

## ANTI-MIGRANT ISLAMOPHOBIA IN EUROPE. SOCIAL ROOTS, MECHANISMS AND ACTORS

*Islamofobia anti-migrante na Europa.  
Raízes sociais, mecanismos e atores*

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**Abstract.** During the last two decades of rising anti-migrant racism in Europe, Islamophobia has proven to be the highest, most acute, and widely spread form of racism. The article shows how anti-migrant Islamophobia is a structural phenomenon in European societies and how its internal structure has specific social roots and mechanisms of functioning. Such an articulate and interdependent set of key themes, policies, practices, discourses, and social actors it is intended to inferiorise and marginalise Muslim immigrants while legitimising and reproducing social inequalities affecting the majority of them. The article examines the social origins of anti-migrant Islamophobia and the modes and mechanisms through which it naturalises inequalities; it focuses on the main social actors involved in its production, specifically on the role of some collective subjects as anti-Muslim organizations and movements, far-right parties, best-selling authors, and the mass-media.

**Keywords:** Islamophobia; muslim immigration; inequalities; racialization; Europe.

**Resumo.** Durante as últimas duas décadas de crescente racismo anti-migrante na Europa, a islamofobia provou ser a forma mais alta, mais aguda e amplamente difundida de racismo. O artigo mostra como a islamofobia anti-migrante é um fenômeno estrutural nas sociedades européias, sendo que sua estrutura interna tem raízes sociais específicas e mecanismos de funcionamento. Tal conjunto articulado e interdependente de temas-chave, políticas, práticas, discursos e atores sociais visa inferiorizar e marginalizar os imigrantes muçulmanos, ao mesmo tempo em que legitima e reproduz as desigualdades sociais que afetam a maioria deles. O artigo examina as origens sociais da islamofobia anti-migrante e os modos e mecanismos através dos quais ela naturaliza as desigualdades; concentra-se nos principais atores sociais envolvidos em sua produção, especificamente

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*no papel de alguns sujeitos coletivos como organizações e movimentos antimuçulmanos, partidos de extrema-direita, autores de best-sellers e os meios de comunicação de massa.*

**Palavras-chave:** *islamofobia; imigração muçulmana; desigualdades; racialização; Europa.*

## Introduction

In Western Europe, in the last two decades, there has been a strong upswing in racism, which is and has been mainly anti-migrant racism and primarily propelled by institutional racism. The several causes – historical, social, economic, political, and cultural – at the basis of such rise must each be examined individually so as not to lose sight of the specific historical and geographical contexts, at the same time they must be analysed from an overall perspective in order to understand the general structure and depth of the phenomenon. The rise of anti-migrant racism has occurred in a wide variety of forms, depending on the national contexts, events and social and political circumstances, ranging from xenophobia in the name of the welfare state to “municipal racism”, selective racism of state policies as well as the immigrant hunt staged by far-right groups. The targets of racism have been equally as varied (young second generation, eastern European migrants, Chinese people, etc.), however three main forms of racism and related targets can be identified: Islamophobia and racism against migrants and citizens with a migratory background originating from countries with a Muslim majority<sup>1</sup>, Romaphobia and anti-Gypsy racism, and the criminalisation of undocumented migrants (currently mainly of asylum seekers) (Basso, 2016). Islamophobia is the deepest, most acute and widely spread form of racism among the three; it is the main and the highest expression of contemporary European racism and most likely the primary form of racism in the neoliberal era.

The article highlights anti-migrant Islamophobia is a structural phenomenon in European society, is internally structured and has specific social roots and mechanisms of functioning<sup>2</sup>. Such an articulate and interdependent set of topics, policies, practices, discourses, and social actors is intended to inferiorise and marginalise this population while legitimising and reproducing social inequalities affecting the majority of it. The first paragraph examines the social origins of anti-migrant Islamophobia, which are linked to the processes of social rooting, self-organisation and increase in social value of Muslim immigration. The second paragraph analyses the modes and mechanisms through which Islamophobia legitimises and naturalises the structural inequality affecting Muslim migrants; it focuses specifically on the relationship between social

<sup>1</sup> From here on referred to as “Muslim immigrants” or “this population”.

