccan State a reliable partner for the management of local Islam, especially due to the fact Morocco is considered to be a warrantor of the practice of a "moderate" Islam.

In any case, the municipality shifted the attention from mosques-related matters towards other forms of dialogue and inclusion of Muslim associations, focusing especially on young Muslims, so that mosque-related matters would not monopolize the entire agenda of local integration policies, with the risk of fuelling polarizations among the local population with political opponents exploiting the issue. In this regard, in line with its "intercultural approach", the administration has always maintained a constant dialogue with the Muslim communities and other relevant stakeholders, by favoring interreligious dialogue and facilitating initiatives involving both natives and Muslim immigrants at the neighborhood level (Caponio 2014; CLIP 2009). The activities promoted by Muslim religious organizations have been considered by the city government as a useful support for the welfare and the integration of local Muslim communities (CLIP 2009). Islamic religious and cultural centers have always been encouraged by the administration to take steps to open their doors to the local population and get to be known by the neighborhood, in order to reduce prejudices and to avoid possible situations of conflict. Over the two past decades, numerous projects and activities for spreading a "correct knowledge" of Islam among natives and for empowering leaders of Muslim organizations have been financed by the administration (CLIP 2009), with a view to consider the Muslim local community as a partner in governing the process of the increasing diversification of the city's population (ibid.). Young Muslims' associations, in particular, have been always benefited from the administration's great support in the organization of events and in the promotion of activities.

This collaboration between Islamic organizations and the municipality eventually led to the definition of a "Pact for participation and active citizenship" (Patto per la condivisione e la cittadinanza attiva), signed by the administration and Muslims' representatives in 2016. This initiative was proposed by Islamic centers themselves, in order to promote reciprocal knowledge and mutual respect (Bombardieri 2017). The Pact contains three points: formalizing the institution of a coordinating body that would steer relations between Islamic centers and the administration; compile an updated bulletin with communications about the life on the city to be distributed in all Muslim places of worship; organize an annual open day in each mosque, during which Muslims "introduce themselves" to the population living in the neighborhood and guide tours around the place of worship – the name of the event is "Open mosques – room for everyone" (Moschee aperte – spazio per tutti).

During Ramadan, Muslims are given permission to celebrate the Eid in one of Turin's parks, with representatives from the administration joining the feast, and organize a large breaking-the-fast dinner named "Iftar street", which takes place in the streets one of the city's neighbourhoods, and is jointly organized by the local Muslim communities and the city administration. Other examples of dialogue and collaboration concern Muslim migrant women's request to have a reserved swimming pool, to which the administration's Integration Department responded by arranging with a municipal swimming pool special opening times, reserved to women, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Furthermore, the Department assisted Muslim women selling informally home-backed bread in the Porta Palazzo street market to set up a cooperative in order to comply with the rules concerning food production (Caponio 2014b). In sum, Turin has shown much less hostility towards the presence of Muslims, while Milan has repeatedly been the stage of a harsh, aggressive discourse on Muslims, thus providing very different possibilities for the "acceptation" of Muslims in the two cities' cultural, social and political landscapes.

As a result, two diverging political opportunity structures have developed in the two contexts, which in turn generated different forms of responses, activism, visibility and claim-making among Muslim organization and actors. In Milan, relationships are undoubtedly tenser and more antagonistic between the local government and Muslim representatives, with Muslim constituencies feeling hardened by the

situation. However, one significant difference between Milan and Turin is that the former is affected by a strong interference from the national level of governance, while the latter is not. Whenever an issue concerning "Muslims" emerges in Milan, it had or has an immediate national projection at the national level. For instance, national media reported in a highly sensationalistic manner how Muslims were obliged to "invade" the streets close to their place of worship for Fridays' prayers (due to the limited space available in the small prayer rooms), and right-wing parties exploited the phenomenon and used it as a plastic representation of an intolerable "Muslim invasion". This made the case of Milan particularly symbolic for Italy, with the Milanese Muslim community being put on a sort of "watch list" – also because some of CAIM's members have also belonged to the leadership of UCOII (Unione delle Comunità Islamiche Italiane), the largest federation of Islamic associations in Italy, and had interacted with national institutions in the failed negotiations to reach a Concordat between the Italian Stet and Islam.

The reason for this state of affairs is that Milan represents the second capital of the country - or, for some, the "other capital"- due to its importance for the Italian economic system: therefore, what takes place in Milan is in general of highly significance for the country. Moreover, Milan has long been administered by the right, in periods during which the national government too was upheld by a right-wing majority, thereby creating an alignment and a mutual influence and interest between the national and the local level. Actually, until recent years, the right considered Milan and Lombardy its most iconic stronghold. Settling the "mosque issue" and allowing to build one or more purpose-built mosques in Milan would mean finally acknowledging the cultural transformations that Italy, as a country, is experiencing, with the ensuing changes in the religious landscape. In the eyes of many, it would mean "surrendering" to the influence and the requests of Muslims. This is arguably the reason why the issue is still so controversial. Indeed, the establishment of a purpose-built mosque in Milan would put a strong pressure on the national government to finally institutionally recognize Islam as one of Italy's religions. This appears as an interesting development, as usually it is decision-making, laws and regulations at the national level that impose themselves on the local level. While this dynamic still takes place for Milan as well, it can also be said that the local level's decisions and struggles concerning "the Muslim issue" influence decision-making at the national level. This is not true for Turin: even if it is one of the most important Italian cities, it is much more marginal for developments at the national level than Milan - in general, and also on this particular set of issues.

4. The local configuration of Islam: different opportunities for youths of Muslim background

The consequences of the differences in the composition of the Muslim communities in the two cities – as well as the diverging stances adopted by the local government in handling the local presence of Islam – can be observed at two levels: the first concerns the distinct "religious offers" available to the young Muslims who live in the two contexts; the second regards the different attitudes that local youths of Muslim background developed towards their city's management of religious difference.

With regards to the local "religious offer", Milan and Turin's differences consist in the degree of "variety" that is available to Muslim youths. In Milan, most organizations that manage Islamic places of worship have gathered under the umbrella organization named CAIM. This is not just a coordinating body aimed at facilitating relationships with local institutions through a unified representation, as organizations that federated under CAIM are characterized by a very similar approach to Islam and

convey the same kind of moderately conservative orthodoxy. Linked to CAIM is GMI – Giovani Musulmani d'Italia (Young Muslims of Italy), the largest organization of Muslim youths in Italy. GMI was founded in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, with the aim of aiding children of Muslim migrants develop an Italian identity balanced with the Muslim one, and of offering a positive image of an "integrated Islam". This organization was established in Milan and has a nationwide outreach, with sections in all major Italian cities. The Milanese section remains the largest one and, since its inception, has been linked to one of the major Islamic places of worship of the city, now member of CAIM. The Italian branch of Italian Relief - whose offices are in Milan - is strongly related to GMI and to CAIM, as it was started and is currently run by former GMI old members and national representatives (see Chapter 6). Therefore, GMI and Islamic Relief monopolize the "religious offer" available to young Muslims in Milan. It is no surprise, then, that both organizations have a large number of members/volunteers in this city.

On the contrary, in Turin, each organization managing a place of worship remains separate and independent from the others, and each one of them has set up its own youth branch. The result is that there has been a multiplication of Muslim youths' associations linked to places of worship, which increased diversification and competition among them. Young Muslims have available a wider and more varied choice in terms of youths' religious associations, while this is not the case in Milan, where choice is much more restricted. GMI has its own section in Turin, and Islamic Relief too created a group of volunteers in this city; however, these two organizations have to compete with many other associations to attract young Muslims. Actually, as some of my interviewees explained to me, GMI and Islamic Relief even have to compete against each other. One of the largest associations attracting young Muslims is PSM (see above), which, due its linkages to Morocco, especially addresses youths of Moroccan heritage. This is the reason why the number of members/volunteers belonging to GMI and Islamic Relief is much lower in Turin than in Milan, which allows for the organization of only a limited quantity of activities in both cases, as compared to Milan. In sum, having granted "visibility" to Muslims was conducive to an increase in religious offer in Turin, with a burgeoning in youth associations and the organization of numerous "intercultural" events.

Concerning the relationships with institutions entertained by youths of Muslim background, there are clear differences in the two cities, as explained above. GMI and Islamic Relief in Milan have never had significant relationships with the local administration – not even in recent years, when the attitude of the local administration has changed. Furthermore, although young Muslims' associations do not have the establishment of a place of worship as their first and foremost objective and do not fixate on this topic in their demands (which focus instead on recognition as fully fledged citizens and as bridges between cultures - Ricucci 2014, 2017), the long-standing controversy over the establishment of officially recognized mosques in Milan affects young Milanese Muslims too – regardless of their involvement in religious organizations. Indeed, some of my interviewees (both among organized and non-organized youths) expressed their feelings of frustration and their anger at the situation and think that the administration has fooled and deceived Muslims:

> The U-turn on mosques made me angry. We spent 150.000 euros on the project of the mosque in order to take part in the bid [see above]. And for what? Nothing. Typical promises made during electoral campaigns, and once you have been elected, you don't keep your promise because you have to please the part of your voters that doesn't want the mosque… (Moosa, 26 years-old, Milan, Islamic Relief staff member).

Why isn't there any mosque in Milan? In Rome there's a beautiful one! Why not in Milan? […] but why can't we have a big mosque? We are a large community! (Mariam, 22 years old, Milan, Islamic Relief volunteer).

Muslim places of worship in Milan are horrible. It makes me sad. And I can't understand why there cannot be a real mosque, from the architectonic point of view, instead of a warehouse. I'm not saying that there should be a loud call to prayer five times a day, because it would be too much. But I don't understand, because [to have a place of worship] is a right that is enshrined in the Italian Constitution! […] It makes me sad because I was born here, but it is as if I wasn't. It hurts. (Alessandra, 23 years old, Milan).

These words well testify to their frustration. Indeed, in the negotiations with the administration concerning the mosque, second-generation youths have never been involved: only first-generation Muslims have dealt with the issue, which possibly represented an obstacle, as they keep being considered as "foreigners" and "others". The only "appearance" made by young Muslim in the debate over the mosque was a video shot by CAIM entitled "Moschea, sì prego" (Mosque, yes please) in which second-generation Muslims explain why there should finally be a mosque in Milan. Arguably, choosing to have young Italian Muslims speaking in the video, instead of first-generation Muslims, was considered strategic in order to provide a new, more "credible" image to CAIM. However, this is the only example: therefore, it is safe to argue that, on one hand, the negative discourse surrounding Milanese Muslim representatives drew all the attention to them, which constituted a significant stumbling block for Muslim youths to become visible at the city-level; on the other hand, first-generation representatives themselves did not envisage a turnover in their leadership, thus contributing to obstruct Muslim youths' participation.

By contrast in Turin, as we have seen, young Muslims' activism has always been greatly favored by the municipality, which considers them privileged interlocutors in the definition and implementation of integration projects. As one of my interviewees from Turin (an Islamic Relief volunteer) told me,

we [Muslims] are facilitated by the administration, but also buy other civil society organizations. They know us, they trust us, and all our demands are listened to. For instance, whenever we ask for a place where to meet or where to organize events [such as fund-raising dinners], they always give us what we ask, and never make us pay. This is a great advantage… I know that in other cities it is not as easy as it is here" (Amalia, 22 years-old, Turin, Islamic Relief volunteer).

Though they are certainly affected by the overall negative discourse about Islam, youths of Muslim background in Turin are aware of the privileged status they can enjoy in their city, as compared to other realities:

Turin is a multi-ethnic city and I feel extremely lucky: I don't know whether I would have made the same choice to wear the veil, had I lived in Veneto [another region in the North of Italy, known for its right-wing orientation], or in a remote province like Cuneo [a province of Piedmont characterized by rural, small villages]. Here in Turin we are so lucky because people here are not so narrow-minded, people are generally open-minded. (Khalida, 26 years old, Turin).

As explained, young Muslims in Turin were thus facilitated in qualifying and presenting themselves as the city's partners and as active citizens –, which, in turn, stimulated them to skilfully develop alliances and social capital at the local level. For instance, they are currently focusing on collaborating with institutions such as schools and universities to organizes workshops and cultural initiatives together,

thus gaining credibility and recognition to become trustworthy interlocutors. Therefore, they do not ask for recognition as something "different" and specific; on the contrary, they frame their request to be recognized in terms of a right to inclusion as citizens and in the framework of the promotion of intercultural policies:

> Yes, I would like to become the leader of a mosque, but with other people of my age. My vision is that, if I take a mosque, I want to sign an agreement with the municipality. I want the mosque to be transparent, maybe also with a baroque architectonic background, so that it can fit well in the landscape. The khutba [sermon] should be in Arabic, in Italian and maybe also in English for the Pakistanis. It shouldn't just be a place of worship, but also a library. Because there's a lot of Arab philosophy and literature, like the Lebanese poet Khalil Gibran. And there are many Muslim philosophers (Carlo, 25 years old, Turin).

In conclusion, while youths with a Muslim background in Milan appear more passive and seem to have "resigned" to not participate in the city's life, in Turin they are increasingly assuming a visible and proactive role. Indeed, for some of the Milanese young Muslims, the foundation of the Islamic Relief branch, run only by young people, represented a way to emancipate themselves from the generation of the "fathers", who (ineffectively) monopolized the city's attention, which led to a significant neglect of the potential of youths.

Chapter 6

"WE ARE NOT A RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION": ISLAMIC RELIEF AND ITS ITALIAN BRANCH

The present Chapter completes the description of the settings where the research was conducted, by illustrating Islamic Relief as a humanitarian organization. After retracing its origins and development, as well as its aims and "culture of aid" (par.1), I will then focus more specifically on the story and on the articulation of the Italian branch by presenting its activities and especially the role and involvement of volunteers by drawing on the fieldwork I conducted (par.2).

1. Islamic Relief: "faith-inspired" action. The organization's foundation and development

As stated on the website of Islamic Relief Worldwide, the organization was

> established in 1984 by Dr. Hany El-Banna and fellow students from the University of Birmingham in the UK in response to the famine in Africa. Launching an appeal, they went door to door and from mosque to mosque asking for money, and this paid for food for people affected by the famine. In 1985, Islamic Relief's began its first project – sponsoring a chicken farm in Sudan. That same year, its founders hired a small office in Mosely, in Birmingham, and from there raised £100,000 for the famine response. Islamic Relief grew at a rapid rate, and over the next five years, started working in Mozambique, Iran, Pakistan, Malawi, Iraq, and Afghanistan, among others, responding to emergencies and distributing clothes, food, offering health support and beginning the long-term project that is now our One-to-One Orphan Sponsorship program. Today, by the grace of God, Islamic Relief is a truly global organization, working in more than 40 countries providing emergency aid, carrying out long-term development, and campaigning for change.[1]

Petersen (2015:119) provides more details about the foundation: El Banna, an Egyptian student of medicine in Birmingham, was struck by the famine hitting Sudan while attending a medical conference in that country. Upon his return to the UK, he gathered other people, mostly Egyptians, many of whom were living in Egypt, and they set up a Muslim NGO. According to a more romanticized version of the "founding myth" of the organization recounted by the Italian staff members (see below), he started by putting a few cents in a plastic bag and then tour his neighborhood with his friends, holding that plastic bag, where people would put the money they were convinced to donate by El Banna. He then became director and chairman of the organization.

This founding group had connections to the Muslim Brotherhood; therefore, the organization was infused with a marked religious conservative character. Due to its links to the Brotherhood, the organization – like many other Muslim NGOs – came under close scrutiny after 9/11, and was accused several times of financing Islamic terrorist organizations, especially Hamas in Palestine. However, these allegations have always proved unfounded (Benthall 2016) and the organization, at least from the 90s, has shown a very careful attitude: in order to prevent possible accusations of fraud, it started

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[1] See https://www.islamic-relief.org/about-us/history/ (last accessed: 25 September 2018).

developing an extremely rigorous auditing infrastructure, allowing for an extremely precise tracking of expenditures (ibid.). In recent years, it has been awarded certifications recognizing the high standards of its procedures for guaranteeing transparency. The organizations' reputation and integrity have also been acknowledged regarding its approach to and management of development projects: the high quality of its development practice was certified by "Core Humanitarian Standard" in 2017.

Today, Islamic Relief is the largest Sunni Muslim NGO at the international level, and is present in more than 40 countries. In developing countries or in zones of war, it established "field offices"; in developed countries it established "partner offices", which are entirely devoted to fund-raising.

Born as a Muslim NGO, the organization was well positioned to raise funds by drawing on Muslims' obligation to pay *zaqat* and *sadaqa*. *Zaqat* represents one of the five pillars of Islam, and consists in the obligation to give a percentage of a Muslims' wealth to poor Muslims. *Sadaqa*, on the contrary, is not obligatory, but is based on the Quran's repeated encouragement to be charitable. Islamic Relief, therefore, offered Western-based Muslims the possibility to channel their donations to the poor and deprived, ensuring that the entire process would be dealt with "Islamically" - therefore, in a way that would please and reassure Muslim donors (Petersen 2015). On the Italian website of the organization, there is a zaqat calculator available, which allows for calculating the precise amount one has to give to charity.

Islamic Relief's vision, mission and values

The heading of Islamic Relief Worldwide website is "faith-inspired action". Indeed, as one of the members of the Policy and Strategy Unit of Islamic Relief Worldwide told me, Islamic Relief considers itself a "faith-inspired" organization – and not a "faith-based" organization. He would make this distinction by explaining that, as a faith-inspired organization, they do not claim to be representative of Islam, "contrary to what people think of us, for instance, at the United Nations, they would interrogate us as the representatives of 'the Muslim world', which we are not". Interestingly, I was introduced to this officer by one his colleagues, who nonchalantly said that I was a researcher studying a faith-based organization such as Islamic Relief – she took for granted the self-definition of the organization as a faith-based one. He immediately corrected her, differentiating between "faith-based" and "faith-inspired". Indeed, this is revelatory of the fact that even among staff members of the same organization there might not be a uniform thinking or a common understanding of the organization's self-definition. In any case, according to the officer who explained the meaning of "faith-inspired", this label ensures that the organization does not have and show the pretension to be representative "of Islam" and to act on behalf of the Sunna as a whole.

As displayed on the website of Islamic Relief Worldwide, the organization claims to be guided by five values inspired by Islam. Arguably, the number of five values is meant to mirror or recall the five pillars of Islam. These five values are described as follows:

> We remain guided by the timeless values and teachings of the Qur'an and the prophetic example (*Sunnah*), most specifically:
> *Sincerity (Ikhlas)* – In responding to poverty and suffering, our efforts are driven by sincerity to God and the need to fulfil our obligations to humanity.

Excellence (Ihsan) – Our actions in tackling poverty are marked by excellence in our operations and the conduct through which we help the deserving people we serve.

Compassion (Rahma) – We believe the protection and well-being of every life is of paramount importance and we shall join with other humanitarian actors to act as one in responding to suffering brought on by disasters, poverty and injustice.

Social Justice (Adl) – Our work is founded on enabling people and institutions to fulfil the rights of the poor and vulnerable. We work to empower the dispossessed towards realizing their God-given human potential and develop their capabilities and resources.

Custodianship (Amana) – We uphold our duty of custodianship over Earth and its resources, and the trust people place in us as a humanitarian and development practitioner to be transparent and accountable.[2]

The inspiration provided by Islam is briefly mentioned in the description of the organization's vision:

Inspired by our Islamic faith and guided by our values, we envisage a world where communities are empowered, social obligations are fulfilled and people respond as one to the suffering of others[3].

This limited reference to religion also characterizes the mission statement:

Exemplifying our Islamic values, we will mobilize resources, build partnerships and develop local capacity as we work to:
Enable communities to mitigate the effect of disasters, prepare for their occurrence and respond by providing relief, protection and recovery.
Promote integrated development and environmental custodianship with a focus on sustainable livelihoods.
Support the marginalized and vulnerable to voice their needs and address root causes of poverty[4].

In both statements, what prevails is an extremely concrete, humanitarian and development-related language; arguably, the only implicit reference to religion can be found in the vision's imagining of a world where "social obligations are fulfilled", which points to the value of social justice (see above).

Lastly, the organization underlines that it subscribes to the values of universalism and non-discrimination heralded by the humanitarian community:

We are signatories of the Red Cross Code of Conduct, an international standard on working with people affected by emergencies in a non-biased manner, and we have acquired NGO status with the UN's Economic and Social Council. We have signed a Framework Partnership was signed with the European Commission Humanitarian Aid department, and a partnership agreement with UNHCR that reaffirmed both organizations' principles of giving aid without discrimination.[5]

The logo of the organization has remained unchanged since it was first designed. It clearly evokes the religious origin and component of the organization, as, the upper part represents the dome of a mosque, with two minarets; the lower part recalls a globe, to underline its nature as a developmental organization. The blue color signals that the organization belongs to the "family" of large humanitarian NGOs and IGOs (i.e. the UN).

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[2] See https://www.islamic-relief.org/about-us/ (last accessed: 25 September 2018).
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.

Picture 1 – Islamic Relief Logo

Although it was founded by an Egyptian-born Muslim migrant, because it was created and then developed in a Western country, Islamic Relief can be said to represent an example *par excellence* of the deculturation and the deterritorialisation of Islam (Roy 2004). The marketing strategy it adopts presents Islamic Relief as an international, modern, young, "cool" NGO, with a truly global outreach, seeking to make room for Islam as a new "normality" within the landscape of humanitarian organizations.

Perhaps, this is the reason why the "religious part" of the logo – the upper one, which recalls the mosque – is experienced with uneasiness by some of the organization's members. According to them, it may risk to characterize the organization as a religious one in a too straightforwardly. As two staff members (one based in the Birmingham headquarters, the other based in Italy) explained to me, that "mosque" can represent an obstacle, as it may signal that the organization is not truly universalistic – i.e. that it would aid only Muslims, thus discouraging possible non-Muslim donors to offer money to the organization. Indeed, as many interviewees admitted, when they are performing some fund-raising activity and non-Muslims see the logo of the organization, volunteers find it difficult to even get listened to. We will see this more in detail in Chapter 8 and 10.

Islamic Relief's aid culture: between religion and professionalism

As discussed by Petersen (2015) and Benthall (2016), Islamic Relief has become a fully respected faith-inspired NGO in the realm of the aid and development communities. Over the past twenty years, the organization received millions of pounds from institutional funding authorities, and it has come to be considered a reliable partner for the implementation of projects. Entering this "club" and pushing away the "halo of suspicion" surrounding Islamic organizations was at once enabled by, and led to, growing levels of accountability and professionalization, through the increasing recruitment of people – also non-Muslims – with development education and experience. Over time, this created a dividing line between old, immigrant, male, Arabic or South Asian, pious and practicing staff members, who were recruited by the organization in its early phases, and new, young, not necessarily practicing, not

necessarily Muslim or not necessarily of immigrant background staff members, who have been hired in more recent times and selected purely based on their experience in the development sector (Petersen 2015: 120-123) – as we shall see, a divide between the "old" and the "young" characterizes also the situation of the Italian branch.

Yet, achieving this kind of positive international acknowledgement was arguably made possible, first and foremost, by the organization's convinced subscription to principles of universalism and non-discrimination, as we have seen above. This has meant, for instance, that the organization committed to refrain from any religious activity in the countries where it runs development projects, in order to show that it does not serve the purpose of "doing proselytism". Concretely, this may translate, for example, to avoiding taking charge of the reconstruction of mosques in areas where these happen to be destroyed (as was the case in Indonesia after the 2006 tsunami - Benthall 2016: 120-123). More generally, faith-based or faith-inspired organizations are implicitly required to display a privatized form of religiosity in their practice: "development aid agencies want a religiosity that complies with secular development principles, that is, either a personalized moral religiosity, relegated to the sphere of individual motivations, or an instrumentalized religiosity, used as a tool to enhance development efforts" (Petersen 2015: 177-178). If they want to be included in the international development community and to keep benefitting from institutional funding, "today's NGOs can be religious, and they may even use this religiosity as a tool to meet the material needs of the recipients, but they cannot use it to meet their religious needs" (ibid.).

A slightly ambiguous attitude in regards the respect of universalism, however, is displayed when other interests are at stake – i.e. safeguarding the maintenance of a loyal relationship with the organization's principal donors, that is, Muslims. A case in point is the management of the funds collected through *zaqat*: according to the religious norm, *zaqat* should only benefit other Muslims. In order to avoid a clash with the principle of universalism, funds are conveyed to Muslim-majority countries experiencing dire conditions of deprivation. This way, the destination of the funds is irreproachably justified, while the religious rule is accommodated in the development discourse and Muslim donors' expectations are fulfilled (Benthall 2016; Petersen 2015). Indeed, for many Muslims who channel their almsgiving to Islamic Relief, the organization represents an opportunity to engage in development activities - often in their country of origin, for which they have a clear interest - while simultaneously enacting a religious duty and performing a religious practice (Erdal & Borchgrevink 2016). Actually, it is precisely religion and religious practices that powerfully motivates migrants' development engagements (Borchgrevink & Erdal 2017).

Yet, while the religiosity of faith-based or faith-inspired organizations has to abide by secular development principles, in recent years a trend has emerged with the development community which values "cultural" or "religious proximity". According to development policy circles, the religiosity of an organization can represent an added value, especially in accessing areas where it can be more difficult to operate, where faith-based organizations can benefit from a potential "comparative advantage" in establishing relationships with locals thanks to a common religion or culture. According to Petersen (2015), this argument requires faith-based organizations to continually "prove" their value – albeit while abstaining from addressing beneficiaries' religious needs.

All of these different requirements and discourses oblige the organization to live up to different sets of expectations, held by different kinds of public. Both the "old staff" and the community of Muslim donors wish that the organization expressed itself in more religious terms; by contrast, the "younger

staff" and the development community require the organization to adopt a purely universalistic language, with only "superficial" references to religion. The result is that Islamic Relief has to navigate this complex web of expectations, by situationally resorting to diverging "languages" and framings. Benthall claims that Islamic Relief succeeds in maintaining "an astute, if sometimes contentious, balance between two kinds of purisms: Islam and humanitarianism, but with a leaning towards the latter" (2016: 123). As we will see in the following sections, this kind of dynamics also affects the positioning of the Italian branch: on one hand, it has to address the public of the Muslim community; on the other hand, the "non-Muslim" public it seeks to reach out is not so much represented by the development community, but by "Italians".

2. The Italian branch

The story and the present articulation of the office

Italy's Islamic Relief office is a so-called "partner office" of Islamic Relief Worldwide: partner offices are devoted to the collection of funds for situations of humanitarian emergency across the globe and for development projects – which are implemented in developing countries through field offices. In general, partner offices do not benefit themselves from funding for the implementation of projects in the country where they are based – although there might be few exceptions, as the Italian case shows (see below). The Italian branch benefits from a relative absence of competition, as no other large Muslim transnational NGO has ever opened offices in Italy. As one staff member told me, apart from small no-profit associations that collect funds for Palestine or Syria, Islamic Relief has no big competitors in the landscape of Islamic faith-based organizations.

The story of the Italian branch of Islamic Relief can be fundamentally divided in two phases: a first phase that lasted between 1992 and 2011, and a second phase that started in 2012-2013. In 1992 a small Islamic Relief office was opened in Rome by a handful of first-generation Muslim migrants, but was then closed after two years. In 2002 it was restarted in Milan, under the direction of an Italian convert. Another Italian convert took the management of the office in his hands between 2005 and 2011. During this phase, the branch remained very small, with only few employees, and its fundraising activity mainly consisted in fund-raising in mosques and through the organization of small events, whose target was exclusively the Muslim community – with the exception of one large event linked to the war in the Gaza strip, which broke out after the launch of the operation "Cast lead" conducted by Israel between December 2008 and January 2009. This event, named "And you, what Gaza do you want?" (E tu che Gaza vuoi?), was organized in order to collect funds for the situation of humanitarian emergency caused by the war, but also as a way to show solidarity with the Palestinian cause. However, Islamic Relief had remained largely unknown to the Italian Muslim community during this first phase. Due to a series of financial issues, the branch got into troubles and was closed a second time in 2011.

Between 2012 and 2013, Islamic Relief Worldwide headquarters decided to restart its Italian branch: an officer from its "Emerging markets" department was sent to Italy to set up a completely new office in Milan and to train the team that would manage it. Thus, Islamic Relief's Italian branch, from being very small and practically unheard-of, experienced a complete overhaul and was totally "relaunched", under the supervision of the Islamic Relief Worldwide headquarters. The new team was formed based on the exclusive and explicit recruitment of young people, sons and daughters of first-generation

migrants. Some of my interviewees, as well the Islamic Relief "Emerging markets" officer who supervised the overhaul of the Italian office, variously explained to me the reasons of this choice. Through their recounts, I could identify three main motivations. The first one was linked to the necessity of avoiding that mismanagement of the collected funds could take place again (after the problems experienced between 2010 and 2011), by ensuring a better quality of the work and an increased professionalization through an in-depth training of newly recruited staff members, not connected to the previous management - except for one member, who had not been previously involved in the direct administration of the funds though. The second one was linked to the need to ensure the compliance with all Italian laws and procedures concerning the activities organized by the office, as well as more effective relationships and coordination with Italian institutions, by recruiting Italians – i.e. people of migrant origin and Muslim heritage, who were born or had grown up in Italy – who are better positioned for this. The third reason has to do with the exigency to expand the outreach of the organization in Italy, by not focusing exclusively on the Muslim community, but also by engaging with the wider Italian, non-Muslim public, drawing on the capacity of children of migrants to act as "bridges" between "Muslims" and "Italians".

Whilst it is true that the board of trustees is composed by individuals belonging to the generation of the "fathers" – pious first-generation immigrants, some of whom are leaders of large mosques –there are not conflictual relationships between them and the current "young", "professional" operating staff, contrary to what Petersen describes concerning Islamic Relief Worldwide country offices (2015: 119-123). Yet, the young people who were recruited in the start-up phase saw a great empowerment opportunity in starting working for Islamic Relief, especially vis-à-vis the "older generation" of Muslim community leaders. During the first phase, Islamic Relief in Italy relied on network of mosques managed by first-generation migrants, and no representative of the younger generation had ever been involved in the decision-making process or was ever been made responsible for the collection of funds. Therefore, for the younger generation, being hired by Islamic Relief and assuming "top management" positions (though in the start-up phase of what still is a small office) represented an occasion to "make room for themselves" and to be "finally" able to "do something by themselves". As discussed by Ricucci (2017), among the younger generation of Muslims, the legacy of the "fathers" in the management of "organized Islam" is frequently perceived as a heavy one, too attached to first-generation migrants' countries of origin both materially and symbolically, too remote form the needs of youths who grow up in a Western setting and need to strike a balance between the different influences of their identity, too narrowly-focused on obtaining places of worship, without taking enough into account the need to partner with institutions and to dialogue with non-Muslims. The re-establishment of the Italian branch of Islamic relief was then perceived as a way to finally demonstrate what the young "are capable of doing", without having to account for what they do to "the old". This is all the more relevant as the new office has been established in Milan, where, as we have seen in Chapter 5, the generation of the "fathers" has largely overshadowed the younger one.

GMI (Giovani Musulmani d'Italia) – the largest organization of young Muslims – was founded in Milan in 2002. As explained in the previous Chapter, it has no rivals in the local city-level configuration of organized Islam. Therefore, due to its "history" and its "monopoly", the Milanese section is the largest one in Italy. It is no surprise, then, that the recruitment of the first employees of Islamic Relief, which was re-started in Milan, drew on the pool of local GMI members. GMI is also linked to the nation-level network of mosques that gathered under the UCOII umbrella (Unione Comunità Islamiche Italiane). In fact, those who were first hired were GMI members and had already been somewhat involved in informal fund-raising activities - such as simple collection of money in mosques - for Islamic Relief,

under the previous management of the branch. Some of today's employees had taken part in the above-mentioned event in favor of Palestine and consider it a defining moment in their development of a consciousness "to do something good".

However, it appears that for those who are now employed as Islamic Relief staff members, working for this organization seems to represent a more qualified opportunity to detach themselves from the first-generation, as compared to membership in GMI. Whilst GMI already constituted a space to "speak up" for themselves, Islamic Relief empowers them more than what just a youth association could do, due to its professionalism and results-oriented approach. Moreover, it allows them to look "beyond Italy", as the constant relationships with the headquarters as well as with other partner and field offices makes them feel inserted in an international and highly competent environment.

The relaunching of the office consisted in hiring a tam initially composed by less than ten people and setting up three clearly defined departments: administration, fund-raising and communication & marketing. As the staff members I interviewed explained to me, they were trained by the Islamic Relief headquarters representatives in all relevant areas: communication strategies, organization of events and planning of innovative fund-raising strategies, management of funds in completely transparent way through the compilation of updated reports, donor care, etc. Graphic designers were hired for the preparation of all the advertisement material to be disseminated both physically and via social media channels. Such training also concerned the development of professional skills such as leadership, public speaking, team building techniques and the like. It lasted for two years and was delivered mainly in Italy, but some staff members and volunteers' leaders took part in camps organized by Islamic Relief Worldwide at its headquarters in Birmingham, where they met other staff members form other field and partner offices. They describe these experiences as extremely enriching and mind-opening, as they got to know other people "like them" from other countries.

After the first recruitment of employees from between 2012 and 2013 and following the "boom" in terms of fund-raising success experienced by the Italian branch, the staff further expanded and incorporated new members between 2016 and 2018, now reaching the number of 15 employees (comprising both full-time and part-time ones) – half of whom are young women, some in leadership roles. New young professionals with a development education and experience were hired in order to fill new positions in the admin sector, specifically implementing donor care tasks, and in the fund-raising sector. With reference to the latter, in 2018 Islamic Relief Italy finally "felt ready" (as I was explained by more informants) to apply for institutional development funding provided by Italian and international public authorities and to develop partnerships with other NGOs in Italy for the creation of common projects. This required the selection of a person experienced in project design and management in the aid and development field – which further adds to the increasing professionalization of the Italian branch, based on the trajectory already followed by Islamic Relief Worldwide (Petersen 2015). This professionalization is also implied in the selected profiles for the two positions: as the Islamic Relief Worldwide officer that was tasked with the relaunch of the Italian branch explained to me, "the Italian office is finally ready to take a step up the ladder and hire people with the right skills and experience, true professionals, regardless of their background or religion". In other words, the Italian branch has reached such a level of professionalization that it is ready free itself from "communitarian logics" and choose the best and the brightest, irrespective of them being Muslims or not. This occurs indeed in other large partner offices, such as the British, the Canadian or the American one, where people with different backgrounds and non-Muslims work as officers, and were chosen solely based on merit.

Given the success of the relaunch of the Italian branch, some Italian staff members were tasked in 2017 to assist in the start-up of the Spanish office of Islamic Relief (based in Barcelona), by providing training and advice based on "lessons learnt" in a genuine process of transfer of knowledge among peers. According to my interviewees, the Italian office was chosen to help set up the Spanish one also due to the "cultural proximity" between Italy and Spain - in general and with specific reference to charity culture - and the analogous patterns of migration of Muslims to Spain, which make for two very similar settings. Staff members who have been involved in this specific task seem to feel greatly valued by the organization and enjoy working with their Spanish colleagues, precisely because of these "similarities".

The young age of the volunteers is clearly reflected in the communication style of the organization, which heavily draws on social media – especially Facebook and Instagram. The graphic design of leaflets and of advertisement shared on social media channels is modern and "cool". The social media pages of the organization are obviously used to spread the appeals and calls to donate on a continuous basis (see below). However, they are also employed in order to advertise, in a very informal manner, the numerous occasions of "fun" provided by the organization to young people through its charity events, as these pages are flooded with "stories", pictures, videos and live recordings about the fund-raising activities that are being carried out by the various teams of volunteers. Volunteers in turn keep sharing these posts on their personal accounts to generate a multiplier effect. Indeed, young volunteers can be said to represent the core of the visibility and the success of Islamic Relief in Italy, as we shall see in the following section.

