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Mustafa Martino Roma

Understanding Hate Crimes Against Muslims

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Addressing the Security Needs of Muslim Communities

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Abstract

Islamophobia today represents a crucial challenge to security and social cohesion, emerging as a clear intent of exclusion that undermines the stability of democratic societies. Overcoming the false myth of the incompatibility between Islam and democracy requires institutional and cultural recognition that addresses the roots of a widespread misinterpretation: that which sees faith as an intrinsic obstacle to reason or modernity. Within this framework, spiritual identity and civic engagement can be harmoniously integrated, preventing religious affiliation from becoming a pretext for applying differentiated standards among citizens.

However, dialogue is hampered by internal and external tendencies that fragment this unity: on the one hand, a formalism and reformism skeptical of the sacred; on the other, a justicial literalism that reduces doctrine to a mere legal code, or a spiritualism that eludes social responsibility. To overcome these critical issues, we must transcend the opposition between modernist scientism and religious vision, defending a space of positive pluralism. This approach allows for a perspective of integral knowledge, where metaphysics offers the faithful Muslim solid references for living in the contemporary world.

In this paradigm, the primacy of Mercy allows us to frame justice not as retaliation, but as a process of safeguarding the harmony between the individual and society, subordinating rigor to the protection of the common good. Promoting a shared approach in which Islam is an active part of the solution and not a mere object of study allows us to mitigate the impact of victimization, overcoming visions that pit rights against supposed Western values in sterile logics of revenge.

The **2020 OSCE-ODIHR** report offers a fundamental analytical framework for understanding the extent of discrimination against Muslims in the European and Italian context, highlighting a convergence of cultural issues, social prejudice, and systemic barriers.

In terms of **social perception**, Pew research data reveals widespread mistrust: in Italy, **61%** of respondents believe that Muslims do not wish to integrate into society. This percentage, identical to that recorded in Germany, places Italy among the countries with the highest level of skepticism, surpassed only by Greece, Hungary, and Spain.

This climate of opinion translates directly into **structural discrimination** that impacts daily life. According to EU-wide surveys, approximately one in three Muslims encounters discriminatory obstacles in the labor market, while one in four reports having experienced harassment based on their ethnic origin. This latter figure highlights the **intersectional** nature of the phenomenon, in which religion is inextricably intertwined with ethnic and cultural prejudice, multiplying the risk of exclusion.

Women are the primary target of Islamophobic hate incidents, as confirmed by gender data collected across Europe. In the Netherlands (2015), over 90% of reported victims were women, while in France (2014), 81.5% of acts of violence recorded by the Collective Against Islamophobia targeted women. This vulnerability translates into a particularly marked level of daily hostility for those who wear the veil or niqab: 39% of these women report having experienced inappropriate looks or offensive gestures, 22% have been the victims of verbal insults, and 2% have reported physical assaults.

Police Stops: One in three Muslims reports having been stopped by the police or harassed specifically because of visible religious symbols or traditional clothing.

The phenomenon of hate is divided into three distinct categories based on criminal relevance and symbolic value: **hate crimes**, which are criminal offenses motivated by prejudice against a protected characteristic; **hate incidents or episodes**, which are discriminatory acts that, while not necessarily constituting crimes, undermine social cohesion and the sense of security; and **hate messages**. The latter define the communicative nature of the act, aimed at intimidating the victim's entire community through offensive or desecrating symbols (such as public profanations or insults), signaling to the group that it is neither welcome nor safe in society.

OSCE States have committed to officially recognizing, recording, and reporting the anti-Muslim bias motivations that inspire hate crimes. The agreed-upon regulatory framework provides for the adoption of specific legislation that considers the discriminatory motive as an aggravating circumstance, ensuring effective and proportionate sanctions. It is also considered essential to **collect and publish detailed statistical data** on reported, prosecuted, and convicted cases, in order to monitor the trend of the phenomenon and develop effective, evidence-based policies to combat it.

The practical guidelines place strong emphasis on the **physical protection of places of worship**, educational institutions, and religious sites, urging governments to adopt preventative measures against vandalism and terrorist attacks. At the same time, the recommendations highlight the need to invest in **specialized training for police forces and prosecutors** to improve their ability to recognize indicators of bias and manage investigations with an empathetic approach focused on the needs of victims. Finally, states are called upon to build **lasting relationships of trust with Muslim communities**

through operational partnerships, transparent communication channels, and the immediate public condemnation of any incident of intolerance by political leaders.

The implementation of these guidelines **in Italy shows significant discrepancies**, often attributable to a process of **securitization** of the Muslim presence. While the OSCE recommends protecting minorities as vulnerable groups, the Italian institutional approach tends to frame them primarily as a potential threat to national security to be monitored and contained.

From an operational perspective, an emblematic **gap is the lack of dedicated liaison officers**, a support role already established for other discriminated communities (Jews and LGBTI) that would facilitate the bond of trust necessary to overcome the high rate of **under-reporting** (official reports are only 6%) and **under-recording**, i.e., the failure to record hate motives in police reports.

The current classification often groups religious crimes under the **generic category of "racism and xenophobia"**, preventing a granular and specific analysis of the phenomenon of Islamophobia. Furthermore, a serious "accountability gap" persists, as **Italy has not reported complete data on the judicial phase (criminal proceedings and sentences) since 2018**, making it impossible to verify the effectiveness of the state response and the actual impact of any corrective measures.