<sup>2</sup> As well as old cultural roots and established leitmotifs.

inequalities and Islamophobia, on the interaction of xenophobia, Arabophobia, and Islamophobia, on the process of racialisation of this population, and on the construction of a “Muslim race” considered responsible for the social condition of Muslim migrants, who are therefore represented as *victims of their own culture*. The third paragraph examines the main social actors involved in the production of Islamophobia, focusing specifically on the role of some collective subjects (anti-Islam movements and organisations, far-right parties, best-selling authors, and the mass media) which refine, employ and disseminate the devices and discourses of anti-migrant Islamophobia, thus acting as a decisive factor in the marginalisation of this population and in its transformation into a “backward religious minority”.

### 1. The social roots of anti-migrant Islamophobia

The intense and broad wave of anti-migrant Islamophobia which Europe has experienced for at least the past two decades has multiple historical, cultural, and social roots. Among the social roots, it must be considered that Muslim migrants make up the first, largest, and most rooted non-European population which has arrived and settled in contemporary Europe for work reasons. Over time, they have become rooted in European societies and a factor in the social transformation of several countries. This population has established bonds with locals at workplace and in the community, has obtained rights, has a large and firm presence in the public space and as an integral part of society has a higher social value and cost, tends to be stronger and tougher, less docile and disposable, and thus is wanted but not welcome.

Furthermore, this population is the most organised group of immigrants in Europe<sup>3</sup>. On several occasions, it has defied state institutions, employers and public opinions claiming rights and recognition and fighting discrimination, and it has contested the living and working conditions of immigrants, resisting both assimilation and segregation. Since the seventies, it has been taking part in workers’ movements and trade unions’ struggles (especially in France: Gallissot *et alii*, 1994; Le Cour Grandmaison, 2008) while new generations, born and brought up in Europe, reiterated their refusal to be treated as second-class citizens. At work and in the public space it demands better living opportunities, the recognition of identity, and respect for its origins (Louati, 2015; Ouali, 2018). In other words, all this is in full contradiction with the requests of the current productive system and of the migration and labour policies, which are intended to provide a workforce that is granted only a few rights and is temporary, cheap, docile, precarious, and separate from the rest of society and can thus be used *just in time*, without the “social and political costs of immigration”.

<sup>3</sup> Muslims are also the most organised group of citizens with a migratory background.

Especially for these reasons, throughout the 90s, a set of policies, practices, and discourses hostile to Muslim immigration started to spread, leading to the development of an actual system of Islamophobia. This system is made up of a wide variety of key themes (“the Islamic invasion”, “the irreducible difference”, “the female condition”, “the incompatibility”, and “the impossible integration”); policies (exclusion, identity and security policies); practices (institutional discrimination, acts of violence); and actors, and it is a determining factor in the marginalisation and deprivation of this population and in its crystallisation into a deprived religious minority.

## **2. Inequalities, Islamophobia and racialisation**

In Western Europe the current condition and social position of the Muslim population are heterogeneous; however, because of the interaction, accumulation, and transmission of inequalities, most of it is in the lowest, poorest, and most precarious section of the European working class. Muslims have higher rates of unemployment and underemployment than the majority of the population (and often than the rest of the population of foreign origin) and are more likely to be confined to the lower levels of the labour market. On average, they have lower levels of education, higher rates of poverty, a worse overall health profile and their concentration in destitute urban areas and in poorer-quality housing is higher (Breem, 2013; Cesari, 2014; Connor, Koenig, 2015; Insee, 2014; MCB, 2015).

Islamophobia plays an important role in this regard: the depiction of the Islamic culture and religion as directly responsible for this situation and Muslim migrants as victims of their own culture, is a contributing factor in the transformation of this section of the European working class into a backward religious minority.