The involvement of young volunteers

One of the most important aspects of the innovations that were introduced concerns the involvement of young volunteers to carry out fund-raising activities. Based on the model developed in the UK, young volunteers have proved crucial for the organization to become visible and known; at the same time, Islamic Relief represents an opportunity "to do something good" for young Muslims who wish to do so in the framework of an organization that, to a lesser or greater extent, displays an Islamic referential. Groups of volunteers have thus been set up by the fund-Raising department in a number of Italian cities, mainly in the North: to date, there are active groups in Milan, Turin, Brescia, Verona, Padua, Trento, Bologna, Ferrara, Florence, Grosseto. They are more active depending on the "degree of involvement" of their members, and on the period of the year. For instance, during the period of Ramadan the number of fund-raising activities reaches its peak. In order to start setting up these groups and recruit volunteers, staff members tapped into the group of GMI members in various cities (GMI is a nation-wide organization and has sections in all major Italian cities). However, this also poses a problem: in a city like Turin, where there are already many competing Muslim youths' associations, GMI laments an unfair competition from Islamic Relief. At the same time, Islamic Relief sought to go beyond the "usual knowns" and to proactively recruit volunteers through schools and universities, by leaving leaflets or promoting word-of-mouth, in order to reach also people who were not already GMI members. During the past two years, "open days" were organized in various Italian cities in order to present the organization and encourage young people to get involved (see Picture 2).

Becoming a volunteer is extremely simple, as there is no need to sign any document or to "declare" some form of commitment: one is added to the Whatsapp chat created for each group of volunteers in each city and is already considered involved in that group. As my informants explained, this very loose and casual organization of volunteers is meant to prevent the possible discouragement that could

derive from requesting an official commitment from them. As a result, a simple spreadsheet is compiled with names and phone numbers for each city. However, this lack of more official logs impedes knowing the exact number of volunteers involved. According to my informants, there are roughly 500 hundred volunteers in Islamic Relief's network, but this is hardly an accurate figure, because many of those counted of volunteers might not be active anymore: there are different degrees of involvement, and commitment might change over time. In fact, volunteers are let free to decide when, where, how much to join or setting up activities. Thus, there are some volunteers who are extremely active and take the initiative of organizing events (see below), others who work more "behind the scenes", and others who decide to just "show up" at events and give a hand.

Anyways, even if the number of volunteers is indeed a "guestimate", Islamic Relief has undoubtedly become increasingly known and popular among Muslim youths through its recruitment campaigns and its fund-raising activities. Indeed, the Italian branch of Islamic Relief literally burgeoned over the past 4-5 years, with a significant number of volunteers recruited. One of the most striking aspects is certainly their young age. As anticipated in Chapter II, their average age is between 14 and 25. Among them, girls and young women largely outnumber boys and young men: according to my informants, female volunteers represent between 70% and 80% of all volunteers. With reference to the groups considered in the present research, the ratio male/female volunteers is more balanced in Milan, while in Turin female volunteers represent 90% of the group. Many of them – but not the overwhelming majority – wears the hijab; on the basis of my observation, between 30 and 40% of the girls and young women involved do not don the hijab. The prevailing migratory backgrounds across all volunteers refer to North-African countries – Morocco above all, and then Egypt and Tunisia. Very few volunteers are of Sub-Saharan, Middle Eastern or South-Asian origin. Therefore, the ethnic composition of volunteers reflects that of immigrant Muslim populations in Italy.

The Milanese group is composed by roughly 100 members and is by far the largest in Italy: as mentioned above and in Chapter III, the local Islamic Relief section and the local GMI monopolize the "religious offer" available to children of Muslims in that city. Moreover, Milan hosts a very large Muslim community. Therefore, both organizations can count on a large number of potential volunteers, without competing against each other. On the contrary, the Turin group has experienced a first phase of great expansion, reaching the number of 70 volunteers, who then decreased to some 20 to 30 rotating volunteers today. According to my informants, this "boom" in volunteers (dating back to 2014-2015) was due to the great novelty it represented in the local "religious offer"; today, the Turin Islamic Relief group has to "compete" with other Muslim youths' religious associations, as pointed out above. Noticeably, there were, and there are, some non-Muslim volunteers. Although their number is very restricted (six people comprising also those who left the organization), the national coordinator of volunteers considers the presence of non-Muslims as an extremely significant accomplishment: "precisely because we are not a religious organization, we are not associated to mosques and the like, Italians too can come and join us! Actually, we are really happy when this happens… And it is very striking to hear from THEM that it is true that we do not focus so much on the religious aspect!" – as if only the perspective of an "Italian" could guarantee or prove that is true that Islamic Relief "is not a religious group".

According to this member of the staff, it is important that the organization include also non-Muslims or non-Arabs, and should proactively seek to involve also "Italians", for instance by leaving leaflets about Open Days (see below) in universities. For the National coordinator of volunteers, the fact that "Italians" too become volunteers would testify to the openness of the organization and would mean that

prejudices and stereotypes are being defeated (and Muslims are slowly being accepted in Italy). This is how we should read he characterization of the organization as "not a religious one". In her words, this means that the organization does not intend to proselytize or to provide religious education. Although Islamic Relief does actually provide a sort of religious education, and certainly conveys a strong religious message, as we will see in Chapter 8, it is important for the organization to present itself as "non-religious", in order to "reassure" the public. However, what emerges from the words of the National Coordinator of Volunteers, as well as from other staff members I met in Milan and in the Birmingham headquarters, is that this attitude is not just instrumental: there is a genuine adhesion to this self-representation, as contradictory it may be. I will elaborate more on such contradictions in Chapter 8.

On a side note, it is interesting to remark that non-Muslims are characterized as "Italians": while many Islamic Relief members are of Arab origin and often refer to themselves as "Arabs"[6], the use of the label "Italians" as opposed to "Muslims" suggests that, even in the eyes of children of migrants who consider themselves 100% Italian, "Muslim" still means extraneousness to the nation.

Each group of volunteers has a responsible-coordinator, who liaise with the Milan offices and with the national coordinator of all volunteers, who, in turn, is constantly updated about the activities that are organized in each city. Each group is subdivided in smaller sub-groups, each one dealing with different tasks: the "events" group has to concretely organize activities, the "marketing group" has to promote the events, and so on. Volunteers are often induced through Open Days, which I will now present more in detail.

Open days for the recruitment of volunteers

"Volontar'io" is a pun meaning "I volunteer"

"Aperto a tutti" means "Open to all" – this aspect is specified in order to encourage also non-Muslims to join if they want to learn more

Picture 2- Advertisement of the Open Day for volunteers organized in Turin

At the two Open Days I took part in, the meeting started by showing one video about Islamic Relief as a humanitarian organization: its story, objectives and activities across the globe. The video includes footage of both intervention in disasters and development projects since the foundation of the organization. The refrain is "when the famine devastated Sudan, we were there; when Pakistan was

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[6] This is due to the fact that the overwhelming majority of volunteers have a migratory background rooted in North-African countries.

ravaged by floods, we were there; when Haiti was hit by a terrible earthquake, we were the first to intervene; in Gaza we are the largest operating humanitarian organization, ready to intervene each time a conflict breaks out killing innocents".

Two interesting points are touched upon in the video, which might seem to contradict each other: the first concerns the fact that Islamic Relief offers aid solely based on the criterion of "need", regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, political affiliation, etc; the second stresses that, the organization's cultural and religious vision, allows it to work in more sensitive areas, where some humanitarian agencies cannot enter, thus gaining easier access to many populations – such as in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Baluchistan. Later in these meetings, staff members would explain that such an easier access is "due to the deployment of local staff, who have a first-hand knowledge of the situation on the ground and speak the local language". However, as mentioned above, the two points highlighted in the video seek to respond to two possibly contrasting expectations placed on faith-inspired NGOs: the first concerns their adhesion to principles of universalism and non-discrimination; the second has to do with the emphasis on the competitive advantage of "cultural proximity". The video then concludes by quoting what has become the organization's motto – the famous verse of the Quran that reads "whoever saves one, it is as if he had saved mankind entirely" (5.32) and by thanking donors with the words "None of this would have been possible without God's mercy and your help". This testifies to the "strategies" - in De Certeau's sense - that the organization pursues, and which I will analyze more in detail in Chapter 8.

The video is followed by the staff members' narration of the organization's "founding myth" – i.e. the story of the foundation of Islamic Relief by "this Egyptian student of medicine in Birmingham, who starting with his few pennies, went house by house with his friends and a simple plastic bag to collect money for the famine that hit Sudan at the time… and he had no structure behind himself, no staff, no headquarters…". This is recalled in order to stress "the great difference that we can make with our small actions, because what we do, when we collect funds and convince people to donate to us, requires very little effort of us, but this changes the life of many". Staff members further reinforce this point by recounting their experience during field visits, "confirming" what the video shows about the impact of Islamic Relief and explaining the extent to which the "money we raise makes the true difference for this people". The stress is put on how volunteers should learn about the conditions of distress people suffer from where Islamic Relief operates, because "we must feel truly sympathetic with their situation, otherwise we do not manage to convince people to donate money".

After an explanation of how Islamic Relief is organized at the international level and in Italy, another short video is shown, which is actually a collection of pictures concerning the activities that volunteers carry out. The video hints at both the acquisition of "skills" and at the "fun" side, and concludes with the words "Grow up – Learn – Have fun – Are you ready?". In the comments that follow, the skills that volunteers can learn by taking part in Islamic Relief's activities is a particularly underlined point. The national coordinator of volunteers usually emphasizes how the kind of activities carried out as volunteers – e.g. organization of events – represent an added value on one's one CV as they are chances to learn transferable skills, implying that joining Islamic Relief also means personal growth in professional terms, by making examples from her own experience as a volunteer. The coordinator considers that is an especially convincing argument in the recruitment of volunteers:

> Maybe you come to an event because a friend of yours obliged you to do so, or because you don't
> know what to do on a Saturday afternoon and you just want to spend time with friends, but then

you'll find out that you can actually start a personal journey, that we'll make you feel good because you will be doing good, but also because you will learn a lot, you will learn skills that are useful at the personal and at the professional level. For instance, I didn't know how to speak in public or how to use spreadsheets (National coordinator of volunteers, Open Day in Milan)

In fact, as she explained to me, one of the stated goals between 2017 and 2018 was ensuring that volunteers would rotate every year, passing from one sub-group to another (e.g. from the "communication" group to the "events" group), "so that they would keep learning different skills every time". This is conceived as a way to maintain volunteers' motivation high, in order to avoid "losing" them over time.

As we could see, when presenting the organization in these occasions, staff members sought to strike a balance between the religious character of Islamic Relief and its professionalism, in order to attract both those may be driven by a religious motive (or my simply want to stay among similar peers – see Chapter 10) and those who may feel closer to the purely humanitarian goals pursued by Islamic Relief. The development of such "professional" skills, as well religious education, are also explicitly provided through specific training sessions, mainly delivered during "volunteers' camps", as I will describe in Chapter 8.

Activities and events organized by and for volunteers

Most of Islamic Relief's fund-raising events are organized by volunteers themselves, and usually address peers and youths. Under a "soft" supervision of the national and local coordinators of volunteers, each group at the city-level is left free to decide what to organize in terms of fund-raising activities. Actually, volunteers are strongly encouraged to resort to their creativity in imagining new kinds of events. Typical events would be charity dinners, barbecues or "aperitivo" – more informal dinners with a simple buffet. Sometimes, "gala dinners" reserved to young people have been organized. Indeed, as was explained to me by Islamic Relief Staff members, one of the strengths linked to the involvement of young volunteers lies in their capacity to come up with fresh and innovative ideas, leading to the organization of new kinds of fund-raising activities. For instance, they have organized football tournaments, paint-ball matches, ice-skating days, one-day trips to some Italian cities, "beauty farm" afternoons reserved to girls... Participating in these kinds of events entails the payment of usually very affordable fee; no less than half of this fee usually constitutes the donation to the organization.

The public of this kind of events is generally made up of peers, i.e. volunteers' friends, including also "Italians", who are more inclined to join especially at "aperitivos" (typically when Middle Eastern food is involved, as the national coordinator of volunteers explained to me), or at sport tournaments (although instances of Italians taking part in these events remain occasional). In other words, volunteers basically organize this kind of activities for themselves and for people like them.

Other innovative activities which volunteers are involved in are so-called "Challenges". They usually consist in one-day cycling or trekking trips; if a volunteer wishes to participate, he or she has to pay a fee of roughly 100 euros. The fund-raising linked to a "Challenge" precisely consists in collecting money from friends and families (or through individual "street collections", see below) in order to pay that fee. As the representative of Islamic Relief Worldwide that assisted in the start-up of the Italian office told me, this kind of fund-raising activity is completely new to the Italian charity culture, compared to the

British one, where fund-raising schemes like these are much more common. He told me that the Italian branch needed some time in order to launch this sort of activity and to make sure that they would be understood by volunteers and eventually be successful. Indeed, the Italian office of Islamic Relief appears to be the only NGO in Italy resorting to this kind of fund-raising strategies, which the Italian public is still quite unfamiliar with. In this sense, Islamic Relief in Italy, through both the large-scale involvement of young volunteers and this type of activities can be certainly described as a "forerunner".

Challenges have been organized also at the international level by Islamic Relief Worldwide: Islamic Relief's members from the various partner and field offices are invited to participate in one-week long cycling tours. The fee in this case is much higher (more or less 1000 euros) and requires a much bigger fund-raising capacity on the part of singles volunteers or individual staff members. So far, three "challenges" have been organized: two in Andalusia, one in Turkey.

Both "small" national-level challenges and "large" international challenges are connected to the "Water for life" appeal. The "message" that these trips are supposed to convey concerns the dire conditions that people endure in poor countries. By taking part in a trekking or in a cycling trip - thus making a physical effort – participants are induced to reflect on the number of kilometers that people have to walk, among extreme difficulties, in order to reach drinkable water in some African countries (see Picture 3). Although they are aware that their physical effort cannot anyhow be compared to that of an African woman who has to walk long distances in order to get water, this is a way for volunteers to bear in mind what they are doing and why they are doing it. In other words, "challenges" should serve to "renovate one's intention" (see above), as was explained to me by a Italian national coordinator of volunteers, who participated in one international challenge: "you know, we were cycling, it was so beautiful, and tons of fun… but also hard… and when you are climbing on a steep hill, you have to pause for a moment to think 'why am I doing this', and you think about the people who are obliged to do so… we are lucky because we had the safety car following us, and we would rest every night in a hotel… this is why with the other participants we would stop every once in a while to reflect about what we were doing and the cause we were serving".

"This year too Islamic Relief offers you the possibility to have fun and save lives at the same time, WILL YOU TAKE UP THE CHALLENGE?"
#Waterforlife
#Challenges

Picture 3 – Advertisement of two "Challenges": a trekking trip and a cycling trip

However, besides the emphasis on the "intention", the dimension of "fun" associated to challenges is appears prominent – as the words of this staff member and this advertisement (Picture 3) clearly illustrate. Indeed, that fund-raising activities are also "a lot of fun" is usually emphasized both to attract new volunteers and to keep the already involved ones. As one volunteer told me: "intention is important but there is nothing wrong in doing good while having so much fun" (Rasha, 19 years old, Turin).

Even if challenges are organized by the Milan offices, I inserted this kind of activity in this category because of the public it addresses – i.e. volunteers themselves. Staff members explained to me that the organization of challenges is also a way to gratify and reward volunteers for their work, by offering them the possibility to spend time and have fun with their fellows while enjoying the nature. Challenges are not meant to address the Muslim community nor to reach an "Italian public" – as opposed to the other two kinds of events and activities that I will describe in Chapter 8.

As we could already observe, Islamic Relief seeks to nurture its base of volunteers by offering them the possibility to become friends, have fun, construct meaningful relationships. As staff members put it frequently, volunteers represent the organization's "core strength" and its "most beautiful thing" – not just because they represent (unpaid) workforce, but first and foremost because they constitute Islamic Relief's legacy in terms of humanitarian (and religious) education.

PART IV

INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF A RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION

Chapter 7
RELIGION AS FREE-FLOATERS. LIVING ISLAM REMOTELY FROM RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

In this Chapter, I will describe how some of the non-organized youths I interviewed relate to religion and to their cultural background. I will present a selection of cases that allow to shed light on the meaning of experiencing Islam remotely from organized religion. By means of "portraits" aimed at retracing their stories, I will comment on the role played by the religious socialization they received (or not) and on the reasons why they decided to keep away from religious organisations – or to not get involved any more, after briefly getting in touch with some of them.

As we will see, disinterest in organized religion may be due to different motivations. In fact, what these stories demonstrate is that, outside of religious organization, it is possible to find very different characters and attitudes towards Islam – from very conservative and orthodox orientations to rejective reactions to religion. While it is true that atheist or agnostic positions can hardly be found among members of a religious organization, these stories show that, contrary to the characterization of non-organized Muslims offered by scholars in this field (see Chapters 3 and 4), refusing to become a member of an organization does not equate refusing religion altogether. Moreover, among the non-organized youths of Muslim origin, even the non-religious or less religious may somehow resort to their cultural-religious heritage or have doubts and questions about "ultimate meanings" more generally. In this respect, some of these portraits illuminate how these youths navigate the complex religious field of Islam as "free floaters" - with very few certainties and numerous questions.

1. Religious socialization and (non-)religiousness

The presence or the absence of a religious socialization may have diverging effects on the religious behaviour of a (young) adult. In many cases, the attitude that children adopt towards religion is similar to that of their parents; in other instances, they develop reactive (non)religious behaviours, rejecting the way religion was – or was not – transmitted to them. The following cases are exemplary of both these kinds of effects. The first two "portraits" concern Leonard and Randa[1]: Leonard declares to be atheist, while Randa defines herself agnostic. Their disinterest in Islam, however, descends from very different religious upbringings.

Leonard, 27 years old, from Turin, describes his mother as the "traditionalist" parent – "she does not eat pork and observes Ramadan" – and his father as "progressive" one – "he does not fast at Ramadan and drinks wine at home". The mother tried to transmit him religious values and behaviours: "When I

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[1] Interviewees are anonymized. When explaining them that their real name would not appear in my writings and that it would have been replaced by another name, I asked them if they wanted to choose the name with which they would be anonymized. Some did not feel like choosing a name for themselves, and let me decide how to change their names. Others reacted surprised but were happy to choose a name they like: some chose Arabic names; others, interestingly, chose Italian names, like "Amalia". When I attributed names, I chose Arabic ones; all the Italian names that the reader will find were selected by the interviewees.

was a child my mother tried to transmit me religious tenets, she tried to give a direction to her son". However, he affirms that he realized he was not interested in religion since the elementary school:

> I told my mother "I would like to take the class on religion"[2]. I asked her not because I was really interested, but because I was the only foreign child who did not take part in that and I felt alone. My mom said "ok". And I realized that there were many things in common [between Catholicism and Islam] and these were the things that annoyed me, like the fact that there is a period during which one is not allowed to eat. I didn't like that and I used to tell my mom that I didn't want to respect that: "why should I observe Lent or Ramadan?". Now I think that these obligations don't make much sense anymore. […] [Now] she asks me "will you fast at Ramadan?" and I answer "are you crazy?".

However, his refusal of religion did not cause any trouble or conflict with his parents, whom he describes as extremely open-minded:

> One thing that struck my friend is that I can take my girlfriend home and stay at home with her with my parents, without any problem. Because my parents have a very open-minded mentality. When I told them that I am atheist they did not tell me anything – my father simply told me that it would be good for me to believe at least in something, so that I would give some sort of sense to what happens to me. He told me "if you don't believe in anything, then nothing has sense". But he didn't tell me "you have to be Arab, Muslim or Buddhist". He just meant that I should believe in something to live better. And I have to thank this great mentality of my parents'.

He feels grateful towards his parents for teaching him the values of freedom and tolerance – and not so much for the religious values that his mother feebly tried to transmit him. It is precisely on the basis of this education and mentality, that he feels different than other "Arabs", with whom he does not want to be associated:

> I am now working in a warehouse [despite he holds a university degree] because I could not find a job suiting what I studied, and I found myself working with two other Arabs. One is really moderate, but if you tell him "that girls wears a miniskirt", he insults her; the other one is very closed off in his mentality, he comes from a tiny Arab village, and he keeps on saying that one should not do this or that. And that is something that I really suffer, because sometimes the other people who work with us think I am like them. but they tell us that, since we are "Arabs"; we can understand each other. I don't want to sound racist, but I try to explain that I am not Arab, that I feel Italian because I was born here and grew up here, with the Italian mentality, while there were born and grew up in Arab countries.

Distancing himself from his "Arabness" - which he equates with "backwardness" - is his way to counter the strength of a negative external discourse. In fact, Leonard considers himself so "cultivated" and "progressive" (*sic*) that he suffers the Italian political climate and the widespread distrust towards immigrants - to the extent that he sometimes feels

> the desire to go live in Ireland. Because they have an Arab[3], homosexual Prime Minister: if this does not mean being open-minded as a people, then I don't know what could!

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[2] In Italy, religious instruction is imparted at all school levels, one hour per week.
[3] The Irish Prime Minister actually is not of Arab origin, but of Indian origin, and is not Muslim.

His rejection of his "Arabness", however, should not lead us to think that just refuses Islam as part of his cultural-religious background. Indeed, he refuses religion - all religions - in general terms:

> Religion should have less room in people's lives. Actually, I think that religion should not have any room at all in people's lives. If one believes in God and attends the Mass, he should not impose his ideas and tell me that I should get in touch with God. [...] Religion is a big constraint.

Nonetheless, this does not mean that forms of moral questioning are completely absent in his life. Rather than religion, he affirms to be more interested in the Buddhist "philosophy":

> I didn't feel at ease with religion. The only religion I like – which is defined as a religion but it is not, it is a philosophy – is Buddhism, because, according to Buddhism, you can do whatever you want as long as you are correct with yourself and with the others. [...] The main idea of Buddhism is "never exaggerate". I find myself closer to Buddhism than to Christianism.

By choosing Buddhism as a guide to enact moral, correct behaviour, Leonard seems to embody an example of what has become the typical Western attitude to "pick 'n mix" religions and philosophies from different traditions and parts of the world, so as to create made-to-measure spiritualities and moral tenets (see Chapter 2).

However, his story and relationship with religion and "God" is not exempt from contradictions and fluctuations – as it often occurs in the life of most individuals. Despite affirming to be atheist, he describes this moment of "classic" religiosity he lived:

> Once, I entered a mosque and I prayed in that mosque. Another time, I entered a church and I prayed in that church. I think that it depends on how you enter these places, on the intention you have when you enter. [...] The moment I entered that church and that mosque, I felt that it was my duty and I felt that I wanted to. I did that with my heart. When I got out, I did not have any revelation that God exists, but I did that with my heart. If God really exists, he will say that, on that very day, I prayed, which means that I am good somehow. If God does not exist, anyway I did something good.

Leonard grew up in a context that is not strongly religiously-connoted: while his mother's religiosity is "traditional", his father seems to detach the need to have some forms of spirituality from the actual enactment of religious behaviours. Therefore, Leonard's non-religiousness represents the most obvious development of the absence of a real religious socialization, derived from this context. His dismissal of Islam resembles to the dismissal of religion often displayed by his western, non-Muslim peers. Similarly, he separates religion - understood as a set of norms and of fixed predicaments - from the quest of a source of morality. Indeed, his adoption of other forms of moral teachings echoes today's tendency to personalize religion by borrowing from other religions and philosophies, and signals a concern for ultimate meanings – which is also reflected in the prayers he "surprisingly" recited in two different places of worship. As we will better see in Chapter 9, the presence – as intermittent as it may be – of a questioning regarding spirituality and morality can be described as a form of "religious reflexivity".

However, youths of Muslim background may be non-religious also as a result of growing in opposition to a strongly religiously-connoted context. Randa - 30 years-old, Milan - offers a very different example than Leonard's, as she has chosen to distance herself significantly from the model embodied by her parents. Indeed, her story shows how hard it may be for a person to come to terms with one's own cultural-religious heritage, with which she has had an uneasy relationship. She came to Italy as a small

child with her Moroccan parents and her little sister; they settled in a small village at the border between Tuscany and Umbria. The village was so small that there was no mosque and no Quranic schools; despite that, she was socialized within the community of Moroccans that had settled in that area. In fact, although she feels attached to that the places where she grew up, which she considers beautiful, she explains that she could not "make the most" of them, as her parents only spent time with other Moroccans:

> They are beautiful places, but I now realize I could not enjoy them because I was confined into my community. Everything you would do would be reported to my parents, people would gossip, so I absolutely had to pay attention at everything I did, otherwise the honour of the family would be impaired, and all of this bullshit…

This made her feel that her world was quite "narrow" and remote from the wider Italian context:

> [I suffered] this absence of freedom […] All that I could do in my spare time in Italy was not part of our tradition. Therefore, I could not do anything. Grabbing a coffee with a friend was a problem. Going at a schoolmate's place to do our homework together was a problem. If a boy talked to me, I would be grilled.

Indeed, since the very beginning of the interview I had with her, she started recounting about how she distanced herself from the lifestyle and behaviours of her parents, whom she defines as "traditionalist" and as particularly strict in their religious practice, at least in her view.

She further describes how this "absence of freedom" motivated her strong sense of self-determination to find a "way out" of that context: she decided she would start doing some part-time jobs while attending high school (she worked as a waitress, for instance), so she could save money to leave her family and her home at her coming of age. She explains that her parents could not question her, because she was both earning her own money and doing things with her own money, and she kept receiving excellent grades at school, which won her scholarships that allowed her to pursue her studies, obtaining a Bachelor's degree and a Master's degree. During her Master's, she could take part in an exchange programme with a Japanese university. Her experience in Japan represented a great change for her, because she could meet people from different parts of the world, which allowed her to overcome what she calls an "internal fight" between the Muslim-Moroccan and the Italian components of her identity:

> My experience in Japan was a turning point in my life […], because until that moment I lived a sort of antithesis, an internal fight, because I was Moroccan but I lived in Italy, where there is a different mentality […] In Japan I met a third culture, I met people coming from all over the world, a sort of cultural élite, by which I mean people that could share things going beyond their countries of origin, their religion, their language, their tradition.

This made her realize that she could finally choose who she wanted to be:

> So, I spent the first part of my stay in Japan during which I would wake up at night to pray, because it was Ramadan, and I used to pray only during Ramadan. I don't know if I was a believer at the time, maybe I was just following my family's tradition more than actually believing. And then in Japan I realized I was doing that only for tradition. I used to do it "because I am Moroccan, so I am Muslim, so I fast at Ramadan". But this was not logic. Because you do not observe Ramadan because you are Moroccan, you observe it because you are Muslim.

The word "tradition" often recurs in her account, compounding religious and cultural aspects of her background and of that of her parents, which she rejects following this international experience. From that moment, she felt that she could define herself free from any constraints of her heritage:

> During the second part of my Japanese experience I felt free because I had been able to dismantle all of the elements that belonged to my tradition and I slowly started to discover myself. I felt like a personal self-determination, as I found myself thinking that I was really able to write my own story, my own life, as if I had a white, blank page and I could decide the person I wanted to be, what to believe in. Before that, I was conditioned by the community where I lived and the rest of the society does not help you because they label you – but from that moment on, I could reject those labels.

By claiming that she rejected her *ascribed* identity and could *achieve* her "own" identity, by finally being able to write "her book", Randa embodies the perfect example of a truly Western, post-modern search for "authenticity". Nonetheless, it took her time to start writing her story on that blank page, as that was not an easy endeavour: as she recounts, "it took me four years from the moment I decided not to observe Ramadan anymore to when I actually stopped observing it".

However, despite her refusal of the parents' "tradition", there are elements of her cultural-religious upbringing which she would like to valorise:

> We [Randa and her Italian, non-Muslim husband] always say "oh it would be nice to observe Ramadan just for a few days, just a few days of fasting, just to take part in that". Eventually we have not tried yet, but this is something we will do. Symbolically. Because it is something that belongs to my tradition, anyways […] this is part of me. And I want to insert this in the right "perimeter", why not. Because [after her choice not to practice religion any more] I developed a reaction of rejection, of refusal, and I now think that such a reaction, too, is wrong […] Now I think I should modify my attitude […] Well, actually I think I am already in that phase. I've moved from rejecting the tradition to a phase in which I take "what is good" from that [i.e. from her "tradition"] and I do not reject anything anymore, because these are all things that belong to me anyhow, and I would like to transmit them to my daughter. […] Let's start from the message of Ramadan, which is that getting closer to the poor, to those who have nothing.

 The desire to observe Ramadan just for a few days, *symbolically*, resonates well with Gans' description of *symbolic religiosity* – a concept which designates "the consumption of religious symbols, apart from regular participation in a religious culture and in religious affiliations […] in such a way as to create no complications or barriers for dominant secular lifestyles" (1994: 585). At the same time, however, it also signals that the rejection of religion she experienced in a first phase morphed into the need to "keep" what she thinks is "good" in her religion. Indeed, as a result of this self-construction, she now describes her relationship with religion as an identification with the moral teachings preached by great revealed religions:

> I am agnostic […] I am not strong enough to believe in atheism. I am not atheist because I believe that there must be something up there, or at least I give the benefit of the doubt. But I don't know how to identify it. So, all I can do is to make the values that all great religions share my own. [I think we can go beyond divisions nowadays, but unfortunately people tend to focus only on the cult of traditions and of symbols. […] But I do think that we can get past these differences, and I think this can be easy between Muslims and Christians because there are so many things in common.

Her characterization of religion revolves around the *moral* normative framework born by a religion. In other words, she "reduces" all main religions to a general source of moral guidance – which is the only aspect she is interested in about religion. Therefore, her rejection of religion coexists with the acknowledgement that religions can provide moral direction. In any case, what emerges from her words does not seem to be an affectionate, benevolent attachment to her roots which; rather, Randa's relationship with her heritage has been fraught with uneasiness, and these last words may at best indicate a need to reconcile herself with her cultural-religious background. More generally, Randa's story exemplifies the extent to which one's relation to religion may be emotionally laden and may include ebbs and flows, ups and downs.

Leonard and Randa's experiences are quite comparable: they both refuse the narrow-minded mentality they impute to "religion" or to "tradition", though they were exposed to very different understandings of religion in the familial contexts they grew up. What they further share is an entirely Western, post-modern conception of ultimate meanings as a moral framework, which they can choose and freely adapt to their life styles and worldviews. This makes them akin to many Western youths, Christian by origin, who distance themselves from their religious heritage and end up fabricating their own religiosity and spirituality by picking elements from other religious philosophies. Therefore, youths of Muslim background are not necessarily or intrinsically different than their non-Muslim peers: while the majority of individuals with a Muslim heritage appears to grow attached to its religious background – to a greater or lesser extent and with various meanings (see Chapter 1, par. 1), there are cases of persons to whom their "classic" religion is not important, who represent interesting counter-examples to this more general trend.

As explained, Leonard was exposed to low levels of religiosity during his upbringing, and his dismissal of religion partly reflects the way he was socialized to it. However, there are also opposite cases, such as that of Nour (26 years-old, Turin), who autonomously developed a resolute, pronounced commitment to religion, with a strict observance of orthodoxy, despite having grown up in a family that is not characterized by high levels of religious practice:

> I don't have memories of my mother or my father praying a lot. Actually, they almost never prayed when I was a child. They started praying a little more after they went on pilgrimage to Mecca.

As she recalls, she was not taught how to pray by her parents. This caused her to feel ashamed, when she started attending the meetings of GMI (Giovani Musulmani d'Italia)[4] – an association which she eventually quit after a short time:

> I joined to this association [Young Muslims of Italy – the Turin branch] and I did not know how to pray, and this worried me because, damn it! Everybody knew how to pray and I did not know how to pray, and I thought that this was not ok.

Such a feeling of embarrassment motivated her to learn how to pray by herself:

> So, I studied a booklet to learn how to pray and so on. I studied the sentences to recite during the prayer… I started in that moment and then I never stopped.

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[4] The translation of their name would be "Young Muslims of Italy".

She then embarked on a "solo journey" into religion. At the beginning, she hoped in the possibility to learn more about Islam through the meetings of GMI's Turin branch, but she abandoned the group as soon as she realized that GMI aimed more at offering young Muslims the possibility to get to know each other, than at actually providing religious education:

> I was let down by them because I went there with the intention of learning something new and I did not want to waste time making new friends or just chatting…

In her pursuit of knowledge about her religion she then joined another organization – PSM (Partecipazione e Spiritualità Musulmana[5]). While she was happy with their activities, she felt deceived by what she describes as an exclusionary attitude shown by its members, which eventually caused her to quit this organization too:

> They [PSM] were born in Morocco also as a political movement, but here in Italy they cannot be a fully-fledged political party. This is why they tend to exclude… you can attend their events and their meetings with their imams and educators, but if you want to get more involved and become more active, then they tell you that your parents have to become members too or be already members. Other times they say things like "we have to know well the persons we take to our camps and meetings because we do not want any problem… we cannot afford to take someone who seems to behaving well, but then does not respect the rules" … In this sense they kind of force you… and they exclude. They did not exclude me, because they told me that I was showing to behave very well in the activities I used to attend, but I did not like this attitude of theirs and I never agreed, because, in my view, I think that religion belongs to everybody, and it shouldn't matter whether one is good or bad, right or wrong: no one is entitled or has the right to exclude and say "you can be one of us" or "you cannot be one of us". I clearly remember that a lot of young boys and girls were rejected, and they felt sad about that. I think it is misleading to try to invite new people, on one hand, and then exclude them because they are not good enough. And this is why I left them. Because it is as if you could become a real member only if you are sort of "recommended" or referenced by other members of theirs. It works if your parents are members, so you can become a member because you are considered reliable. But if your parents are not members, even if they are good people, you cannot be considered reliable. And I cannot tolerate this, because religion belongs to everybody and is open to everybody. I don't understand why one needs to make these selections.

Through this experience, Nour found herself confronted with the dynamics of the "internal discourse" on Muslims, which, in this case, was conveyed by a religious organization. According to her account, PSM scrutinizes its affiliates' behaviour and "credentials" as good or reliable Muslims in order to select what would become its more active members. Although she was "approved" by the organization due to her deserving, good behaviour as a Muslim, she was negatively struck by PSM's elitist character. Indeed, in her opinion, "religion belongs to everybody", regardless of whether a person is "good or bad, right or wrong": a religious organization should not claim the right to preclude well-meaning people, who sincerely want to get involved, from becoming active members. In her view, this kind of judgement, aimed at excluding the "unfit" ones, is unfair and not respectful of the very predicaments of Islam. In this regard, her point of view on the matter might appear surprising: given her deep and self-achieved religious commitment, as well as her strictly orthodox practice, she could be expected to appear less "tolerant" towards people who do not abide by religious prescriptions as much as she does.

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[5] The translation of their name would be "Muslim Participation and Spirituality".

Her description of how she attained a meticulous observance of Islamic orthodoxy corresponds to Roy's portrayal of neo-orthodox Islam (see Chapter 1 – par. 2): not being socialized to religion in a Muslim-majority country, nor by a practicing family, she acquired notions about Islam mainly alone, as religious organizations did not represent a meaningful resource for her in this respect. In order to deepen her knowledge about religious tenets and the correct performance of practices, she mainly searched on the web, surfing among the many websites of the "Islamosphere". This confirms what Césari (2013) describes regarding the questions that young Muslims pose on online fora: these almost invariably concern the correct enactment of religious practices, but do not "dare" to challenge or dispute theological contents *per se*.

However, navigating through the many voices populating the Islamic field is an arduous endeavour. feeling disorientated by the numerous available interpretations of the Scripture, Nour still finds it hard to choose whom to "trust":

> When I stopped taking part in GMI or PSM's activities, I preferred staying home to look for information on the internet and study as an autodidact. Yes, I had to pay attention to the websites I would stumble upon, because what you can find on the internet is not always truthful or reliable. You can find Shiite or Sufi websites very often and you may think they are Sunni, and one has to be very careful. Now I am able to distinguish the good websites from the bad ones, and I get much more information on Facebook, because there are so many pages that can help people to understand religion. There are also many Imams that have opened their pages on Facebook, so if you have doubts and questions you can ask them directly.

