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Islamophobia in Italy: Examining the Libyan Refugee Crisis and its Effects on Italian Immigration Policy

Seth Walker
Seattle University

Seattle University

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Effects on Italian Immigration Policy

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Seth Walker

Committee in charge:

Professor Serena Cosgrove, Director

Professor Nova Robinson, Reader

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Dr. Serena Cosgrove, Director

Dr. Nova Robinson, Reader

"no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark
you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well

your neighbors running faster than you
breath bloody in their throats
the boy you went to school with
who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory
is holding a gun bigger than his body
you only leave home
when home won't let you stay."

Warsan Shire,
"Home"

Abstract

This paper addresses the contemporary roots and implications of Islamophobic sentiments in Italian society by examining a specific case study: the Libyan refugee crisis. I begin

by analyzing the history of Italy's imperialism in Libya between 1911 and 1945, in which I examine how Italian imperial practices (coupled with United States and British intervention post World War II) have influenced the economic and political state that Libya is in today, in order to understand the connections between imperialism and the Libyan refugee crisis. I then provide the theoretical framework of Islamophobia, set forth by the *Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia*, to give context to understand contemporary implications of Islamophobia and what it means for Italian identity building. After presenting this conceptual framework, I address the rise of populism in Italy to show how right-wing political parties have pushed back against incoming immigrants from Muslim majority countries. Understanding the rise of right-wing populism allows for greater understanding of how Islamophobia manifests itself when coopted and mobilized by a group of people. Then, I examine the various factors that have influenced Italian Islamophobic sentiments since the beginning of the Libyan refugee crisis in 2009. This analysis fuses a gap in knowledge about the different factors affecting domestic tensions between Italians and Muslim immigrants. Moreover, it seeks to determine what factors have allowed the Lega Nord party to enact and enforce laws that target refugee communities. After examining these factors, I conclude with a glimpse into the future at an attempt to understand how the instituted legislation directed at refugees and Muslim communities affects political and economic relations between Italy and the Muslim world.

Introduction

Addressing the systems of governance and economic exploitation that European powers institutionalized in their colonies is crucial to understanding the development of modern nations after colonialism. In order to understand contemporary migration patterns that have developed

between Italy and Libya, it is important to examine how Italy's imperial past has influenced political and economic strife in Libya today. Contextualizing the past in order to understand its effects on contemporary issues facilitates a better understanding of how the political and economic strife in Libya has forced many to seek refuge outside Libya's borders. Until the 1980's, Italy was a country with significant out migration, and the recent influx of refugees from Libya has not only challenged the Italian state to extend its resources to a new community of people seeking economic prosperity, it has challenged the homogenous, European, Catholic identity that Italy has fostered since 1871, leading to domestic tensions between Italians and Muslim refugees that has manifested as institutionalized racism. Between 1970 and 2015, the number of Muslims in Italy increased from roughly 2,000 to 2 million. That is, the percentage of Muslims of the total population of Italy increased from less than 1% to 3.7%, the fourth largest percentage in Europe (Hackett, 2016). Due to recent economic and political strife in Libya, a yearly average of 170,000 refugees have found themselves on the borders of Southern Italy. Resultantly, the large influx of immigration to Italy from Libya and other Muslim majority countries has prompted Islamophobic sentiments within Italian society and right-wing political parties have coopted these sentiments to fuel a structured, tangible movement against Muslims living in Italy.

Therefore, through the examination of Italy's colonial history in Libya (specifically its use of violence and economic exploitation), this paper seeks to address the factors that have influenced the rise of Islamophobic sentiments in Italy, how Islamophobia operates in contemporary Italian society and politics, and the transition in immigration policy that has forcibly repatriated thousands of Libyans. Through the lens of the theoretical framework of Islamophobia, I analyze how, despite some scholars' claims that Italy has successfully integrated Muslim refugees, the Italian media's representation of radical Islam, the rise of right wing, xenophobic political parties, and the promotion of a homogenous Italian identity have allowed for the enactment and enforcement of laws targeting refugee integration and endorsed a general mistrust of Muslim peoples.

