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Islam in Italy: Dynamics of Community Development and Contemporary Challenges

Islam di Itali: Dinamik Pembangunan Komuniti dan Cabaran Kontemporari

Mohamed Bamoshmoosh*, Fatmir Shehu**

Abstract

This study seeks to examine the development of the Muslim community in Italy and the challenges it faces in preserving its Islamic identity while engaging actively with members of Italian society. It aims to explore the arrival of Islam in Italy and its growth through the establishment of mosques, cultural centers, educational initiatives and institutions, and community organizations that support Muslims' identity, social integration, and interreligious dialogue and cooperation. The research is important as it investigates how Islam and Muslims have gradually become part of Italy's society, emphasizing the realities of migration, cultural diversity, and community interactions in contemporary Europe. The historical, descriptive, and analytical methods are adopted to explore the arrival of Islam in Italy and to address the issues of legal recognition, Islamophobia, media representation, and identity rights among younger generations born and raised in Italy as key contemporary challenges faced by Muslims in the country. The paper focuses its discussion on: a) Historical background of Islam in Italy, b) Contemporary presence of Islam in Italy, c) Muslim Organization in Italy, d) Italian Muslim population, e) Challenges of Italian Muslim population, and f) Solutions. The study concludes that, despite the social, economic, and administrative challenges, Italian Muslims continue to adapt, grow, and contribute effectively to Italian society.

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Also, the article offers new insights through discussions on minority experiences and social integration by examining the historical, sociological, and religious experiences of Muslims in Italy.

Keywords: Islam in Italy, Muslim Community, Challenges, Interreligious Dialogue, Integration and Identity.

Abstrak

Kajian ini bertujuan meneliti perkembangan komuniti Muslim di Itali serta cabaran yang dihadapi dalam mengekalkan identiti Islam mereka sambil terlibat secara aktif dengan anggota masyarakat Itali. Kajian ini juga bertujuan meneroka kedatangan Islam ke Itali dan perkembangannya melalui penubuhan masjid, pusat kebudayaan, inisiatif dan institusi pendidikan, serta organisasi komuniti yang menyokong identiti Muslim, integrasi sosial, dan dialog serta kerjasama antara agama. Kajian ini penting kerana ia mengkaji bagaimana Islam dan umat Islam secara beransur-ansur menjadi sebahagian daripada masyarakat Itali, dengan menekankan realiti migrasi, kepelbagaian budaya, dan interaksi komuniti dalam konteks Eropah kontemporari. Kaedah sejarah, deskriptif dan analitikal digunakan untuk meneliti kedatangan Islam ke Itali serta membincangkan isu-isu pengiktirafan undang-undang, Islamofobia, representasi media, dan hak identiti dalam kalangan generasi muda yang dilahirkan dan dibesarkan di Itali sebagai cabaran utama yang dihadapi oleh umat Islam di negara tersebut. Makalah ini memfokuskan perbincangannya kepada: a) latar belakang sejarah Islam di Itali, b) kehadiran Islam di Itali pada masa kini, c) organisasi Muslim di Itali, d) populasi Muslim Itali, e) cabaran yang dihadapi oleh populasi Muslim Itali, dan f) penyelesaian yang dicadangkan. Kajian ini menyimpulkan bahawa walaupun berdepan dengan cabaran sosial, ekonomi dan pentadbiran, umat Islam di Itali terus menyesuaikan diri, berkembang, dan menyumbang secara berkesan kepada masyarakat Itali. Selain itu, artikel ini menawarkan perspektif baharu melalui perbincangan mengenai pengalaman golongan minoriti dan integrasi sosial dengan meneliti pengalaman sejarah, sosiologi dan keagamaan umat Islam di Itali.

Kata Kunci: Islam di Itali, Komuniti Muslim, Cabaran, Dialog Antara Agama, Integrasi dan Identiti.