Due to the dilemmas encountered in discerning what is "reliable", she tends to follow a "pure" version of Islam – one which applies a literal reading to the Quran and of the Sunna:

> For us who were born Muslims it is probably easier, but I realize that for my Italian Muslim girlfriends [friends of hers, Italian by origin, who converted to Islam] it is very difficult to understand [how to practice correctly]. Therefore, they tell me that they start from the basis and the very core elements, by following the Quran and the Sunna, and then, one day maybe, they will deepen their knowledge the four schools [the four schools if Islamic jurisprudence]. [...] Because even among us [Muslims] people do not understand why there are different schools when, in principle, we are supposed to follow the Quran and the Sunna. We should study and look for information, but very often it is extremely difficult to find the right explanations, and this causes many doubts: you never know whether something is right or wrong. I personally think that, for some things, the most difficult ones, one has to have a point of reference simply in the Quran, because they can be so complex to understand beyond the Quran that you can't get to a conclusion. For other matters, it may be useful to follow the Sheiks [the pundits], because after all these people have devoted their entire life to the study of these things, and their existence is also quoted in the Quran...

Nour's heartfelt commitment to respect the Islamic orthodoxy – at least, this "literal" version of orthodoxy - emerges from her description of the meanings and feelings that she attaches to the act of praying:

> When I pray it is as if I could disconnect myself from the rest of the world, and after that I go on studying. I think that disconnecting like this helps me a lot, because it really allows me to "recharge my soul", and not to "recharge my stomach" [...] it may happen very often that one prays, but his mind goes in totally different directions while praying, and is not concentrated on the prayer. It often occurs to me as well, because you think about all the things that you have to do... And then

you find yourself praying and you recite by heart, but your mind is not there. And this is a sort of jihad.

However, her words also highlight the difficulties she experiences during the concrete practice of religion. Not only does she explain that she may lack knowledge and feel doubtful about the correct enactment of practices, but she also admits that her practice may be imperfect at times. In any case, prayer has become an integral part of her life, to the extent that she regrets that her family is not as practicing as she is. On one hand, she would like her behaviour to be taken as a model for her younger sisters; on the other hand, however, she has fraught feelings about acting as the "the good example", as she can be overwhelmed by the pressure to always represent the ideal of impeccable religious behaviour:

> I am sorry that they [my sisters] do not pray… I understand that they do not wear the veil, but at least praying… I always explain them that the prayer is a pillar [in Islam]. Just as you observe Ramadan and just as you say you are Muslim, then you should pray, because this is really the basis. I am not talking about doing more complex things, I am just saying that one should at least pray. I am sorry because they keep telling me that they are still kids, that they are not ready… and my mother tells me "not even you used to pray at their age". I reply that yes, it is true, but I am the eldest one and, if I had someone older than me giving me the example, I think I would have started to pray earlier. It is always a fight. And as soon as I make a mistake, they [my family] tell me "you wear the veil, you should be an example for all of us, you shouldn't make this and that mistake". It's true, I make mistakes too, I am a human being after all, therefore I am not perfect.

Nour's need to "learn more" about Islam derived from her poor knowledge about it, which she imputes to a weak socialization to religious contents. However, even persons who did receive a religious education and whose religiosity reflects that of their family feel the same need to look for more information and listen to different "voices" to discern what is the "exact" predicament of Islam concerning a number of issues. This is the case of Jameela (23 years old, Milan), of Pakistani origin. While she defines herself as religious as her parents, she also explains that neither her mother nor her father is able to answer to the many questions she has about the reasons that lie behind some Islamic precepts:

> Sometimes I ask my mom, but my mom gives me the answer that she, in turn, received from her mom, and this is not enough for me. I would like to receive a more complete answer, maybe also with some quotes from a book or from a pundit, from someone who knows. I ask my father less often, but he always concludes by saying that I am right to ask and that I should get more information form some expert. And I think to myself "ok, great, but where can I find an expert?".

Therefore, she tries to find some "experts" on the internet, but her search never quite satisfies her, given the confused and contradictory explanations she finds:

> I look for information on the internet, but then I give up, because I find various forums on Islam where there are discussions, but you never know who is right, and what is a reliable source. So, you read someone's statement which says that is based on ten or more sources, and then you read someone else's which claims the contrary, and you remain with your doubt, and you never know what is the truth. You often read things that are not quite satisfying and that do not really reply to your doubt […] there are many people that pose questions, and I noticed that there are some forums where answers are quite neat, quite rigid, and I think that it is not possible that there is such

a lack of flexibility… and I also noticed that the same answer contains many contradictions, and this makes no sense.

On one hand, she rejects explanations that appear too rigid; on the other hand, she cannot find some expert to "trust", who is able to not contradict himself. Just as Nour's story, Jameela's experience testifies to the difficulty of navigating this "internal discourse" – especially when one lacks crucial resources like a thorough knowledge of Arabic, or significant amounts of times to devote to the study of theology. This is the case of the overwhelming majority of youths of Muslim origin, who have to devote their energies to studying or working and often cannot afford to spend much time deepening their knowledge about theology. Jameela, for instance, is a student of medicine and is also the students' representative within her university.

One of the possible reasons why Jameela resorts to the numerous discussion forums on the internet to find information and answers to her questions may be linked to the fact that, around her, she does not have many actual persons with a similar cultural-religious background, with whom she could talk:

> Actually, I never looked for them [other Italian youths with a Muslim background]. There surely are other young Muslims that have my same doubts, but since I know no one, I wouldn't even know where to start looking for them. And this inhibits me. Because, contrary to my peers from the Pakistani community, I did not grow up within the Pakistani or Muslim community.

As she explains, she "did not grow up within the community". Indeed, she appears to be so used to conceiving of herself as "isolated", that she never thought of joining any Muslim organization or Pakistani association in the past – and does not feel interested in this possibility now:

> I never thought about joining an association or an organization. And now I feel I reconciled myself with these issues. Yes, I keep feeling these "contrasts", but, over time, I developed a certain awareness and also a certain strength in my way of being which I still did not have while I was an adolescent, when I thought I wanted to disavow my Pakistani origin.

The "contrasts" she refers to concern the typical difficulties of an adolescent who grows up torn between his/her cultural-religious background and the cultural-(a)religious context of the country of destination where the parents have settled. However, not only did she feel different from what surrounded her, but she also felt different in regards to the Pakistani community of the town where she lived before moving to Milan to pursue her studies:

> I did not keep in touch with the people of the Pakistani community of the town where I grew up [a small town close in Emilia-Romagna]. I see the difference between my family and theirs, which are more traditional, more closed off. For instance, they do not let their daughters go out with her girlfriends, while my parents are more open-minded in this regard. Yes, I always found it difficult to find someone similar to me. […] These families do not agree with my parents, who want me to work, to study, to realize something in my life, while other Pakistani parents want their children to finish high school and then find a job in the case of boys, or get married in the case of girls. On the contrary, that I get married is not my parents' primary objective. And this is a big difference [with the rest of the community]. Also, my father is a real estate agent, has got his own agency, his own office, he graduated in mathematics, so the topics of conversation with other people of the community are very limited [due to the difference in educational levels]. He actually has more Italian than Pakistani friends.

Indeed, Jameela never felt to belong to this community, also due to the higher cultural capital of her family, as compared to that of their co-nationals. Significantly, the examples she makes in her account about the "difference" distinguishing her family from the rest of the community are "gendered", as they concern forms of social control exerted on girls by their parents – e.g. the possibility to go out as teenagers, the possibility to study at university and become independent as young adults. It is no coincidence, then, that the doubts and questions she raises about religion precisely regard Islam's characterization of the role of the woman:

> The topic that I need to know about the most is the role of the woman, because I've always been told that the woman is respected in Islam, but then, for instance, the woman is denied the possibility to divorce in Islam. So, I ask myself "what kind of right is this?". And I would like to know more, I would like someone to explain to me the reason why even well-educated people accept this thing, why emancipated Muslim women accept this. Because this means that I still don't have full knowledge about these things.

Since there are "well-educated people" that accept that women have a different, disadvantageous treatment in Muslim countries, she thinks there must be some "plausible" reasons motivating this "unfair" treatment – reasons which she thinks she does not have adequate knowledge about and that she still has to find out. In this sense, she does not want to refuse or disavow her religion; however, at the same time, Jameela's questioning is of a theological nature, and precisely aims at challenging the Islam's theology – thus offering a counter-example to Césari's (2013) portrayal of young Muslims as being only interested in the "behave" dimension of Islam, rather than in the "believe" one 8see above and Chapter 1).

More generally, I encountered objections or concerns referring to the condition of women in Muslim countries or the Quran's portrayal of the woman more frequently among non-organized girls and young women. They are present among girls and young women who belong to religious organizations, too, but, at least across the sample of the present research, they seem to be more widespread among non-organised youths. In Jameela's case, these doubts of hers add to her experience of "alienation" and from other "average Muslims", by whom she does not feel understood:

> I spoke to a girl that had been born and had grown up in Morocco, and had been living in Italy for some years only. She was a bit older than me. And I saw that she was rigid with me: we had a discussion on religion, I told her about the doubts I have, for instance on the role of women, I told her about that I was looking for someone who could solve them, and she found it absurd that I had these doubts. I expected her to understand me, but no, she didn't: I felt I was not understood even by someone who is supposed to be similar to me.

Different views on the role and treatment of women in Islam originate, among other things, from the multitude of interpretations and judgements that characterize the internal discourse of Islam – both at the level of theological interpretation, and at the level of actual, local communities. Jameela seems largely dissatisfied with both the former and the latter, and lives her personal religiosity "isolated".

Randa and Nour's relationship to religion grew in opposition to what they were socialized to – but while one rejected her cultural-religious background, the other developed an active interest for a "purified" Islam. The ways Leonard and Jameela's relate to Islam, on the contrary, reflect the education they received in their familial context: Leonard became completely disinterested in Islam, following the tepid or absent religious practice in his family; Jameela's observance is the same of that of her parents.

However, they both feel different and alienated from their community of reference – be it Arab, Pakistani or Muslim more generally.

What Randa and Leonard share is the same conception of their identity and spirituality as self-achieved, independently from their upbringing and their heritage. The ways they frame their self-identification and their quest for meaning in life are exemplary of how youths of Muslim origin can be influenced by a typically Western, post-modern attitude, according to which one should be enabled to "write his own story", free from any ascribed conditioning or constraint.

Nour and Jameela have in common the need to learn more about their religion. Removed from any association or from "the community", they try to navigate a complex religious field such as the Islamic one in order to attain the most "truthful", "reliable", "non-contradictory" explanation of Islamic predicaments. Nonetheless, their queries originate form very different exigencies. Nour's concern is to not "make mistakes" in her practice of religion – hence, the choice to resort to the most literal readings of the Scriptures when discerning among different interpretations becomes too difficult. Jameela's interest, on the contrary, descends from doubts of a theological nature, as they regard the very contents of Islamic theology on a topic that she has close to her heart – i.e. the role and treatment of women in Islam.

2. Want to get involved? No, thanks!

To a greater or lesser extent, the majority of non-organized youths of Muslim origin I interviewed do not generally feel – or explicitly do not want to feel - conditioned or somehow constrained by the internal discourse on Islam, by which I here refer to the discourse that circulates both within the local, proximate Muslim community and at the internet level.

For this reason, many explained to me that they simply "never thought of" joining an organization, that they "never felt the ned to", and they "do not know any". This is the case of Jameela, which we have just commented in the above paragraph: she is not used to spending time with people of "the community", and, as a consequence, she never even thought of reaching out to other youths with a background similar to heirs to share her questions and doubts.

Others clearly reject this possibility, as they negatively perceive associations of young Muslims or other Muslim organizations as places where one is forced to abide by religious rules and is strictly controlled. As we will see in Chapter 9, these interviewees do not want to feel forced to practice and have their own understandings of religious observance; therefore, their considerations criticize religious organizations' social pressure to conform to their religious norm. This criticism concerns in particular organizations created and composed by young Muslims: in the opinion of these informants, there should not be impositions and presumptions about "correct" religious behaviours among peers with the same cultural-religious background. In this regard, these interviewees challenge the internal discourse about Islam by expressing their need to not be looked down on and "told what to do" by other Muslims. While these concerns were voiced by people who do not follow an orthodox, literal version of Islam, they attain the same conclusion as Nour, who similarly left one of the organizations she got involved in, due to its "intolerant" attitude towards "different" Muslims.

Indeed, Nour's experience with the two associations she got in touch with offers an interesting example of why a person may choose to not get involved in any religious organization: if the first one was disappointing because it was not providing the religious education she was seeking for, the second one was perceived as too elitist and exclusionary with regards to one's religious behaviour and possible affiliations. This kind of perception is shared by another interviewee, Najat (23 years-old, Turin) who was briefly involved in another organization – the Turin group of volunteers of Islamic Relief:

> There were some people who wanted to be more powerful within the organization and be in the spotlight, while other people who were a bit left behind… and I didn't like this because in theory the people involved should work altogether like in a family, with everybody contributing in the same way… There shouldn't be any boss and there shouldn't' be people that just take orders from the bosses. I don't like to take orders from anyone, and that is why I left. I was very sorry to leave, but I really couldn't stand that.

Her decision to leave was not motivated by a disagreement regarding the contents of organization's message or its activities, but by a too hierarchical management of the "human resources": according to Najat, volunteers should be considered all the same level and should get involved as "a family". In this respect, and in a vein similar to those who think that other Muslims should not "tell you how to behave", Najat thinks that there should be no differentiation among Muslim peers. Significantly, her words stand in stark contrast with the accounts of many other Islamic Relief's volunteers (as we shall see in Chapter 10), who precisely depict the organization as a big family, where they feel welcomed and understood for who they are. In any case, Najat's interest in the organization was connected in her will to do "something good" – something which she felt prevented from doing in the way she desired, due to the internal functioning of the organization, which she criticized; she was less attracted or stimulated by the religious-identitarian resources they organization could provide in terms of religious education and practice.

On the contrary, Khalida's story shows what a religious organization can offer in this regard – but it also significantly highlights the limitations of such resources. Khalida – 26 years old, Turin – was bullied and even beaten by her schoolmates in the early years of high school. For this reason, she felt she would never been able to start wearing the veil – a strong desire she had – until she would be a student of that school:

> For three years at least, I wanted to go out with my veil so much… I would get ready, get out of our apartment wearing it, and then in front of the mirror of the elevator I would cave in and take it off…

During the last years of high school, she started attending GMI's weekly meetings, which represented the only moments when she could wear her veil without feeling vulnerable or endangered – but also conveyed a certain pressure to conformism:

> I used to wear the veil only on Saturdays as I used to attend the weekly meetings of an association called "Giovani Musulmani" [GMI]. They have meetings on Saturdays and if I did not wear the veil at their meetings I would have felt … maybe not discriminated against, but certainly out of place. So, I decided that I would wear the veil at their meetings, so as to feel like all the other girls. Even if there were other girls who did not wear the veil, I had this idea in my mind that I had to be "the Muslim with the veil".

As these words show, the act of wearing the veil at the organization's meetings was not the result of a free, conscious, mature, well thought-through, unfettered decision. Although she did feel the desire to don the veil, she also felt pressured to show the "credentials" of her "Muslimness" to the fellow-members – associating such credentials to the veil, as if "veil" equated to "real Muslim". Indeed, this testifies to the quite reified image of "Muslimness" that she herself, as an adolescent, had at the time.

During her fourth year of high school, her family and her moved to Belgium for a short period. She was very happy about this decision, because

> I told to myself "now I will finally be able to wear it, as no one knows me here, I can start from zero, have new friends and a new life". But then I found out that in Belgium there is a law that bans the veil in public schools, like in France. And I was so depressed. […] I told my father "Dad, I am not going to school anymore" and he was desperate, he told me "you have to go to school". […] He found a school where I could wear my veil and I started there.

Nonetheless, she lived this experience with uneasiness, as if she had to be confined in a ghetto:

> In that school there were like 200 Muslim girls with their hijabs. And this… on one hand this gave me the comfort to wear it too, as I did not feel alone, but on the other hand I didn't like that this school was like a ghetto. […] It was as if I was going to the mosque and not to school anymore. I didn't like it because I thought it was unfair that there are schools that look like ghettos.

Indeed, she realized that she could feel able to don her hijab only because she was protected within the walls of a sort of "Indian reservation" where Muslims would stay among themselves:

> Moving to Belgium was the opportunity to start wearing my veil, but, in reality, I was not ready yet, although I wanted to. Because in Belgium I could feel comfortable, I wanted to win it easy! And the experience in that school made me reflect that, actually, I was still too afraid of the others' judgement.

This Belgian experience reproduced the exact same mechanism of her attendance of GMI's weekly meetings in Turin: she could wear the veil only when she was surrounded and shielded by other Muslims. However, realizing how that school resembled to a ghetto caused Khalida to further reflect, and triggered a more profound awareness, which flourished upon her return to Turin. When her family and her moved back, she resumed attending GMI's weekly meetings. However, she had an epiphany thanks to her best friend:

> One Saturday, this friend of mine asked me to go out with her, and I told her that I could not because I had to go to the GMI's meeting. And she told me that I had been getting on her nerves for a long time, because she had grown sick and tired of me having become withdrawn in my Muslim organization. She told me "Today you are going out with me!" and I said "Ok, but not veiled… wearing the veil in public would be too much". And she told me "What is your problem? You want to wear the veil, don't you?" and I said "Yes, but I still don't have the courage" and she replied "Let's go out together, so you can see yourself in a different context, other than the usual GMI, where they are all Muslims. Get out of your comfort zone!". And in the end, she convinced me: I went out that day with her, and I wore a white veil. That day is unforgettable. And she was great! She told me: "Can you see that it is you who is creating all of these problems? That all these problems you think of are only in your head? You should not care about what the others think!". And this helped me a lot: although her opinions are completely different than mine, she encouraged me, because

she could see that I didn't have the courage to wear it, which meant that I was renouncing to something that I care about, due to the "others'" opinion, but who were these "others"? [...] Yes, this friend of mine is fantastic. A real friend. She accepted me for what I am, even she is atheist and does not understand or shares anything I do that is related to religion. But she respects me.

It was an "atheist" friend of hers that helped her to get out of her "comfort zone" and to manifest herself, with her veil, in "public". This is how she could finally start donning her hijab freely and utterly: in order to be able to wear it she had to defy – and win – the fear of the others' looks, by going beyond the protective walls of a Muslim microcosm. It was precisely by breaking out of her "comfort zone" that she could fulfil herself and be and at ease with her hijab. Arguably, the resources that a Muslim context such as that of the association she frequented or of the school she briefly attended proved also to represent a strong limitation for her. Even if she affirms that GMI "helped me a lot, because it means having a local reference point, here in Italy, where there are other Muslims who feel Italian", it was not GMI that gave her the courage to "go public" – in fact, since that moment, she quit the organization as she did not "need" it anymore. From being the protective cocoon where she could be who she wanted – though she also felt pressured to prove her "Muslimness" by wearing the veil – the association (just as the Belgian school) had transformed into a barrier, preventing her from revealing her true self to the rest of the world. Only an external solicitation – such as that of her friend – could make her take these barriers down and acquire visibility as a Muslim. This is reflected in the words she chooses to describe the meanings she attaches to her veil:

> The veil for me is courage, it is purity, it is sensitiveness, it is being myself. I chose to wear the veil in that period of my life in order to gain courage. Paradoxically, I started wearing in the same school where I had been bullied before. [...] Due to the fear of prejudice, I wasn't as open and lively and cheerful and talkative as I am now. [...] But then, thanks to veil and thanks to my faith, thanks to the fact that I believe in God and that there is a great divinity who is above us all and listens to you, with whom you can talk and who helps you, I became the confident and outgoing person that I am now.

Wearing the veil every day, in public, made her become self-confident, to the extent that she now takes part in the workshops organized in Italian schools by an intercultural association, where she shares her story and speaks about Islam with the gold of countering negative prejudices and discrimination. This made her realize that her experiences can be very similar to that of other discriminated minorities:

> When I tell my story in school classes, when I speak about the decision to wear the veil to these students, there are people that come and hug me when I finish telling my story, or that burst in tears. There are people that tell me "I was bullied too, because I am lesbian, or because I am gay" and then I realized that, wow!, our stories are very similar – the subject is different, but we have our fear and our courage in common.

In this regard, she makes herself strongly "visible" as an engaged Muslim, who shows and talks about her "Muslimness" in order to tactically challenge the negative "external discourse" about Islam – something that will be thoroughly treated in Chapter 10.

The confidence and the fearlessness she acquired, though, do not translate to some kind of presumption over her behaviour as a practicing believer. In other words, for her, being able to accomplish her desire to finally wear the veil does not mean that she has now become a "perfect" Muslim:

> Through the veil, I wanted to express my gratitude to God, even if he does not need our acknowledgements – on the contrary, it is us who need him. But I feel I did something to get close to him. Then I will always have the doubt: "who knows whether my veil is ok". Because you can't judge a book by its cover, and the same goes for the veil: even if I wear the veil, I commit sins as any other human being. But this is something that concerns all of us, no matter the religion we belong to. This is normal, but I want to express my effort to improve myself religiously.

Not only does Khalida consider herself "imperfect" – as many other believers do – but she also claims that the veil does not mean anything, as "you can't judge a book by its cover", while until she attended GMI's meetings, she held a stereotyped idea of "the Muslim with the veil". As I will discuss in Chapter 9, these more nuanced visions of religious behaviours represent forms of a "religious reflexivity".

Khalida's story shows that an organization of young Muslims may create a "safe space" for its members; however, in her case, such a space for Muslims to stay "with other Muslims" revealed to be double-edged for her, and eventually turned to be more of an obstacle than a proper resource in eh path. Indeed, two other interviewees characterize Muslim organizations in these terms and express criticism towards this attitude: in their view, an Islamic organization should open itself up to and start a dialogue with other religious communities and with non-Muslims more generally. According to the them, Muslim organizations should not be closed off, with members only staying "among themselves"; on the contrary, they should have a proactive role and reach out to the outer world, in order to speak about Islam to and with others. In their opinion, this would have the effect of countering negative prejudices against Islam, but it would also represent a meaningful opportunity for Muslims to learn about other religions and other people's views. These reflections may be considered to condemn Muslim communities for their "narrow-mindedness" in terms of "closure" and lack of interest for engaging in interreligious and intercultural dialogue. In this sense, they add a further nuance to the challenge that many youths of Muslim background pose to Islam's internal discourse.

Concerning specifically the necessity to combat the spread of negative prejudices against Muslims, there are interviewees who hold different views regarding the role of organizations in this regard. For instance, Najat, who criticized the Turin branch of Islamic Relief for its sort of "elitism", acknowledges that a Muslim organization is able to provide its members with a set of positive resources, that can help them overcome the pain of discrimination or even dismantle stereotypes:

> What is useful in an organization is that they teach you how a Muslim should behave in everyday life. Because there are some things that a Muslim should not underestimate and that you should be very careful about. For example, how to improve the other's perceptions of Muslims: instead of letting them looking down on you, you have to behave in ways so that people will have a good impression of you. For instance, when I am on the bus and I leave my seat to an older person, that person is shocked but in a positive way! She may think: "There was a young boy who did not leave his seat to me, but the Muslim girl did stand up and leave me the seat she was occupying!" This kind of things leave a positive impression in people's minds.

Najat quotes an example of the possible - *tactical* - behaviours that a Muslim should adopt in order to counter negative prejudices. However, she is aware that these possible *tactics* are taught by organizations formed by young Muslims, to "teach them how they should behave" in order to be accepted in a Western context. As opposed to Khalida, who achieved the ability to respond to prejudices and negative looks completely by herself (and was more obstacle than aided by a Muslim organization), Najat appreciates this opportunity that, in her view, a Muslim organization may offer.

This aspect points to the fact that non-organized Muslims may have more difficulties in facing both the internal and the external discourse on Islam. With regards to the internal discourse, they have less guidance concerning the "right interpretation" of Islam to follow or the sources to consult, while organized young Muslims may have more certainties in orientating themselves among the many voices of the internal discourse, concerning specifically their relationship with religious authority, because an organization devotes significant energies to communicate a specific religious message and to portray itself as a "reliable "source". At the same time, navigating the religious field as "free floaters" also entails, for many, becoming emancipated from the constraints of social control and pressure to conformism that the community – and a religious organization – may convey. This clearly emerges from the stories of individuals as different as Jameela and Randa, for instance. However, this does not mean that being a member of an organization implies simply "surrendering" to the workings of social control: on the contrary, as we shall see in Chapter 8, while espousing the overall religious preaching of the organization, its members may criticize impositions and intolerant attitudes among Muslims.

With respect to the external discourse, "free-floaters" may appear less equipped to react to stigmatizing attitudes held by the majority society towards Muslims, as they cannot "learn" the tactical scripts, narratives and repertoires that a Muslim organisation may develop to position itself and get recognized as legitimate in a Western context. Admittedly, the only thing that Najat regrets about not being involved in an organization is missing the opportunity to learn these tactics to counter prejudices and become appreciated as a Muslim. However, Khalida's story offers a powerful counter-example in this regard: having overcome her fears, she decided to share her story to inspire ad offer comfort to other teenagers that she meets through workshops organized in schools. Therefore, she tactically succeeded in transforming her "disadvantage" or "weakness" in a strong rhetoric "weapon", by becoming fully "visible" as a Muslim. Indeed, forms of tactical agency do not lack among non-organized youths, even if they cannot resort to the kind of resources that a religious organization can offer. Chapter 8 is precisely devoted to the scrutiny of the repertoires developed by the organization considered in the present study – the Italian branch of Islamic Relief. The extent to which such repertoires and "strategies" are successful and prove effective among its members will be examined by conducting a comparison with non-organized youths in Chapters 9 and 10.

Chapter 8
MUSLIMNESS IN THE FOREGROUND, MUSLIMNESS IN THE BACKGROUND. THE STRATEGIES OF THE ITALIAN BRANCH OF ISLAMIC RELIEF

While Chapter 6 described the set up and the functioning of the Italian branch of Islamic Relief as a research setting, I will now turn to the in-depth study of its organizational culture, with its "scripts" and "repertoires". By analyzing the format and the contents of Islamic Relief Italy's activities, as well as the ways its staff members and volunteers describe them, I will seek to trace the "ambient religiosity" of the organization, and the kind of religious orthodoxy or "message" it conveys, and I will appraise what this means for the young people who are involved in terms of the "strategies" at work impinging on them – in De Certeau's sense.

1. Muslimness in the foreground: addressing the Muslim community

Religiosity and orthodoxy within Islamic Relief

As the National coordinator of volunteers explained in the interview we had,

> obviously, the majority of our volunteers is Muslim, so it might seem that we are a religious or Islamic group, but this is not the case. In fact, we had and still have Italian volunteers, even if there is only a few. They are Christian, or atheists, and have nothing to do with Islam. It is simply a humanitarian organization that is based on Islamic values and foundations... just as aid is distributed also to non-Muslims or non-Arabs, so people who work or volunteer for it do not necessarily have to be Muslims. [...] When we do street collections, people see our logo and immediately think that we are linked to mosques or Islamic cultural centers, and that we are advertising something that has to do with religion, so we have to immediately tell them that we are not a religious group, that we are not a mosque, and so on...

Certainly, the fact that non-Muslims too are recipients of aid, that non-Muslims too work or volunteer for the organization, and that the main purpose of Islamic Relief is not to proselytize or spread an Islamic message, does not mean that there is no religious discourse within the organization, or that the organization does not promote a certain religiosity. On the basis of the description of Islamic Relief's organizational culture, activities, events, campaigns, we can now better appraise the role played by religion in the organization's discourses and concrete actions, as well as the kind of orthodoxy and "religious message" it conveys.

In fact, religion "appears" to be important in many domains. First and foremost, Islamic relief has a "shared interest" with the Muslim community, and it primarily addresses Muslims as its major stakeholders and donors. As we have seen, all the events and the activities targeting the Muslim community are strongly characterized by a religious dimension, that is manifest in the numerous quotations of the Quran made by fundraisers in their speeches, or in the emphasis put on the fact that the duty to "do good" is prescribed by Islamic religious tenets, or in the appeal to help the Rohingya (and not just people in the Arab world) because "they are Muslims like us" – although in practice no

event was held for this cause specifically, and the attention keeps being prevailingly focused on Syria, Gaza and the sponsorship of orphans. As the chief fundraiser told me, half laughing and half serious, reciting verses from the Quran which urge Muslims to think of the poor and the disadvantaged is a way to make the audience "fell guilty, that they are not doing enough as Muslims… so I 'go in heavy' with religious quotes and our behavior as Muslims".

Other instances can be found in the "Night of Hope" event, which always saw the presence of a Shaykh who was invited to deliver a talk about purely religion-related issues, or in the kind of campaigns and seasonal activities that the organization carries out. At least in Italy, the Ramadan campaign represents the most demanding effort in terms of activities organized, number of mosques visited, communication, etc… The entire campaign significantly draws on the religious duties associated with the period of Ramadan.

However, the attention is not only concentrated on the religiously-motivated obligation to perform charitable actions. Much of the organization's communication, especially via social media, concerns suggestions on how to personally live religion in the form of quotes, or aphorisms, or is about reminding Muslims of their religious duties in general - not just those linked to charity. For instance, Picture 4 shows a page of the Islamic Relief Italy's website where it is possible to find a "prayer times" calculator[1] - the page contains an explanation of the meaning of prayer. Picture 5 is a Facebook post with a Jumuaa reminder (Friday prayer reminder), containing an aphorism on the faithful's distance from God. Pictures 6 and 7 are other Facebook posts and they both regard on Ramadan: while Picture 6 displays a "countdown to Ramadan" (which was posted every day during the month preceding Ramadan), Picture 7 shows one of the many "suggestions to get prepared for Ramadan". This content is meant to illustrate to the faithful how to correctly prepare for the holy month and, in general, to advice Muslims on "how to be good Muslims". Picture 8 captures another Facebook post, containing a quote from a famous Muslim, Malcom X. Due to its fame as a prominent political activist, his origin as a Black American, and considering the very content of the quote, this post is arguably more intended for a young audience, which is more familiar than the first-generation with non-Arab Muslim figures.

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[1] Prayer times in Islam vary during the year, as they are based on dawn and sunset times.

Picture 4 – Prayer times on the Italian website[2]

"Prayer is one of the five pillars of Islam. Taking some minutes to pray five times during the day helps us think of Allah swt [Subhanahu Wa-Ta'ala – Glory to Him] and the sense of life while worshipping Him".

"When we face Mecca, we are united with other Muslims in the world, all in the same direction, and when we raise our hands to start the Salat, [prayer], we put stress and worries aside and remember our God".

Page of the Italian website, where prayer times can be calculated.

"If you feel far from Allah, ask yourself whom of the two has distanced himself from the other".
"Blessed Friday Prayer".

Picture 5 – Friday prayer reminder

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[2] See https://www.islamic-relief.it/chi-siamo/cosa-facciamo/ramadan/orario-preghiere/ (last accessed: 25 September 2018).

Picture 6 – Countdown to Ramadan

"The countdown starts.
- 29 days to Ramadan"
"Oh Allah allow us to reach Ramadan".

"Tenth suggestion on how to prepare for Ramadan:
Get ready to perform the night prayer"

Picture 7 – Tenth suggestion about Ramadan

Picture 8 – Malcom X quote

"The future belongs to those who prepare for it today"
- Malcom X

Young people are particularly exposed to and active on social media. This is a reason why some volunteers are involved in the creation of religion-related contents to be posted on the social media channels of the organization. For instance, during the last period of Ramadan, volunteers took part in the shooting of four short videos – a sort of series named "Pills of Ramadan" (Pillole di Ramadan – see Picture 9). During each of these short videos, a volunteer would explain a religion-related concept. These "Pills" did not deal with rules about "correct" behavior or distinctions about *haram* or *halal*. Rather, they had a more "philosophical" or abstract nature, and illustrated complex notions such as divine mercy, or how to feel closer to God and cultivate one's own faith, etc. Indeed, young volunteers are made the recipients of a certain religious education, as will be explained in the final section of the present paragraph.

"Pill number 3 – 'Divine tenderness'"

During the month of Ramadan, young volunteers shot short videos – "Pills of Ramadan" – providing explanations of religious notions, by referring to hadiths or Quranic verses.

Picture 9 – "Pills of Ramadan"

Appeals and campaigns

No fundraising event or activity is ever "abstract": whatever is organized is linked to a specific appeal or campaign. The funds collected through each activity is thus directly channeled to the "cause" it was devoted to.

With reference to Islamic Relief's work in the development area, the Italian office advertises two main projects among the ones implemented by Islamic Relief Worldwide: one is called "Water for life" and concerns the provision of drinkable water in areas of African countries affected by severe drought (such as Mali) through the excavation of wells and the distribution of the extracted water to remote villages; the second one concerns the sponsorship of orphans in conflict areas or in situations of extreme poverty. The cause of orphans is considered as a particularly important one and is an old Islamic tradition, because taking care of orphans is also prescribed to the Muslim faithful. The Prophet was a orphan himself and, as it is specified on the Islamic Relief website: "Indeed, being kind to and looking after an orphan is a great act of generosity encouraged by the Prophet (peace be upon him) who said: 'I and the person who looks after an orphan and provides for him, will be in Paradise like this," putting his index and middle fingers together' [Bukhari]".[3]

Regarding humanitarian emergencies, Islamic Relief is currently running four appeals: one for Syria, one for Gaza, one for Myanmar (concerning the genocide of Rohingya Muslims) and one for Yemen. However, whilst the four appeals compare on the Italian website, fund-raising events are mainly organized evolving around the appeal for Syria and for Gaza (see Pictures 10 and 11), as these causes are felt as "closer" to donors' interests. Occasionally, the appeal for Yemen is advertised on the Facebook page of the Italian branch. However, the chief fund-raiser explained to me that

> it is now time to open the Italian Muslim community's eyes to what is going on also in Myanmar against the Rohingya… because, you know, it is very easy to collect money for Syria or for Gaza, these causes are always successful because people here [Muslims in Italy] feel very close to what goes on there… Gaza is a recurring theme, while Syria is so geographically close, and there are Syrians in Italy, and the humanitarian tragedy is terrible. But it is also because they are Arabs. Instead, nobody knows about the Rohingya, and now I want to add this topic to our fund-raising events and let the people know and make them feel guilty for knowing and doing nothing about the Rohingya… Because Muslims here don't care because they [the Rohingya] are not Arabs and people perceive them as distant. And on the contrary I want to insist on this point: they are Muslims like us! And Muslims should feel this bound that unites us all, and religion tells you to care about your brothers, even if they are of different cultures, or regions, or ethnicities. And also, there are many small organizations that are gathering funds for Syria, and the [Muslim] community is tired because everybody asks them to donate, while for Myanmar we would be the only ones, there are no competitors. This is why I asked the headquarters [Islamic Relief Worldwide] to send me material about the situation of the Rohingya, so that I can speak about it during my fundraising speeches.

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[3] On Islamic Relief UK's website: https://www.islamic-relief.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/orphans-and-children/ (last accessed 25 September 2018). The same quote is also present on the Italian website: https://www.islamic-relief.it/chi-siamo/cosa-facciamo/orfani-e-tutela-dell-infanzia/ (last accessed: 25 September 2018).

Islamic Relief Italia
Yesterday at 21:11 · 🌐

Alhamdulillah gli aiuti stanno raggiungendo le famiglie in disperato bisogno nel **#Ghouta**, grazie alla vostra generosità ed alla determinazione dei nostri operatori sul campo.

Con poco, possiamo fare la differenza. bit.ly/2E3TVeH

50€
POSSONO FORNIRE UN **PACCO ALIMENTARE** AD UNA FAMIGLIA INTERA

90€
POSSONO FORNIRE UN **KIT MEDICO D'EMERGENZA** AD UN OSPEDALE

250€
POSSONO FORNIRE UN **RIFUGIO (TENDA, COPERTE, TELI DI PLASTICA)** AD UNA FAMIGLIA

Picture 10 – Call to donate for Ghouta (Syria)

"Praise be to God, aid is reaching the desperately needy families of Ghouta [a region of Syria under siege since 2013 and heavily bombed between January and March 2018], thanks to your generosity and to the determination of our aid workers on the field.