Historical Roots of Contemporary Immigration

Libya's Pre-Colonial Moment

      Italian imperial interests in Libya date back to 1880, when the government declared its desire for two trading posts on Libya's North coast, Cyrenaica and Tripoli. Five years later, at the Berlin Conference of 1885, Italy formally acquired rights to penetrate Libya from stronger imperial powers, the British and French. Between 1900 and 1911, the Italian press began calling on the Italian government to seek control of Tripoli, arguing that the region (Cyrenaica and Tripoli) "naturally belonged to the Italians" as it was historically part of the Roman Empire. (Lutsky, 1969, Diplomatic Preparations section, para. 13). On September 28, 1911 Italy declared its intended occupation. The Italian government provided Ottoman Empire with an ultimatum, claiming Italy's interest in providing Tripolitania with the "blessings of progress" (Lutsky, 1969, The Italo-Turkish War of 1911 section, para. 1). In exchange for the gifts of progress, the Ottomans were asked to stand down and not resist the new occupation. The Young Turk government responded peacefully, stating they were willing to meet Italian demands as long as they aligned with Ottomans interests. However, they objected to a permanent occupation, resulting in Italy's declaration of war on September 29, 1911.

      Overall, Ottoman forces were no match for the Italian navy. The Italian fleet blockaded Tripoli by sea and British forces refused to let Ottoman troops pass through Egypt. Therefore, the Ottoman Empire could not send reinforcements and food supplies, causing a famine in Libya. The war was short lived with an Italian to Ottoman troop ratio of 50,000 to 7,000. Within two months the war was over, and on November 5, 1911 Italy officially annexed Tripoli. In following peace negotiations, the Lausanne Peace Treaty of 1912, the Ottomans withdrew their troops and high officials. However reluctant, the Ottoman Empire refused to recognize Italian sovereignty over all of Libya[1] (Raza, 2012, p. 18-19). On an international level, other imperial European powers

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[1] Upon the annexation of Tripoli in 1911, Italy changed its name to Libya.

(Russia, Britain, France, Germany) objected to Italy's decision to invade Libya. They viewed Italy's expansionist policies as a violation of international norms and contrary to the liberal ideals of the *Risorgimento.* Upon formal declaration of invasion, however, none of these powers sought to stop Italy from what it was doing. Instead, they adopted policies of non-interference, hinged upon Italian support of their own colonial endeavors. Therefore, upon arrival in Libya, Italian settlers quickly established the new territory as their "promised land" (Jayne, 2010, p. 28). In Tripoli, the Italian navy established bases, Catholic missionaries established mission sites, and banks and schools were opened.

Nevertheless, upon conquest in 1911, Italians were convinced of Libya's strategic geography.[2] They believed its location served as the gateway to the center of Africa and that its lands could be revived once the desert was conquered. The government was also convinced that Libya was a "'Little Eden' where farming would flourish and where the unskilled could prosper" (Jayne, 2010, p. 28). However, the true underlying rationalization of its conquest was to serve as a place of emigration for an overpopulated peasant class in southern Italy. In order to send large groups of Italian citizens to live in Libya, the government devised a "gradualist policy of slow economic penetration," wherein Italian businessmen bought Libyan commercial and manufacturing interests (which sought to monopolize Libya's shipping lines and export industry), to employ Italians and gain economic profit (Raza, 2012, p. 7).

Despite economic presence, Italians were never welcomed in Libya. Between 1912 and 1922, they were met with resistance from the Sanusi, a jihadist Order that was designed to protect the Islamic world from the 'outer' world. The Italians were unable to crush this resistance. The Sanusi Order, founded by Sayyid Muhammad bin Ali al-Sanusi, was developed in 1798 is response to Napoleon's invasion of Egypt. The order was founded to create "awareness within the Muslim world of the innate power and threat Europe was to embody" (Raza, 2012, p. 8).

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[2] Tripoli is short for Tripolitania.

Moreover, it developed mutually beneficial economic and political relationships with indigenous, Bedouin tribes that helped it harvest political power and exert influence in regional, North African affairs. By 1899, the Sanusi Order had developed "a monopolistic economic control over the Eastern Sahara and associated that with control over the internal power structures of tribal society" (Raza, 2012, p. 11).

Between 1876 and 1883, al-Mahdi resisted Ottoman demands for reinforcements in wars against the Russians, Egyptian Arabi Pasha, and the Sudanese Mahdi. By 1902, under al-Mahdi (al-Sanusi's son), the Sanusi Order had developed into a full-swing resistance movement. However, resistance was not in full swing until 1902 when the French invaded the Saharan territories. When the French invaded, they destroyed religious houses, and, when the Italians did the same in Cyrenaica, "the Order had no choice but to mount a resistance" (Raza, 2012, p. 13). Therefore, while the land and sea blockade forced Ottoman defeat, the Sanusi Order refused to accept Italy's annexation without a fight. Their resistance movements began during the Italo-Turkish War and continued on-and-off throughout the entire time that Italy was present in Libya between 1911 and 1951. As Raza reclaims, "The Sanusi Chief al-Sharif (grandson of the Founder) against the advice of his councillors made the decision to throw the Order into the struggle and in essence transform the trade-orientated organisation into a guerrilla force" (Raza, 2012, p. 20). The realization that Italian forces were unable to defeat the Sanusi resistance brought about the years of the accords. Between the 1916 and 1922, "the Italian policy, unable to crush the resistance, shifted its direction to making peace with the Sanusi" (Raza, 2012, p. 29). In these negotiations, Italy was forced into a multidimensional treaty that obliged the government to recognize Sanusi Order autonomy as well as Libyan religious autonomy and Islamic judiciary customs. It also granted Cyrenaica a parliament which was established in 1920. Moreover, to silence further resistance movements, Muhammad Idris, head of the Sanusi Order, became formally recognized as a prince and was given a stipend of 300,000 lire per month (Raza, 2012, p. 31).