At the same time this population is a segment of the European working class with migratory background and foreign origins: it is doubly disadvantaged as foreign and Muslim; penalised because of its class position (migrant workers), its faith (Muslim), and its countries of origin being once under the rule of colonialism (dominated nations). Xenophobia, Arabophobia, and Islamophobia contribute jointly to the production-process of this inequality, to the worsening of deprivation and social compression, to the consolidation of an excluded social segment religiously characterised.

This *combined inequality* results from the interaction of the different dimensions of social inequality (work, income, housing, education, and health inequality) with the interaction of the different forms of racism (xenophobia, Arabophobia, and Islamophobia). This dual interaction is the driving force of a process of production and accumulation of inequalities that structurally

affect the Muslim population, which has recently become an increasingly stable section of the immigrant reserve army.

At this juncture, Islamophobia has the primacy among the various forms of racism, is a central element of contemporary racism and a structuring factor of the current nationalisms (Traverso, 2017): it is the most important element in the reproduction of this social segment, it plays a major role in crystallising inequalities, it provides plenty of ideological support which paves the way for a range of discriminating policies and practices, whose outcomes and results it subsequently legitimises.

A mean for maintaining and legitimating such inequalities is racialisation (Garner, Selod, 2015; Halliday, 1999; Meer, 2013; Selod, 2015; Selod, Embrick, 2013). This population is defined as a “race” or a “semi-race”, i.e. “the Muslim race”, through a social process in which the factors of race, culture, and faith overlap, the religious dimension is racialised and the Muslim culture is naturalised. Through this process, an extremely heterogeneous population is depicted as a *unitary* subject and as an *exception* (Saint-Blancat, 2002); the idea of a “Muslim exception” allows for the normalisation of a religiously “racialised” underclass. By naturalising inequalities – ascribing them to *the nature of the Islamic culture* – Islamophobia crystallises the “Muslim issue” as the major matter of concern, the culprit of all the social issues related to immigration, under which all social issues are subsumed and turned into elements of a clash of civilisations *caused by the culture of the other*. This exception is normalised by identifying Muslims as *victims of their own culture* and by pointing to their “way of being” as the cause of the social exclusion they suffer, thus ultimately blaming it on them. In turn, this results in the culturalisation and racialisation of the social condition of Muslim immigrants, regardless of its relation to the Islamic culture and religion.

This dual process of racialisation and marginalisation draws on a broad and diverse set of social actors, which operate differently depending on the context. Some are directly engaged in the theoretical production-process and practice of Islamophobia, while others follow “in tow”, confirming stereotypes and reiterating the leitmotifs. I will focus on anti-Muslim organisations and movements, far-right parties, best-selling authors, and mass-media<sup>4</sup>.

### 3. The actors of anti-migrant Islamophobia

In Europe (and in the United States), culturally oriented anti-Muslim organisations, such as associations, NGOs, foundations, and research institutes<sup>5</sup>,

<sup>4</sup> Due to a lack of space, the (fundamental) role of state institutions and state Islamophobia will not be examined.

<sup>5</sup> Distinguishing between anti-Islam organisations and movements is merely a theoretical exercise as the difference is not so clear-cut; the author’s aim is to draw attention to their salient features.

are both very active in local contexts, where they operate on a daily basis, and have a global reach.

These organisations, more or less structured and stable, are engaged in a wide range of activities aimed at the delegitimation and denigration of Muslim immigration, such as spreading falsified notions and conspiracy theories in virtual and physical space, exerting political pressure for the approval of measures limiting the rights of Muslims and the revocation of measures publicly recognizing Islam in the public sphere, reporting to the local authorities behaviours and events deemed unconventional, participating in demonstrations against Muslim celebrations (*Īd al-aḏḩā*, *ramaḑān*, *Īd al-Fitr*) and the presence of Islam in the public space (the presence of mosques and Muslim burial sites and the teaching of Islam and the Arabic language in schools).