We can make the difference with very little".

Picture 11– Appeal to donate for Palestine on the occasion of the incidents occurred during the protests at the border in the Gaza strip. Spring 2018

EMERGENZA GAZA

ISLAMIC RELIEF

COME DONARE:

ONLINE
islamic-relief.it/donare

BOLLETTINO POSTALE
Intestato a Islamic Relief Italia
c/c n° 1020099568

BONIFICO BANCARIO
Intestato a Islamic Relief Italia
IBAN: IT66 T033 5901 6001 0000 0018 776

Besides pointing to the need to find alternative strategies to overcome what the jargon defines as the "donors' fatigue" by identifying new appeals, for which there are no "competitors", these words highlight the extent to which the organization draws on religious motives in order to encourage donations from Muslims, also tapping into Muslim migrants' diaspora engagement concerning their countries of origin (Borchgrevink & Erdal 2016) – this applies especially to migrants of Pakistani origin, who may feel particularly willing to donate to projects realized in Pakistan or surrounding areas.

Indeed, the argument of "cultural proximity" is used not only in the field, to refer to the easier access that Muslim faith-based organizations have in reaching and dealing with some populations (Benthall 2016), but is also used in this instance to justify the moral duty of a Muslim to help his brothers. However, "cultural proximity" is morphed into "religious proximity". According to the chief fund-raiser, the Italian Muslim community, which is overwhelmingly composed by people of Arab origin, feels "culturally distant" from the Rohingya and is not interesting in financially supporting this cause. On the contrary, this type of discourse arguably reminds potential donors from the Italian Muslim community that Muslims should feel close to other Muslims, regardless of ethnic background and geographical distance, by using the image of a unified *umma,* to which a Muslim should feel loyal, "because it is religion that tells you so".

Religious motives and prescriptions are also central to the so-called "seasonal projects", Ramadan and Qurbani. During the holy month of Ramadan, Muslims do not only have to fast and abstain from the consumption of liquids between dawn and sunset, but have to enhance their religious practice also in other ways – increase the number of prayers, refrain from sexual activity, push "bad" or immoral thoughts away, and mandatorily paying the *zaqat* and the *sadaqa* to the poor, as well as serving *iftar* (the meal after sunset by which Muslims break the fast) to the poor. Therefore, this period is ideal for collecting funds for charity purposes, and Islamic Relief offices organize large campaigns and numerous events. For instance, in Italy fifteen "charity iftar" were organized in different towns by young volunteers in 2018. Indeed, Ramadan is the period during which the organization receives most money. The collected funds serve to prepare food packs to be sent to the neediest across the countries where Islamic Relief operates – see Picture 12.

"This Ramadan, fill the void"
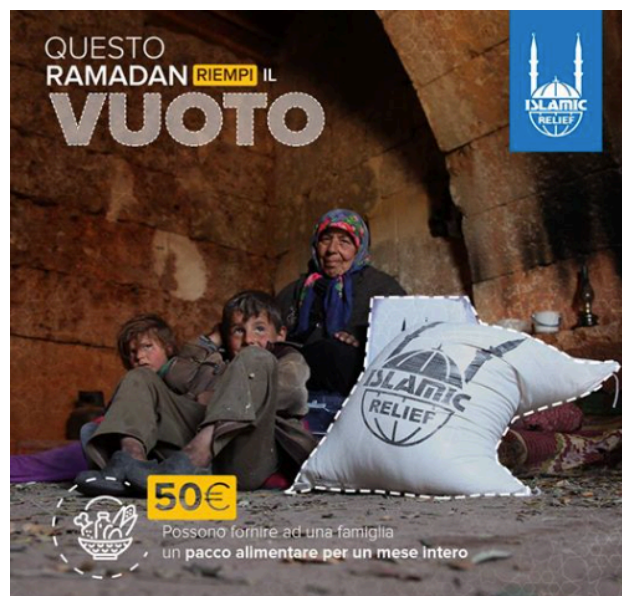
Picture 12 – Ramadan appeal for the donation of food aid

Qurbani means "sacrifice" and refers to the "feast of the sacrifice", which recalls the reward given by God to prophet Ibrahim, who was about to sacrifice his son Ismail because he thought God had ordered him to do so. To gratify Ibrahim for his obedience, God sent a ram to be sacrificed in Ismail's place. During this feast, Muslims around the world slaughter an animal – a goat, sheep, cow or camel - and one third of the meat must go the poor or vulnerable ones. Islamic Relief offers the possibility to abide by this religious norm through a donation, corresponding to the meat of the animal (Picture 13).

"Qurbani meat – make a sacrifice for the needy"

Picture 13 – Appeal for the donation of Qurbani meat

As explained by Petersen (2015: 155-159), this fund-raising strategy, which is eminently coined in religious terms and grows out of Islamic traditions of charity, represents an opportunity for individual Muslim donors to uphold religious traditions and behave as "good Muslims". For many Muslims who are based in Western countries, it is also a way to maintain bonds with their motherlands.

However, as I have been explained by some staff members, the Italian office encountered some criticism from their Muslim donors, which was directed at the collection of funds only destined to other parts of the world – countries and regions they may only loosely relate to "emotionally". Indeed, as explained by Erdal & Borchgrevink (2017), for sustained almsgiving to take place, the donor must feel somehow related to the beneficiary – emotionally and symbolically when not personally. The Italian Muslim community – and most of all, Islamic Relief0s audience – is mainly composed of people of Arab descent. Therefore, it certainly is close to the sufferings of Syria, but feels less connected to the cause of relieving draught in Sub-Saharan countries. According to these critiques, in Italy too there are many poor, especially among Muslims, which deserve the organization's help. Therefore, during the month of Ramadan 2018, the Italian branch of Islamic Relief realized a food distribution for the poor in Italy, for the first time. Food packs were prepared by volunteers in different cities and then distributed relying

on network of mosques – most recipients were Muslims residing in Italy (see Picture 14). This was certainly a manner to encourage donations, considering the above-mentioned criticism and the phenomenon of the "donor's fatigue" - by which donors who are continuously asked to donate, especially f always for the same cause, might get annoyed and stop their donations. It was also a strategy for the organization to become more even more visible and known - and possibly appreciated - in Italy.

Picture 14 – Ramadan food distribution in Italy 2018

Through the implementation of these "seasonal projects", the organization can realize its development and humanitarian projects by "Islamising" them, drawing on the religious obligations connected to religious feasts and holidays. In her description of Islamic Relief's conception of development and aid, Petersen claims that many young professionals accept the historical and religious legacy of these traditions on one hand, and, on the other hand, fear that these seasonal activities might undermine the reputation of the organization as a universalistic, non-discriminatory humanitarian organization, precisely because they are so tied to religious identity and massively address Muslims – both as donors and as recipients. However, based on my observation, I did not find any trace of this kind of fear among staff members and volunteers of the Italian branch. It is true that no specific activity was organized neither in 2017 nor in 2018 for celebrating the feast of the sacrifice (apart from some advertisement of the appeal diffused on social media), because this feast occurred at the end of August, when people are still on holiday and no activities are implemented in that period.

On the contrary, Ramadan-related events and advertisement are proudly heralded as central to the branch's fund-raising strategy: the holy month is the period during which Islamic Relief multiplies its visibility and promotes itself the most. This is certainly due to the fact that fund-raising is mostly geared towards the Italian Muslim community; however, I could also appreciate a certain feeling of satisfaction among volunteers for what was being done during Ramadan – which was also characterized in religious terms as the "good thing to do as a Muslim" during this period of the year. In other words, while universalistic values are invoked in the description of Islamic Relief's approach to aid by staff members and volunteers alike, there is no "embarrassment" in supporting a large religiously-framed campaign such as that of Ramadan. These two dimensions are considered separately, or on different planes, as we shall see below.

Fundraising events for the Muslim community

Besides the events organized by volunteers (see Chapter 6), a second type of events are those targeting directly the Muslim community. The activities too rely on the mobilization of volunteers, but, in this case, they are guided and coordinated by staff members. As pointed out above, the major share of the "public" of the fund-raising activities of the Italian branch is fundamentally made up of Muslim migrants residing in Italy, who are variously engaged in or belonging to Italian mosques or Islamic associations. In general terms, Islamic Relief has always had to address first and foremost Muslim communities: as Islamic Relief Worldwide staff members told me, "we share an interest with Muslims". Indeed, Islamic Relief offers Muslims the possibility to perform their religious duty to make donations to the poor through a religiously-informed framework, that is conform to Islamic principles.

In fact, the kind of activities meant for an Islamic audience draw on Muslims' duty to donate their *zakat* and *sadaqa*. In the Italian case, they consist in collecting money in the following manners:
o directly in mosques – either through one of the chief fund-raisers that is tasked to constantly tour Italian mosques with this purpose[4], or by asking volunteers to set up stands outside of mosques on Fridays;
o through street collections – as already explained, these consist in groups of volunteers walking through a neighborhood, or through markets' stands during market's days, wearing the Islamic Relief t-shirt and carrying a bucket. Money is collected through one-to-one interaction with the passersby that volunteers manage to speak with. The neighborhoods where street collections usually take place are those inhabited by large Muslim populations[5]. Markets are also considered privileged sites for street collections, as market stands are often run or attended by immigrants. This type of activity requires a more proactive and "brave" approach on the part of volunteers, who have to overcome their shyness and their fear to be ignored or insulted. As we shall see in Chapter VI, many feel uncomfortable in performing street collections, even if they take place in areas that are densely populated by immigrant and Muslim populations. Street collections are generally planned by groups' coordinators, but a volunteer is free to conduct his/her individual street collection, if he/she wants to raise funds for a cause – such as participating in a challenge (see above);
o charity dinners in mosques – these are not only reserved only to Muslims (at the one I took part in, there were also some Italian non-Muslims). However, due to the fact that they take place in mosques, they are meant to address primarily the Muslim community;
o gala dinners – as one staff member told me, "elegant" occasions such as these had never been organized by and for Muslim communities, and this innovation was greatly appreciated;
o large events, such as "Notte della Speranza" – "Night of Hope".

The last kind of event deserves a more detailed description. Every November between 2012 and 2017, the Italian branch organized this series of large events in different Italian Northern cities with sizeable Muslim populations – "Nights of hope" have taken place in Milan, Turin, Brescia, Padova, Verona, Treviso, Bologna, Firenze[6]. The aim was raising funds for orphans in Syria. The evening was invariably

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[4] Islamic Relief can rely on the adhesion from a vast network of mosques. The fund-raiser who takes care of the relationships with mosques across Italy has recently been appointed as president of UCOII – Unione Comunità Islamiche Italiane – the Italian largest association of mosques.

[5] In Milan, the chosen neighbourhoods for street collections are via Padova/viale Monza, Piazzale Corvetto, Piazzale Maciachini/via Pellegrino Rossi. In Turin, volunteers carry out street collections in the areas of Porta Palazzo, Barriera di Milano and San Salvario.

[6] See for instance the website of the 2017 edition (http://www.islamic-relief.it/nds/ - last accessed: 25 September 2018) and short videos of past editions of this event on Islamic Relief's Italy Youtube channel

structured as follows: a speech in Arabic by an invited Shaykh, coming usually from Gulf countries, about religious teachings, on topics ranging from "science in the Quran" to the Muslim's duty to "do good". These Shaykhs are often well-known pundits appearing on satellite TV channels from Arabic countries. As one staff member revealed to me, "we invite these Shaykhs because the generation of our parents know them well and like them a lot, because they see them on TV… if it was for us [young staff members], we would prefer to invite younger Shaykhs who are based in Western countries, because we like them better… but the old [firs-generation Muslims] would probably not appreciate, and since we need the old to to participate in the event and donate, we have to invite these Shaykhs from the Gulf. At some point we will invite someone younger". This observation is quite revelatory of the generational divide between first-generation Muslims and their children in the understanding of Islam: the latter would prefer to listen to the speeches of someone younger, who has experienced their same situation (growing up as a Muslim on a non-Muslim country) - someone they would feel closer to. The Italian branch's staff, however, does not feel yet ready to invite someone that would not meet the "parents'" preferences. Thus, this first part of the evening aimed at "pleasing" the "old".

The Shaykh's lesson was then followed by the fundraisers' speeches: the two chief fund-raisers would alternate on the stage, one would speak in Italian and the other in Arabic. The two would describe Islamic Relief's projects, especially concerning orphans and the situation in Syria, and would tell what they could see "with their own eyes" during their field visits to refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon, underlining the great difference that even a small contribution can make. Videos of their field visits would be shown, which contained interviews to beneficiaries. These speeches would significantly draw on religious references, such as verses from the Quran, reminding Muslims of their moral duty to help the needy. At the "Night of Hope" I took part in, the "takbir formula" often recurred in fundraisers' speeches, inviting the public to say "Allahu Akhbar" altogether and loudly. Small children eagerly took part in the recitation of the formula. During these speeches, volunteers would walk around with their buckets to collect offers. At the end of the evening, the total of the money donated by the public would be displayed on the screen.

The final part of the evening consisted in a concert by Middle Eastern *anasheed* singers – i.e. singers of *halal* music[7]. During the two first editions of the "Night of Hope" tours, the *anasheed* invited singer was Maher Zain, who is a Swedish musician and producer of Lebanese origin, having become an authentic *anasheed* pop-star, extremely popular among youths across the entire Muslim world. As one of my interviewees told me, "he is like the Justin Bieber of the Muslim world… girls love him!" (Mariam, 23 years old, Milan). The concluding concert, therefore, is meant to target youths in particular, "compensating" for the first part of the evening, which was more Since he had not given any concert in Italy before these occasions, there was a huge demand of tickets for these editions of the "Night of Hope".

I was told by some of my informants that "there were so many people that had come to see his concert that many were left out… they were trying to enter the place anyways but it was packed already, and we had to block them at the entrance, it was hard to keep them out!". Indeed, the presence of Maher Zain attracted an incredibly high number of youths of Muslim origin, who had never heard of Islamic Relief before, and got to know about the organization this way. This is the case of some of my

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(https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=notte+della+speranza+ - last accessed: 25 September 2018).
[7] Music is considered *halal* as long as it does not contain "indecency". De facto, the lyrics of halal pop songs make often use of R&B composition and singing style and speak about God and his greatness, express gratitude to God, etc. Maher Zain's debut album is titled "Thank you Allah".

informants, who recall beautiful memories of when they first took part in the "Night of Hope", and explain that this was the "trigger" of their desire to become volunteers:

> I took part in the second edition of the Night of Hope because I had learned about Maher Zain's concert, and I did not know much about Islamic Relief, I was invited by a friend from university who sold me the ticket. So I was simply sitting in the public, but it was great, there were so many people, the theatre was full, there was him singing… he's so cool! And so much energy… and then at the end of the evening, they projected the amount of money that was collected during that evening… it was more than 80.000 euros, enormous! It was such an emotion! There I see the result of the collective effort they were making… all of these volunteers with blue t-shirts around me… I wanted to become part of that! (Mariam, 23 years old, Milan)

> I went to the "Night of Hope", there was the concert, which was great… and I saw all of these volunteers that were doing things, they guided me to my seat and so on, but I thought that it would have been much cooler to be one of them, instead than simply staying in the public… because they were making things happen! I wanted to be like them! This is how I joined Islamic Relief (Rasha, 19 years old, Turin)

At the same time, some of my informants underline that it is a bit "sad" that many of the people who took part in these events only came for Maher Zain's concert, without showing too much interest for Islamic Relief. At the same time, they acknowledge that inviting such a star did serve to make the organization known to a wide public of Muslims. Still, the organization received some criticism from some extremely conservative Muslims, who "condemned" the presence of music (eve if it was *halal* music). As I was told by some staff members, "we don't care about these critiques and go on with our activities". During the three last editions there were other, less known, *anasheed* singers.

The public of these events is entirely composed by Muslims, both older and younger; many families even with small children were present at the one I attended. Headphones with simultaneous translation from/to Arabic and Italian were available – in order to facilitate both the old in understanding Italian, and the young and those who come from countries where Arab is not the first language in understanding Arabic.

However, while the first editions proved extremely successful - both due to the presence of this famous singer and to the "novelty" represented by the event - the outcome of the last edition of the "Night of Hope" in 2017 was judged unsatisfying, with significantly lower attendance rate. The staff deems that "donors' fatigue", as well as the repetition of exactly the same format each year, are at the origin of these disappointing results. In 2018 the "Night of Hope" will not take place, and the Milan office is reflecting on possible "new things" to propose to the public.

Educating volunteers religiously

Religion also permeates activities addressed to or requiring the participation of young volunteers. Seasonal campaigns – especially during the Ramadan period – see a massive participation of young volunteers, who feel the moral and religious "call of duty" to take part in fund-raising activities. In 2018, the Ramadan food distribution that took place in Italy also strongly relied on the participation of volunteers, who showed a form of "proud" in preparing and distributing food packs to poor – eminently Muslim - households in Italy.

During the Open Days for volunteers described in Chapter 6, phrases and expressions like "Bismillah [in the name of God] we are ready to start", "Hamdulillah [Thank God], Islamic Relief can operate in many different countries and keeps improving its results", "Subhanallah [Glory to God] the dinner with the Italians was very successful" or simply "Allah Subhanahu Wa-Ta'ala [Glory to Him]" were recurrent in the presentations made by the Islamic Relief staff members, who pronounced them in a completely automatic, *norm*-al way – i.e. as a habitual disposition (see Chapter 9). Furthermore, at all the events I took part in, participants greeted each other with the formula "As-salāmu ʿalaykum" (peace be upon you).

At the same Open Days, staff members would also emphasize the religious dimension of the "duty to do good", urging young people to volunteer because "this is not so much effort", and "we have no excuses in the face of a tragedy such as the Syrian one". At one of the two Open Days I took part in, a staff member explained that "doing good is a religious prescription in Islam" and recalled the five values and guiding principles of the organization in Arabic (see above) – however, ironically only three of them were mentioned and thoroughly described in the end.

The presentation of Islamic Relief's activities and structure would then be concluded by a prayer of thanks to God in Arabic (as the prayer consists in reciting a few verses of the Quran), all in circle, and with the hands towards the sky, as prescribed by the norms on the positions to assume when praying. The meeting would then conclude with a role play, or a small buffet, and by encouraging and discussing would-be volunteers' proposals in terms of activities and events.

The most committed volunteers take part in organizational meetings and especially in "camps", which usually last two days and represent a moment of "full immersion", during which volunteers benefit from training in different domains (see Pictures 15 and 16). However, camps are conceived as fun moments, and training is delivered through workshops and role playing in an extremely informal setting. As my informants explained to me, these training activities usually concern what staff members, in turn, were trained about by Islamic Relief Worldwide officers – namely: a) public speaking, i.e. how to describe Islamic Relief and its projects to different publics – including non-Muslims; b) how to handle one-to-one interactions with potential donors and how to behave when challenged about the nature of Islamic Relief as an organization or about Islamic Relief's projects (see details below concerning this point); c) how to organize events and compile short "how – to" guides for future volunteers; c) how to work in team and take on leadership roles; d) how to develop trust in each other; d) how to be responsible for the collected money; e) how to bear in mind the ultimate goal by constantly "renovate the intention" - i.e. the value of sincerity (a founding value both for Islam and for Islamic Relief – see above).

Whilst training is strongly oriented to the development of professional skills for the reasons explained in Chapter 6, a specific emphasis is attributed to the importance of "renovating one's intention". Furthermore, during the last edition of the volunteers' camp many sessions were devoted to "spirituality", with a view to prepare for Ramadan through meetings with Imams and moments of reflection that can arguably be said to resemble "catechism lessons". As some informants explained to, the performance of the five daily prayers was practically obligatory in this context.

This hints at the religious and spiritual dimension that permeates these camps. The strong focus on the development of skills for equipping volunteers with all they might need in order to be as effective as possible does not erase the reminder of the "religious duty" associated with "doing good". At one of

the open Days I attended, the chief fund-raiser motivated young would-be volunteers to join the camp "because there will be a lot of fun and learning but also lots and lots of spirituality" (see Picture 15).

"An entire weekend with Islamic Relief volunteers from Italy and Spain. SPIRITUALITY, SHARING and FUN. Follow our activities through our Instagram stories"

Picture 15 - The Islamic Relief volunteers' annual camp

Indeed, the last camp was organized right before the beginning of Ramadan, and most of the activities concerned the spiritual preparation for Ramadan, in order to live the coming holy month by behaving in the best possible way as a faithful – see Picture 16:

Picture 16 – Program of the 2018 camp

In fact, the program of the 2018 camp included two meetings with two imams: Abdallah Tchina (who is the imam of a mosque close to Milan) and Amin El Hamzi (the imam of one of the mosques of Brescia, a large town with a numerous Muslim community in Lombardy). Another activity is titled "The Ramadan that I wish" and the Saturday themed evening is titled "Courage: the first prerequisite for spirituality".

Furthermore, all the prayer times are indicated. As one of my interviewees told me, prayers were performed by all participants: the chief fund-raiser would wake everybody up in the early morning for the first morning prayer, and they all had to gather in one room and pray altogether. They would not start the prayer until every participant would join. In a past edition of the camp, there were also two "Italian" (non-Muslim) volunteers, but, as the national coordinator of volunteers, "they really enjoyed and did not feel uncomfortable during our prayers... they simply did not take part in the prayer but did not feel embarrassed".

The same interviewee added that the particular "atmosphere" of the camp induced one of the girls to start wearing the veil: "she appeared on the Sunday morning with the hijab, saying that the experience of the camp finally motivated her to wear it, and we all applauded her. It was beautiful... such an emotion... Beautiful... I want to wear it too" (Moufida, 19 years old, Turin). However, another informant of mine recounted that some girls, who do not usually don the hijab, wear the veil just during the days of the camp: "Yes, this happens, it is normal". This further testifies to the "heightened religiosity" that permeates such occasions, and might hint at some sort of embarrassment that a girl who does not wear

the hijab on a daily basis might feel during the days of the camp, where the importance of the religious and spiritual dimension in one's life and in relation to volunteering is particularly highlighted.

With specific reference to need to renovate one's own "intention", the organization considers it vital, as it is connected to a more spiritual dimension which is crucial in Islam, i.e. the correct "intention" and the sincerity with which one carries out his/her actions. As one volunteer told me:

> one year during the Ramadan campaign I was fund-raising for food packs [see below], and I realized that I was thinking more about collecting as much money as possible, as in a competition to be the first, and I was not thinking actually about why I was doing it. Then I paused for a moment and asked myself "why am I doing this"? So, I used my imagination and I thought about a sunny day in which people receive a food pack and can finally eat after they have not been eating for a while… and this was my way of renovating my intention, imagining the fruit of my work as a volunteer in my spare time (Rasha, 19 years-old, Turin).

Rasha underlines that one should not collect money for the sake of collecting money, otherwise his/her objective becomes that of "being the best at fund-raising" instead of "fund-raising for doing good to people in need".

In all the situations I could observe, rules concerning gender relations were respected. These rules prescribe that females do not come into close physical contact with males – the maximum form of contact is a handshake when they greet each other (and it does not occur often, on the basis of what I could see). I learned this myself as a female volunteer explained to me – very kindly and comprehensively - that in theory I was not supposed to greet male volunteers or staff members with a hug. In the group photos taken at all events, females are all gathered on one side, and males are all gathered on the other side. The two groups are close, but there is no physical contact, like hugging, between the two. As another volunteer told me, "in these pictures, if you see a male between the two groups who is close to both to the guys and to the girls, then that means that he is the brother of one of the girls that are in the picture – because he can stay close to his sister".

Another rule related to gender concerns girls and young women's clothing. According to the Nation coordinator of volunteers, "we've always had a very varied group, so there are those who wear the *hijab*, and those who don't, there are those who wear the t-shirt [leaving the arms uncovered] and those who completely cover their body… yeah there are many different facts among us and this si something that is usually considered striking". However, according to another volunteer, who coordinates the group of Turin, "decency" is an important criterion:

> Islamic Relief has to be very careful in its relationship with volunteers and would-be volunteers because, contrary to GMI [Giovani Musulmani d'Italia], it does not have the aim to educate young people. Therefore, we cannot exclude those volunteers who are willing to help: imagine someone who is even able to collect a lot of money, if we told her "you cannot wear this, you cannot wear that, you cannot come because you are not dressed correctly", she would get angry at us. At the same time, our first point of reference, our most important stakeholder is the Muslim community, and, at the end of the day, there is the word "Islamic" in our name. Therefore, what we can ask to volunteers is to respect a criterion of "decency", at least, because you cannot wear the Islamic Relief t-shirt with a pair of shorts! Otherwise people from the community, the elder, will tell us that they don't trust us, because they see these situations… they told us "I want to see girls that at least are dressed decently, if they do not wear the veil". This is a problem that we have especially with teenagers. So we insist on decency, our chief fund-raiser also keeps reminding volunteers about

this… anyhow, if you are a young girl, after attending a couple of our meetings you understand by yourself that you would be inappropriate if you wore the turban, big earrings, lipstick and leggings!

Whilst clothing is fundamentally a gender-related issue, concerning only girls and young women, the respect of other rules like the ban on smoking and drinking regards especially boys and young men: when they take part in Islamic Relief's initiatives and wear the organization's t-shirt, they know that they cannot light a cigarette, as another male volunteer told me. Yet, the words of this Turin coordinator demonstrate that, in order to be able to attract young people (and the funds they are able to raise), Islamic Relief has to strike a very delicate balance between ensuring the respect of certain religious norms and encouraging also young, less observant, people to join. Because volunteers are crucial for the organization, it is necessary not to "scare" those who may feel less devout with an intolerant attitude towards them.

This is true in general, and especially in the case of Turin – i.e. a context characterized by a competition among the city's Islamic organizations in attracting young people. Islamic Relief has to differentiate itself by demonstrating to be more "inclusive", welcoming different expressions of religiosity, as compared to other local organizations. As the Turin volunteers' coordinator told me,

> PSM[8] attracts the most pious and devout youths… they even select them… they are quite elitist, as they choose only 'the best' from the religious point of view, those who are very practicing and behave well… and they have to attend the organization's courses, and their attendance is registered… They are very strong and well organized, but they are very strict… On the contrary, GMI, but also Islamic Relief, seek to attract also those who are not so observant, because our aim is to make them improve in their religion! If you choose only the best [like PSM does] it's too easy! On the contrary, we decide to run the risk: for instance, if you convince a Moroccan [a young person with a Moroccan background] who smokes joints to come to our meetings, you run the risk that there will be a "contagion" and that other people in the group will start smoking, but you also bet on being able to change him through our example!

In the first excerpt of the interview, the Turin volunteers' coordinator makes a distinction between GMI and Islamic Relief: while the former was born with the aim of educating young Muslims about their religion, helping them make the Muslim identity coexist "harmoniously" with the Italian one, the latter's goal is to raise funds for humanitarian causes based on Islamic principles. Yet, while being "careful" not to discourage less practicing youths to join, Islamic Relief also aims at inspiring the less practicing ones to deepen their religiosity, by reminding them to cultivate their "intention", or through initiatives like the volunteers' camps, which are infused with a particularly religious atmosphere – it suffices to think of the girl who "found the courage" to start donning the hijab while attending a camp and was applauded by all other participants. In fact, some young volunteers did not practice much when they joined Islamic Relief, and after a while as a member of the organization, started being more observant and learning more about Islam, as we shall see in Chapter 9. This is due to the fact that the majority of Islamic Relief staff members were (and some still are) also members of GMI (this is the case also fo the Turin volunteer's coordinator), which blurs the boundaries between these two organization, with Islamic Relief being influenced by GMI's approach to the cultivation of religion. Whilst they may compete for members (especially in Turin, as described above), they certainly share a very similar approach in terms of religious orthodoxy, that looks moderately conservative.

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[8] PSM – "Partecipazione e Spiritualità Musulmana" – a locally strong organization linked to Morocco, also quoted by one of the interviewees in Chapter 7. See also Chapter 5.

Furthermore, as is evident through the above-described examples, there is no conflict about religious orthodoxy between the older generation of the "fathers", who still occupy positions in the board of trustees, and the new generation of recruited staff. The younger generation might certainly prove to be more "tolerant" and display a more open attitude towards less practicing youths who decide to join, compared to the "older" one. Still, contrary to what Petersen (2015) could observe, in the Italian case there is a substantial alignment between the old and the young with regards to the kind of orthodoxy that the organization must respect.

On a side note, a certain "ambient religiosity" is also perceivable in the premises of the organization in Milan: prayer rugs are found in each office; I could hear several times the *adhan* (the call to prayer for the five daily prayers) being played by the cell phone of some employees; I once was present during one of the ritual prayers (it was during the Ramadan period), which officers performed altogether; an old Islamic Relief calendar hung in one of the rooms was open on a page displaying the photo of a monumental mosque. At the headquarters of Islamic Relief Worldwide in Birmingham, too, I could sense a similar atmosphere, despite the presence of non-Muslims (while the Italian staff is "still" only composed by Muslims). Indeed, Islamic Relief in general, at the international level (and not just its Italian branch) seems to somehow nurture the "Muslim identity" of its affiliates and staff members – albeit in a probably less pronounced way. For instance, it is no coincidence that the International Challenges that were organized between 2017 and 2018 (see above) took place in Andalusia (twice) and in Turkey (once). As explained in one of the videos documenting the Challenge posted on the Italian Facebook page of Islamic Relief, these places were chosen so as participants "could learn about the prestigious past of the Ottoman Empire". Therefore, also at the level of organization's headquarters it is possible to observe the presence and the workings of a certain religious orthodoxy, which nonetheless manages to coexist (albeit at times in a rather conflictual manner – Petersen 2015) with a marked professionalization, i.e. the recruitment of development experts only on the basis of merit, which leads to hire many non-Muslims.

In conclusion, the Italian branch of Islamic Relief displays a rather ambivalent attitude: on one hand, it welcomes young people, both Muslim and non-Muslims (although these are only a handful). The Muslim ones are variously religious and may display different "degrees" of religious attachment. On the other hand, the organization conveys certain characterizations of "Muslimness" as well as a certain religious orthodoxy. This reveals the presence and the consequences of different discourses within the organization, but might also hint at potential discrepancies between stated principles concerning the open and non-religious nature of the organization and the actual practices enacted by its members, especially those belonging to the permanent staff.

2. Muslimness in the background: addressing the non-Muslim public

Training volunteers to deal with non-Muslims

With regards to the relationship of the organization with religion more specifically, some questions were asked at one of the two Open Days I attended by some would-be volunteers. The first question concerned whether the organization aided only Muslims. The answer was that the organization does not help only Muslims, and the example provided was that of orphans' adoptions: "the policy of Islamic

Relief on the adoption of orphans is that of letting donors choose the orphan to adopt on the basis of poverty bands, but on criteria based on the religious belonging of the orphan". The point was reinforced by adding that "we have a varied public… of course our most relevant public is the Muslim one, and 80% of our fund-raising relies on the Muslim community, but we also have Christian and atheist donors, and an Italian has recently organized a charity dinner where she hosted us, there were only Italians, and Subhanallah [Glory to God] we collected 4000 euros at that dinner" (see below for details on this dinner).

A second question regarded how to transmit adherence to the Quran and the Sunnah. It was answered that "it is our religion that tells you not to look at race, gender and religion… being inspired by religion is not our limit but our strength… For instance, transparency is a Muslim value, not just a value that a humanitarian organization should have". At the same time, it was also recalled that "these are universal values [non-discrimination], not just values of Muslims". A third question asked what is the percentage of non-Muslim employees and volunteers at the international level; while it was impossible for staff members to answer with precise values, they quoted examples of the many non-Muslim working for the big Islamic Relief office in the USA and of the coordinator of volunteers at Islamic Relief UK, who is a British, non-Muslim young man. The impression is that the would-be volunteers were at once amazed and reassured by these information: in citing these examples, staff members conveyed that feeling that, "unexpectedly", non-Muslims would dare to consider a Muslim organization so positively that they would work for it, implying that this testifies to the high quality standards of the services provided by Islamic Relief; at the same time, the other implicit message was that Islamic Relief is so open that it hires also non-Muslims in key positions.

A further key-point, highlighted in both occasions, was how to deal with "non-Muslims" when performing "street collections" – i.e. literally walking through a neighborhood wearing the blue Islamic Relief t-shirt and carrying a bucket in order to collect casual donations by stopping passersby. As was explained, in general when directly dealing with the public in general – and not just the non-Muslim one – it is essential to keep smiling and be kind and polite, even if people do not listen or are rude or even insult you. However, in referring to possible insults received by "Italians", the National coordinator of volunteers made it clear that responding to insults with other insults is not good for the image of the organization:

> I know that sometimes you might feel offended and would want to answer back in the same rude way, and I know that sometimes these people that insult us would deserve it, but it is important that you keep calm, because in that moment you are representing the organization, and not just yourself, and if you are rude, the entire organization will be perceived in negative terms and our reputation will be damaged, and people will not pay attention to us anymore or might even say bad things about us (National coordinator of volunteers, Open Day in Turin)

Moreover, staff members highlighted that one should anticipate the possible "suspicion" that a non-Muslim might have in seeing the logo of Islamic Relief: "When they see our logo, when they see "Islamic", they might think that we help only Muslims, but we have to state from the very beginning that we do not help only Muslims, that we are not a religious organization, that we have 'Islamic' in our name simply because we are inspired by Islamic values, but that's it!" (National coordinator of volunteers, Open Day in Milan).

Fundraising events targeting non-Muslim audiences

A third kind of events targets the public of non-Muslims, or of "Italians" – as Islamic Relief staff members and volunteers frame them. The staff holds control of this type of activities, but these are not systematically planned, as opposed to events addressing the Muslim community or events organized by volunteers. Rather, events "with Italians" have started taking place between 2017 and 2018 in a rather "random" way, as they were born out of casual situations and contacts.

It all began in 2017, thanks to the interest in Islamic Relief shown by an Italian elementary school teacher, who works in a Catholic private school in the center of Milan. She had befriended the mother of one of the volunteers, and she got to know about the organization this way. She invited the Milanese staff to present Islamic Relief at the school where she teaches, and also at her villa on Lake Como, where she organized a private dinner with her friends. Among them, there was the pastor of the Anglican Church in Milan, who, in turn, invited Islamic Relief to organize a charity dinner at the Church she is in charge of (see Picture 11). All of these dinners offered Moroccan and Syrian food - "which is always a good way to attract Italians" (National coordinator of volunteers) - cooked by the mothers of some volunteers, who were present during the dinners and served the meals.

In all of these instances, Islamic Relief could raise significant amounts of money, which was devoted to the Syrian and the orphans cause. The charity dinner at the elementary school was repeated in spring 2018; before the dinner, the fund-raiser's speech included the projection of a video showing how the money collected at the previous dinner in 2017 was spent (he had shot the video himself during one of his field visits in Syrians' refugee camps in Jordan). The two dinners at the elementary school saw the participation of a significant number of pupils, accompanied by their parents (roughly 100 people took part in both cases).

At all these dinners, volunteers were involved in serving the meals and ensuring an overall "smooth flow" of the various phases of the evening. However, as one volunteer told me, no "adults" from the Milanese Muslim community were asked to join (apart from the cooks): "they thought that it would have been better if there were just us, the young". This suggests that the "deployment" of young people is strategically conceived as a way to "reassure" the Italian public, as young people are considered to act as "bridges" with the Italian majority society. In other words, in Islamic Relief's view, youths might be perceived by Italians as "less scary", compared to firs-generation Muslims, who, for instance, do not have the same mastery of Italian that their children, and might therefore appear more reluctant to speak and interact.