From Sphere of Influence to Colony

In 1934, Libya was formally declared a colony of Italy, a result of a long fought process that sought to relocate Southern Italy's growing peasant class. This phenomenon, known as demographic colonization, refers to "the transplantation of self-supporting groups of peasants from the mainland." (Jayne, 2010, p. 27) In 1932, prior to its official declaration as a colony, the Italian government created the Libyan Colonization Board to devise a plan for transporting Italian families to Libya. However, until claiming Libya as a formal colony, Italy was hesitant to foster unity between its two provinces (Tripoli and Cyrenaica) because it feared a growing alliance between Arabs and Bedouins. The government feared Italian forces stood no chance to the tribal governance these two groups desired. Despite these fears, the Italian government still sought to unify Italy and Libya. In 1929, the two administrations were "consolidated… under a single governor with the capital in Tripoli." In 1934 the press officially announced the unification of Libya, which would later become a territorial extension to the Kingdom of Italy in 1939 (Jayne, 2010, p. 27-28).

However, despite spending almost 30 years fully conquering Libya, Italian colonization efforts in Libya were largely unsuccessful until the latter half of the 1930's. By 1937 only 300 families had settled in Libya, but that number continued to double and by 1939 more than 110,000 Italian immigrants were settled. Under Italo Balbo, the Italian Governor-General of Libya, all Italian families that came to Libya were guaranteed prosperity. The Italian government ensured immigrant success by giving each family a car, a strategic plan that allowed immigrants to travel further into the interior of Libya to expand colonial settlements outside of Tripoli and Cyrenaica (Jayne, 2010, p. 32).

Lasting Impacts of Imperialism on Libyan Infrastructure

Despite the government's claimed success, Italy's colonial endeavors in Libya had lasting impacts that are still echoed today. In its wars against the Sanusi Order and other Bedouin tribes, Italian rule displaced more than 20,000 people, most of whom took refuge in Egypt. The Italians

also placed more than 100,000 rebels in concentration camps with harsh, life threatening conditions. Altogether, the estimated number of people who died under Italian rule (either by fighting, disease, or starvation) is around 80,000. Moreover, throughout their regime, Italian rulers actively repressed Bedouin peoples to advance the development of its settler colony for Italian immigrants. As historian Dusti R. Jayne says,

> not only must the Bedouin be kept off the fertile plateau but [they] must be stabilized in the country on the edge of the wilderness (*predesertico*) where, in his opinion, they had sufficient and suitable land for pasturing and sowing. It was often Italian policy to take the best coastal lands from Bedouin landowners, sometimes with compensation, other times without it (Jayne, 2010, p. 35).

By the end of its colonial regime, Italy had followed in the footsteps of other imperial powers by subjugating indigenous Libyan populations in various ways. However, these actions were not without consequence, and following independence on December 24, 1951, Italian settlers were expelled by Libyan officials (St. John, 2008).

Discussing the large patterns of out-migration is a key component of understanding the. lasting impacts of Italian dominion in Libya that have propelled Libya into its current state of strife. At the end of World War II, when Italy lost control of its colonial holdings, the United States and Britain intervened in Libya's domestic politics with the "protection and assistance of the United Nations" to impose Western leaning Muhammad Idris as the rightful King (Vandewalle, 2012). In 1969, Idris was overthrown by Libyan nationalists under the leadership of Muammar Qaddafi, which led the country into three decades free of U.S. and British involvement. Between 1970 and 2000, the Libyan economy flourished as Qaddafi used the revenues from Libyan oil reserves to invest in education and social welfare programs and provide education for everyone. However, in the early 2000's, fearing U.S. intervention, Qaddafi moved his regime to the right. He imposed austerity measures and cut programs and access to resources for the poor. Simultaneously, while attempting to improve relations with Libya, the U.S. worked behind the scenes and bribed officials

within Qaddafi's government, organized an intelligence team on the ground to operate as a counter-insurgency, and collaborated with NATO to wage a bombing campaign (Vandewalle, 2012).