Although the modes of action and organisation vary depending on the context, at least three common elements can be identified. First, these organisations play a key role both in the creation of rumours which engender moral panic and islamo-hysteria and in influencing political provisions and courts' decisions. Second, they are often interconnected and participate in networks and national and international federations<sup>6</sup>. For instance, the German organisation Pax Europa cooperates with the Belgian party Vlaams Belang, the Danish organisation Siad (Stop Islamiseringen Af Danmark), the English group No Sharia Here and with leaders of the U.S. anti-Muslim network and participates in the blog Politically Incorrect. In 2015, G. Wilders, the leader of the Dutch Freedom Party (PVV), delivered an opening speech for a cartoon contest on the prophet Muhammad organised by Stop Islamisation of America in Texas (Shooman, 2016, p. 140). Several of the roughly seventy anti-Muslim organisations in the United States – some of which are active in the human rights field<sup>7</sup> – work on common projects and share some staff and leaders. Third, these organisations have very good relations with journalists and the mass media, politicians and sectors of parties, state officials, entrepreneurs and business people, scholars and intellectuals. From 2008 to 2011, for example, the U.S. network raised \$120 million from private donations by business people, celebrities, newspapers, and foundations (Kaminski, 2014; Saylor, 2014).

These well connected organisations form a network which plays an important role in spreading the key themes of Islamophobia, in particular acting as a transmission belt from theoretical racism to popular racism. The influence

<sup>6</sup> For example, Stop the Islamization of the Nations is a federation between Stop Islamization of Europe and Stop Islamization of America.

<sup>7</sup> They have high-sounding names (Americans against Hate, Florida Family Association), threatening (American Freedom Defense Initiative, Citizens for National Security, Counter Terrorism Operations Center, Society of Americans for National Existence), unequivocal (Gates of Vienna, Jihad Watch, The Virginia Anti-Shariah Taskforce).

of these groups is partly due to their strong presence on the internet and partly to a powerful use of social media, and to online activism, which results in an intense virulence of virtual Islamophobia (Chao, 2015; Shooman, 2016).

The political, anti-Islam movements are heterogeneous. They might be extemporaneous, little organised, and mainly linked, in their action, to individual local episodes (e.g. citizens' committee against a Muslim prayer hall) or indeed be more structured, characterised by aggressive militancy, sometimes paramilitary as is the case with Britain First. This group combines formal political activity with street campaigning: its Christian Patrols and its vigilantes paramilitary wing, Britain First Defence Force, have organised protests against mosques in many British towns and cities, spreading apocalyptic rumours among the local population (Allen, 2014).

These movements are linked with anti-Muslim organisations and far-right parties; they organise and participate in rallies, demonstrations, petitions, leafleting, and occupations of mosques and areas designated for worship<sup>8</sup>. They refuse Islam's presence in the public space as they consider it a tainting element which corrupts the national identity or the purity of the local community, introducing backward habits and incompatible values. They contest Muslim immigration in the name of the defense of local traditional culture and national religious identity, and in defense of secularism and modernity. In the last two decades, there has been a wide variety of demonstrations and raids, particularly against prayer halls (NEF, 2009), all across Europe – from Romania to Greece, Slovakia, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Norway, and Iceland. This widespread phenomenon affects large cities and small towns, thriving industrial areas, poor districts and regions, and urban and rural territories.

These movements, whose actors are represented in the media as rowdy kids and boors, have a strong and very real impact on the public domain inasmuch as they contribute to legitimising Islamophobia, normalising discrimination, mobilising common citizens, and hindering relationships between locals and immigrants. Such movements play an important role in spreading the acceptance and banalisation of Islamophobia; they contribute to the transition of Islamophobic key themes from the discourses debated in restricted and specialised circles to the masses, through the daily discourse of politics and the media. Although not numerically relevant, these movements have had a frighteningly significant impact on the European public opinion on Muslim immigration, which is strongly worsened<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Their action often consists in desecrating lands and buildings by bringing pigs, letting them walk around, pouring their urine and excrements all over and, generally, by raiding the area and damaging it.