During these dinners, the fundraiser's speeches touched upon the religious component of Islamic Relief's identity only very briefly – or would relate it to the "Christian identity" of the Catholic elementary school or of the Anglican Church. Every speech would start with showing the same video that is shown to volunteers during Open Days (see above), which shortly presents the story and the modus operandi of Islamic Relief. As already mentioned, the video concludes with the famous quote of the Quran, that reads "whoever saves one, it is as if he had saved mankind entirely". The fundraiser would then take this last point and say "this is a verse form the Quran, but it could also be an excerpt from the Bible! Because it is a principle of humanity! […] There are no differences between Christians and Muslims, because religion is about honesty, faith, empathy, sharing, feel the other's suffering".

The organization would be presented as apolitical and simply inspired by Islamic values. Specific emphasis would be put on the respect of the principle of non-discrimination in the implementation of activities, underlining in particular that the organization "simply offers aid to those who need it" and "does not help only Muslims: on the contrary, we were the first to intervene in Haiti and Nepal after the earthquakes that stroke those areas, but we were also present in the first phases of the emergency in the aftermath of the earthquakes that have hit Italy during these years, at l'Aquila [2009], in Emilia-Romagna [2012] and at Amatrice [2016]! We also immediately intervened in Livorno after the floods [2017]!" (fundraiser's speech - my fieldnotes). Indeed, highlighting that Islamic Relief intervened in disasters that occurred in Italy is a way to demonstrate that it is a "reliable organization", and that its members are "loyal to Italy" and do care about the country where they live, against usual negative portrayals of Muslims and of immigrants who allegedly live detached from mainstream society. In other words, stressing that Islamic Relief operates also in Italy means seeking recognition and legitimation as Muslims and as a "serious" NGO.

Moreover, when showing videos about the current humanitarian crisis in Syria, the fundraiser would underscore that "these are people like us: Syrians are cultivated people. They are doctors, engineers, professionals, like us here in the West. Imagine, it is as if it was happening to us! We can relate to their situations, we had to feel empathy towards them" (fundraiser's speech - my fieldnotes). I read this as a manner to "de-exoticize" the representation of Muslims in other regions of the world, who are generally perceived as poor or backward, by pointing to the commonalities that "Italians" may share with them. According to this strategy, by reducing the perception of social distance between Italians and Syrians, the latter are made appear as "deserving" people in the eyes of former.
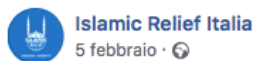
Islamic Relief Italia
5 febbraio ·

Sabato siamo stati ospiti della All Saints' Anglican Church Milan, per una cena di beneficenza in supporto dei progetti di Islamic Relief in Siria e nei paesi limitrofi. Di fronte al bisogno crollano i muri ed il ricordo che siamo tutti fratelli e sorelle nell'umanità restituisce speranza a chi l'ha persa a causa di tragedie come la guerra.

Grazie alla Chiesa Anglicana di Milano e a tutti i partecipanti, grazie a Vickie Lela Sims, Souheir Katkhouda, Mathouba Gyoriova, Fatima Colombo e a tutti i volontari che hanno reso questo evento possibile.

"On Saturday we were hosted by the All Saints' Anglican Church in Milan, for a charity dinner aimed at collecting funds for Islamic Relief's project in Syria and in the neighboring countries. Dire need tears down all walls, while the reminder that we are all brothers and sisters in humanity gives hope to those who have lost it due to tragedies such as war".

"Thanks to the Anglican Church of Milan and to all the participants, and thanks to Vickie Lela Sims [the pastor of the church], Souheir Katkhouda, Mathouba Gyoriova, Fatima Colombo [the cooks, mothers of some of the volunteers, who prepared Syrian and Moroccan food] and to all the volunteers who have made this event possible".

Picture 17 – Charity dinner at the Anglican Church in Milan

Other casual contacts led to other occasions for Islamic Relief to address an Italian public. These contacts were born out of the fact that some Islamic Relief members have parallelly founded the first-to-date Association of Muslim Scouts in Italy. During this start-up phase of the newly established association, they asked for assistance to the local section of Catholic Scouts, some of whom they have also befriended. Following these contacts, a couple of these Catholic scouts invited Islamic Relief representatives to come present the organization in their respective high schools – in this case too, it was elite schools (albeit public), mostly attended by children of families residing in the center of Milan (see Picture 18). These were not considered occasions to raise funds; in both cases, it was simply about presenting the organization, stimulate reflection about the war in Syria and elsewhere and attract students' interest for humanitarian causes. Volunteers were not involved in these occasions.

Picture 18– Invited presentation of Islamic Relief at a high school in Milan

At the presentation I could attend, the Islamic Relief representative started by asking the students "do you know 'Islamic Relief? What are your immediate thoughts if I say 'Islamic Relief'?". Some answered that it made them think of Middle Easter countries, another responded that he thought it would be "an association that helps Muslims". The Islamic Relief representative would then start by recounting the "founding myth" (Dr. Hani El Banna putting 20 cents in plastic bag and then starting collecting money with his friends). In telling the story, he stressed that "contrary to expectations, Islamic Relief was not born in Syria, or Morocco, or Yemen, or some other Muslim country. It was founded HERE, in Europe, with European values, that is, compassion, mercy, altruism, which are also the values of Islam". According to the framing used in this instance, Islamic Relief's founders were guided by a mentality shaped by European values, and the stress is then put on the commonalities in values and world vision between "Europe" and "Islam".

He would then show the same video that is shown to volunteers during Open Days (see above) concerning Islamic Relief history and projects. As at charity dinners with "Italians", he commented the video by greatly emphasizing that "we are only guided by a principle of humanity. Our criterion is need, and we help those who suffer from disasters regardless of where or who they are". After this, he listed the interventions made in non-Muslim countries, highlighting Islamic Relief's interventions in Italy, as we have seen above. References to religion in the forms of quotes from the Quran or appeals to Islamic principles are completely absent. Rather, the accent is put on the universalism that inspires the

organization; however, this universalism is not presented as something rooted in Islam, but as something that "Europe" and "Islam" have in common. This way of presenting Islamic Relief arguably seems to expunge the religious component of the organization's identity.

He then talked about the emergency in Syria also by quoting examples from his experience on the field, and then initiated a debate with the students about the war and the duty to intervene – again, not framed in religious terms, but in a purely humanitarian language. During the ensuing debate with the students, in speaking about the situation in Syria, he urged students to be accurately informed about political issues at the national and international level, to look for as much information as possible and to develop critical thinking. He made a very effective example of this:

> When I was invited to speak here, I was honored because I know that this is considered a highly titled school... but I was also already forming in my mind typical stereotypes such as 'there will only be rich, lazy, snobby people' and so on. Then I read the news and I learned about the polemic that was mounting around this school and its classist attitudes[9]. It would have been very easy for me to stop there and keep my prejudices, which seemed to be confirmed by this news. But, on the contrary, I decided to learn more, and I acquired more information, and I read the headmasters' statement, and I understood that this polemic was largely exaggerated and unfounded... and the same goes for prejudices about immigrants and Muslims...

This was the occasion for him to speak about the condition of Muslims and of their descendants – like him - in non-Western countries:

> It never occurred to me to be discriminated against, my personality helps me because I am sociable and I easily challenge people... people don't think I have a foreign origin and are surprised when they learn it, and tell me "oh really!? Your name is Mohammed?!". On the contrary, to a girl named Fatima, they [people, Italians] would ask "can you speak Italian?", and if she is more fragile, more introverted than someone like me, she might feel a great pain... because you know, having a double identity like we do [youths of Muslim descent] is so hard! There are girls who go into depression... if this happens among you [depression], can you imagine how it is even more difficult for us? But if you inform yourself, you realize that maybe prejudices against Muslims are wrong because in reality there are so many things in common between Muslims and Christians... didn't Christ send a message of compassion and altruism? But also for non-believers empathy, compassion, love are important values, aren't they?... and if we acknowledge these commonalities, then we can all live better, because Italy is not like France or Great Britain yet, where immigrants are segregated and there is social hate on both sides...

The young age of this representative, the many references he made to youth culture (quoting for instance famous Italian rappers) and his very "young" language certainly facilitated a common understanding between him and this public. A student then said that she shared all that was being spoken about, and asked him about how it is possible to reduce negative prejudices. He answered that

> Muslims should do their part too, because we should not behave as victims... the problem is that immigrants too often create the problem, because they close themselves in their community and refuse contact, and this is wrong. We, the children of the first generation, do not have this problem.

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[9] During the days preceding this presentation, a newspaper claimed that this school (Liceo Parini) is classist in that it would have supposedly positively advertised on its brochures the fact that only students from the upper classes attend it.

I'll give you an example. When there was the earthquake in Amatrice[10], Islamic Relief immediately sent emergency aid. I was in the team that went there first. When we arrived, we were all wearing our blue t-shirt with or logo on the front, while on the back there is written "at the service of the neediest in the world" [al servizio dei più bisognosi nel mondo, in Italian]. Bear in mind that the inhabitants of Amatrice are on average very old. So we arrive, with our t-shirts, and we start the distribution of emergency kits, but many of the old people there insulted us, telling us things like "we already have our problems here, we don't need you, go away, what do you want from us?". Nonetheless, we continued our distribution coordinating with the civil protection during the following days. After a few days, the same old people that had insulted us got back to us, excusing themselves, saying "we were wrong, we are sorry, you really do help those who need help. Thank you". And for us this was a great moment. You reduce prejudices with concrete actions, giving the positive example.

Indeed, as this representative told me in the interview I had with him, the development of the "brand" of Islamic Relief in Italy has to be based on the actions and on the exemplary behaviors of its members: "instead of talking, talking, talking, we want our actions speak for the organization. Then the positive image and reputation of Islamic Relief will derive naturally from there. This is the what makes the force of a brand".

Islamic Relief staff and volunteers really cherish these occasions, because they feel "proud" to be "listened to" by "Italians", as various volunteers told me. Indeed, addressing the Italian audience through these events represents a double opportunity for the organization. The first, more "utilitarian" one consists in reaching out to the wider Italian public in order to expand the pool of potential donors, and to gain credit as a serious, impartial NGO. The second, and probably the most important one, has to do with the possibility to deconstruct negative prejudices about Muslims. This objective was pursued in different ways at the events I participated in: by not spending too many words on the "Islamic component" of the organization; by drawing on commonalities between Muslims and Christians; by demonstrating that Islamic Relief operates in non-Muslim settings and is appreciated by the beneficiaries and, lastly, by showing that misconceptions can affect also non-Muslims, and that one must always "train" his/her critical thinking. These strategies aim at getting to be appreciated and "accepted" by a non-Muslim, Italian, elite public. Ironically, though, offering a positive image of Islam and seeking for a "common ground" with non-Muslims means neglecting, hiding, or suspending, the very Muslimness of the organization. It appears that, for these Muslim youths to be recognized, they have to disguise the Islamic component of their identity, or make the "Italian" public forget about it.

3. What strategies? And what tactics?

To resume the concepts and the language introduced in the first Chapters, it is necessary at this point to ask what are the "strategies" pursued by the Italian branch of Islamic Relief. On the basis of the present analysis, I would argue that young volunteers can be said to be exposed to two different sets of discourses and "strategies" (in De Certeau's sense), which are differently articulated by staff members.

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[10] Italian central regions were hit by a strong earthquake in August 2016. Amatrice, a small village in the mountains, was the most damaged area.

The first kind of strategy has to do with religion, and aims at conveying a precise understanding of religion and orthodoxy. As was illustrated above, the organization can be considered a "site of production" of a "strategic religion", to use Woodhead's terminology (2013). Islamic Relief seeks to strike a balance between imposing (or requiring the respect of) religious norms and not discouraging youths who feel less religious to join. In this sense, emphasizing that "volunteers can acquire significant professional skills by joining the organization" can be considered as a way to overshadow the religious component of Islamic Relief and thus increase potential volunteers' interest in taking part. Therefore, personal religious freedom does exist within the organization; yet, it has to remain within the limits of a clearly defined framework: some bottom-line religiously-informed rules apply to all – if anything, in order to please the primary stakeholder, that is, the Muslim community (this is the case for girls' clothing, for instance). However, beyond requiring volunteers and staff members to abide by these rules at least on the surface, for this "instrumental" reason, Islamic Relief also aims at providing some religious education to its members and volunteers, in order to make them "grow" more religious. Whilst this is not an explicitly stated goal, it certainly appears evident from initiatives such as the volunteers' camp, or from the contents posted on social media.

Arguably, for Islamic Relief's members, the strategic religion put forward by the organization represents a strong "voice" within the religious "internal discourse" about Islam, as it provides powerful religiously-framed normative claims about how Muslims should behave: e.g. Muslims should "do good", either by volunteering or by donating, because it is a religious duty; Ramadan is not only about fasting but is first and foremost about purifying one's soul by praying and committing to charitable actions; Muslims should help their brothers Rohingya because we all belong to the same *umma*; volunteers should show a "decent" attitude when wearing Islamic Relief's garments; it is important that volunteers bear in mind the intention with which they do things, as this is important in our religion, etc. In sum, Islamic Relief promotes a certain vision of Islamic orthodoxy and constitutes a source of religious normativity; the targets of this strategy are its members - both staff, who contribute to shape it, and volunteers - but also the Muslim community at large, which has to be "reassured" about the correct positioning and religiousness displayed by the organization. In these instances, Muslimness is therefore put in the *foreground*.

The second kind of strategy concerns the organization's relationship with the public of non-Muslims, i.e. the bearers and producers of the "external discourse" about Islam, which portrays Muslims in derogatory terms (see Chapter III). In other words, this strategy precisely consists in the ways the organization deals with such "external discourse": countering negative prejudices against Muslims is considered almost as a mission by the Italian branch – almost as important as raising funds. As the chief fundraiser told me,

> we [Islamic Relief] have a strong responsibility socially speaking in favoring Muslims' inclusion… I prefer to speak about inclusion rather than integration, because, take my case for instance: I was born in Italy, where should I 'integrate' exactly? I am already part of this county. So I think that 'inclusion' is a more appropriate word. My generation [he is 26 years old] has a great responsibility, wittingly or unwittingly, we have this burden because we are the pioneers in making immigrants and Muslims included.

This "responsibility" to promote the inclusion of Muslims translates to the duty to multiply the occasions in which Islamic Relief can meet an "Italian" public:

> With our [Muslim] community we organize events even with 2000 people [the "Night of Hope"], with Italians we have small initiatives, but they keep increasing. But with the Italians what comes first are not the funds that we manage to raise, but the image of our brand... the fact that they [Italians] start thinking 'oh, maybe Muslims are not as I thought they would be", and this makes the difference. Because nowadays if you ask an Italian 'would you give 100 euros to an Islamic organization?', he would certainly say 'no' because he thinks that it would mean financing terrorism (Islamic Relief Italy Chief fundraiser).

In these occasions, according to him, "it is important to get prepared for these meetings, and have answers for all possible questions". Indeed, Islamic Relief staff members expect to be grilled by a non-Muslim audience on a number of different topics, ranging from how funds are used to questions about theological issues: they know that the logics of the "external discourse" holds Muslims accountable for whatever they do or believe in, and takes any "random" Muslim as representative of his/her religion - without considering that he/she might be a believer, but might not know much about issues of theology. Islamic Relief's members, therefore, have to learn how to answer to these kinds of questions in order to defend themselves, promote knowledge of Islam, protect the brand they represent from negative judgements and be positively perceived by non-Muslims.

For achieving these goals, humanitarianism is thus the "card" that the organization can play: the hoped-for outcome of this strategy is that Italians are led to think something of the sort "since they do good, (these) Muslims can be accepted". However, the deconstruction of the prevailing negative consideration of Muslims among Italians basically evolves around arguments that highlight the universalism of the organization, while Islam is minimized or "marginalized". As we have seen, when approaching non-Muslims - either during a street collection or in a charity dinner - Islamic Relief would present itself as a humanitarian organization, rather than a religious one; when religion is touched upon in these presentations, it is only to highlight that the values inspiring the organization's' actions are the same values of Catholicism or of other religions. Great emphasis is put on the fact that Islamic Relief offers aid to, and also employs, "non-Muslims too". As I already partly pointed out in the previous sections, this generates a paradox: in these discourses, the acceptance of Islamic Relief – and of Muslims in general – is pursued through arguments that devitalize, conceal or suppress the very Muslim component of the organization's (and of Muslims) identity. In other words, the presentation of Islamic Relief makes implicitly use of a "notwithstanding framing": *notwithstanding* the fact that we are Muslims, we hire non-Muslims; *notwithstanding* the fact that we are Muslims, we bring aid to non-Muslims; *notwithstanding* the fact that we are called 'Islamic Relief', our values are universalist and are very similar to yours. I interpret this framing as a result of the internalization of the external, negative depiction of Islam: the dominant discourse is internalized to the extent that, ironically, Islamic Relief's strategy encapsulates the idea that for Muslims to be recognized *qua* Muslims by Italians, their very Muslimness has to be denied. In these instances, Muslimness is thus relegated to the *background*.

It might be argued that, given the pervasiveness and the strength of the external discourse, this is the only manner for an organization such as Islamic Relief to be acknowledged and reach out successfully also to non-Muslims, outside its usual Muslim audience. However, as the Islamic Relief Worldwide officer that assisted in start-up of the Italian branch told me, the Italian office should not play the role of "apologetic Muslims" any more: "I want them to feel confident and proud!". However, this is not an easy step to take - and might even be true for Islamic Relief in general: as a member of the Islamic Relief Worldwide told me, it took her a while to be finally feel proud to say "*because* we are Muslims, we also help non-Muslims" and to abandon the formula "we are Muslims, *but* we also help non-Muslims".

Therefore, for the Islamic Relief Italian office too it might be necessary to further build confidence and trust in order to change its self-presentation, going as far as shifting from a "notwithstanding framing" to a "because framing" and making claims like "*because* we are Muslims we bring aid to non-Muslims, *because* we are Muslims we are universalists, and so on. While presentations of the organization to Italian audiences described a "principle of humanity", dictating to aid everyone who is need, as rooted in all religion, no emphasis was put to what might be specific to Islam in this regard.

Hence, I would argue that this framing can be considered as a strategy and a tactic at the same time. It is a strategy from the perspective of volunteers, as it represents a further discourse that is conveyed to them. Indeed, for achieving the goal of gaining recognition form non-Muslims, volunteers are deemed crucial: a significant "investment" is made on them, as they are tasked to provide a positive image of the organization - and by extensions of Muslims - through their work. Street collections are emblematic in this regard: as we have seen above, volunteers are trained about what to say and how to behave when dealing with non-Muslims. In order to "leave a good impression" of the organization, they have to de-emphasize the Muslim component, and focus on the purely humanitarian, universalistic principles that guide its action, by saying that it also addresses non-Muslims. But there is more to that. As a former volunteer told me, "Islamic Relief equips you with the tools to answer back these negative comments we receive… they give you the arguments, the right attitude… you grow up a lot this way" (Ramy, 25 years old, Turin). Indeed, as was confirmed by two staff members, providing volunteers with this sort of "equipment" is not merely perceived as instrumental to the promotion of the organization's brand; on the contrary, Islamic Relief genuinely wants to empower its volunteers, above and beyond their role in the organization.

However, from the point of view of the organization's relation to the "external discourse", this approach is more of a tactical nature, because it does not disrupt the external discourse's strategy. Whilst it still represents a way for Islamic Relief to "score a point" and get to be appreciated and acknowledged, it does not contest or deconstruct the master logic of the external discourse, according to which, in order to be accepted, Muslims cannot show they are Muslim. This produces a peculiar form of visibility, to use Jeldtoft's categories (2011; 2013 – see also Chapter I, par. 4 and Chapter II, par. 1): the process of visibilization that Islamic Relief is going through in Italy - i.e. gaining recognition as Muslims – is ironically pursued through a sort of invisibilization of the Muslim component of the organization's identity – which nonetheless permeates all its spheres of action, as was illustrated in the previous section. This is different form the forms of visibility identified by Jeldtoft, according to whom Muslims are made visible, and make themselves visible in turn, either through a narrative of antagonism or through a narrative of victimhood: Islamic Relief seeks neither to position itself as an antagonist, nor as a victim. While it certainly falls prey to the external discourse's strategy, it tactically - and successfully - plays on the invisibilization of its Muslimness in order to gain visibility as a Muslim organization.

What is now interesting to observe is how these two sets of discourses conveyed by and within the organization - one concerning the "strategic religion" it promotes, the other regarding the attitude to adopt vis-à-vis the Italian public – are lived and understood by its members. As pointed out in Chapter II, an organization can both represent a resource and an obstacle; there might be distance between religious discourses officially imparted and members' actual practices. We will explore these aspects in Chapter V and VI respectively, in a comparative perspective, analyzing also the experiences of "non-organized" youths of Muslim heritage, in the attempt to appreciate the role played by membership in an organization in shaping everyday lived religion and self-identification processes as opposed to lack of such a membership.

PART V

EXPERIENCES OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL DISCOURSES
ABOUT ISLAM

Chapter 9
RELIGIOUS REFLEXIVITY IN THE EVERYDAY. CHALLENGING THE INTERNAL DISCOURSE?

In the preceding Chapters, I have described the different "strategies" to which youths of Muslim origin are exposed – that of an ambient external negative discourse, which affects all of these youths indistinctively – and the discourses forged by an organization such as Islamic Relief, which concerns its members. Furthermore, as explained in Chapter 3, both those who are inside a religious organization and those who are outside also have to deal with the many "voices" of an internal discourse, in which different conceptualizations of "the good Muslim" are put forward. Whilst Islamic Relief's members certainly find themselves more exposed to one of the voices "speaking" within such discourse – that of the organization and of its orthodoxy – they are, just as their non-organized peers, also inserted in the wider "arena" of the religious internal discourse. As anticipated in Chapter 3, the everyday lived religion of these youths takes shape against the background formed by the intertwining strategies of internal and external sets of discourses.

In the present Chapter, I will present and analyze how Muslims' descendants experience and appropriate religious orthodoxy and normativity in their daily lives, seeking to trace whether and how religious norms and tenets are differently understood by people who engage in a religious organization in more or less active manners, and people who are not interested in what a religious organization might offer. My goal is not to build a typology building on degrees of practice ("more practicing" or "less observant" Muslims), or on degrees of "literalism" in interpreting religious norms ("more conservative" or "more progressive" Muslims); rather, I attempt to analyze the manners in which the religious "grand scheme" – i.e. religious orthodoxy and normativity – is referred to and experienced by these youths.

In particular, I will expose examples of the different ways religious normativity is consciously adhered to and may "naturally" manifest itself in individuals' practices and narratives (paragraph 1), or appears to be "reflexively" appropriated and engaged with in ways that can be more implicit (paragraph 2) or explicit (paragraph 3). In so doing, I bear in mind the role of internal and external discourses and attempt to identify possible tactical enactments against these strategies, while assessing the difference that membership in an organization can make.

Across the youths who took part in the present research, the "strength" of the religious grand scheme and of religious orthodoxy is variably observable at both the level of what I define "*norm*-al" – i.e. routine, unreflected actions - and at the level of implicit and explicit forms of what we can define a "religious reflexivity". However, as we will see, for some of them, critical engagement with normativity takes a peculiar form, which leads to distinguish between religious prescriptions or conceptualizations, and expectations expressed, or impositions exerted, by "the community".

On the basis of the analysis conducted, I will then flesh out the concept of "religious reflexivity", which appears particularly suitable to grasp the meaning and consequences of the often fluctuating or doubtful enactment of religious practices. This allows to conclude the Chapter by appraising the lessons that can be drawn from this analysis, regarding the "making" of religion in the everyday.

1. Adhering to religious tenets and normativity

A classic example of the adhesion to religious tenets and moral norms is the respect of the obligation to wear the hijab or to avoid alcoholic beverages. Amalia inscribes the duty to abide by these rules in the reminder that God is rigorous and exigent, and Muslims cannot freely "choose" what rules to respect thinking that they will eventually be forgiven for their sins:

> The veil is an obligation, that is very well written in the Quran … then one is free to do what one wants, but let's not be hypocritical, don't tell me it's not written in the Quran… like alcohol: one cannot accept a job where you have to handle alcohol [in bars, restaurants], because that is prohibited: if one does accept, and say that he had no choice but accepting, then he is hypocritical! And let's not just say that God will forgive us all if we commit sins because God is merciful and so on and so forth… We Muslims keep repeating that God is mercy, which is true, but we forget that God is also very exigent, and we are bound to the respect of our principles, and we have to commit ourselves… (Amalia, 22 years old, Turin, Islamic Relief member).

For her, there are no possible "good excuses". However, at the same time, she explains that

> We [members of GMI and Islamic Relief] are criticized a lot by other Muslims because we try to get less 'good Muslims' involved… well but it's our mission, right? It would be too easy to just pick 'the best' [the most practicing and observant ones]… Actually, the challenge is to go pick the less religious because they need religion the most! […] Often these people [the 'less good Muslims] 'don't know much about religious norms: maybe their parents pray just for routine, and did not teach them much about religion. So, they smoke, drink and so on. Or, as it happened to me, they don't know that girls and boys are not supposed to hug and have physical contact when greeting each other… but at the beginning the don't know about these things? So, what should we do, exclude them? No, it's wrong, because you miss the chance to teach them… For instance, we all went skiing recently, we always organize a day of skiing at least once a year, and I had a problem with one of my boots, I couldn't take it off… and one of the guys that were there immediately came to help me, took my foot and pulled the boot… he is not supposed to do such things but what could I tell him in that very moment? Should I have pushed him away? It would have been rude and he would have not understood. On the contrary, it's better to explain him politely, after some time, that I prefer not to be hugged and not to have contacts and that this is in our religion, and there are good reasons for that… because every rule has a reason and if you explain that if you start by greeting people with hugs, then other things may follow, then people understand the reason of the norm… Same with another girl who came to one of our meetings with a cake because it was her birthday: we Muslims don't celebrate birthdays, but what could I do? Smash the cake in her face? Of course not! You accept it and then, in a different moment, patiently explain that we do not celebrate birthdays… (Amalia, 22 years old, Turin, Islamic Relief member).

While strictly adhering to her understanding of religious norms, Amalia makes room for other people's "mistakes" and tries to strike a balance between the observance of these rules, their imposition to others and the need to welcome "less religious" people in the organization, who are not so much knowledgeable about religious prescriptions – *despite* the harsh criticism that her organization receives for this move. Arguably, this criticism can be considered a manifestation of the "internal discourse" which sees Muslims holding other Muslims accountable for what they do, i.e. a strategy against which Amalia and her fellow members respond with a tactic, enabling for the accommodation of less religious people in the organization for pursuing the superior aim of educating them about religion, which, in turn, represents another strategy, as discussed in Chapter 8.

Islamic Relief's strategy to put Muslimness in the foreground when addressing the Muslim community as well as its members and volunteers seems to "pay off", as it yields effects on the religious behaviors of its members. Some would adopt certain routine practices that, even if they do not represent the enactment of religious values, certainly belong to the "pool of elements" (Barylo 2017 - see Chapter 3, par. 1) that remind of the presence of a religious grand scheme. For example, Salima has incorporated the typical greeting formula "Assalamu alaykum" in her habitus:

> GIULIA: I noticed that you usually tell each other "Assalamu alaykum" when you meet…
> SALIMA: Oh yes! Well, now that you make me think of it… I did not use to say "Assalamu alaykum" to other Arabs before… that's true! I started when I joined Islamic Relief! I did not realize! (Salima, 24 years old, Turin).

The practice of greeting others in Arabic was taken on by Salima to the extent that it had become an unreflected component of her embodied dispositions, which the attendance of Islamic Relief contributes to shape. Although this not directly points to routine ethical thinking influenced by religious normativity, it arguably strengthens the individual predispositions towards the adhesion to a religiously-informed sense of morality.

Another young woman told me that she started wearing the hijab after becoming a volunteer, and then a staff member, of Islamic Relief:

> I always thought I would wear it at some point in my life, but I relegated it to a far future… Instead, through my experience at Islamic Relief, I built the confidence, I felt convinced: the other girls from the staff, that now are my best friends, kept encouraging me, until I started! And I like it very much: there are many ways of wearing it, and I like the fact that I can change every day, according to my mood, my clothes… (Sahar, 24 years old, Turin, Islamic Relief staff member).

Furthermore, a number of interviewees – all of them young men - declared that Islamic Relief was helping them "revert to" religion (Schimdt 2004):

> I started learning more, getting info on the internet, reading the Quran… actually listening to the Quran more than reading, because it is easier to follow… I use this app, it is very convenient [Muslim Pro[1]]… And Islamic Relief is a way to get to know more about Islam, I'm learning a lot, and there are people like me… I wasn't so religious, you know I was a teenager, I want to be the rebel, against my parents and everything, but now actually rediscovered religion and this makes me happy (Rachid, 20 years old, Milan, Islamic Relief volunteer).

> Islamic Relief is a very good thing… I cannot attend their events now because I work, but they are very good. They helped me a lot, because now I pray, and go to the mosque, which I didn't do before, and it is also thanks to things like Islamic Relief… And it is important because now I understand who I am, it gives me positivity, it gives me a direction… as we say, I returned to Islam (Seif, 23 years old, Turin).

> I was not so religious until a few years ago... I liked rap music, I wore my hat as a rapper all the time... Then, when I started studying and working at the same time, I also rediscovered religion, which helped me a lot. I often go the mosque that is close to the factory where I work. And when I

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[1] "Muslim Pro" is an app containing the Quran in Arabic, its transliteration, a number of translations in different languages, a recorded version, as well as prayer times and the call to prayer. It is extremely widespread among Muslims: the majority of my sample components – be them organized or non-organized youths – had it on their smartphones.

started practicing Islam, I also took part in initiatives that were related to Islam that looked interesting to me, like Islamic Relief, because I think it is important that we do our share as Muslims, that we do good, positive things like charity... and Islamic Relief gives you the possibility to do so, and the people of the group are really good and it's nice to meet other people who are religious like you (Bilal, 23 years old, Turin).

They are all in the phase of discovery of religious orthodoxy and inevitably tend to uncritically adhere to its prescriptions. While Seif and Bilal rely more on the mosque and the imam for learning about religious contents, Rachid consults many different websites and Facebook pages, trying to navigate among the many "voices" that act as purveyors of an Islamic doxa: "there is so much to know about how to do things right!".

In other cases, taking part in Islamic Relief as a volunteer obliges people to "behave properly", especially when it comes to norms regarding gender relations, clothing, restrictions concerning smoke, etc., as we have seen in the previous Chapter. This leads some to adopt different behaviors depending on the context: outside of the organization's context they "allow" themselves to act in certain ways, while they abide by the organization's rules when they participate in its activities. The cases of Mahdy and Francesco are illustrative of these "situational" behaviors:

> I know that this maybe not right, but I behave differently with Italian girls and with Arab girls.[2] I had affairs and sentimental relationships with Italian girls, with whom I would do practically everything, you know what I mean... On the contrary with Arab girls one has to be much more careful... I think you've seen this right? At Islamic Relief meetings, you must have seen that we do not have physical contact etcetera, I think you noticed... But even my Arab friends [youths of Muslim origin grown up or born in Italy like him], who are not shy at all with Italian girls, when it comes to dealing with Arab girls, they are frozen: we all become immediately shy, there is like a barrier... because it's different among Arabs... you cannot act as a stupid in their presence. And if you like one, you have to be serious, you cannot just have fun with her, you must be committed (Mahdy, 25 years old, Turin).

> FRANCESCO: Those [Islamic Relief people] are really good guys... the vast majority of them are really good, really pious, and they do great things... but there are also some people who take part in events and claim to be "good Muslims" and are not, but these are exceptions.
> GIULIA: What do you mean by "claim to be good Muslims"?
> FRANCESCO: Like girls that wear the veil but then... you know... post these kinds of pictures on Facebook [showing me the pictures of an Islamic Relief volunteer posing in what he considered to be a seductive pose], you see? I mean, come on, you cannot behave like that and then tell me you are religious and wear the hijab and everything... I am not so religious, even if I am improving, but at least I am not hypocritical, I do not pretend to be religious...
> GIULIA: When you say that you are improving, what do you mean?
> FRANCESCO: I recently did the small pilgrimage [Uhmrah] to Mecca and since then I am improving... since then I have refrained from having occasional sex, and I am reducing cigarettes... and you know what? I feel better, I see that I feel better inside, that all of this is good for me. Well, with cigarettes... I still have a long way to go! [laughing]
> GIULIA: But do your friends from Islamic Relief know that you smoke?
> FRANCESCO: Yes, they know, they know. But when I go to Islamic Relief events, I don't smoke there of course. But I am always happy to go and give a hand, I've always been happy to help... they know

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[2] As explained in Chapter IV, "Arab" is often used as an identifier of Muslims as opposed to "Italians", which is used to generally refer to non-Muslims.

> I am kind and I like them... I have many friends there, some are like my little brothers (Francesco, 28 years old, Milan).

Francesco and Mahdy situationally adopt different behaviors, in line with religious prescriptions, in the context of Islamic Relief activities. However, this is not merely instrumental to being accepted in the group of volunteers, as they both subscribe to the sets of rules that concern gender relations or abstention form smoking: they display difficulties in enacting those norms, but they think they are correct. The will to quit smoking demonstrates that religious normativity is adhered to, "as I feel better inside" - although it is not completely enacted yet. This points to the realm of difficulties and ambiguities that one can find in respecting religious tenets in everyday practice, but also to the pragmatic personal accommodations and variations that can be found also among the members of a religious group.

In other instances, however, the transmission of religious normativity reveals to be slightly more unsuccessful. As we have seen in Chapters 6 and 8, a fundamental value – or pillar – of Islamic Relief's "organizational culture" is that of the "intention", or the sincerity, with which charitable actions are conducted. This principle is one of the five values of the organizations' Islam-inspired values – along with excellence, compassion, social justice and custodianship (that they are five in number is arguably meant to echo the five pillars of Islam). However, it is also an essential religious tenet, according to which every action (not just the religious-related ones) must be done with the right intention. As was illustrated in Chapter 8, Rasha, as well as the Italian coordinator of volunteers, attach strong meanings to this value, which they continuously reflect upon and consciously interiorize. Ironically, though, it often occurred that Islamic Relief volunteers could not recall all of the five values of the organization, at least in the context of the interviews I conducted - typically forgetting "compassion" and "excellence", and sometimes that of "social justice". Individuals were more likely to remember the value of "intention" because it is one of the most basic principles in Islam – thus demonstrating that not all the religious discourses mediated and promoted by a religious organization are interiorized by its members or are reflected in their practices.

Islamic Relief members would also hold diverging understandings of the same concepts. For instance, Moosa and Sahar, two staff members, conceive of "believing", of "practicing" quite differently:

> I was with some scouts from AGESCI [the Italian Catholic scout association], so we are talking about Catholic people, and I could notice that there is a huge, neat gap between young Muslims and young Christians with regards to faith, but actually more in terms of practice, things like "I am a practicing Christian" or "I am Christian but do not practice". This does not exist for us. For us, if you are Muslim, you practice; it does not exist the "non-practicing Muslim". [...] if you are Muslim, you have to follow the five pillars; if you are Muslim, you have to do the five prayers; if you are Muslim, you have to fast; if you are Muslim, you have to respect the other; if you are Muslim, you have to be virgin when you get married; if you are Muslim.. it's all these things. For us something like "if you want, you can pray" cannot be, because you have to pray, it's not that you can choose. And the vocation to volunteer and do good, for me it is a religious mission, a religious duty. [...] I was educated this way, you understand? In the Quran there is a verse that goes "none of you is a true believer until he does not desire for the other what he desires for himself". And this is the bottom line in faith, can you imagine! When people tell me that the holy war comes from religion... they are ignorant (Moosa, 26 years old, Milan, Islamic Relief staff member).