Today, the Western backed war in Libya is at the heart of the strife that has ensued since 2004 which has patronized free speech and forced hundreds of thousands of people out of Libya and into Italy. As multiple rebel groups continue to fight for control of Libya's de facto government, "even Libyans aren't protected. Because of the war and the spread of weapons, even Libyans are leaving the country because they don't feel secure"[3] (Salustro, 2016).

Theoretical Framework of Islamophobia

Islamophobia is a political construct, set forth in 1997 by the *Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia*. Essential to its understanding is its connotation; it is a "fear of," yet it is also a racist ideology. Two prominent scholars on Islamophobia, Alfredo Alietti and Dario Padovan, associate Islamophobia with two things: one, the fear of the internal enemy, connected with the fear of the proximity of the Muslim body, and two, the general view of Islamic civilization as a threat to Western, Christian civilization because of its potential to perpetuate terrorism. In recent discourse, it has developed into a new category, similar to Antisemitism, called xeno-racism. It transcends a 'phobia' in multiple ways, the most important being its grouping of all Muslims into one category: that inferior to Euro-Christian civilization. Moreover, it has called for a preservation of "our people" (which represents one way of life, standard of living, and race) and an anti-foreignness sentiment. As understood by Zafar Iqbal, "Islamophobia is a new word for an old fear." (Alietti and Padovan, 2013, p. 586). In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, Western countries (most prominently the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy) have deemphasized the importance of a multicultural society, placing Islam as a threat to the notion of European-ness, characterizing Islamophobia as explicitly exclusionary. Moreover, instead of the

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[3] Testimony given in the film "Libya's Migrant Trade: Europe or Die" by Mohamed Abu Breda, Deputy Director, Libyan Department for Control of Irregular Migration.

fear of one, Islamophobia constitutes a fear of all Islamic civilization. As stated by Alietti and Padovan, "the guilty party here is the Muslim civilization, reproducing anomic and anonymous violent guys, broadly global networked to tear up the social fabric of Western democratic societies" (Alietti and Padovan, 2013, p. 586). Therefore, Islamophobia is explicitly exclusionary and has for allowed institutionally supported hate crimes and restricted immigration policies from Muslim majority countries. In "Rights: Europe's Rising Islamophobia**,** Virginie Guiraudon addresses how Europe's far right has occupied public space to assert their culture over Muslim practices. He says, "pointedly insulting anti-Muslim actions are increasing… In Italy, the right-wing Northern League party organizes processions of pigs on the sites where mosques are to be erected" (Guiraudon, 2011).

S. Sayyid, another prominent scholar on Islamophobia, identifies Islamophobia as a "concept that emerges precisely to do the work that categories like racism were not doing" (Sayyid, 2014, p. 11). He conceptualizes the ongoing critique within the framework of Islamophobia: the differentiation between the philosophical and political. The philosophical represents the "lack of clarity about the concept of Islamophobia" while the political involves understanding the contestation about Islamophobia that has arisen in trying to answer questions of "national security, social cohesion, and cultural belonging" (Sayyid, 2014, p. 11). Furthermore, Sayyid argues that the empirical studies of Islamophobia, which analyzes media representations and socio-psychological approaches, cannot "provide us with a theoretical clarification" (Sayyid, 2014, p. 11). He states,

> Islamophobia is rejected not only because there may be a disagreement about whether a particular practice or behavior meets the criterion of what constitutes Islamophobia, but also because there is a dispute that any such behavior could be considered to be Islamophobic, because the concept of Islamophobia lacks any validity (Sayyid, 2014, p. 12).

Therefore, Sayyid's research provides an important perspective on understanding Islamophobia: that which argues Islamophobia does not exist or is too complex to address and define in a single term.

Ultimately, it is evident that justifications for Islamophobia are grounded in its collection of lacks (lack of freedom, human worth, and respect for women and queer individuals) and fear that Muslims will attempt to institutionalize their beliefs in Christian civilization. While Alietti, Padovan, and Sayyid all provide important understandings for Islamophobia, it is seemingly too complex to be regarded solely as a fear of Muslims. Instead, Islamophobia should be conceptualized as fully encompassing the discrimination, exclusion, and racism that Muslims experience worldwide.