<sup>9</sup> According to a 2016 Pew Research Center survey, 43% of the respondents had a negative opinion about Muslims (72% in Hungary, 69% in Italy, 66% in Poland, 65% in Greece, 29% in Germany

### 3.1. Far-right parties

The “new”<sup>10</sup>, “post-industrial” (Ignazi, 2003), far-right parties are thriving<sup>11</sup> and play a key role in the genesis and development of anti-migrant Islamophobia. In Europe, in the last two decades, these parties have increased in number, members, and sympathisers; they have taken a firmer hold in society, reaching consensus in diverse social classes, from the middle classes to the most precarious proletariat, and have gained more political influence (Hainsworth, 2008). These parties have been elected into parliaments and on some occasions have been part of governments all the while praising the nobility of white skin, inciting the fight against “inferior races” in order to prevent the decline of the “superior race”, and invoking the purity of the motherland. Their white supremacist slogans, championing the primacy of the national majority and depicting Muslim immigration as a global threat, have been endorsed by various sectors of society and some have found their way into the programmes of majority parties, influencing the political agenda in more than a few cases.

The political picture of the far-right parties in Europe is mixed (Wilson, Hainsworth, 2012). The goals and language, the predominant leitmotifs, and the organisation and modes of action vary depending on the context and leaders. However, far-right parties share a political trademark and its characteristic features are: populism, in that political-economic elites and immigrants are accused of oppressing the majority of the people; nationalism, mixed with nativism, xenophobia, and cultural anti-globalisation; Romaphobia; the native citizens’ priority over immigrants with regard to welfare; Euro-skepticism; traditionalism and strong bonds between leaders and supporters (Ignazi, 2003). Yet, the primary commonality is hostility to immigrants and Islam: they all are “anti-immigration” and “anti-Islam” parties. This is an important element of communication between them and the glue that keeps these parties together<sup>12</sup>, which in their turn are in contact with anti-migrant and anti-Muslim groups and movements in the United States. Moreover, there is a mutual sharing of ideas, experiences, and staff between these parties and the traditional conservative parties, which results in a legitimization of the far-right positions and members.

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and France, 28% in the U.K.). Available at: <<http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/07/11/europeans-fear-wave-of-refugees-will-mean-more-terrorism-fewer-jobs>>. Accessed on: 29.08.2016.

<sup>10</sup> “New” in a manner of speaking (cf. Art, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> The growth of these parties is a modern phenomenon, resulting from precariousness, impoverishment, and social polarisation (Bihl, 1999; *Idem*, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> The European political party European Alliance for Freedom has existed since 2011 and became the Movement for a Europe of Nations and Freedom in 2014, joined by Front National, Lega Nord, Vlaams Belang, and FPÖ.



Again, amidst the complexity of the far-right political scene, at least one common element can be identified: the anti-Islam position, as can be deduced from the brief, non-exhaustive review below.

In Switzerland, the SVP (Schweizerische Volkspartei) has been one of the major political forces since 1999 and the majority party in the country since 2003. Notoriously anti-immigration, it proposed a federal popular referendum against the construction of minarets in the country in 2007, which was approved in 2009. In Austria, the FPÖ (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs) has been one of the most important political forces since 1999 and Norbert Hofer, a leader of the party, was a candidate for President in the 2016 election. Islamophobia is a key feature of the party, as the leader Heinz-Christian Strache did not fail to point out during the past campaigns for the local, national, and European elections. In Germany, the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland), an anti-immigration and anti-Islam party par excellence, obtained around 15% in the 2014 European election, around 24% in Sachsen-Anhalt and 20% in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in the 2016 regional election, and achieved a historic result, entering the Parliament for the first time and becoming the third party in the country (12.6%), in the 2017 political election.