> I often heard some of my Christian friends say things like "I believe, but do not practice". We Muslims don't really have this distinction because being Muslim.. well you demonstrate it to yourself first and foremost, through your actions.. being practicing does not necessarily mean

praying all the five times during the day or wearing the hijab or fasting during Ramadan and all of this sort of things, but emerges from your tiny actions, like doing some good, smiling, behaving politely, all of these small things. So, it is obvious that each one lives his own religiosity in his own way, and this is why there are many variations in our religion [...] then there are people that think that if you do not wear the veil or skip a prayer you are not a Muslim, but this is completely wrong! Because in our religion there are no intermediaries between yourself and God, it's a direct relationship, so it's just you and God that know what you did and what parts of religion you respected or not. No one has the right to judge or to tell you that you are not a good Muslim because you do not wear the veil... this is living or understanding religion in the wrong way, in an extremist way (Sahar, 23 years old, Turin, Islamic Relief staff member).

Both explain that "doing good" is a religious moral duty- and therefore display the same understanding of religious normativity with regards to volunteering or doing charitable actions. Both think that there cannot be any such thing as non-practicing faithful in Islam, and both adhere to how each of them individually understands orthodoxy and normativity. However, they have rather diverging conceptions of what it means to practice religion: while Moosa emphasizes, also through the efficacious use of the anaphora "if you are Muslim...", that practicing means respecting all the five pillars, Sahar thinks that even small actions such as doing some good, smiling, be polite already means translating Muslimness into practice. Contrary to Moosa, she allows for variations in personal religiosity among Muslims, as she underlines that being Muslims does not necessarily entail the respect of the five pillars or donning the hijab – about which she reports an interesting example of how Muslims' internal discourses hold other Muslims accountable for what they do (or do not do).

Interestingly, Sahar's conception of practice is very close to the one held by a young woman from Milan who does not belong to any religious organization:

> You know what? At the end of the day many things are reflected in social life, many characteristics of the good Muslim concern things that also a non-Muslim should do, like respecting the others, being polite [...] because religion is not just about the relationship between you and God, but it also concerns how you behave with the others, how you relate to the others (Sofia, 26 years old, Milan).

Sofia displays a "relational" conception of religious practice: behaving religiously means relating to others with respect and kindness, and this concerns us all, and not only Muslims. For both Sahar and Sofia, religion represents an ethical referent that applies to how people should relate to others and which prescribes to "behave politely". In this sense, religious normativity manifests itself in the realm of a person' daily "ordinary ethics" - the unreflected, automatic, quotidian acting that makes up our habitus of embodied dispositions towards the world.

Leila describes other actions that are "automatic" for her: indeed, they are "*norm*-al", as they are informed by a religious *norm* – i.e. a religious *normativity* - that is taken for granted:

> Every evening, before sleeping, I just recite that "Allah is the only God and Muhammad is his Prophet". This is a phrase that we always say before sleeping: if you say this, and then you die, in theory – they say – the gates of Paradise will be open to you. This is something I was taught as a small girl and that I got used to. It really is natural for me: I don't have to remember to say this phrase, it just comes automatically. Like saying "thank you" to God before eating and after eating, for having been able to eat. I was taught these things when I was a child: they are automatic for me. (Leila, 29 years old, Turin).

The *norm*-ality of Leila's actions is all the more interesting and significant, as she declares to not "know much" about Islam and to not be interested in practicing her religion at the moment.

Other instances of uncritical adhesion to religious principles concern the choice to wear the hijab. However, the following examples show that different meanings may be attached to this practice by different young women – which, surprisingly, do not refer first and foremost to religion *qua talis* when giving their reasons for the veil. For instance, Mariam is extremely passionate about modest fashion and has an Instagram page where she posts pictures of herself with various combination of veils, colors, clothes and accessories – like a fashion blog – followed by 13.000 people:

> I wanted to wear the hijab since I was a kid: I remember that I wanted it already when I was at the elementary school, but my mother prevented me from wearing it because she feared the criticism of the mothers of the other kids or of the school teachers. So, I started when I was at the middle school... but because I liked it too much! I liked to see my mother wearing it, and I liked to see other women making all the matches, with accessories, and colors, and I was like "it's so much fun! I wanted to do that too!", but I was too young, I could not understand the meaning, and my schoolmates kept asking me 'Why do you wear it'? and I didn't know what to reply. So I surfed the internet, until I found answers that satisfied me, that I understood. [...] I cannot of think of getting out without the veil, it would be as if I got out in the street naked... I don't understand why, but it has become a part of me. [...] For me the veil is manifestation of decency and modesty. It does not mean that those who do not wear it are not modest or decent, but it is a manifestation of modesty. Not wearing it is a sin as drinking or as eating pork... well actually there are worse sins that this, but still. Anyways it expresses modesty, and anyhow it serves to protect you from the others' gazes... even if actually the Arabs in Egypt, or Arabs here in Italy verbally harass you [...] we have to bear in mind that when the Quran descended, it was a very old epoch, in which covering the head was important because it protected you. Nowadays it still protects you, but not so much actually... however I wear it for this reason. And for fashion too, because I like it so much! (Mariam, 22 years old, Milan, Islamic Relief volunteer).

Mariam's story shows the extent to which the veil represents an automatic, natural, *norm*al embodied disposition, since she was a child, to the extent that not wearing would be like "being naked". The very fact that she was interested in wearing the hijab as a child demonstrates how the veil is part of her habitus and of her vision of the world. For her, wearing the veil is so "*norm*-al" insofar as it is influenced by religious *normativity* in a self-explanatory and taken-for-granted way. This example shows how the presence of religious normativity in a persons' everyday life may be observed in the religiously-informed ethical behaving embedded in individuals' non-reflected, "natural", "obvious" performance of practices. This represents one level at which the influence of a religious grand scheme can be appreciated in people's lives.

At the same time, the force of the external discourse, represented by her schoolmates who question her, obliges her to reflect on the previously automatic, natural choices she had made up until that moment: that the veil is associated to religion and of the cultural ambience she grew up in is so much taken for granted, that she has to look for "ex post facto" explanations that motivate why the veil has to be worn – usually, explanations of this kind are sought for by girls and women who are doubtful about starting to wear it and need arguments. However, the result of these "ex post facto" rationalizations leads her to motivate her choice not in sacralized terms: while modesty is certainly a religious value, she never refers to the veil as a symbol of personal devotion to God, as many other women who wear it do. In her explanation, she indulges much more on gender relations and on the

veil's shielding function from males' harassment – even if this leads her to fall into a contradiction, as she acknowledges that sexual harassment occurs anyways, despite the veil. The component represented by amusement and fashion also plays an eminent role in her choice: paradoxically, her adhesion to religious normativity ends up not being chiefly framed in religious terms.

This occurs also in the other instances that concern two young women who are not involved – and manifestly declare to not be interested – in religious organizations. Alessandra started wearing the veil at the age of 15, and she describes her decision in these terms:

> I don't know why but when I was 14-15, boys liked me a lot, they liked my physical appearance. And I was embarrassed, and I wanted to challenge them… because it's true, it makes a lot of difference to see or not to see the hair in terms of physical attraction! So I felt like, you know, I wanted to see if they liked me anyways and I wanted to test them, and see if they would dare to come tell me anything. I remember that I sat with my father and we talked about this for long, because he wanted to make sure that I was convinced about this choice and wanted me to motivate it (Alessandra, 24 years old, Milan)

For her, the hijab can be said to have represented an empowering tool in order to counter annoying undue attentions: she made use of a religious prescription in a purely tactical form, adding her own meaning to this practice, thus appropriating it in her own terms, while indirectly addressing the strategy of the external discourse which would "prefer" that Muslim girls did not veil. On a side note, the role of the father in her story shows that not all Muslim immigrant families are characterized by conservative, controlling parents that limit the freedom of their daughters, contrary to common stereotypes.

Hamida, too, tactically uses the veil – albeit in a different way. She is a strong advocate of the right of women and a vehement contester of patriarchal structures, both in Western cultures – although she does not belong to any feminist or women's rights movement. For her too, the veil was initially an automatic, obvious component of her habitus, but over time it has come to represent a tool to challenge misconceptions about Muslim women's emancipation:

> I'm not so practicing but I wanted to start wearing the veil as child, I liked how it looked, I had my mother as a model […] the veil to me is important, because for me it is a way of saying 'Hey! Take a look at me: I am a Muslim and wear the veil, but I can do many things! (Hamida, 22 years old, Turin)

None of the three, however, seems to sacralize her hijab: whilst they take for granted that it is a religiously-informed practice, that "it is in Islam", their adhesion to prescriptions of the religious "grand scheme" are not framed first and foremost in religious terms.

2. Doubts, difficulties, uncertainties in enacting religious normativity

A significant number of my informants take what we could define "reflexive stances" about religion in different forms. One of the most recurring is to acknowledge one's own imperfections and mistakes in enacting religious prescriptions. Sofia, whom was already quoted above, recognizes that

> Let's say that I care about it [practicing religion], more than actually practicing. […]. I should improve, live everybody should. Let's say that I commit sins. But I try to do my best. Obviously, I am not really a faithful, but I care about it. Whenever I can, I try to… (Sofia, 26 years old, Milan)

Similar affirmations are made about the wearing of the veil about the same young women quoted above:

> The veil has to cover the entire neck and no hair should be visible, and I respect this. Obviously, I do not literally follow all what is written in the Quran, I do not wear very large clothes, but I try to do what I can, I do my best (Mariam, 22 years old, Milan, Islamic Relief volunteer).

> I wear it and I really care about it even if I know that I do not wear exactly the way it should be worn [showing me that her hijab should have covered her neck more, and that the earrings are not allowed in principle]. Very often I wear it as turban, although the entire neck is not covered. I'm used to making it as a turban when I look for occasional jobs, otherwise I would not be hired due to the veil. But it also really depends on my mood when I wake up. I do what I can, nobody is perfect (Alessandra, 24 years old, Milan)

> I care a lot about my hijab, even if I do not wear it the most correct way… But I don't care, I'm happy anyways (Hamida, 22 years old, Turin)

These acknowledgements prove the extent to which the religious grand scheme is perceived as the ideal of perfection, on one hand, and as something that can hardly be achieved due to its very perfection, on the other hand: ordinary believers can just "do their best" in accommodating this grand scheme with other schemes that they feel almost as important. Mariam does not "obviously" wear large clothes, otherwise she would not be able to "play" with fashion in wearing the hijab and in posting its outfits on her Instagram account. Alessandra needs to accommodate donning the hijab with finding seasonal, part time jobs; Hamida wears it in the way she feels like, without paying attention to details.

Therefore, just as the strength of the religious grand scheme manifests itself in "*norm*-al", routine, "natural" acting, it can also be observed in the doubts, uncertainties, ambiguities and discrepancies that people express or embody in the face of a grand scheme, which appears to be entrusted with a sort of independent existence and perceived as an ideal of perfection. The ability to contain contradictions, or the selective - even paradoxical - use of normativity that results from navigating the complexities of life and from being pressured by other, equally important, grand schemes (such as the need to find part-time jobs) actually represent ways of engaging with normativity and to exert forms of "religious reflexivity" (Højbjerg 2002; Schielke & Debevec 2012).

Moufida would really want to build the necessary confidence and start wearing it, but she has been struggling for a long time:

> My objective is really to finally wear the hijab […] It's not obligatory… but it's a sin not to wear it, I have been told that I have to wear it.. I've been told than on the judgement day we will be judged for wearing or not wearing it I've been thinking about this for five years now.. I had started donning it but then I did an internship in a hotel, and then in a travel agency, and they did not want me to wear the veil, so I kept taking it off and resuming wearing it. But my mother told me 'either you wear it or not, otherwise the people [other persons of the community] will think that you are not being serious, that you are playing with the veil'. So I stopped wearing it. But I started thinking about it again after joining Islamic Relief […] when I take part in Islamic Relief events or meetings I feel too

embarrassed.. all the girls there wear the veil.. too embarrassing not to have it. And my family has started telling me.. 'you should wear it now'. […] After the Islamic Relief camp [described in Chapter IV], I said to myself 'This Ramadan I will start wearing the veil' [she eventually did not succeed in this, as she told me in subsequent exchanges]. (Moufida, 19 years old, Turin, Islamic Relief member).

Moufida's story contains contradictory elements – "it's not obligatory but I have to wear it" – and shows the strength of both internal discourses – mediated by the family, the community and by the group of peers of Islamic Relief – as well as of external discourses, represented by the workplaces where she was asked to take it off. Her story also reveals just how painful it is for her to be finally able to wear it: she feels the pressure to conformism from the group of peers - "every girl wears it, it is embarrassing" – and she also feels pressured by her family. Probably due to her young age, she is struggling in finding her own way to decide for herself and to affirm her self-determination.

In a vein similar to Moufida's, Sabrina experienced the "workings" of social control and of group pressure in volunteering for Islamic Relief. Whilst she enormously values the benefits of volunteering with this organization, she realized that it was "absorbing" too much of her life when she was about to start wearing the hijab:

> You know I was about to wear the veil after one year that I had been so active in Islamic Relief, and I was so happy about it… you know the majority of girls wears the hijab there and I felt that I had to… And my girlfriends were encouraging me and would tell me "yes wear it, wear it!"… I had even bought some veils, and had been trying them on in front of the mirror and was training on how to best wear it… One day I was finally ready to go out with the veil, but my mom, who wears the veil, stopped me, because she understood that I was doing it for the others and not for me, not out of real conviction… and now in retrospect I am grateful to my mom because she made me reason and I realized I was not ready (Sabrina, 23 years old, Milan, Islamic Relief volunteer).

For both Sabrina and Moufida Islamic Relief is a great source of gratification, but at the same, it arguably works (or worked) as an obstacle, or a constraint, for their self-determination: they do not enthusiastically embrace the religious orthodoxy promoted by Islamic Relief in an unproblematic way. On the contrary, in both cases the relationship with religious normativity – as mediated by Islamic Relief and its members – generates an inner conflict, is a source of self-doubt, causing sorrow (especially for Moufida). Unexpectedly, Sabrina could elude the (unwitting) strategy of the "pressure to conformism" exerted by the group of her fellow volunteers of Islamic Relief thanks to her mother, who provided her with tactical resources that could make her reflect for herself. At the same time, the mother's realization that the daughter was not acting "seriously" enough, as she was about to wear the hijab "for the others" and not out of real conviction, conveys a further message to Sabrina as to how she should relate to religious normativity and to the actual meaning of religious predicaments.

Indeed, conducting a religious life might be difficult, but in the eyes of many religious actors such difficulties do not make religious normativity less valid – rather, acknowledging one's imperfections and ambivalences testifies to the force attributed to the grand scheme, which may be evoked pragmatically in the often-contradictory practice of morality – such as in the cases of Francesco and Mahdi who adopt "situational behaviors", quoted in the previous paragraph. It also shows that individuals are not merely passive recipients of religious norms: on the contrary, they can build "reflexive stances" towards religion – albeit implicitly, either in the forms of doubts, frustrations, dilemmas, struggles, pain, or in the forms of tactical adjustment and accommodations.

Whilst Islamic Relief arguably represents more a constraint than a resource for Moufida and Sabrina (although they would probably not depict it in these norms), Aasim would find reassurances and consolation in his group of friends from GMI and Islamic Relief:

> We all have difficulties, ups and downs in religion… it's normal… as young people, it's not always easy to be religious… but things like GMI and IR help you stay on track, on the right track… we all deviate at some point from the track, and then we come back… but it is thanks to a group of friends such as these that we can all improve, because we understand each other, and we all know that at some point each of us has his own moments of difficulty. So, we all help each other without being judgmental (Aasim, 23 years old, Milan, Islamic Relief volunteer).

For him, membership in these organizations provides significant resources for the conduct of a religiously-informed life – not so much in terms of religious content, but in terms of motivation, encouragement and mutual understanding coming from people who share similar experiences of difficulties and can support each other.

The "right track" he mentions points to another common trope found among both organized and non-organized, that concerns the perceived (social) desirability of the conduct of a pious life. Indeed, many interviewees would declare things of the sort "At some point I will finally get my head together", "One day I will behave", "I should quit smoking" and the like, referring to the difficulties they currently have in practicing their religion. Typically, these hoped-for changes in religious conduct are associated to significant life transitions – i.e. get married and have children, to whom one must be of example as a parent, also religiously. This is exemplary of the significance attributed to the religious grand scheme, which is referred to "make sense" of the imperfections of daily lives, and it also suggests that "behaving religiously" is something that these youths, except few exceptions, highly value, regardless of the level of practice and of the level of conservativeness of their religious vision.

There are numerous examples of this attitude among my informants; one of the most significant is that of Leila. She grew up with moderately practicing parents and with a "neo-orthodox" older brother, who has always exerted a strict control on her, both concerning her religious conduct and her behaviors as a young woman more generally – something which she has always painfully suffered. She got married at the age of 21 with a man of Moroccan origin, who exerted the same kind of scrutiny on her, preventing her from doing a number of things. She eventually got divorced from this person and could gain her personal and economic independence. As a result of these experiences, she equates religion to control and impositions – as the control and the restrictions she has been subjected to were framed in religious terms, especially by her older brother. Consequently, she distanced herself form the practice of religion and she is not interested in deepening her knowledge about religion at all – in fact, she once attended a meeting of a religious organization, but immediately stopped, as she felt that the religious message and orthodoxy conveyed by the organization was too much of a suffocating imposition (as her quote in paragraph 3 will show). Her parents try to encourage her to wear the veil and to learn how to pray, but she does not feel ready for none of the two things: for the moment, she perceives as too "demanding", as she maintains that the two have to be inevitably associated. Yet, she reserves the possibility to start adopting these behaviors to a moment in the future, or to later stage in life:

> One day, when I will feel ready, I will start praying… but for the moment no. I don't know how to read the Quran, I smoke, I don't wear the veil… these things are incompatible with praying. If one

starts, he has to start seriously. I don't feel ready yet, but maybe one day… (Leila, 29 years old, Turin).

Leila's words appear significant, as they come from someone who had a negative experience with religion and the way it was "imposed" to her. Arguably, other religions are not viewed as desirably and positively – especially in the West. It remains to be explored, however, whether such a positive consideration of the conduct of a religious life is the result of real personal convictions or it automatically, unreflectedly, naturally responds to taken-for-granted social expectations spread among people of Muslim origin.

3. Critically engaging with religious tenets… or with their imposition?

More explicit forms of what we can define "religious reflexivity" or "reflexive stances" towards religion may consist in a conscious critical engagement with normativity and orthodoxy, resulting in a more or less straightforward questioning of religious tenets. However, as Césari explains (2013 – see also Chapter 3) theological disputes about the very content of religious beliefs and tenets do not take place among Muslims, especially young ones; what is discussed is the correct performance of religious tenets or their translation into practice(s). Indeed, interviewees would not question or doubt the content of prescriptions or engage in theologically debating the meaning of the Scriptures: they do not criticize what religion imposes from a theological point of view; they would criticize, sometimes even harshly, what other Muslims would impose to do.

Let us consider some examples.

> I don't think we should put pressures on her… No girl should be pressured about wearing the veil, that is not nice, that is not ok… then she might feel like she's doing it just for us. […] We Muslims keep criticizing ourselves so much… we talk behind each other's backs… we are so judgmental about what persons do… we keep looking at each other… we complain that we are criticized [by majority society] but we are the first to criticize ourselves… like 'she did that, he did that'… (Mariam, 22 years old, Milan, Islamic Relief volunteer).

> You know, I'm so happy that many of us [Somalis] have migrated to other countries, because I feel the pressure less and less… you know… the bad looks because I don't wear the long abaya or long skirts… I mean I wear a pair of jeans but still I am modest, I am veiled, I cover my waist, I don't show my body… but they would look at you and go tell your mom this and that (Amal, 22 years old, Milan, Islamic Relief volunteer).

> Sometimes we do street collections and Muslim people would stop us and say "you are not veiled, you cannot call yourself Islamic"! it happened to me, until two years ago I did not wear the veil and sometimes I even got insulted because I was stopped to those ignorant Arabs who think that because you are Arab you have to wear the hijab necessarily, which is not true at all! They say things like 'you are not a Muslim because you don't wear the veil'. But they do not know that we are not a religious association, that we are not associated to mosques or stuff like that and we try to explain them… (Islamic Relief National coordinator of volunteers).

> When other Muslims tell me 'why don't you wear the veil', I always quote a proverb in Arabic which basically means that "it is my life and that it is only God that can judge us": I will regulate these things with him directly! (Paola, 20 years old, Milan).

Through these examples, these youths show to engage with criticism coming from within the Muslim community concerning the way they live religion and manifest it – by no coincidence, all these cases concern young women's clothing. Besides proving the existence of a gap between an older and a younger generation, these words demonstrate the strength of the "internal discourse" – representations of what a good Muslims should be, which are used by Muslims to hold other Muslims accountable for how they behave. In the last three examples, the protagonists respond with some tactical behavior: either by demonstrating one's modesty also through modern, "cool" clothing, or by explaining also to Muslims that Islamic Relief is not a religious organization (something which goes against the strategy enacted by Islamic Relief itself towards Muslims – see Chapter 8), or by resorting to forms of "popular" religious culture, that those who criticize should know themselves. Either way, all of these young women denounce, directly or indirectly, the internal discourse and its impositions on people's personal religiosity.

Some express this criticism towards such an internal discourse in conjunction with a negative perception of religious organizations:

> Many years ago I attended a couple of meetings of GMI [Giovani Musulmani d'Italia] but I really did not like the fact that they would tell you what you have to do... it was only rules, rules, rules... and I hate when people tell me what I have to do... I mean religion is already something difficult, if you only talk about rules, rules, rules, you don't make it lighter... and people like me escape from that (Leila, 29 years old, Turin).

> No, I don't like religious associations... I don't know them much but I don't want to be told what to do, I live my life as I like, I don't want other to tell me... once they asked me if I would join them to collect money for an association... total waste of time, I am not interested... my mother gives the *zaqat* privately, to those she knows are in need, we don't need an association to tell us whom to donate (Aadil, 23 years old, Turin).

> I really don't like associations ... I think that religion is something very intimate, each one lives it in its own way... so no, I am not interested in associations... (Alessandra, 23 years old, Milan)

As implied by Alessandra's words - "everyone lives it in its own way" - what is criticized in these examples is that respect of religious norms is presented and imposed by religious associations, in ways that would undermine intimate, personal religiosity.

We have already underlined that criticism addressing "impositions" and "expectations" conveyed by the community - and by extension, by an internal discourse - is conspicuously expressed by young women and concern their conditions as female believers:

> We were talking about the issue of infibulation, no? That it is a cultural practice, which has nothing to with religion, and so on. And obviously there is the connected issue of virginity... that we should be virgin when we marry... well yes ok but in the end this discourse always only to women, but for our religion also men should be virgin when they marry, and I don't understand why we [Muslims, the community] always imply that it is something that concerns only girls! (Mariam, 22 years old, Islamic Relief volunteer).

In so doing, a number of them explores the relationship between Islam and culture, or local traditions:

> Me and my uncle in Morocco always fight. Because he is extremely strict and obliges his wife and my cousins to wear the niqab, even at home! They do not wear it while he is away and then immediately run to put it on before his arrival, otherwise he gets angry… he is terrible, he really doesn't know anything about Islam, he gets it completely wrong! And since I wear the veil but I am free, and I always criticize how women are treated badly, not only in Morocco, but in general, he really dislikes me… […] The woman in Islam is not what you [people in the West] think! Because the prophet really respected women, he was fantastic with his wife if you read about his life! And if we really lived the way he lived with his wife, we women would not be subdued at all! But it's a cultural problem, not a religious one. If people really respected religion, there wouldn't be these problems for women! (Hamida, 22 years old, Turin).

> I was talking with a colleague of mine about a woman that was at the hospital and was asked to take off the veil for the medical visit, and the woman refused. These girls defended the woman, while I did not, because she was not committing any sin… […] One thing that disappoints me a lot is the fact that often tradition gets confused with religion. Things that were valid 1400 years ago cannot be simply valid today… […] In the Moroccan culture there are so many things that one should not do because otherwise people would say bad things about him, but this is due to ignorance… All of these habits in the end get confused with religion and I am sorry about that. Take my case: me and my sisters have always been perceived as good girls, and other Moroccans in the [Italian] town where we lived would say 'oh, yes, [name of her father]'s daughters are really good girls, if only they wore the veil' and I was sorry to hear that (Salwa, 27 years old, Milan, Islamic Relief staff member).

They all painfully feel the position of inferiority that women often are relegated to in Muslim-majority countries: although they do not experience it themselves, they are aware of it. Yet, they do not want to just "surrender" to the common widespread idea that "Islam is responsible" for that. Because they do care about their religion, they either want to know more about it – as in the case of Jameela, analyzed in Chapter 7 – or tactically resort to operating a distinction, or a separation, between religion and culture – Salwa, Hamida, and Mariam.

Through this tactic, they can "save religion" from the risk of being "blamed" as the culprit of the "submission" imposed to women. Yet, whilst such a separation may lead to a form of "deculturation of religion" in Roy's terms (2004 – see- Chapter 1), this does not mean neither seeking a neo-orthodox, "intransigent" Islam, purified from the parents' superstitions or non-Islamic practices, nor pursuing a meditative pious self-fulfillment, as theorized by Roy. It represents a way to "defend" both *religion* and *their own behaviors* – Hamida's criticism of the condition of women, Salwa's decision not to wear the veil – from impositions or negative remarks coming from other close Muslims – family members, family friends, people form the local community, etc. Making this distinction between religion and culture reveals an emancipatory empowering tactic for these women.

Ironically, Hamida, who wears the hijab, goes as far as saying that

> In Middle Eastern countries, like in Iraq, the piercing is not considered haram now. But in Morocco or in Algeria it is considered *makruh*, which means that it is not accepted culturally. But it is a cultural thing, not a religious one. And it is impossible to make my other understand it… I would really love to have one! (Hamida, 22 years old, Turin).

On the contrary, Randa – one of the portraits of Chapter 7- compounds religion and culture and eventually rejects this "compound" altogether. By defining her parents as "traditionalists" and describing her refusal to be subdued to the "weight of the community" by which she felt she was controlled, Randa does not "save religion" from "traditionalism" and expresses her rejection of both. She then describes her eventual success in "writing her own story", remote from the norms imposed by others – which makes for an example of post-modern authenticity, as we could see.

All of these forms of criticism, which can be found both among Islamic Relief volunteers or staff members and non-organized young people are illustrative of a certain reflexivity connected to religion: in most cases, it leads to not criticize religious tenets per se, but their wrong interpretation, or their imposition – especially with reference to what is felt as the permanent "gaze" of the "community", which seems to be always ready to judge Muslims, and young women in particular, for their behavior. In this sense, they represent a more or less tactical way to challenge internal discourses about expectations on how the good Muslim should look like, and enable personal definitions of what should being religious means. Contrary to expectations, this form of reflexivity is displayed not only by less observing Muslims, but also by very pious and devout ones: the above-presented quotes come from both veiled and non-veiled young women, from more practicing to less practicing, from organized and non-organized.

4. What relationship can there be with religious "grand schemes"? Religious reflexivity and the strength of normativity

As explained in the introductory Chapters, the "everyday lived religion" research stance is animated by the interest to look both at the very personalized and syncretic expressions of religiosity appearing in Western societies nowadays, and at the multiple manners in which people might still somehow relate to grand schemes. With reference to this second point - and in connection with the object of study of the present research, i.e. the everyday relation with Islam - the analysis of this empirical material allows to flesh out the ways youths of Muslim origin build their relationship with Islam's grand schemes and moral framework. The study of the above-commented cases allows to respond to questions such as: in what ways may religious normativity impinge on individuals? Alternatively, how may it be referred to or treated by individuals? How wide can be the gap between the narrative of the grand scheme and the way people actually live (by) it, and what's inside it?

The evaluation of the examples described in the present Chapter shows that religious normativity may manifest itself in at least three ways – or at three different levels – which can all perfectly coexist. As we could see, a first kind of expression of religious normativity's embeddedness or "immanence" in the everyday is represented by how it can be expressed in spontaneous, sincere, unreflected ways. Lambek (2010) and Sunier (2015) use the concept of "ordinary ethics" to illustrate how ethics is not a separate field of human action: on the contrary, ethical thinking is deeply embedded in the realm of everyday common-sense distinctions we make, albeit often in a non-reflected manner. Ethical acting is not compartmentalized in a "specific register" but informs our quotidian acting. In a Bourdieuian perspective, non-deliberative ordinary ethics constitutes an important part of the embodied dispositions towards the world that make up our habitus. We translate those dispositions into practice in un-reflected ways, because they operate as preconscious or automatic habits informed by a vision of the world that seems "natural" to the subject, true to him/herself. This is not the same as saying that

such actions are unintentional; it simply means that the reason why individuals act in particular ways is taken-for-granted, obvious or not so much thought of.

It is precisely in observing how much of that unreflectedness plays out in ordinary actions that it seems possible to grasp the extent to which normativity - and specifically the religious one - unfolds in daily practices. It is literally in seeing how *norm*-al are some actions to a person, that we have the chance to appreciate the role of *norm*ativity in shaping that non-deliberative ethics of which his/her habitus is made up of. One could make the argument that it is precisely because actions develop unreflectedly, that they have a normative nature or reflect some degree of normativity. For research purposes, this means assessing how much of people's "unreflected intentionality" is prompted by normativity. As we could see in the analysis conducted in the present Chapter, this is all the appropriate in the case of Islam, a religion holding a peculiar performative character (see Chapter 3 about this point): the performance of practices offers a standpoint from which we can recognize the expression or influence of religious normativity, appreciating the manners in which Islamic references are tapped into. Indeed, the cases herein considered show how adhesion to religious tenets is reflected in automatic behaviours, which I define "*norm*-al", insofar as they mirror what is (deemed to be) prescribed by the religious *norm* – from the performance of "little prayers", to donning the hijab, or greeting other people "Islamically", and so on.

However, this represents just a first level that makes up for only a part of our daily lives. People are not simply automatons that behave in a "culturally programmed" manner. Indeed, when resorting to culturally or religiously encoded "ways of doing", they might engage in different ways with the normativity lying behind them, as people's relation to a religious grand scheme or normativity is made, more often than not, of pragmatical adjustments and accommodations, or even ambiguities, uncertainties, contradictions and doubts. As Schielke and Debevec (2012:1-8) clearly explain, the force of religious grand schemes lies in the sort of "independent existence" they are entrusted with, as a perfectionist ideal: they can be so powerful because believers locate them "above", granting them the purity and certainty that life can never have. This allows individuals to evoke such religion "to navigate the complexities of life" (Schielke & Debevec 2012: 10), which means that people might make use of religious normativity selectively, or in contradictory ways. The reason is that the enactment of religious beliefs and practices is the result of "a lived engagement with a multitude of ideas, expectations, pressures and possibilities" (Schielke & Debevec 2012:5).

In other words, the conduct of a religious life is not separable from the other domains of life, which in turn impinge on individuals with their expectations and demands (Schielke 2010). The enactment of religious normativity has often to be conciliated with other equally onerous everyday "grand schemes", and this might cause individuals to resort to religion in very pragmatic ways, while acknowledging the difficulties and uncertainties they experience in respecting religious norms. This is the case even among people who entirely subscribe to the content of religious predicaments – such as the cases of Francesco, Moosa, Mahdi or Amalia reveal (paragraph 1). This represents a second kind of manifestation of religious normativity in daily life.

Indeed, individuals might act with a certain leeway and they might not be able to enact all what is prescribed by religious normativity, but this, in their eyes, does not make that normativity less valid. On the contrary, it testifies to the tensions that pervade one's own sense and practice of morality: precisely by acknowledging one's doubts, uncertainties and imperfections people reveal the "force" of such grand schemes, as shown by the cases depicted in paragraph 2. As these cases show, religious people

conceive religious normativity as sources of guidance, and enact it as they can, thus not necessarily to reach perfection, "but in order to make at least some sense of the imperfections and complexities of lived experience" (Schielke & Debevec 2012:7). Individuals' major problem, in this view, is how to navigate a course of life thanks to a religious grand scheme, while consistency and order are less of an issue: religious normativity can thus be turned into a "pragmatic condition of action", which, by being granted coherence and objective power, becomes something that people "approach, use and do" (ibid.).

In sum, contrary to expectations, doubt and scepticism are not antithetical to religious beliefs, but inherent to it, and demonstrate just how much religious beliefs count and do matter in people's lives. This kind of difficulties represents a constitutive form of "religious reflexivity" as defined by Højbjerg (2002), according to whom ambivalent attitudes to religious ideas and actions, including doubt, uncertainty, scepticism, voluntary illusion and make-believe are all manners through which individuals show that they are not mere recipients or consumers of religious normativity, but indeed have reflective stances towards religion (Sunier 2015). Far from being exceptional, doubt, scepticism and illusory devices represent essential elements in the process of acquisition of religious ideas; they arguably even sustain the very existence of religious ideas and practices more generally (Højbjerg 2002: 3-4). Religious practitioners' ability to accommodate contradictory ideas or their experience of cognitive dissonances represent forms of reflexivity, which, ultimately, can be described not only as intrinsic to religious action, but even as "fulfilling a belief-generating role" (Højbjerg 2002:8).

While ambivalences and difficulties might be more implicit, religious practitioners might also express more explicit reflexive stances, as they might also engage with religious normativity at a more conscious level, by manifesting critique or by questioning basic religious tenets and/or their enactment (Højbjerg 2002; Sunier 2015). Implicit and explicit religious reflexivity both account for the often-observed openness, indeterminacy and ambiguity of religious practice. Hence, religious beliefs and practices are rarely fixed and consistent (Højbjerg 2002: 5). Such more explicit reflective stances represent the third way people may relate to religious reflexivity. However, while Højbjerg describes it as the act of consciously addressing criticism towards the theological content of religious tenets, the cases here illustrated do not express objections to the "contents" of relgion, which are rarely questioned, but articulate a more or less vehement disapproval of their *imposition*, thus pointing to the fractures that pervade the "internal discourse" within the Islamic field. "Religious reflexivity", for the persons considered in the present research, may often take the form of a challenge to such an internal discourse and to the related pressure to conformism or social control.

5. Conciliating concept and experience: the "making" of religion

All of the findings derived from literature on "everyday Islam" (summarized in Chapter 3) reveal that only an attentive and close investigation of practices can open our eyes to the manifold manners in which individuals may relate to religious normativity, the "grand schemes" of both the community and the society and other equally important dimensions of daily life. Indeed, the above-described three "levels" at which religious normativity manifests itself - that of *norm*-al, routine, unreflected actions and that of the often difficult, contradictory or more consciously criticized translation into practice of religious prescriptions – can become visible to the researcher only through the study of religion-as-lived. Indeed, they all amount to an *embodiment* of theology performed by ordinary individuals, who

thus contribute to *make* religion in the everyday, as religious ideas are made evolve or drift in a complex interweaving of *concept* and *experience*.

Depending on cases and situations, the enactment of religious practices might present tactical traits insofar as these "insinuate" within the boundaries set by the strategy and expectations of communitarian narratives, and by the strategy and expectations of the majority society, possibly adding personal adjustments and shades of meanings. These manners might comprise unreflected, *norm*-al behaviors that mirror what one considers to be religiously-prescribed, showing the degree of internalization of community expectations (e.g. taking fasting or abstaining from pork or alcohol for granted). But they might also include varying, tactical forms of engagement with religious normativity ranging from difficulties, doubts (and even suffering) encountered in the enactment of practices (e.g. finding it impossible to *not* shake hands with newly-met persons even if one would prefer not to) to conscious and reflected-upon appropriations of normativity (e.g. adapting the meaning and times of prayer to one's spiritual and practical needs or deciding to go to a place where alcohol is served to meet friends anyways). In other words, narratives of justification of practices are derived from different ways of navigating among grand schemes.