Islamophobia Enforced Through Policy

Research on Italian Islamophobia demonstrates that this prejudice has allowed for an institutionally structured, racist movement against Muslims living in Italy. As highlighted by Alietti and Padovan [in reference to anti-Muslim xeno-racism], "it is becoming something more structured, something that we can call a social bonding in order to substitute different forms of social organization such as the rule of law or class solidarity and cohesion" (Alietti and Padovan, 2013, p. 599). Islamophobic sentiments in Italy have prevailed in multiple ways: publically, through hate crimes, such as public humiliation for wearing traditional Islamic clothing and vandalizing Mosques, and politically, in the Italian Parliament. The Lega Nord (Northern League), a right-wing, xenophobic nationalist party that has successfully passed legislation (Bossi-Fini Law and Law 94) establishing impediments to offshore rescues, encouraging repatriation of arriving boats, and making illegal immigration a criminal offense, has institutionalized Islamophobic sentiments (which fully support and encourage public hate crimes against Muslims) and prevailed as the vanguard of this racist movement (Alietti and Padovan, 2013, p. 599). As Virginie Guiraudon states, "the far right in Europe has occupied public space to aggressively assert their culture against Moslem practices. Pointedly insulting anti-Muslim actions are increasing… In Italy, the right-wing Northern League party organizes processions of pigs on the sites where mosques are

to be erected" (Guiraudon, 2011). Furthermore, the Lega Nord has campaigned to build an "internal enemy" which endorses logic of social antagonism (Alietti and Padovan, 2013, p. 589). The party has utilized popular, nationalist Islamophobic sentiments and coopted them for their own benefit, using racist discourse to push legislation that is harmful to future Muslim refugees and immigrants seeking refuge in Italy.

To better understand how Islamophobia operates in Italy, it is crucial to examine the implemented immigration policies that have failed to integrate incoming Muslim refugees. Altogether, Italy's response to the Libyan refugee crisis has had both social and political implications. Since 2014, policy has been drafted, redrafted, and changed. The initial influx of migration from Libya that occurred between 2009 and 2014 allowed Italy to implement a policy called Mare Nostrum ("Our Sea" in Latin). This policy, presented as a humanitarian and security operation, allowed for offshore rescuing of boats with refugees heading towards Italian waters. Through Mare Nostrum, Italy was able to safely bring in over 150,000 refugees. However, the large influx of refugee from Libya sparked criticism from the European Union and Italian citizens who condemned Italian leaders for making E.U. borders too easily accessible. Mare Nostrum, which cost the Italian government 9 million Euros per month, was ultimately replaced by a Triton, an E.U. initiative to maintain border security (Girard, 2016, p. 9).

As immigrants kept coming into Italy and the Lega Nord continued developing popular sentiment throughout Italy, its members worked to pass two important laws that have significantly impacted how the Italian government addresses incoming refugees. The first law, passed in 2002, is Bossi Fini Law. Bossi Fini Law was drafted in 2001 as a response to the increase in "criminal activities such as drug-pushing, prostitution and petty crime." (Eurofound, 2002). While it was not drafted as a response to the Libyan refugee crisis, it is still applicable to the waves of migration coming from Libya because it promotes intolerance to immigration, especially to those seeking economic prosperity and political refuge. According to Eurofound, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, "[Bossi Fini] has led a part of the [Italian]

population to have intolerant attitudes towards immigrants, fueled and exploited by some political parties such as the Lega Nord" (Eurofound, 2002). Bossi Fini Law is explicitly exclusionary to refugees because it welcomes high-skilled workers but sets quotas on low-skilled labor. The law states,

> there are no limitations to entry into Italy for highly-skilled workers (university lecturers and professors, professional nurses etc.)… and a specific immigration office is to be set up in each province of Italy to oversee the entire recruitment procedure for immigrant workers on both open-ended and fixed-term contracts (Eurofound, 2002).

Furthermore, Bossi Fini Law limits access to Italian residency permits, denies state protections and citizenship rights to non-EU minors, and arrests and deports any persons discovered as undocumented. The second law, passed in 2009, is Law 94. Unlike Bossi Fini Law, Law 94 was implemented as a direct response (by the Lega Nord) to large influxes of migration from North Africa to Italy. Moreover, it was implemented because "the Italian Ministry of Internal Affairs estimated that between 2000 and 2006, between 60% and 75% of irregular aliens in Italy had entered the country legally but had overstayed their visit" (Komada, 2011, p. 459). Of the two laws examined in this research, Law 94 has greater implications, because it was passed in accordance with Italian Penal Code, allotting harsher punishments for refugees and illegal immigrants that are discovered to undocumented. Law 94 states that illegal immigrants are subject to jail time if they refuse to present their documentation to law enforcement and are subject to a fine if they are found to be residing in Italy illegally. Articles 6 and 10 of Law 94 state, "in case the foreigner refuses to show these identification documents (s)he is punished with a fine up to 2000 euro and up to 1-year imprisonment" and "illegal entry and stay in the territory of the State: is punished with a fine from 5,000 up to 10,000 euro." (Law 94, Article 6.2, Article 6.3, and Article 10). However, Law 94 does not only affect illegal immigrants. It punishes anyone that employs or protects illegal immigrants. Articles 12 and 22.12 of Law 94 state,

sanctions with 6 months to 3 years (convertible in fine under 2 years) imprisonment for

those who locate or sell housing to individuals who do not have a regular stay permit at the

moment of the signing/renewal of the contract… and those who employ irregular migrants

are punished with 6 months to 5 years' imprisonment and with a sanction up to 5000 euro

for every person irregularly employed (Law 94, Articles 12 and 22.12)