In the Netherlands, Islamophobia is the distinctive feature of the PVV, the third party in the 2009 European election, which obtained good results in the 2010 political election and ranked second in the 2017 political election. In Geert Wilders' view, the leader of PVV, Muslim immigration is a ghost haunting Europe and the embodiment of absolute evil which needs to be fought against. In Belgium, especially in Flanders, the rise of far-right parties, namely Vlaams Belang, dates back to the beginning of the 90s; in the following decade, this party was defeated and replaced by the NVA (Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie), a separatist party which has assumed a leading role in the political sphere and has adopted a strong stance against Muslim immigration (Ouali, 2018, p. 9). The French Front National, forerunner of the previously mentioned far-right parties and traditionally anti-immigration and anti-Islam, reached 25% in the 2014 European election, 27% in the first turn of the 2015 administrative election, and ranked second in the 2017 presidential election. In Italy, Lega Nord, one of the major political forces in the country<sup>13</sup>, has expressed strong hostility towards Muslim immigration, both in the national political discourse and in the local political action, through campaigns, decisions in City councils, writings on the walls, marches, and torchlight processions.

In Denmark, the Df (Dansk Folkeparti), a self-declared anti-Muslim party, won the 2014 European election and became the second force in the

<sup>13</sup> Over the past ten years, "traditional" far-right neo-fascist groups have followed suit (Fiamma Tricolore, Forza Nuova), with a consequent increase in the number of raids and mobilisations.

Danish Parliament in 2015. Its leader, K. Thulesen Dahl, has repeatedly stated that Denmark should restrict the arrival of Muslim migrants and refugees. In Sweden, the SD (Sverigedemokraterna) entered the Parliament in 2010 and increased its presence in the legislative body taking 14% of the seats in 2014; its political programme is founded on xenophobia and the fight against Muslim immigration. In Finland, Perussuomalaiset – which has denounced “the Islamic invasion” of the country (Muslims are 1% of the population) – ranked third in the 2011 political election and second in 2015, entering the government.

Despite the often limited electoral importance and fluctuating success, these parties have had a strong impact on diverse aspects of social life, particularly on the conditions of immigrants and on the rise of racism. On the one hand, at times their positions on Muslim immigration have influenced establishment parties and national and local governments’ measures on migration and integration (Ansari, Hafez, 2012); on the other hand, they have contributed to the thorough dissemination of the Islamophobic key themes, which are showcased in bestselling publications.

### **3.2. Best-sellers**

Anti-Muslim publications have become a literary genre and an important editorial sector, one of the most active in the industry of Islamophobia. This branch produces best-sellers reiterating and revising the set of elements, theses and ideas which have historically converged in a caricatural representation of Islam and Muslims. For more than a decade, a literary strand of publications, for example the Eurabia fantasies series, has been dedicated to promoting inferiorising stereotypes and conspiracy theories about Muslim immigration. There are two, often mixed, prevailing styles: the popular-visceral style and the “scientific” and learned style.

This literary strand plays a crucial role in the spreading of Islamophobic key themes among their common readers, so much so as to be a main factor in the socialization of the Muslim immigration even before one personally meets a Moroccan worker, an Algerian cashier, or a Pakistani neighbour. They *educate* their common readers, creating acceptance of and habituation to anti-Muslim racism and exclusion practices. However also politicians, state officials, journalists, bloggers, anti-Muslim activists, make reference to these publications, from which they draw arguments and terms that will be reused in new contexts in a circular feedback process between causes, intermediate causes, and their effects.

The list of authors is long but, more importantly, varied in terms of nationalities: all European countries and the United States are present on the list. Beginning in France, where already more than three decades ago Alain

Griotteray (*Les Immigrés, le choc*, 1984) depicted the 1983 “March for equality and against racism” as a clash of incompatible values (democracy and secularism vs. Islam), thereby shifting the focus from the reason of the demonstration – the social conditions of immigrants and their descendants – to the religious dimension. *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (“Germany abolishes itself”, 2010), a book by Thilo Sarrazin<sup>14</sup>, was an enormous success, selling more than a million copies. In the author’s opinion, Muslim immigrants will have a demographic advantage, which will result in the genetic and cultural decline of the “German race”: in his view, intelligence has a genetic basis and it’s higher in superior races, as in the German population, and lower in inferior races, as in the Turkish population; it’s higher in upper classes (i.e. the white classes, which are also the least fertile) and lower in popular classes (more fertile, parasitic and including a large number of immigrants). Consequently, German welfare, the intelligence of the German people, and the German nation are endangered by the demographic infiltration of Muslim immigration, genetically characterised by a low level of intelligence and congenital parasitism.