This has an important consequence. Indeed, this analysis aimed at illustrating that religious people – in this case youths of Muslim origin, but it can be true also for believers of other religions – *do not neatly fit in boxes*. They may show to adopt all of these different forms of reflexivity in their religious life: the same person may plainly adhere to, more or less consciously to some aspects of religious normativity or norms in automatic or unreflected ways or in more self-aware manners, and reflect upon other aspects of religious orthodoxy and normativity, which can be made the object of doubts, contradictions, uncertainties – even in highly painful ways, such as in the case of Moufida, who strives to wear the veil but does not manage to. Depending on the contexts, situational behaviors may be adopted in order to live up to expectations concerning one setting – for instance in the case of Mahdy or Francesco. Again, this further illustrates that religious normativity does matter, attesting to its role in contributing to shape individuals' processes of (religious) subjectivation, in which religious ideas are accommodated in a complex interweaving of *concept* and *experience*. That it may be difficult to conciliate *concept* – religious norms and prescriptions – with *experience* - everyday's engagements or leisure activities, each of them informed by its "demands" – is exemplified by numerous tactical accommodations and adjustments, which may even lead to blatant contradictions. For instance, Moosa, who remarked with an efficacious anaphor that "if you are Muslim, then...", lit himself a cigarette in a totally automatic way while we were walking together to the subway stop.

This reveals that not only there is variation among religious people concerning their adherence and internalization of religious norms, but also that there is variation within the behaviors of the same person in the way religious normativity informs his or her life. Therefore, it appears artificial and all too simplistic to apply fixed, immutable labels such as "orthodox", "practicing", "progressive" to religious people – as they do not "belong" to just one of these categories. Arguably, typologies of this kind might run the risk of hiding the manifold ways religion is understood and appropriated, relationally and situationally, by religious people.

This appears all the more interesting in light of the distinction made between "organized" and "non-organized" youths of Muslim background: the former are portrayed as conspicuously pious and devout, while the latter are considered to be more "flexible" about their religiosity, as this would not depend on organized or institutionalized settings. As this analysis has sought to show, on one hand, there are

differences in the way the same religious concepts are interpreted and understood by people within the same organization - who therefore are not "all the same" – and, on the other hand, members of an organization may share numerous commonalities with people who are not interested in religious organizations.

Chapter 10
PATTERNS AND PRACTICES OF VISIBILITY. CHALLENGING "EXTERNAL DISCOURSES"?

In the previous Chapter, we have analyzed how religious orthodoxy and normativity are understood and manifest themselves in the everyday life of youths of Muslim background. In so doing, we could evaluate the existence of forms of religious reflexivity, especially in relation to communitarian impositions and expectations, which many criticize, while "sparing" religion from such criticism. The social relevance of everyday lived religion lies precisely in the subject's relation to the multiple manifestations of strategic religion. However, in the case of Muslims, a further powerful strategy they have to deal with is represented by the dominant, external, negative discourse that surrounds them. Micro-negotiations of identity occurring in the everyday, then, take place also in relation to the "external discourse", and has greatly to do with the display and the visibility of "Muslimness".

With respect to this aspect in particular, literature on "everyday lived Islam" applies a top-down perspective, and applies the label of "visible" from a sort of "third eye", so that members of religious organizations are considered to be "visible by default", due to their membership, and non-members are considered to be "invisible". This implies an oversimplification according to which the former are the only devout ones, and the latter are non-religious or less religious. In other words, this top-down perspective takes for granted that members of religious organizations put their Muslimness in the foreground: by constructing themselves and being constructed first and foremost as Muslims, "Muslim" becomes their defining master status, both in their relationship with other Muslims and especially with non-Muslims. According to this top-down perspective, then, those who are not involved in visible manifestations of Muslimness, on the contrary, can elude this "trap" and can define themselves more freely, attributing significance to other components of their identities, far from this self-construction and other-construction of Muslimness which does not apply to them, or less so.

In the present Chapter, I would like to engage critically with this probably too simplistic representation, by exploring how and why the display – or the lack thereof – of one's own religion (belonging) or religiosity (behaving) *actually* takes place (or does not take place) among who is involved in an organization and who is not. This means asking how and why one might want to be visible about his/her own religion, in relation to the intersecting strategies of external and internal discourse, letting practices of visibility emerge from a bottom-up perspective, by observing the actual practices of the actors involved. Comparing organized and non-organized youths of Muslim background, then, appears particularly salient in this regard- especially in light of the strategies adopted by Islamic Relief and its diverging ways of relating to different audiences. The aim is that of tracing the practices and the patterns of visibility - or invisibility - adopted by the protagonists of the present research, appraising the role of strategies and identifying individuals' tactical capacities, in the attempt to assess "what counts as visible" when we offer depictions about Islam in the West, on the basis of actors' definition or practice of visibility. As I will illustrate below, several practices and patters of visibility emerge, which are shared by both organized and non-organized young people of Muslim heritage.

1. Sought-for visibility

A first kind of enactment or manifestation of "visibility" consists in practices which aim at gaining recognition for Islam. This pattern is associated with Muslims' forms of claim-making related to their Muslimness: visibility is sought for by those who wish to make themselves visible as Muslims, in order to be acknowledged as such.

In this area, members of an organization such as Islamic Relief certainly stand out. As we have seen in Chapter IV, Islamic Relief trains its volunteers also to be prepared to respond to "bad looks" or negative reactions on the part of non-Muslims they might encounter when carrying out so-called "street collections":

> We have to be kind and polite and smile instead of answering back, if someone insults us in the street or at the market when we go for a street collection. They [Islamic Relief staff members] told us that it is important we behave this way, because people take us as representatives of all Muslims... it is as if we represented Islam, all Muslims, that is the problem, so if we are not polite, they [random people, Italians] think that all Muslims are rude, so we have to be kind, and maybe thy will change their mind about Muslims (Mariam, 22 years old, Milan, Islamic Relief volunteer)

Mariam explains that Islamic Relief staff members tell volunteers how to behave correctly not only for preserving the reputation of the organization itself (as staff members told me – see Chapter 6), but also for promoting a good, positive image of Islam more generally. As was amply discussed in Chapter 8, the organization explicitly pursues this objective when dealing with an "Italian", non-Muslim audience at public events organized with or by Italians. In all of these instances, the organization's staff members make use of arguments that emphasize commonalities between Islamic values and other religions' values (or with universalist values), or illustrates Islamic Relief's enactment of the principle of non-discrimination by recounting that it offered emergency aid to earthquakes' victims in Italy. As I already argued, resorting to this kind of arguments can be interpreted as a tactical behavior in order to counter the strategy of the negative, external discourse about Islam; it has a tactical quality because it obeys to the logic of the strategy it seeks to counter, in that Muslimness has to be invisibilized in order to become accepted. Whilst the Muslimness of Islamic Relief is clearly visible in the *foreground* when the Muslim audience is targeted, it is hidden in the *background* when the Italian one is addressed.

As we have seen, according to this tactic, Muslims have to paradoxically hide or deny their Muslimness, in order to gain recognition as Muslims. Indeed, it pays off, as the "Italians" who took part in the events told Islamic Relief staff members how happy they were to have learned about the organization, how good are the projects of the organization, and so on... Besides, these occasions were also successful from the fundraising point of view, as considerable sums of money were collected, meaning that "Italians" had been eager to donate generously.

Furthermore, despite the fact that this tactic invisibilizes Muslimness, it proves to be extremely empowering for Islamic Relief volunteers, as clearly illustrated by the words of Yousuf and Rami:

> I wanted to become a volunteer since a long time... finally I have the honor to represent Muslims, to give the good example as a Muslim, to show that we are good, as a minority this is important.. […] I was moved to hear that we [Islamic Relief] were present at Amatrice [where an earthquake occurred in 2016] and we were there to help. I am really honored.. because you know, at school it was never easy.. you know all the bad jokes that they would make about us, calling us 'terrorists'

and so on… I tried not to care but it was not easy, it was not easy. And now I feel much better being a Muslim, because I told you it is not easy to be a minority in a country that is not Muslim […] one of the best things is when we have Italians coming to our events, that is great! Such a honor! And I heard that there are also some Italian volunteers! (Yousuf, 23 years old, Milan, Islamic Relief volunteer).

You know what? The most beautiful moments are those with Italians… because they finally get to see who we [Muslims] really are, that they should not be scared… it's a great emotion, makes me really proud (Aasim, 24 years old, Milan, Islamic Relief volunteer).

Both speak of feelings of pride and honor in "representing Muslims". Yousuf in particular, who seems to have particularly suffered from experiences of islamophobic behavior in the past, has eventually found a sort of "serenity" in showing that he is a Muslim – but that is because the organization has equipped him with effective arguments to use in order to counter negative stereotypes, such as the example about disaster relief in case of earthquakes in Italy. Throughout the interview we had, it was clear that Yousuf "finally" felt happy to have these "cards to play" available in order to challenge derogatory depictions of Muslims.

Indeed, the arguments used by the organization provide a *script* or a *toolkit* (see Chapter 4) to which its members can easily resort to. This script is devised as a strategy towards the organization's members, in that they are trained to use it; however, this strategy provides them with the tactical capacities to answer back – politely, smiling – to the degrading remarks they might receive in their daily lives: we may refer to as a strategic tactic. Yet, it cannot be described in terms of "resistance", precisely because it does not overtly challenge the negative external discourse. Arguably, "resistance" would be taking place if Islamic Relief started using a language that drew on a "because" framing, rather than on "notwithstanding" framing (see Chapter 8). In other words, if Islamic Relief put "Muslimness" in the foreground also with Italians, then it would be putting in place a counter-strategy subverting the strategy of the dominant negative discourse, and it would be appropriate to speak of resistance.

It is important to note how, when referring to their engagement with a non-Muslim public, these youths consistently labelled referred to "Italians": "non-Muslim" is equated to "Italian", as if "being Italian" cannot contemplate "being Muslim". In these youths' representations, Muslims cannot fully belong to Italy yet, as they keep being perceived as different. They do feel Italian – and not just "instrumentally", as testified by their numerous accounts I collected of how they are attached to where they have grown up in Italy or of what they like about Italy; nonetheless, the fact that they do feel Italian does not mean they can freely claim to be Italian, due to their "Muslimness". The strategy of the external discourse, in this regard, marks a further score: Muslims are not assumed to "naturally" belong.

In any case, Islamic Relief's youths who wish to become visible as Muslims can achieve this objective through this paradoxical strategic tactic provided by the organization. In these instances, the organization precisely acts as a powerful purveyor of resources for its members. Indeed, practically all volunteers felt comfortable and proud in repeating this script when describing the organization – "we are not a religious organization, we do not bring aid only to Muslims, there are some Italian volunteers and non-Muslim employees in other countries, we were present at Amatrice" and so on. They seem to be even more at ease in reciting this script than the religious one, given that they hardly remember all of the five values of the organization, as highlighted in Chapter 9.

Yet, repeating this script in the situation of an interview (in which my sheer "being Italian" surely played a role) is not the same as willing to be visible. While a number of volunteers actively seek for such a visibility and accomplish recognition through this script, as the exemplary cases of Yousuf and Rami show, many others do not wish to be as visible – as we will shall see in the next section.

Other forms of claim-making, on the contrary, transform symbols of Muslimness into tools for countering the external discourse. This is the case of Hamida, already quoted in Chapter 9:

> the veil to me is important, because for me it is a way of saying "Hey! Take a look at me: I am a Muslim and wear the veil, but I can do many things!" […] I saw powerful women wearing the veil, it is possible to be powerful and wear the hijab! (Hamida, 22 years old, Turin)

In order to claim recognition as a Muslim, Hamida puts an aspect of Muslimsness in the foreground by entrusting the veil with a tactical quality. Although it is an extremely small-scale practice, it testifies to the variation in meanings and purposes attributed to religious symbols and to the possible subjectivation these might generate.

These are certainly not the only ways of "being visible", though. Other youths of Muslim origin actively engage with negative depictions, but do not necessarily put forward forms of claim-making concerning "Muslims" specifically. For instance, Rashad is happy to sit for long discussions concerning Islam to deconstruct the usual stereotypes surrounding it:

> I don't know why, but people always ask me to talk about Islam and religion… I mean I'm happy to do so, but I don't know why they always pick me, maybe because I'm sociable and talkative. Anyhow, I'm happy to engage in discussions and demonstrate them that they are mistaken about us… so I would explain them everything about the woman in Islam, about the fact that Islam strictly prohibits murder […] then they always tell me "You're fine, but you're the exception, not all Muslims are like you" and I'm really tired to hear this. Because all of my friends as well are told that they are polite, but they are the exception… so, are we all exceptions? (Rashad, 26 years old, Milan)

Moreover, he displays a certain tactical agency towards the dominant, negative gaze:

> Sometimes I put on the funny side… for example: my sister wears the veil, and sometimes we are in the subway together, and I see how people look at her, and I make fun of this and I go 'let's explode!? And we then we start laughing so much about it […] A couple of times, this winter, I went out in the morning and the windscreen of my car and of that of my neighbor are covered with frost. So I would clean mine, and on purpose, I cleaned also the neighbor's, because I really wanted to demonstrate her that we are good-mannered… and, in the end, she thanked me a lot (Rashad, 26 years old, Milan)

In this case, Rashid (and his sister's) agency is placed in the very embodied encounter with non-Muslims: in the relationality generated by these encounters (Erdal & Strømsø 2018), he manages to trump the external discourse' boundary-making strategy, based on Arabs'/Muslims' sheer appearance, by playing with his (and his sister's) very appearance and visibility as Muslims/Arabs.

Jameela, who is not involved in any religious organization, took part several times in a project run by the small town where she grew up before moving to Milan. The project is called "Living library" and is designed to challenge prejudice and discrimination. Individuals with their stories represent the "books"

of this library, which visitors may "consult" by asking the person to tell his or her "story". Khalida, already portrayed in Chapter 7, from Turin, who is not involved in religious organizations, collaborates with an association that runs similar projects by setting up workshops in high schools, during which individuals with a migrant background, like her talk about their experiences as "minorities" in countering prejudices, through role playing and small-scale social experiments. She showed me the feedback she got from the many students she has met with great proud and emotion: many thanked her for her "uplifting speech" which had given them more courage, and many others would explicitly acknowledge that her experience had deconstructed their prejudices: "now I know that the hijab is not a bad thing", "I understood that Islam and violence are not related" and the like. Paola, too, felt hurt and questioned as a Muslim following the Paris jihadist attacks in 2015 by her schoolmates and her professors; after that, she decided she would start speaking about Islam in her school through ad hoc lessons and workshops, which she organized with her headmaster. Prior to that, Paola and her father had taken part in local, small-scale initiatives for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, that had been organized in the town she lived before moving to Milan.

These all represent examples of individual initiatives: these young people do not seek recognition as a "group", but rather aim at gaining acceptance by resorting to different mythbusting tactics. While Jameela and Khalida's tactics explicitly draw on the "difference" they embody in order to reduce negative stereotyping, Rashad's plays with these misrepresentations by laughing at them with his sister, or resorts to his "good manners" in order to show that he is not "different" and is a trustworthy person. Either way, these are all micro-practices of sought-for visibility which variously resort to the display of difference or of Muslimness.

However, "being visible" can sometimes be tiring. Amalia is an extremely visible Muslim activist: she does not only take part in Islamic Relief, but is also a member of GMI, she contributed to found the Italian section of "Muslim scouts", she appeared on local newspapers as the first Muslim football player, contributed to obtain special opening hours for Muslim women at one of Turin's public swimming pools, has a sister who is a modest fashion designer... Contrary to many Islamic Relief fellow volunteers of hers, she does put her Muslimness in the foreground. And yet,

> You know sometimes I am really tired of being always been asked to speak about Muslims, as a Muslim... Actually, I always feel undecided whether I should become a politician, because I am good at speaking in public and at defending our reasons, I think I would be good at that, but then I find myself thinking of how happy I would be if I was given the chance to speak of other topics, and not to be continually asked to speak on behalf of Muslims, as a Muslim... For instance, last year I took part in this event about sustainability education, which is a topic I am really interested in. I had to go in schools and speak about sustainable consumption. I would enter in classes and students would think 'she's going to talk about Islam', which I understand, but that time I was happy to do something that was not related to my being Muslim. Or another time I was invited to speak about literature outside of Turin: a woman invited me to speak about European literature, which is what I am studying, and I was so happy that I was about to cry of happiness! Because I want to speak about the topics that I am passionate about and I can claim I know! But, at the end of that meeting too, questions were like 'Are there similar authors in the Arab literature?' Well, I DON'T KNOW! It's not because I am of Arab origin that I know! I know nothing about Arab literature! I am studying English, French, German literature, I would want people to ask me about Baudelaire, Goethe or Foscolo.. But no, I only got questions like 'as an Arab girl, how would you see this female character?' But I am Italian, not Arabic!" (Amalia, 22 years old, Turin, Islamic Relief member)

Amalia shows mixed feelings about her activism and visibility as a Muslim: on one hand, she thinks she's very good at engaging in debates and even thinks she might go into politics; on the other hand, she would like to be perceived simply as an Italian young woman, or a student if literature, or an active citizen raising awareness about sustainability, without being continually questioned about Islam. She does foreground her Muslimness in many aspects of her life, but she would also like her Muslimness not to stand out as something exceptional. To use a metaphor, we might characterize the ways she is visible about her religion as "on" and "off" visibility: while she sometimes would like to turn her visibility "off", people around her leave it always "on". Indeed, appearing as visibly Muslim can be perceived as a burden by many, as we shall see below.

In any case, Amalia is one of the few that explicitly mentions political activism as an option: in her case, the engagement in an organization such as Islamic Relief and in a host of activities aimed at legitimizing Muslims as interlocutors or at advancing their rights did lead to interest into politics – which can be considered as one of the strongest forms of "visibility".

A similar case concerns a Islamic Relief members who contributed to found "EquiLibri d'Oriente"[1] with other youths of migrant background. It is an association aimed at valorizing and disseminating old and contemporary literature from Arab, Middle-Eastern and Asiatic countries, through the organizations of workshops, presentations and debates, also in collaboration with Turin's book fair (the most important book fair in Italy). Though this does not fall within the realm of political activism, it certainly constitutes a "citizenship practice" and a "visibility practice" aimed at fostering intercultural dialogue by valorizing (young) people with a Muslim background. In light of the discussion of Chapter 5, it is not surprising that such a "citizenship practice" would unfold in the context of the city of Turin, which allows Muslims to be much more visible in the public sphere.

However, apart from these two exceptions, interest in political activism *qua* Muslims to defend and promote Muslims' rights, or *qua* young people with a migrant background (for instance, in order to mobilize for obtaining changes in the citizenship law) does not emerge from the interviews I conducted. While this is a widespread tendency among the youths in general, and not just those with a migrant background, it may be even more the case for the latter. On one hand, they certainly share a feeling of frustration and of uselessness of political engagement, as previous battles for a new citizenship law did not yield the hoped-for results, as the law was never changed and, predictably, this will not be a topic in the political agenda of the coming years. On the other hand, as we could see when commenting the words of Islamic Relief's members about "Italians", what these youths probably lack is a feeling of "entitlement": they do not feel "entitled enough" to claim rights for themselves, as they perceive tha "Muslimness" cannot (yet?) fall within "Italianness".

2. Unwilling visibility

That religiosity or religious belonging may be visible does not necessarily imply that such a visibility is actively sought-for to draw attention to one's own religious belonging or difference: for many, it does not stand for claims to recognition.

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[1] The name is a pun comprising the word "equilibrium" (eqilibri), "books" (libri) and Orient (Oriente).

Unexpectedly, this is true for many Islamic Relief volunteers, who do not attach to their membership in the organization an intention to signal their "Muslimness" to the outer world. This is the case of the many volunteers who do not feel at ease in performing "street collections" and at directly engaging in one-to-one conversations with random people met in the street:

> We learned that many volunteers feel uncomfortable in having to stop people and talking to them, we know it can be very frustrating… because you can meet those who see 'Islamic' in our name and immediately go away and do not want to listen, or even those that insult you… […] so we explain to volunteers that they have to expect they will receive some reactions of this kind, it's normal, but we also explain how to take these things in the right way not to feel demotivated (National coordinator of volunteers).

Example of this slight sense of discomfort emerge from Anbar and Anisa's words:

> I prefer to stay behind the scenes… at events, I don't want to have to talk to the public, or to people, like during street collections, I don't want to appear… I go because we all have to go, but I prefer to hide in the group.. I don't want to go to speak to people that I don't know, stopping them randomly, I am too shy, I don't want to have to explain… (Anbar, 20 years old, Turin, Islamic Relief volunteer).

> Yes, street collections can be difficult, you have to be very motivated, otherwise if you look timorous people do not even stop to listen… and sometimes I am a little timorous (Anisa, 19 years old, Turin, Islamic Relief volunteer).

Contrary to Yousuf and Rami's cases (see above), there are volunteers who do not feel "comfortable" in doing this kind of activity, which entails and having to deal with the public directly, seem to be less interested in the possibility to be individually and collectively "visible" that the organization offers as an empowering tool. Indeed, when performing street collections, they are inevitably confronted with the "boundaries of the everyday nation" (Erdal & Strømsø 2018) through situated encounters, in which their attire and visibility as Muslims are crucial to dynamics of "first impressions", which account for the strong emotional dimension these volunteers attach to these encounters (ibid.). In fact, such encounters often generate automatic negative reactions on the part of "Italians", who – especially when they see "Islamic" in the Islamic Relief logo – refuse to donate and simultaneously reproduce the boundary dividing "Muslims" and "Italians".

Indeed, it is no coincidence that, in answering to the question about how they felt about volunteering and what an organization like Islamic Relief was "giving to them", some volunteers, like Yousuf and Rami, would mention the "pride" or the "honor" they take in "representing Islam" *first*; many others, on the contrary, looked much less interested in the "public" dimension of the organization and would stress other aspects, such as the feeling of "being understood" because "Islamic Relief is like a family and we understand each other", or the sense of self-fulfillment deriving from "doing good to others". Feelings of pride associated with the display of Muslimness when proactively engaging with a non-Muslim public are not the only – and arguably not necessarily the first – reason why many young people join Islamic Relief. Other motivations, completely unrelated to a will to be visible as a Muslim to a wider public, beyond that of the community, induce young people to become a volunteer for such an organization.

As just mentioned, many volunteers and staff members would explain that one of the reasons why they willingly joined Islamic Relief is that they feel the atmosphere of a "family" shared with their fellow volunteers:

> Before joining Islamic Relief, I did not know other Arabs or Muslims, I only had Italian friends… and then when I got to know about Islamic Relief and went to their first activities, I immediately felt understood, because it is people like me, with the same issues, the same problems, having an immigrant origin… and it really feels like a family, now all of my best friends are from Islamic Relief (Aicha, 19 years old, Milan, Islamic Relief volunteer).

> I think that one of the reasons for us [to join] is that it seems like one big family: even if we have Italian friends, there will always be something that an Italian friend will not understand, because he does not share the same feeling of having an Arab origin, another religion… you know, that we [youths of Muslim background] all have this conflict between two identities: at home we behave in a way, outside we behave differently. So, a group of people like that of Islamic Relief helps you a lot because you feel that the others understand you, because we face all the same problems… and yes, it's a family, we call it a family… (Moosa, 25 years old, Turin, Islamic Relief volunteer).

Moosa and Aicha's words are very similar, and the same concept was expressed by many other interviewees. The desire to spend time with peers that understand you, "that do not judge you", with whom to share common everyday problems represents one of the main drivers, if not the main one, to take part in Islamic Relief's activities. The sense of belonging to a same "family" conveyed by the group of fellow volunteers acts as a "protective cocoon" or as a "refuge", where it is possible to display one's Muslimness without the fear of being judged or rejected – which, on the contrary, is something that can occur with Italian peers:

> I did not have fiends at school, except for one… I was the only girls of immigrant origin, and my schoolmates were not nice, they made fun of my hijab, especially at the middle school… so I became rather close and shy […] now thanks to Islamic Relief I have finally found a lot of friends, I feel well with them! (Mariam, 22 years old, Milan).

Indeed, some of my informants did take part in other charitable organizations as volunteers before; however, they ended up preferring Islamic Relief not only, or not so much, because Islamic Relief offers an "Islamic framing" of charity, but also, or precisely, because it would allow them to find more "similar" "Arab" or "Muslim" friends. Obviously, these same feelings are expressed also by the volunteers who speak about "pride" and "honor" in providing a good image of Islam. However, for a number of them what counts most is the possibility to be "finally" oneself: within the Islamic Relief "family", it feels safe to show one's own Muslimness without complexes. Many volunteers, to a greater or lesser extent, feel their being "different" as a burden (e.g. not being understood by Italian peers) or might even feel excluded (e.g. not being able to befriend Italian peers like in Mariam's case), but, for many of them, these feelings do not translate to a willingness to challenge and deconstruct the external, negative discourse about Islam - which causes many to feel their "difference" as a burden. They let the organization take care of that, and they are happy that Islamic Relief is offering a positive image of Islam – indeed, they do internalize the *script* provided by the organization ("we help also non-Muslims", "there are also Italian volunteers", "we are a humanitarian organization simply founded on Islamic principles", etc.), but this does not mean that they want to repeat it out loud, by engaging directly and publicly with non-Muslims (i.e. in street collections).

Thus, what changes between these cases and those of Yousuf and Rami and of staff members) is the *choice* to be visible. The latter seek visibility: in order to provide a good image of Islam, they transform their difference from a burden into a source of pride; thanks to the empowering strategy provided by the organization, they are "honored" to "go public". For the former, being visibly Muslim means being able to show one's own Muslimness "naturally", within the safe space provided by a group composed by people perceived to be similar. Muslimness is displayed too and is visible also in their case, but this visibility is meant for and confined to other Muslims – not just Muslim friends from Islamic Relief, but also the family and the Muslim community in general.

This "unwilling visibility" obviously has a critical gender dimension, as many of the young women involved in Islamic Relief would feel "unwillingly visible" due to their hijab: they attach deep, personal meanings to wearing the hijab – be them submission to God or feeling modest – but they are not interested in the symbolic meaning that the veil has come to signify in Western societies. Their hijab has a private meaning, and not so much a public one: they are not interested in transforming their hijab into a symbol of visibility – although it is inevitably visible as a signal of Muslimness. In fact, they perceive the inevitable visibility of the veil as a burden in a non-Muslim society, as demonstrated by the embarrassment or the annoyance they feel every time they are questioned about their veil. For them, wearing the hijab does not equal "wanting to be visible" in the sense of "claiming recognition" as a veiled Muslim. This contrasts with Amalia's case (see above), who seeks visibility in order to challenge the external discourse: for instance, she was happy to appear in local newspapers as the first "hijabi footballer", with the wish to demonstrate that Muslim girls are not backward, play sports - even an eminently masculine one, at least in common representations - and that the veil is compatible with all of this. Amalia makes of her hijab a claim for recognition; on the contrary, many other veiled girls who take part in Islamic Relief are not interested in being "visibly Muslim" *beyond* the Muslim "audience": even if they may feel the pain of enduring negative external discourses, they are not willing in challenging it proactively and directly. The same goes for the many Islamic Relief volunteers – both young women and young men - who join the organization simply to spend time with their friends and have fun with them.

This is also the case of Lamya, a young woman who never heard of Muslim associations or organizations and declares that she would have not been interested in joining one had she heard of any. She wears the veil and attaches a profound, theologically-informed meaning to her hijab. She works in a pharmacy, and her hijab was initially considered problematic for the pharmacy: at the beginning she was asked not to wear it, but she patiently but firmly succeeded in convincing the management to let her continue to wear it by demonstrating her competence and her good attitude with clients. Yet, she does not frame this action as a "claim to difference", in challenging or antagonistic terms. In fact, at the beginning of our conversation, she would strikingly state that "Yes, I am Muslim but I am not interested in 'spreading the news' that I am Muslim". This seeming contradiction can be clarified by the following quote, which concerns another experience she had. Until some years ago, she had taken part in an initiative run by some youths with different migratory backgrounds, but especially from Muslim-majority countries, born or having grown up in Italy. It consisted in a blog (named "Yalla Italia!") to which she contributed with some posts:

> The aim of the blog was really to send a message "of normality", to tell our stories, but as youths, normal youths, like anyone else… the idea was to show that we face issues like any other young person, that we are youths, period. Just youths (Lamya, 28 years old, Milan)

Her case too is that of an unwilling visibility: while she does engage in an action in order to make her right to wear the hijab respected, she does not transform her hijab into a symbol. Rather than a claim to difference, her steady opposition to the request to take it off was framed as a right to equality. Moreover, she contributed to a blog whose mission was to "normalize" and de-exoticize youths with a migratory or Muslim background, by attracting readers' attention to aspects other than the religious component of her identity. As she says, she is not interested in boasting about her Muslimness.

Lamya's story, as well as the above-described cases of young women volunteering for Islamic Relief, show that piousness, even profound and visible one, does not necessarily correspond to "investments" or engagements about its very visibility.

With reference to other issues, Alessandra and Hamida – who both wear the veil – offer two further examples of "unwilling visibility". They do not belong to any Muslim association or organization; when I asked them why so, they responded providing very similar motivations:

> I am not interested in religious associations… yes, I know about GMI [Giovani Musulmani d'Italia] and I went at one of their meetings once years ago… but you now what? I really don't like associations … because I don't like when we make continue to make boundaries, when we underline the differences…I mean be cool, live your life and let others live, theirs, we shouldn't rub it in… […] and also I think that religion is something very intimate, each one lives it in its own way… so no, I don't like associations… (Alessandra, 23 years old, Milan)

Alessandra's words underline that she is not interested in initiatives which – in her view – "single out" Muslims as such and underline difference, by putting it in the foreground as a basis to define group boundaries. Moreover, notwithstanding her visible veil, she defends the vision of an "intimate" religiosity: in her view, this privacy in living religion is incompatible with continuously claiming loudly to be Muslims by underlining Muslimness, and thus, boundaries.

Hamida makes a very similar point:

> I don't think it makes sense when associations act like 'hey we are Muslims and we stay among each other'… I mean it is completely useless. Associations would make sense when they organize events with food and everything from other cultures. There could be Muslims, Jews, Buddhists.. so there would be dialogue. Dialoguing with other cultures. It would be crazy to think how many fantastic things it would be possible to do this way. So it is in this way [by dialoguing with other cultures] that you show what is good about your culture… not staying closed-off among ourselves! […] Look, associations are really not something for me (Hamida, 22 years old, Turin).

Although she signals her Muslimness through her veil, she would like to go beyond these visible differences in order to dialogue with people from other cultures in order to speak about what is good about one's own culture. She is not interested in associations set up by Muslims for other Muslims: just like Alessandra, she thinks that this would mean underlining differences in a sterile way, as it would not lead to dialoguing with other cultures. Alessandra and Hamida are both visibly Muslim, due to their veils, but do not want to emphasize their Muslimness beyond simply wearing the veil.

3. Invisible Muslimness

Islamic religiosity may also be present in a person's life, without this implying that it may made visible by the single Muslim. For example, feeling religious but not showing it through the wearing the hijab is indeed very common among young women and girls. Many simply do not feel the need to wear it, and justify this choice by making a distinction between culture and religion:

> I am ok this way, I really don't need to… in my family nobody wears it and it was really natural to decide not to wear it. […] Because have become cultural over time. In Islam you wear the veil but in my family nobody does, but at the same time all the women of my family cover their shoulders and their neck, always, so that's the re-adaptation of a religious aspect (Jameela, 23 years old, Milan).

> I feel really Muslim but I don't care about wearing the veil. My mother does not wear it. But you know? The veil is not a religious symbol. It then became one, but it did not start like that… because the Quran has many practical solutions for problems, and at the time there was the problem of women being sexually abused, and in the Arab culture the hair is something that can seduce, so the Quran says 'ok let's cover the hair so women are raped'. But it's not a symbol of religion, it has only become a symbol over time. And it does not have to do with a person's real faith: you can even go to the mosque, wear the veil, do some charity but then if you hurt people and are involved in drug dealing then you are certainly not a believer (Paola, 20 years old, Milan).

Jameela and Paola feel confident about this decision and are comfortable with how they live their religiosity. According to their "way of being Muslim", the veil is not necessary – and in Paola's view – it does not even correlate to a person's faith. However, despite her choice to not wear the veil, and notwithstanding the fact that she never suffered first-hand discriminatory or racist behaviors, Jameela feels it necessary to take part in projects such as the "Living library" (see above) in order to counter negative stereotypes about people who have different cultures and religions. She does not display her Muslimness, but she does show her difference.

Yet, not deciding to wear the veil might not be the result of this kind of reflections about one's own religiosity. For other young women, showing Muslimness might be perceived as something impossible, or not commendable, in the context of a Western society. Warda and Omaima feel that religion is an important part of their lives, but present very similar feelings concerning the opportunity to wear the hijab:

> Yes, I would like to wear the hijab if that was possible. My sisters [some of whom are much older and came to Italy in their late adolescence, while Warda grew up in Italy since she was a child] and my mother wear it, and I would like to wear it too… but it's a very serious decision, and from then you cannot come back [and change your mind], you really have to be committed. And in my case, I think it would be hard because it Italy it is not easy to wear it, I would not be able to find a job. It would be problematic already where I work now [she works as a shop assistant in a luxury boutique in the city center], so you can imagine… I don't think I'll wear it but I really respect those who do and I know it's an important decision (Warda, 27 years old, Milan).

> Here it would be too difficult to wear the veil; my mother [who wears it] agrees with me. But yes, I think that if I was in Egypt I would wear the veil, surely (Omaima, 23 years old, Milan).

Their religiosity "is there"; but can't be seen. Leila underlined this during our conversation, before she started speaking about wearing or not the hijab, by using almost the same exact words used by Lamia (see above):

> I am Muslim but don't boast about it, I don't put signs or billboards out saying 'hey I am Muslim'.. I absolutely feel Muslim, but I am not interested in spreading the news about it (Warda, 27 years old, Milan).

Warda and Omaima prefer avoiding showing their Muslimness through the hijab, because they do not want to experience negative situations in a Western context, such as derogatory remarks or discrimination at work. Indeed, many young women are not interested in being caught in the crossfire deriving from the strong symbolism that the veil in the West has come to catalyze.

However, just like Leila affirms that the veil needs "commitment" and that one "cannot come back" from the decision to wear it, so many other interviewees associate the veil to an increased religiosity that should be manifested "at least" later in life and that they wish for themselves.

> I do not wear the veil now because I know I'm not ready, and I wish to wear it at some point, but I want to be sure that I will be ready. Because it is an important thing, and I know that many behaviors that I have now would not be right if I wore the veil, so it would not be ok... if you wear the veil you have to know that many other things should change, all of that you wear has to change, because otherwise it's pointless, no? I mean I saw so many times in Egypt: so many girls who wear the veil more for fashion than for religion, who have super skinny jeans, and other part of the body not covered... but what's the point of wearing the veil then? It's also an offence to the idea of the veil! You have to respect your veil! And since I am aware of all of this, I don't feel ready yet, because I really care about the veil and I know what wearing it should mean, and one day, I don't know when yet, but one day I will be ready... (Munira, 20 years old, Turin, Islamic Relief volunteer).

As we have seen in Chapter 9, common among youth of Muslim background is a characterization of religiousness in terms of "desirability": although many may not feel "so religious" in the period of life they are going through, and indeed may even violate religious norms (such as smoking or drinking alcohol), many affirm that "one day they will" be religious and that being pious is a good thing. In many instances, this is a genuine wish, and not just something that a Muslim "should think". Only very few reject their religion outright and consider themselves atheists or agnostics. While it may be obvious that desiring a heightened religiosity for oneself is widespread among Islamic Relief volunteers - no matter their degree of involvement - it may appear less obvious that such an attitude is extremely common also among people who do not belong to religious associations.

These examples all deal with hijab-related issues. However, just like "unwilling visibility" has a strong gender dimension, in that it concerns many girls and young women who do not want to become symbols of a sort of "Muslim claim-making" due to their hijabs, the invisibility of religious belonging and behaving has a lot to do with the absence of religious obligations regarding males' clothing in mainstream interpretations of Islam[2]. Whilst male Muslims may willingly signal their Muslimness through clothes such as the *kufi* or the *taqiyah* hats (hats for prayer), it is safe to argue that this is rarely

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[2] This is not the case for Salafism: not only does this religious movement prescribe the full veil or the niqab to women, but it also imposes some rules to men, concerning specific ways to maintain the beard and to wear the *djellaba* (tunic) correctly. However, I did not have the chance to include Salafist young men or women in my sample, as this movement in Italy is not as spread as in other European countries.

the case among youths of Muslims background living in Italy. Therefore, if a male Muslim wants to make his Muslimness visible he has to find other alternatives – such as proudly wearing the Islamic Relief t-shirt and feeling honored to represent Islam by engaging in conversations about the organization, or being kind to one's neighbor in order to demonstrate that "even a Muslim" can be good-mannered.