Therefore, the intention of using Law 94 to affect the lives of those with proximity to illegal immigrants, along with using it to challenge illegal immigrants' lives in the private sphere (including sports and leisure), makes it nearly impossible for them to exist without adhering to the strict immigration system that Italy has in place.

Analysis of Factors Institutionalizing Islamophobia in Italy Today

Immigration reform implemented in response to the Libyan refugee crisis is one of many ways that Islamophobia operates in Italy. Scholars Alfredo Alietti and Dario Padovan argue that Islamophobia is grounded through ethnocentrism and in times of authoritarianism and anomie, and their research provides important evidence as to how prejudices can be influenced at the national level and for political purposes. Most important to this research is the understanding of how nationalism propels the occurrence of prejudice because, with regards to national identity, Muslims are an "out-group" that do not fit with the rest of society. Furthermore, the promotion of a homogenous national identity, such as that in France, denounces individual freedom (i.e. ties to a country of origin) and forces compliance, resulting in a relationship of "reciprocal causality with prejudice, making this latter a functional substitute for the social and juridical covenant that should ensure social harmony and social cohesion" (Alietti and Padovan, 2013, p. 596). Therefore, racism is a means to assert dominance and force assimilation but is also a byproduct of the attempted creation of social solidarity and an ethno-racial identity. Consequently, when there is a suspected threat to one's own identity, there is an emergence of attitudes, in this case European-ness, that favor one's own hegemonic group identity (Alietti and Padovan, 2013, p. 597).

I would argue the most significant factor triggering Islamophobic sentiments is the belief that large influxes of migration can change Italian demographic composition and cultural identity. The supposed fear of non-Italians stealing Italian jobs stems from the 2008 economic crisis that devastated the Italian economy. Upon the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008 (which coincided with Italy's adoption of the Euro), most major Italian banks lost significant shares of their capital. The loss of capital depleted the majority of Italy's financial resources, putting stress on the economy and leaving Italy unable to pay off its national deficit (Di Quirico, 2010). Between 2008 and 2009, Italy's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) decreased by five percentage points and the national unemployment rate reached nearly 10% (Eurofound, 2010). With the onset of mass migration into Italy that began in 2009, Italians became fearful that the integration of nearly 300,000 new refugees would strain the government's resources and propel Italy into further economic dissension. Therefore, as refugees continued arriving in Italy, Italians began using their protectionist rhetoric to legitimize their refugee push back. In a study done by the Pew Research Center, scholars Richard Wike, Bruce Stokes, and Katie Simmons found that "In Hungary, Italy, Poland and Greece, more than six-in-ten say they have an unfavorable opinion of the Muslims in their country… the dominant view is that Muslims want to be distinct from the rest of society rather than adopt the nation's customs and way of life" (Simmons, et. al., 2016). Aside from economic degradation, Italians are fearful of how the influx of Muslim refugees could change the Italian identity. Thus, this outcome from the Pew Research Center proves significant because it serves to justify Italians' exclusionary behavior as they strive to preserve their homogenous identity. The fact that the "Muslim community [in Italy] is comprised primarily of first-generation immigrants who retain strong linguistic, economic, and emotional ties to their country of origin" serves to otherize Muslim refugees and allows Italians to believe that because Muslims refuse to assimilate to the Italian way of life, they do not belong there (James Toronto, 2008, p. 65). As a result, instead of creating space for Islam in Italian policy like in Spain, the Italian government has imposed laws that limit its functionality and place in the public sphere. For example, new mosques cannot be

built without permission of the government (in which requests are often denied) and throughout the entire country there are only eight officially recognized mosques. By comparison, France, which has a Muslim population three to four times bigger than Italy's, has 2,200 mosques, while the UK, with a Muslim population approximately twice the size of Italy's, has 1,500 (Merelli, 2016, para. 3).