The works of Bat Ye’or (*Eurabia*, 2005; *Toward the Universal Caliphate: How Europe Became an Accomplice of Muslim Expansionism*, 2009) and Melanie Phillips (*Londonistan: How Britain is Creating a Terror State Within*, 2009), both British, have enjoyed great international success: their theses concern the demographic and cultural colonization of Europe by Islam. *La rabbia e l’orgoglio* (2001) and *La forza della ragione* (2004) by Oriana Fallaci, an Italian author, have sold well: they warn the West about the serious threat presented by Muslim immigrants because of their cultural backwardness and spiritual inferiority. In the United States – the country where this literary strand first developed and where it is most structured – the double thesis of cultural islamisation and spiritual decline of Europe is central<sup>15</sup>. *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe: Immigration, Islam, and the West* (2009), a book by Christopher Caldwell, has had an enormous impact in Europe.

Again, this is a very structured literary strand and it has been so for long. It serves a precise political project, aimed at inferiorising and marginalising Muslim immigrants (Lean, 2012), creating divisions between Muslim and non-Muslim people and opposing the development of intercultural relations. This “alert literature” exerts a significant influence both on common reader and

<sup>14</sup> Former official of the Ministry of Labour and of the Federal Ministry of Finance, former executive member of the Deutsche Bundesbank, former member of the Spd, and former member of the board of Deutsche Bahn.

<sup>15</sup> B. Bawer (*While Europe Slept: How Radical Islam is Destroying the West from Within*, 2006; *Surrender: Appeasing Islam, Sacrificing Freedom*, 2009), C. Berlinski (*Menace in Europe*, 2006), T. Blankley (*The West’s Last Chance*, 2006), M. Steyn (*America Alone*, 2006), B. Thorton (*Decline and Fall: Europe’s Slow-motion Suicide*, 2007).

on the actors of anti-migrant Islamophobia, with which it interacts dialectically, for example the mass media system.

### **3.3. The media industry of Islamophobia**

The negative attitude of the mass media (newspapers and TV) towards Muslim immigrants – which has often given rise to their merciless denigration and stigmatization (Cesari, 2014; Alsultany, 2012; Foner, 2015; Meer, 2013) – is integral to the marginalisation of this population. Throughout the 90s, the mass media of several European countries became aligned with the international discursive complex and the system of images about Islam (Said, 1997), in which it is defined as a global issue<sup>16</sup>. In European countries this has resulted in an increased focus on Muslim immigration and in a growing suspicion towards Muslims, fuelled by the mass media, which depict their presence as unnatural, troublesome and threatening.

In this period, the mass media specialised in the production of negative discourses around immigrants through the distorted use of the concepts of otherness and diversity, identifying in the Muslims their most notorious representatives. Through a systematically hostile register, Muslims migrants came to be depicted as radically different: an ancestral, organic kind of difference and diversity that must be kept distanced and isolated. The “integration of Muslim immigrants in the national society” was regarded as *a priori* problematic and impossible because of “their culture”. The general public came to know about the presence of Muslim immigrants through the mass media, under a specific perspective: the characteristic traits of a total-Islam, a crystallised and all-consuming religious dimension (the *homo islamicus*, imbued with religion) and a total pervasiveness of the Muslim community, were now fixed in the collective imagination. In France, the press campaign for state secularism and the banning of the veil, which lasted two decades and contributed to the approval of the law 228 in 2004 (renamed *loi foulardière*), was the longest and most important of its kind: the media attention was extremely high and thus so was the public’s.