The 2024 **bill against "illegal mosques"** fits into this framework, prioritizing administrative control and the closure of centers, with the risk of fueling feelings of alienation. Finally, international organizations such as the ECRI (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance) and the CERD (UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination) have issued stern warnings to Italy, denouncing **political rhetoric that demonizes Islam, calling it incompatible with European and indigenous values**. This climate has fueled online toxicity and led to a profound institutional breakdown, culminating in the **wholesale resignation of the "Consulta per l'Islam italiano" in October 2024**. Ultimately, the Italian state continues to frame the Muslim question more as a problem.

Obstacles to Integration

Within the Islamic community, there is sometimes a lack of doctrinal depth and elements of **formalism**. Especially among the first generations or those following "do-it-yourself" paths, superficial religious preparation is found, confusing cultural customs of origin with the universal principles of faith. This **lack of knowledge** fosters "**literalism**," the error of reducing religious identity to a mere legal or moral approach, thus betraying the spiritual dimension. This can lead, in some cases, to an ideological drift or self-ghettoization.

There is also the risk of **spiritualism**, a drift that betrays religious identity by exaggerating the mystical interpretation of reality. This tendency manifests itself in a "sentimental puritanism" that reduces faith to vague emotionality, disconnected from intellectual responsibility, ritual practice, and rational engagement with the world.

Geopolitics profoundly influences the image of Islam in Italy, often generating misleading associations. The risk is that of importing foreign methodological tensions and confusions into the national landscape, creating imbalances in the priorities of interreligious dialogue and distorting the perception of the spiritual identity of Italian Muslims.

COREIS Italy, together with other organizations, works to promote models of best practice in the management of Islamic worship and the Islamic community. It actively engages in relations with institutions and other religious denominations, combining respect for the Italian legal system and culture with the religious representation of Islam in its relations with society.

Indeed, Islam cannot be reduced to something static and merely "historical"; on the contrary, it **contains** within itself the tools necessary for **renewal** and adaptation over time. The Islamic legal tradition calls for consultation and *ijtihad* (interpretative effort) and is based on the *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* (the lofty objectives of the law: protection of life, intellect, religion, family, and property).

Is Islam incompatible with modernity?

Asking this question already reveals a fundamental problem: there is a tendency to overlap the chronological concept of "modernity" with the ideological concept of "modernism" or secularism. Muslims, with their cultural and historical nuances, are an integral part of modern times. However, tension emerges when modernity is understood exclusively as the abandonment of reference to the transcendent in favor of a purely rationalist and materialistic approach.

There is a substantial difference in method: while part of contemporary Western philosophy tends to develop individual thought and the secularized standardization of the citizen, the Islamic perspective maintains the universal human being and service to the Creator as its objective, without separating civil life from spiritual responsibility.

Professor Naquib Al-Attas from Indonesia offers an important key: the issue is not faith per se, but the "corruption of knowledge". Islamophobia and misunderstanding often arise from **the application of Western secular categories to the understanding of Islam**, reducing it either to a museum object or a socio-political ideology, ignoring the fact that for Muslims, reality necessarily includes a metaphysical component.

This approach has consequences for the way Muslims themselves interpret their religion. If it is reduced to a mere socio-cultural phenomenon of traditional societies and investigated solely with the tools of scientific analysis, the connection with the metaphysical foundations of Islamic knowledge is lost: intuition (*khabar shādiq*) and revelation, without which the rational approach is deficient.

This methodological error generates an evident **paradox**. Accusing Islam of being incompatible with democracy only makes sense if one conceives it in a distorted way and as coinciding with secularism, a model that demands the exclusion of the sacred from public life.

This process occurs insidiously by justifying the **denial of the good** and wisdom that Islam, like every sacred tradition, symbolizes—selectively emphasizing those doctrinal interpretations that are distorted and easily exploited by extremists. Acting in this way does not mean defending democracy, but rather imposing **forced conformity on individuals by exploiting their religious identity**, ultimately denying the very pluralism that liberal systems rightly seek to protect, confusing integration with assimilation into an exclusive and exclusivist worldview.

The real obstacle, therefore, is not Islam, but what Al-Attas calls the *Loss of Adab* (loss of education): the inability, both within and outside the Islamic world, to recognize the proper place of each thing in the order of creation. Islam is not incompatible with modernity, but it can serve as a warning against the drift of a modernity that can sometimes even be dehumanizing. It is an educational proposal that goes beyond technical skills, and aims to form the human being in his or her integrity—body, mind, and soul.

The Primacy of Knowledge

Knowledge is not a simple accumulation of technical notions, but an act that requires discernment and the patience to connect different visions, as well as the visible and the invisible. Today's challenge lies **in stemming the currents of irrational opposition** between faith and reason, between different faiths, between modernity and metaphysics, by cultivating an education for life, a synthesis where every discipline finds its place and its usefulness for the Good.

This also means **avoiding exclusivity**, both secular and religious, which stifles pluralism and a lived interpretation of transcendence. Renewing a broader approach to knowledge can also help ward off fanaticism and discrimination, allowing for a dialogue that does not seek to destroy others.

Those who discriminate against Islam and minorities, or even "defend" them, often do so in the name of a narrow, incomplete, biased, or seemingly **procedural interpretation of justice**. Such justice loses its connection to the common and higher Good, transforming itself into a banner of opposition; the law becomes a weapon of exclusion, not a tool for harmonization.

In Islamic tradition, Justice is a divine Name, and is linked to Mercy (*Rahma*). A *hadith qudsi* (divine saying) states: "**My Mercy prevails over My Wrath.**" This teaching perhaps offers a universal insight: true justice cannot be merely the rigid application of rules or social vengeance. It must be subordinated to a principle that transcends it, oriented toward a positive and constructive goal, a common good. A justice devoid of mercy becomes tyranny; an exploited justice becomes ideology.

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