While Italians fear the degradation of their economy, their Islamophobic sentiments are also grounded through the fear of terrorism and crime. A study conducted by La Sapienza University in Rome (interviewing 2,000 students ages 14-18 in over 100 towns) found that 50% of Italian youth believe Muslims "support international terrorism" and have "cruel and barbaric laws" (Girard, 2016, p. 6-7). Of course this study does not represent the entirety of Italian sentiments towards Muslims, but it does highlight a problem that many Italians fail to recognize: the words refugee and Muslim are not synonymous. Because the largest proportion of refugees coming into Italy are Muslim, most refugees, especially those from Muslim majority countries, become homogenized as the "Muslim problem." However, Muslims are not only stereotyped as a homogenous group, they are stereotyped with similar traditions. The acts of few (honor killings, rape, and migrant against migrant crime), which are seen as barbaric and fundamentalist, emerge to represent the beliefs of all Muslims and prevail in discourse as rationale for Italian Islamophobic sentiments. Moreover, members of the Lega Nord coopt acts of crime to advance their xenophobic platform. In 2006, Moroccan El Katawi Dafani stabbed and killed his daughter after discovering her relations with an Italian man. Although many Italian Muslims condemned this killing (including Souad Sbai, a member of the Islamic Italian-Parliament Party and the Association for Moroccan Women in Italy), the Lega Nord claimed that the crime was a representation of Islamic traditions. Enzo Bortolotti stated, "here is another case demonstrating that the Islamic culture cannot be integrated into our society" (Girard, 2016, p. 12). Furthermore, issues surrounding rape and drug trafficking persist at the front of Italian Islamophobia. Writer Daniel Greenfield conducted research in which he discovered that

immigrants are accountable 40% of rape in Italy, 6.3% of which are Moroccan. His research led

him to believe that "with statistics like these, it would appear that Italy doesn't have a problem

with sexual violence, it has a problem with Muslim immigration" (Girard, 2016, p. 13).

Greenfield's statement serves as an example of how, much like the Lega Nord, many Italians

use certain data to push their anti-Muslim agenda. It is evident that Italy has a problem with

sexual violence, but, unknown to many Italians who use an "extrinsic viewpoint when

confronting societal issues," Islam is not the defining factor of the sexual violence (Girard, 2016,

p. 13).

Italian perceptions of Islam are also increasingly based on media representations of

radical Islam, especially post the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the U.S. that set the

stage for radical Islamic terrorism against the West. As Alietti and Padovan state, "these

[Islamophobic] prejudices have grown slowly over the time, scarcely contrasted, supported by

coarse, but clear, discourses and ideologies, diffused by media and by, so called, 'political

entrepreneurs of racism'" (Alietti and Padovan, 2013, p. 599). Italian apprehension to welcome

refugees from the Muslim world stems from the assumption (that the media perpetuates) that

radical Islamic groups represent the entirety of Islam and that incoming Muslims (who therefore

support Islamic fundamentalism) will infiltrate Italy with radical, Islamic ideologies, and there is

ample proof to show how the Italian media has manipulated perceptions of incoming and

resettled refugees in Southern Italy. The first major media-covered event in 2009 during the first

wave of Libyan immigration occurred in Lampedusa, Italy's southernmost island which acts as a

stepping stone to mainland Italy for many refugees looking to make their way into Europe.

During this event, temporary residents of a refugee camp escaped and marched peacefully into

town, demanding rights of freedom and individual human rights (Girard, 2016, p. 8-9). However,

instead of focusing on the lack of rights these refugees were protesting, the media focused on

the fact that four men set fire to their migrant shelter. Evidently, the Italian media uses an "us"

versus "them" rhetoric to demonstrate how incoming refugees are threatening territory and

culture that is undoubtedly Italian. Media expert Marco Bruno from La Sapienza University in Rome identifies three techniques that the Italian media uses to establish and enhance the discourse of the other: the landing issue and the invasion frame, the immigrant as a security threat, and the threat to western culture and the religious frame (Bruno, 2016). Bruno also highlights headlines from media articles which invoke defensive, nationalist sentiments. He states,

> the same frame emerges at the level more strictly of content and terminology. "Lampedusa: still an emergency", "Alarm on immigrants, the invasion has restarted", "Lampedusa, the days of the exodus", "Immigrants: record landing", "An assault that our country cannot stop", "The Great invasion has begun". In all these headlines it clearly emerges that the theme of arrival and, by extension, the entire media image of migration are articulated in public discourse through the frame of "conquest" (by the "invaders") and "defence" (that is down to the autochthons) of a territory" (Bruno, 2016).