In the 90s, press articles and TV reports on Muslim immigration were not yet so numerous, and some of them were unbiased or even characterised by an attitude of openness. In the 2000s, however, the picture changed drastically, also in connection with the international events. A triple process of *overmediatisation*, *spectacularisation*, and *demonisation* of Muslim immigrants, methodically represented as a *totum revolutum*, an undifferentiated monolith, has obscured the pluralist nature of this population and the changes taking place within it. In many European countries, there have been violent

<sup>16</sup> Concurrently with the rise to power of Khomeini, the murder of Sadat, the Rushdie affair, the headscarf issue, and the protests of *beurs* in France.

press campaigns, specifically targeting local contexts (cities, poor suburbs, “difficult neighbourhoods”), individual and collective subjects (intellectuals, representatives of local communities, associations), and aspects of social life (mosques, the veil, the burkini, second generations, the Muslim diet). In parallel, a transformation of stereotypes has taken place: the Muslim immigrant has come to be systematically associated with fundamentalism and terrorism.

The quantitative and qualitative leap of the media’s Islamophobia becomes visible in some specific aspects. First, the focus on Muslim immigrants has become more and more constant, insistent, and obsessive. Second, Muslim immigration has been depicted as a *pathology* and associated with an imagery of strangeness, isolation, and self-exclusion through the use of specific mechanisms of representation and perpetuation, such as semantic chains, figures of speech, images, and photos. This has in turn fuelled feelings of dislike and refusal towards Muslim immigrants. The mass media have turned them into public enemy number one, obscuring their daily life and real conditions of existence through countless distortions, generalizations, and reductionism<sup>17</sup>.

Muslim immigration has become the object of a racialised regime of representation, functional to its subordinate inclusion: using the discursive routines of emergency and security issue, the mass media have promoted the exclusion and marginalisation of Muslim immigrants from social life while encouraging the adoption of special and urgent control policies, which has sometimes resulted in central and local governments actually adopting restrictive measures. The media industry of Islamophobia have been untiringly devoted to the social and symbolic inferiorisation of Muslim immigrants, thus contributing to their subordinate condition in European societies.

## Conclusion

The rise of racism in Europe in the 2000s is characterised by a wide variety of key themes and targets; however, Islamophobia against immigrants share a central place with the criminalisation of undocumented migrants and asylum seekers. I conclude this article considering two issues related to the consolidation of anti-migrant Islamophobia in Europe.

The first point concerns the process of racialisation of Muslims, which materially and discursively constructs them as a race. Although this process falls within the category of cultural racism, there is also a component of biological (neo)racism in the idea that the Muslim culture is rooted in nature and thus

<sup>17</sup> Muslims are not absent from the mass media, but their representation is often manipulated as only the “fundamentalist” or the “subordinate” Muslim is allowed to have a say.

constructed as a “Muslim race”<sup>18</sup>. This component – that establishes the incompatibility of cultural diversity, which is considered naturally fixed – is ever more present and systematically combined with the current cultural racism.

The second point concerns the consequences of Islamophobia on European societies. Its effects reverberate on all immigrant populations, casting a shadow of suspicion and a threat of repression on them. At the same time, Islamophobia predisposes large sections of the European populations to the acceptance of discrimination and anti-Muslim racism, thus creating a serious problem of communication and interaction between populations. It has produced a triple problem throughout Europe: a problem of public representations of Muslim immigrants; a problem of recognition of this population in the public sphere; and a problem of relationships between “native” populations and Muslim populations. It directly affects Muslim immigrants, but indirectly also negatively involves and affects native populations; its discrimination apparatus humiliates the Muslim population while poisoning the minds of the native populations, which are pressured, directly or indirectly, and individually or collectively, to drive a wedge, meant to be unbridgeable between themselves and the Muslims. Therefore, the attitude towards the Muslim population is a decisive test for European societies and the highest challenge for anti-racism.

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<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that Barker himself remarked the similarity between cultural racism and some sort of “pseudo-biological culturalism” (BARKER, 1981, p. 23).

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