However, even if it is certainly easier for Muslim young men to not show their Muslimness, they too may feel not so comfortable in making their religiosity, and in general their difference, visible. Mustafa's words well capture this uneasiness:

> Here in Italy I don't like to go the mosque, because mosques here are horrible. I mean I really respect those of the community who managed to obtain it, they have done an immense work, but it's always a warehouse… I mean the atmosphere is not nice, it's a bit depressing for me, it's degrading. Whereas in Morocco, we have fantastic mosques, they are beautiful, and the atmosphere is completely different. It's a place for meeting in general, not just for praying, and if you go there for praying, maybe you speak to the imam, who is a real one, not like here [in Mustafa's view imams in contexts of emigration are not reliable because they are not so knowledgeable].. and it's fun because you would go to the mosque with all your friends, because it's a place for meeting I told you, so you go altogether and have fun altogether there… whereas here in Italy this is impossible… because it's not like in Morocco, where it is normal to be religious and go to the mosque: here if you are religious you are considered a loser, someone who is not cool. For us it's not like that […] Same thing with my best friend [who is a native Italian, not of Arab origin]: I brought his as a gift from Morocco our typical tunic. He wore it once and got so many negative comments! I wear the tunic too, but only in Morocco, certainly here it is better not to… (Mustafa, 22 years old, Turin).

Mustafa's visibility is situational: depending on the context where he finds himself, he may feel more or less keen on showing his Muslimness. In the Italian setting, he prefers to keep his religiosity for himself, both due to the degrading conditions in which local Muslims are allowed to be visible (the space for a prayer room they manage to obtain) and the fear of having to deal with negative comments or bad looks. Thus, in his case, just like in Warda and Omaima's cases, the strategy of the external discourse impinges on them to the extent that they find it hard to display their Muslimness in the Italian context.

To conclude this section, there is no better comment than that provided by Paola's words precisely about the visibility of belonging and the "authenticity" of such a belonging:

> A Nigerian priest I met here in Italy told me: "Are you Muslim?". I said "Yes". "With this hair? No, you can't be Muslim" [She keeps her hair very short or shaved off]. I replied "What?" and he goes on "You can't be Muslim if you dress like that". And I thought "Well, let me claim for myself if I am Muslim or not!". It's not a matter of appearances, it's a question of what you feel inside. And I told him: "Just because you wear a cassock does not mean you are a priest. If I see you wearing a tracksuit you remain a priest". And he answers "No, I think that it is necessary to be able to identify people from the outside". And I said "What kind of reasoning is this?", and he went on "How can you tell the difference between a banana and a melon?" and I said "Well, I taste them!" and he reacted "I don't need to taste, I see they are different from the outside" and I insisted "I think that the first person who saw a melon and a banana tasted them and did not simply looked at them from the outside". I remember he got so nervous: according to him, I could not be Muslim because I was speaking to a priest, and this meant I was not Muslim! While, actually, I had many more conversations about religion with atheists or Christians than with Muslims!

Paola's story is exemplary of how Muslims may be "requested" to appear as such so as to be identifiable as Muslims, in a way that reproduces a stereotyped and reified image of Muslim themselves, who, paradoxically, may also be questioned for their invisibility – and not just for their "excessive" visibility.

4. Visible? Invisible? Both?

The patterns of visibility that I have identified show that the (in)visibility of Muslimness should not be taken for granted. *Appearing as visible* is not the same as *willing to be visible*: in the first case, an apparent visibility might conceal a sort unwillingness to signal one's own religious belonging; in the second case, visibility is actively sought for and consciously "inhabited".

Sought-for visibility means that the display of Muslimness is entrusted with the precise intention to counter the strategy of the negative external discourse through one's own embodied and enacted religious difference. For some of the young people who adopt these kinds of practices of visibility, it is precisely by drawing on one's own religious visibility that it is possible to deconstruct negative images of Islam". For others, like Islamic Relief members, visibility to an non-Muslim public is acquired at the price of sacrificing the very specificity find an advantage in the "script" that the organization equips them with: the strategy pursed by the organization – however paradoxical it may be in its "hiding Muslimness" in order to make Islam accepted (see Chapter IV) – does represent a powerful resource for its members. Tapping into this resource empowers them and enables them to tactically respond to the negative external discourse. For those who are outside of religious organizations, there is no univocal script to resort to: many of them challenge the strategy of the external discourse by simply drawing on the display of their difference. These too, however, are tactical capacities. Yet, even for those who show a good mastery of these tactics, seeking visibility as a Muslim can sometimes be problematic, as we have seen.

Indeed, the visibility of Muslimness does not equal to putting forward claims for recognition as Muslims. Appearing as visibly Muslim does not necessarily coincide with a desire to challenge negative external discourses on the basis of that very visibility – which can be depicted as "unwilling" in relation to the external discourse. Contrary to simplistic descriptions of religious organizations, many members of Islamic Relief are not to be categorized necessarily as vocal and active Muslims, who draw on their Muslimness to claim recognition. Although they feel the pain of negative representations about Islam as much as their peers do, they are not interested or do not feel comfortable in directly challenging them: their membership in an organization, despite the script that is provided to them by the organization itself, does not lead them to become "active" in this regard or to become symbols of a certain claim-making. Their visibility, on the contrary, points "inward" and corresponds to expectations about "how a good Muslim behaves" – as it simply signals, to their Muslim peers and to the Muslim community more generally, that they are Muslims. In the case of non-organized youths of Muslim heritage, too, there are instances of unwilling visibility, traceable to those who do appear or behave as Muslims, but do not want to belong to any entity that would make them be "singled out" as Muslims. They are not interested in underlining their difference or in establishing boundaries around it.

At the same time, the external discourse may have the effect of making it impossible, for some, to feel confident enough to show one's Muslimness. This is recurrent for girls and young women who think it's

not safe to wear the hijab in a Western context, but can happen also to young men. This is not true in all cases, though: many are religious and are simply uninterested in showing it - while thinking that this does not make them less religious than others at all. Others prefer to postpone showing more religiosity to a later phase of their life. Either way, these two last instances of "invisible Muslimness" are not related to, or depend from external discourse – contrary to the first one.

These different patterns and practices of visibility – which concern both organized and non-organized youths with a Muslim background – have to do with the complex, intertwined dynamic of "identity from the inside" and "identity from the outside" (Dessing 2013:46). "Identity from the inside" refers to what religion means to who practice it; "identity from the outside" designates how religion positions them. For those *who want to be visible* by displaying their Muslimness, the two coincide: they position themselves as Muslims and they want to be perceived as such by others, because that is an important identifier for them – if not the main one. For those who *simply appear as visible*, their identity "from the inside" coincides with "identity from the outside" too; however, being recognizable as Muslims does not mean that they want to be questioned, or singled out, as such, by non-Muslims. Therefore, they avoid "positioning" themselves in regards to non-Muslims' outer look that might a priori only see them as Muslims – in some cases, they just prefer to be considered "youths, as anyone else, period" (see above Lamia's words). For those *whose Muslimness is invisible*, identity from the inside does not coincide with identity form the outside: while in some cases this invisibility is the result of a free choice, in other cases it means "succumbing" to the strategy of an external discourse, in the face of which "invisibility" or "invisibilization" are preferred.

As these examples show, identity from the inside and identity from the outside may be conflicting. This points to the necessity to look at individuals' enactment (or the lack thereof) of their identity from the inside, analyzing whether and to what extent this identity from the inside is made visible, and to whom. Addressing a Muslim audience by showing that one is Muslim is not the same as putting that Muslimness in the foreground in order to challenge a negative external discourse; at the same, the objective of countering such external discourse can be pursued without necessarily signaling in evident ways that one is Muslim – as the case of Jameela shows us. This overcomes the oversimplification which, on one hand, casts people engaged in religious organizations as all, entirely visible – which also considers organizations' members as if they were all the same – and, on the other hand, considers those who are not engaged in religious associations as all uninterested in forms of visibility.

CONCLUSIONS

Organized and non-organized youths: more similar than different?

This "journey" into the lives and experiences of Italian youths, sons and daughters of migrants originating from Muslim countries was initiated with the intention to explore their relationship with their Muslim heritage and background in a Western country – examining in particular how they come to terms with religious values and norms, and how they show their belonging to Islam in a context – the Western one – that has proven so hostile to Islam. While they are exposed to the same trends, issues and dynamics as their peers who descend from "natives", they hold the peculiarity of having their own migrant, cultural and religious background. Some may feel the need to "connect" to these components of their identity by means of getting somehow involved in a religious, or ethno-national organization – although this is not to the only way to do so. Others may not become interested in joining religious or ethno-national associations – although this does not mean that they do not value their migrant and religious heritage. One of the main aims of this work was precisely to assess whether - and to what extent - being a member of a religious organization makes a difference in processes of religious self-identifications and visibilization, in the understanding of religious norms and values and in the enactment of religious practices. This is the reason why the present study compares "organized" and "non-organized" youths of Muslim background.

However, it does so by not treating involvement in an organization as a fixed, rigid, self-evident and self-explanatory independent variable to simply "contrast" organized and non-organized youths of Muslim background, because they cannot be considered as constituting two discrete, inherently different entities, or as two self-contained, distinct "groups". Indeed, one of the fundamental motives of the entire research here conducted is that treating members of a religious organization as a homogenous bloc, composed by people who act all in the same way and share uniform and precise characteristics appears quite untenable, just as it would appear untenable for any other social formation. In doing so, the present doctoral project sought to engage with a stream in the literature on religiosity among Western Muslims that, by concentrating on the "lived religion" of non-organized Muslims, has risked to posit a too rigid distinction between "organized" and "non-organized" Islam.

Indeed, researchers in this area rightly pointed to the need to shift the attention of research from a focus only on "visible" manifestations of Islam – which has often taken the form of analysis of Muslim organizations, associations and institutions in the wealth of studies concerning Islam in the West – to a focus on more "invisible" individuals, who define themselves as Muslims but do not partake in such manifestations and are remote from expressions of organized religion, so as to compensate for the over-representation – both in public debates and in academic research – of "organized" Muslims and to illuminate less "obvious" forms of religiosity, which are often simply and wrongly dismissed as "less religious".

Yet, what I contend – and tried to demonstrate – is precisely the idea that participating in a religious (Muslim) organization is equal to holding an "obvious" religious belonging, taking for granted that members of an organization all show the same religiosity, attach the same meaning to religious beliefs and practices and live their membership in the same way. In a nutshell: just as it would be wrong to

consider non-organized Muslims as a "watered down" version of Islam or as non-representatives of "Muslims", then it would be equally misleading to hold that "organized" Muslims' religiosity - and their will to show it - depends on their membership in a religious organization. On the contrary, at the basis of this research project was a questioning of this too sharp demarcation between "those who belong to a religious organization", and "those who do not". Why should we think that belonging to a religious organization makes someone necessarily "more religious" than someone who does not belong, or, conversely, that those who do not to a religious organization are necessarily or intrinsically "less religious"?

Therefore, my claim has been that it is deceptive both to consider the non-organized as "less religious" or as non-representatives of "true Islam" simply because they do not partake in visible manifestations of Islam, *and* to treat organized Muslims as if they all equally embodied the same religiousness. In other words, my aim was to question and possibly deconstruct the binary and static logic which upholds the distinction between "organized" and "non-organized", which risks providing a too static depiction of people who take part – or do not take part – in a religious organization or institutional setting. In this sense, this research stance is animated by the will to let the protagonists of the study define for themselves, in their own right, what is Muslim and what is religious, in a bottom-up perspective, rather than from an external point of view that assumes "involvement in an organization" for categorizing "less" or "more" religious people.

In line with this view, religious attitudes and behaviors were explored *in the same way* for both those who have chosen to get involved in an organization, and those who prefer not to, meaning that the data were collected in the same manner, by means of the same technique, and were analyzed transversally, in a cross-cutting fashion, and not separately. This is the approach, I believe, that can lead us to appreciate convergences or divergences, variations or trends among the way these youths deal with their religious background and the practice of religion; when similarities or differences are identified, it is possible to assess whether membership in an organization may play a role in shaping them, and to what extent, thus adding a further shade, or layer, in the understanding of their religiosity.

Such a shade, or layer has to be properly accounted for - avoiding to take membership in an organization for granted, as if it had the quality of an explaining factor, being able to explain "everything" alone. As thoroughly illustrated in Chapter 4, membership in a religious organization is not foregrounded, as it does not inform the analysis *a priori*, from the outset: in this sense, being a member of an organization has not been taken for granted as a black-boxed, self-evident *explanans*. On the contrary, this approach allowed "opening" the black box and looking "inside" an organization, to observe what membership in such an organization may signify. Indeed, how members of a religious organization live this experience and make sense of it may be very different from person to person. This is what it means to treat membership in an organization not as a self-evident independent variable. In fact, we do not know *a priori* what "membership in an organization" is able to explain (or not) in religious behaviors: we first need to observe this.

Therefore, in order to investigate the relationship that organized and non-organized youths have with their religious heritage, I resorted to an approach aimed at discovering "everyday lived religion", geared towards an attentive study of how religion unfolds in the different domains of daily life. Such an approach has proven extremely valuable for grasping the multifarious ways in which religion can – even unexpectedly - manifest itself in daily life, and has the advantage of adopting a bottom-up perspective. – i.e. that of the very protagonists of research. This provides ample room for letting *them* define, *for*

themselves, what is religious and what is not, in their own experience of religion – thus precisely allowing to "open" the black boxes of "membership" and "non-membership" in a religious organization, avoiding the risk of assigning extrinsic labels and categories. Moreover, given the profoundly performative character of Islam, such an approach appears particularly apt for investigating the practice of Islam in daily life, as it allows to discern experiential aspects of religiousness. This shields from the possible mistake of resorting to or reproducing categories that have been developed in the study of Western – Christian – denominations: while trends of privatization and of individualization of religion exist in Islam as well, it would be artificial to start studying the modern lives of people who are affiliated with Islam with the aim of observing whether there are trends of "protestantization" among them.

As I could appreciate in the course of the present research, studying the everyday religiosity of these youths' does not just represent an exercise in ethnography: actually, it helped me shed light on aspects holding a non-negligible social relevance. Indeed, finding personal and "true to oneself" ways to deal with one's own religious background is not an easy task for youths whose upbringing unfolded in Western countries, as they are exposed to a double set of expectations concerning their (religious) behavior. One is defined by the discourse internal to the Muslim community and concerns what a "Muslim" should do in order to be considered a "good Muslim"; it plays out both within the Muslim community at large, globally, and within local configurations of Muslim communities in the West, which are subjected to a heightened pressure due to the hostile environment they face in the West. In fact, the other set of expectations is defined by the negative discourse that gradually developed in Western societies casting Islam as incompatible, which conveys a stereotyped image of "the Muslim", usually as a conservative and backward pious individual – one that necessarily wears the veil, in the case of women, or that treats women as inferior subjects, in the case of men. Both these internal and external discourses impart essentialized representations of Muslims, which these youths have to navigate, please, respond to, deal with – or even cope with. Indeed, these competing internal and external definitions of religious normativity – i.e. the communitarian narrative about how a "good Muslim" should behave and a dominant negative discourse that holds Muslims accountable for their "dangerous" religion - imprisons them in that reified representation of what Muslims are and do.

In this sense, these two sets of discourses shape considerable power dynamics that affect the everyday life of these youths: as has been highlighted, "Muslim" is not an identity that can be inhabited unreflectedly in the context of a Western society. It is therefore necessary to properly address and assess the workings of these dynamics of power in the daily lives of youths with a Muslim background. For so doing, I borrowed the categories of "strategic" and "tactical" religion that Woodhead developed precisely for studying Islamic religiosities in the West (2013), based on the distinction drawn by De Certeau between "strategies" and "tactics", which represents a fruitful variation on the classic theme of "structure" and "agency". Thanks to these conceptual tools, I could examine, on one hand, the strength and the pervasiveness of the strategies set by internal and external discourses in these youths' everyday life; on the other hand, I could closely look at the tactics they could deploy, for finding their own accommodations within these strategies and for making sense of them in manners that would be authentic and true to their own appropriation of religion as an encompassing life program. At the same time, I could take the microcosm of a religious organization as an ideal site for observing the purveyance of a "strategic religion", as well as the production of forms of "tactical religion".

This conceptual apparatus, therefore, allowed me to respond to the two fundamental questions animating this study, which evolve around the forms in which religion manifests itself in daily life. The first question concerns the ways they relate to the religious "grand scheme" – as a moral framework

and as an orthodoxy; the second one regards their religious positioning towards the social world they grow up immersed in, i.e. how they show, convey or hide their religiosity and religious belonging in relation to the "outer world" and to the "others'" gaze.

As shown by the cross-cutting analysis of how both organized and non-organized youths of Muslim heritage engage with the top-down strategies of internal and external discourses and of the kinds of bottom-up tactical agency they deploy in the face of them, it is safe to argue that both these kinds of youths appear to share many more similarities than differences - not only, obviously, due to their background, but precisely in the way they deal with such background. They all live in a condition of "inbetweenness", at a crossroads in which communal religious expectations intersect with the expectations of a society that still struggles in perceiving itself as religiously plural. This adds to the already odd condition of inbetweenness intrinsic to migrants' descendants – who cannot completely identify with the country of origin of their parents and feel "different" when they are there, but find it difficult to completely identify with the country they have grown up in due to the peculiarities of their heritage –and because structural discrimination and cultural racism often denies them this possibility.

As highlighted in the course of the present study, living this condition of inbetweenness may generate original forms of appropriation of the religious grand scheme that are very similar for both those who live Islam as "free floaters" and those who valorize the Muslim component of their identity by joining a religious organization such as Islamic Relief. Indeed, both these kinds of youths, develop forms of tactical agency in the face of the internal discourse that are not aimed at contesting the theological contents and basis of religious norms, but, rather, their unexplained imposition. Contrary to possible expectations, this is true also for the group of organized Muslim youths, who find themselves exposed to the further "strategic religion" developed by their organization: while they overall subscribe to the contents of this religious strategy, they also find rooms for accommodating and appropriating it in personal ways, or they go as far as contesting its uncritical imposition.

At the same time, positioning oneself in the face of a context that continuously reminds these youths that they are somehow "different" represents the object of everyday negotiations in which the dimension of "visibility" of religion becomes crucial. Concerning these youths' relationship with the strategy of the external negative discourse surrounding Islam, the analysis has shown how the visibility of one's own religion does not equate to its deliberate, witting visibilization: being visible is not the same as willing to be visible. Often, it is a matter of "inevitable", "unwilling" visibility. Again, this holds for both organized and non-organized youths of Muslim background, challenging the view that posits organized Muslims as first and foremost visible actors who all want to be perceived as such. This shows that "visibility" is often more *in the eye of the beholder*, rather than in the action and practices of social actors. Therefore, it appears profoundly misleading to analyze organized and non-organized Muslim youths by applying *a priori* categories of visibility and invisibility, as if a "third", external eye could define what counts as visible religion or not.

Therefore, these findings represent an invitation to deconstruct the binary opposition between supposedly visible, religious actors and supposedly invisible, less religious actors, based on membership in an organization. In the two following sections, I will appraise these results more in detail and discuss possible implications for future research directions.

What follows from challenging the internal discourse?

The study of everyday religiosity was based on research questions pertaining to how religion manifests itself in their daily lives, whether these youths can appropriate the religious grand scheme in ways that make sense for them, how they conciliate the demands of the religious grand scheme with the demands of other schemes in life, and whether and how they trace boundaries between what is religious and what is not religious.

As I sought to illustrate, religion as lived in the everyday is indeed multifaceted, and can hardly be reduced to simple categorizations, both for organized and for non-organized Western youths of Muslim background. An everyday lived religion approach applied to these youths enabled us to appreciate how forms of reflexivity unfold in the way religion and religious normativity are understood and appropriated – no matter their involvement or not in institutionalized settings such as a religious organization. By looking at the enactment of practices, or how they are reflected upon, it was possible to appreciate the "strength" of the religious "grand scheme" in these people's lives: indeed, this would be "naturally" reflected in practices, informing their daily routines and moral habitus in automatic ways and it would also be evoked as an ideal of perfection in order to make sense of their imperfections, doubts, or ambivalences.

As discussed, it is not an "either/or" relation: either religious and practicing, or not. Rather, what was interesting to observe throughout the analysis is precisely the coexistence of different manners of relating to a religious normativity even in the same person – which accounts for situational or processual religious practices. While some aspects of this normativity might inform certain spheres of life "automatically", some other aspects are subjected to reflection, or are distanced, or doubted. An individual is never "entirely religious" as a monolith; he or she might show a strict adherence to some religious norms – and feel wary about others, or find their enactment particularly difficult – according to situations or phases of life.

Indeed, on the basis of my findings and of the way I approached them, it would have been misleading to build a typology based on degrees of practice ("more practicing" or "less observant" Muslims), or on degrees of "literalism" in interpreting religious norms ("more conservative" or "more progressive" Muslims). This shows that the making of religious subjects is a "work in progress" – but not necessarily in the sense that it tends to be "incremental", aspiring to continuously improvement and enhancement one's own cultivation of practice and knowledge; actually, it can be better understood as a "work in progress" constantly in the making, in which achievements can be counterpointed by setbacks, with religious identification fluctuating in its intensity, or being situationally "compartmentalized" so as to the contain the possibly contradictory need to meet up with contingencies of other "schemes" and demands of everyday life.

For instance, the code-switch adopted by some of the informants belonging to the two categories (organized and non-organized), by which they would foreground their Muslimness or not, depending on the context and situation, does not mean that they live their religious identity with the playfulness that is so recurrent in accounts of today's "razzmatazz" spiritualities: in fact, although they take a situational freedom to accommodate religion in the many demands of everyday life grand schemes, they do not contest the ideal of perfection of Islam, nor do they dare to advance critiques of theological contents. In the case of non-organized, in particular, one would expect them to feel "freer" to not believe or not practice. However, as non-representative as my sample is, I was struck to observe how

this was almost never the case: even for my informants who define themselves as very remote from religion, the religious ideal did play a role, with piety being held in the highest regard and postponed to a later phase in life (Debevec 2012). On a side note, I would argue that this further exemplifies the non-appropriateness of the use of categories such as that of "protestantization" for the study of Islam, as postponing pious behaviors to a later phase in life may translate to possibilities of "visibilization" of one's own religiosity that cannot be anticipated or excluded *a priori*.

Indeed, we have seen how the "religious grand scheme", in its perfection, would be kept separate and distinct from some "problematic aspects", which are not considered inherent to it: when criticism about Islam was expressed, it was actually addressing the "internal discourse" about Islam, more that Islam in itself. Either by denouncing "the impositions" that the community would convey about how to behave "as a good Muslim", or by separating between religion and culture in order to demonstrate that negative aspects about Islam are to imputed to culture (e.g. the condition of the woman), these "critics" were anyhow subscribing to the validity of the religious grand scheme, precisely by taking reflexive stances about it. What is criticized is how the image of the "good Muslim" is conveyed by a number of actors - composing the surrounding Muslim community - and creates undue expectations, which might contrast with the way these youths understand religious normativity. The dimension of the internal discourse about Islam thus revealed to be crucial, testifying to the pervasiveness of power relations in the religious field. Therefore, the expression of these reflexive stances - especially those addressing the "impositions of the community" - can be interpreted as tactics against these manifestations of different forms of strategic religion.

Speaking of "strategic religion", it is now interesting to turn to the role played by the religious strategy deployed by an organization such as Islamic Relief. Indeed, this organization does devote significant organizational energy to nurturing and teaching a religious message, also by training young leaders among its staff members who can articulate compelling visions. This means that the organization conveys its own "Islamic doxa" and has a clear mission as a purveyor of religious education, which also results in dynamics of social control and peer pressure among its members. As was observed, this strategy was successful, in that it did make many new members of the organization "more religious". At the same time, tactical capacities and degrees of religious reflexivity were expressed also by Islamic Relief members, both staff members and volunteers. Indeed, this proved the existence of a difference between religious discourses and religious practices within an organization – which, again, prevents from depicting these institutionalized settings as monoliths, or as if people inside them were all the same. While the internal discourse about Islam and the general "Islamic doxa" may suggest the existence of a "pecking order" whereby someone or something gets rewarded – i.e. those who appear to be "more" or "better" Muslims – the reality of the institutionalized setting of a large Islamic organization, which, in Italy, may be said to represent "standard" Sunni Islam given its linkages with Islamic places of worship across the peninsula – shows many different facets in the understanding of religious norms. Simultaneously, this shows that people inside and outside religious organizations face very similar challenges and share many commonalities.

This leads us to consider how both organized and non-organized youths of Muslim origin navigate and make sense of the complexity in which their religious practice is embedded in – a complexity that is made up of traditions, relations of power, social dynamics. Indeed, their religious self-making is linked with questions of authority and of regimes of truth, which they seem to challenge when they criticize the uncritical imposition of norms. Again, while they show no interest for theological disputes to critique the content and the origins of religious norms, they seem to engage much more – wittingly or

unwittingly – in the advancement of Islam's "discursive tradition" (Sunier 2018). In fact, by contesting the imposition of some norms, or by finding ways to make these norms resonate better with their lives, they contribute to "make theology" in the everyday, with specific regards to the enactment of practices.

Concerning Islamic Relief members, we can refer to the discussions about the pressure felt by some girls to wear the veil or choose some clothes, or to instances of accommodation of *prima facie* "less religious" people in a religious organization: through their tactics, these youths find ways to overcome moral – but very pragmatic – dilemmas: "when recruiting volunteers, should we give precedence to the fact that someone believes in God, even if she does not wear the veil or he smokes, or to the fact that someone wears a veil or does not smoke but has a less genuine intention and displays a more ambiguous behavior"? However, at the same time, its members elaborate an original reflection on "everyday theology". Considering that it is made by youths – both volunteers and staff members – it appears interesting to follow the developments of such an elaboration as a further direction for research.

More generally, if we are to appraise the implication of these findings, they surely confirm the permanence of "Islam" as a signifier from generation to generation in the context of settlement, as discussed at the very beginning of the present thesis. However, they also point to the fact that, while Islam remains a signifier for Muslim migrants' descendants, such "Islam" also changes, not so much in terms of "degree" of religiosity, which, based on the premises of this research, is hardly "measurable"; rather, in terms of variation between generations in practice and in meanings attached to religion.

Moreover, these results also show that the trends of "neo-orthodox deculturation", while certainly present, do not represent the only "destiny" for migrant Islam. In fact, among my informants, only one girl (belonging to the sample of non-organized youths) presented the traits of a culture-less, neo-orthodox Islam depicted by Roy (2004). On the contrary, I would argue that those who displayed criticism for the uncritical imposition of norms and advanced reasonings stemming from the need to solve moral and practical issues contribute to the discursive tradition of Islam in ways that can help Islam gain a more solid rooting in Western societies. It is true that they often do so by "defending" Islam through the critique of impositions that they consider to be related to defects of parental culture, which should be removed from "real religion"; however, at the same time, the ultimate goal is to find ways to better accommodate Islam in their daily lives, by conciliating it with the demands of the other "grand schemes" impinging on the daily experiences of a young person in a Western context. Therefore, I would dare to maintain that this can be seen as a paradoxical form of "reculturation" of Islam in the West – in order to live Islam in ways that "make sense", for these youths, in Western societies.

Hence, future research should focus on these trends, asking how they connect to or contribute to shape and influence other equally significant trends in the globalized, more culture-less Islam, such as the circulation of modest fashion, or of halal music, across localities and contexts that may present sharp differences (e.g. Europe and the Gulf peninsula). For instance, it appears legitimate to ask whether the contributions to the discursive tradition offered by youths of Muslim origin in the West appeal to other Muslim youths in other parts of the world and "make their way" in the circulation of ideas and tendencies in the transnational field of (cyber)Islam.

Can the external discourse be challenged yet?

As already discussed, power relations do not take place only inside the religious field. In fact, "being religious" is also shaped – and just as importantly – by the dominant gaze of the non-Muslims society where these youths have grown up in and by which they feel to be constantly scrutinized. Indeed, their religiosity cannot be the same of other Muslims in other parts of the world, due to the very context which forges it. The weight of the "external discourse" can be just as strong as that of the "internal discourse" in defining Muslimness and in taming it.

Some do respond to this strategy by drawing on their very Muslimness and by getting "visible" about their religiosity. More generally, individuals who willingly engage with the external discourse do so by visibly displaying their Muslimness. Yet, they do not challenge this strategy by posing themselves as victims or antagonists - as opposed to Jeldtoft's arguments (2013a). On the contrary, they seek to deconstruct negative stereotypes and prejudices by displaying their (religious) difference. In the case of the Italian branch of Islamic Relief, we could observe how the organization developed a clear strategy targeting its non-Muslim audience, with the precise intent to counter negative perceptions of Muslims in Italy.

However, the effects of this strategy on its young members appears quite ambivalent. Indeed, this organization appears as a quite robust creator of cultural products (stories, slogans, symbols), crafting a set of religious and identitarian resources - both material and symbolic - that are meant to be maximally portable into the everyday worlds where their members live and across multiple settings. It is true that, for those who resort to the "external strategy" provided by the organization, the use of this kind of resource proves to empower them. Nonetheless, the "script" provided by Islamic Relief obeys to the stronger strategy of the external discourse, bound as it is to promote a positive image of Islam by hiding Muslimness. Actually, these very resources are emancipatory only to a certain extent, in that they risk imprisoning them in a subaltern position of "difference" vis-à-vis the majority, non-Muslim society. Therefore, even if Islamic Relief members are able to put their Muslimness in the foreground, they can do so in a rather "devitalized" way: while they feel empowered in their "Muslimness" - which can also help them in the process of subjectivation and positive self-reevaluation - they have to "control" the level of display of such Muslimness. For those who do make use of these repertoires, however, the external strategy of the organization works perfectly fine, as they do not seem to feel the need to employ these scripts more tactically, or to selectively utilize or even creatively re-signify them. In this sense, this strategy proves successful.

At the same time, while it is true that members of an organization have the comparative advantage of disposing of a set of resources - this "external strategy" - that the organization equips them with in order to counter the negative discourse, not all of its members are willing to make use of this toolkit. For some, even the low "visibility" of Islam that the organization promotes with non-Muslim audiences is seen as an obstacle. Indeed, many of them may appear as visible, but do not wish to act visibly in the face of those who convey the negative external discourse. Their visibility is unwilled – prominently in the case of young girls: wearing the veil might simply result from a "natural", *norm*al adhesion to religious tenets and might simply signal to other Muslims that "I am Muslim too". Yet, it may not be necessarily entrusted with the task of seeking visibility as a Muslim in order to challenge external discourse. The same goes for membership in an organization like Islamic Relief: becoming a volunteer does not necessarily imply the will to be visible as Muslim to others in representing an Islamic organization.

Conversely, non-organized Muslims are not entirely deprived of a tactical agency for countering the external negative discourse. While they cannot resort to a "ready-made" script as their counterparts, they can find creative and very personal ways of "going public" about their religion, drawing on the Muslim component of their identity – and appearance - to promote a positive image of themselves. However, there are non-negligible instances of people in the two samples who make their religiosity invisible to the external gaze, precisely in order not to challenge the logics of external discourse's strategy. For them, it is impossible to enact tactical behaviors against it.

More generally, however, across the two samples, only a minority "practices" religious by displaying its Muslimness, while "unwilling visibility" seem to be the prevailing attitude. This suggests that, for many of these youths, challenging the widespread negative representation of Islam – the "external discourse" - is still extremely difficult. Indeed, this is the case even for the very organization considered in the present study, which has to resort to the "tactical strategy" of minimizing the Muslim component of its identity in order to legitimize itself with non-Muslim audiences, by making use of a "notwithstanding" language. This appears all the more interesting, as the Italian branch of Islamic Relief is one of the largest organizations on the "market" of religious organizations, and certainly one of the most appealing to Muslim youths, given the space it offers for "fun".

In this sense, it was striking to observe how non-Muslims taking part at the organization's events or activities were framed as "Italians" – although all of my informants hold Italian citizenship and have grown up in Italy. My interpretation is not that they refuse to feel Italian; rather, I read this as an impossibility, for them, to conceive of "Italianness" as encompassing "Muslimness" or "Arabness". What emerged from their accounts was a surprised gratification in finding that "Italians" could be interested in learning about and even supporting the organization, as if, in their view, Italians see Muslims as something foreigner and different. In other words, according to their words, "Muslim" still cannot be a quality comprised in "Italian": indeed, it seems that they still cannot feel authorized to call themselves "Italians" and authorized to be part of the Italian mainstream.

Similarly, it appears interesting to analyze the atmosphere of "being home" or of "feeling as if we were in one big family" explained by many Islamic Relief young members. As already discussed, many Islamic Relief volunteers actually join the organization for reasons that are primarily linked not to the will to "go public" and visible about their religious belonging, but to the need of staying with or finding friends that are "similar" to them – i.e. that share that condition of "inbetweenneess" and of suspension between two different "cultural words". Often, they would explain that "we Arabs understand each other" and that many minor or greater aspects of everyday life can be grasped only by "Arabs". I read this as a way to "normalize" their condition of "inbetweenneess" by finding a safe space where to express it without complexes. Here, again, in this dynamic I find traces of a "reculturation" of Islam and of the related cultural-symbolic heritages inherited by these youths: through the "family", within the organization, they can build a "room for their own" in which their religious and cultural background can be valorized and lived "normally" with other similar peers who can understand them better than non-Muslim, native Italians. In this sense, again, the "deculturation" thesis appears to be not so straightforwardly applicable to the majority of youths with a Muslim descent.

Surely, the enduring strength of the external discourse still makes it difficult for these youths to normalize their "inbetweenneess" more openly, in the broader society. Nonetheless, among non-organized youths I observed this tendency to recur a little less: even if the majority of them had many

of peers with a similar background in their circles of friends, they displayed a more fluid and flexible relationship both to heir "Italianness" and their cultural and religious heritages. In this sense, the feeling of staying in a "family" with similar peers may be a resource and a protective refuge, but also an obstacle, in that it may prevent to adopt more floating and adjustable stances towards the attitudes of the majority society and of the external discourse.

Conclusive reflections

The above observations have two consequences. The first is that it is impossible to draw a clear, distinct line between "organized" and "non-organized" youths of Muslim origin, as if the former were all pious and devout, visible and active as Muslims, and the latter were less religious and less interested in displaying Muslimness. Practices of visibility can be observed also among non-organized individuals, while members of an organization might not seek visibility as religious people, even if their membership might hint at this. The second is that even within a religious organization, it is not possible to consider its members as if they all displayed the same religiosity, the same adherence to the religious discourses put forward by the organization and the same enactment of its strategies. In other words, as these youths show with their behaviors, religious people do not fit easy categorizations.

In this sense, I hope to have contributed, with this study, to add a further piece to the promising and ever-expanding stream in research that uses an "everyday lived religion" approach to analyse religiosities in general, and Muslim ones in particular, from a bottom-up perspective – that is, from the point of view of the vert protagonists of the research. This ensures avoiding conventional, lazy representations of Muslims, going past "group" categorizations that apply artificial labels that do not correspond to the reality on the ground. In this case, I hope I have demonstrated that it is possible to overcome a categorization system developed by social sciences which had constructed a misleading opposition between organized, apparently "visible" Muslims and non-organized, supposedly "less" visible Muslims. Furthermore, this research may illustrate how to study a presumed "visibility"- in this case, that of a religious organization - in a way that avoids he pitfalls of "hypervisibilization", that is, the construction of apparently visible Muslim actors as antagonists, or as victims, or as being "all about religion". For these reasons, I deem this work completed the very mission of the research strand on "everyday lived Islam" that has been developing over the most recent years.

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