Therefore, by using rhetoric that projects the dangers of Muslim refugees to the West, the Italian media fabricates three boundaries (both physical and cultural) that refugees overstep by coming into Italy. Furthermore, Italian Islamophobia scholar Zincone states, "the fact that the majority of information in the media regarding immigration concerns crime and its repression is certainly of no help in the attempt to establish low-conflict relationships and a climate of positive interaction" (James Toronto, 69). Ultimately, the manipulation of the media is crucial to advancing Italy's xenophobic agenda, as referring to refugees as illegal immigrants connotes a specific image which sparks hatred and distrust of incoming peoples within Italian society.

Overall, it is evident that the basis of Italian Islamophobic attitudes stem from multiple influences: fear that the influx of refugees can strain the Italian economy and challenge the homogenous Italian identity, the fear of terrorism, jihadism, and crime, and the perpetuation of Islam as fundamentalist via manipulation of the media. Backlash is seen from large scale

immigration and media perceptions of Islam, but these xeno-racist sentiments are also grounded in right-wing, xenophobic political parties that have institutionalized themselves in the Italian parliament. Islam is the second most practiced religion in Italy, yet it is not recognized by the Italian state, and because the Catholic Church is still very prevalent in Italian daily life, a rigid Italian cultural self-identity is boasted that refuses to incorporate Islam (Haberman, 1988).

Methods

This research is based on the work of other scholars, predominantly Alfredo Alietti and Dario Padovan who conducted over 1,500 in person interviews [in Italy] about cultural perceptions and understandings of Islam, as well as that of S. Sayyid, whose understandings of Islamophobia challenge its existence. Based off of the work of others, I have been able to understand and formulate my own argument on the roots of contemporary Italian Islamophobia. To better my research, I would like to move to incorporate the voices and experiences of a few people, rather than focus so much of my understanding of Islamophobia on understandings that represent the views of the majority and potentially ignore the voices of those who stand against Islamophobia. Moreover, in looking to the future, I may incorporate a policy analysis that seeks to address what Islamophobia may look like in Italy in the near future.

Limitations

The largest impediment to articulating my own argument is working without produced research that argues against Islamophobia specific to Italy. Without this research, it is difficult to address a counter argument (something that I believe is crucial to fully articulating my argument) that is specific and relevant enough to what I am arguing. There has been sufficient research produced arguing that Italy has well integrated second generation Muslim immigrants into Italian society (e.g. a study done by Massimo Introvigne that argues the Italian government has created a favorable environment for religious minorities), but since my argument does not encompass that demographic, it makes it hard to tie in and refute as outside readers may not understand its relevance. Despite the fact that the produced research on second generation immigration is not

specific enough to effectively measure Islamophobia, one could refute that their integration is proof of the Italian state's tolerance of Islam. To this I would argue that if the Italian state can integrate second generation Muslim immigrants they can also integrate incoming immigrations, something they have yet to do.

Conclusion

Since 2009, Italian immigration policies have transitioned from open, welcoming refugee rescue legislation to more conservative, protectionist ideology. There is not one, credible distinction for understanding manifestations of Islamophobia in Italy, but scholars are inclined to believe that Islamophobic sentiments have increased since September 11, 2001 (and have resurfaced since the Paris attacks and Syrian refugee crisis), leaving lasting impacts on relations between Italy and the Muslim world. While scholars like Massimo Introvigne suggest that Italy has a favorable environment for religious minorities, stating "religious minorities are not seen as particularly threatening in Italy, simply because they are comparatively small," others scholars, notably Alfredo Alietti and Dario Padovan, have conducted thousands of interviews that show the majority of Italian citizens identify Islam with an immigrant's country of origin and believe it is a religion too traditional to assimilate with Western culture (Introvigne, 2001, p. 276).

Understanding the roots of Islamophobia is not only crucial to understanding how the West defines itself against the East, it is pertinent to understanding the future of political and economic relationships between Italy and the Muslim world. That is, in recent discourse, scholars have sought to understand the "able-action knowledge" that policy makers use to institutionalize anti-Muslim sentiments. Understanding the importance of the use of specific vernacular helps us know how we in the West can diminish the dichotomy that stands between the two identities. How, if even, is this possible? In a critique offered by Ali Akbar Mahdi, he states,

> European assimilationist models should be replaced by integrationist policies allowing full
> participation of Muslims in European society without giving up their Muslim identity. How
> will this be possible? Europe should accept the contribution of Muslim immigrants and

Muslims should adjust their religion to broader European cultural framework (Mahdi, 2003, p. 629).

Ultimately, Islamophobic sentiments, perpetuated by media stereotypes and coupled with the lack of the Italian government's recognition of Islam as a state religion, 'otherize' Italian Muslims and leave no room for Islam to be inherent in Italian society today. When Italians stop resisting the infiltration of their hegemonic identity, they can further appreciate the contributions that Muslim immigrants have brought to the West.

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