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Introduction

Italy has become one of the most significant destinations for Muslim migration in Southern Europe over the last few decades. Even though historically, Italy is known for its Catholic and culturally homogeneous society, in the contemporary context, Italy's society consists members of other religious communities, including Muslims. Although, the history of the presence of Islam and Muslims in Italy goes back to the early days of expansion of Muslims territories outside the Arabian Peninsula, its contemporary context has a different narration. The contemporary community structure of Muslim population in Italy composes of immigrants, refugees, reverts (Muslims of Italian origin), including second-generation citizens from North Africa, the Balkans, South Asia, and the Middle East. Indeed, such presence has reshaped Italy's religious landscape and created new spaces of intercultural interactions and interreligious encounters. Amid these transformations, the Muslim community has encountered numerous challenges in the social, cultural, religious, economic, legal, and educational spheres. Addressing these challenges through appropriate policies and practical solutions is essential for enhancing social relations, fostering interreligious dialogue, and promoting constructive cooperation between Muslims and other members of the Italian society.

Various scholars have contributed through their writings to the arrival of Islam and Muslims in Italy emphasizing the community development and challenges. Chiara Anna Cascino concludes in her research that the pathways contributing to the development of community building and identity reconstruction are multidirectional. She argues that “the peripheries of Islam do not simply receive the religious influence from the center. Instead, the concept of circularity is foundational to the processes of community building and identity reconstruction.”¹ Giammarco Mancinelli states in his research that “mosques shape the experiences of immigrants' children in the face of...exclusion from full civic belonging (“we, the equal citizens”) and exclusion from the

¹ Cascino, Chiara Anna, “De-Centering the Gaze on Peripheral Islams-New Forms of Rooting and Community Building Among Albanian Muslims in Italy,” *Religions* 16, (8) (March 2025):12. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16080992>

urban and civil fabric of the city.”² He asserts that “mosque-based socialization” may help Muslims to construct their identities compatible with civic participation or incompatible with the local democratic space. Mancinelli raises the question: “is being a “mosque Muslim” a barrier or a bridge to civic integration and to challenging both individual and collective marginality?”³ For Francesco Alicino Italy’s “current legal framework does not prevent legal recognition of Muslim communities.... obstacle in this regard is the influence of politics and the predominant (political) role of the government.” Also, its Constitution “guarantees to all religious denominations and associated organizations equal freedom before the law,....”⁴ Roberta Ricucci maintains in her study that “symbolic religiosity, belonging to Islam can be translated into recognition of a common Muslim identity which is shared and practiced within associational activities but is not necessarily tied to the observance of practices”.⁵ It is remarked from such inclination that two Muslim groups were formed. *The first group* consists of those practicing Muslims, and *the second group* includes those non-practicing Muslims, who see Islam as an identity. Another scholar, James A. Toronto maintains in his work that Muslims in Italy are witnessing structural and social challenges posed by “the diversity and divisions found within the Muslim community itself, deep-seated mistrust of Islam in Italian society, media coverage that tends to be biased and inaccurate, and ambivalence on the part of the Catholic Church hierarchy toward Islam and other religious minorities”.⁶

These studies have contributed greatly to the subject on Islam in Italy while looking at it from a diverse context concerning various issues related to Muslim community in Italy. Nevertheless, a comprehensive representation of Islam in Italy covering the past, present, and the

² Mancinelli, Giammarco, “Mosques and the Second Generation: Pathways of Demarginalization in Bologna, Italy,” *Religions*, 16(10), (October 2025):3. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16101316>

³ Giammarco, “Mosques and the Second Generation: ...,” 3. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16101316>

⁴ Alicino, Francesco, “The Legal Treatment of Muslims in Italy in the Age of Fear and Insecurity,” *Journal of Law and Religion*, 37(3) (2022):485. doi:10.1017/jlr.2022.42

⁵ Ricucci, Roberta, “Living in Italy in an Anti-Immigrant Scenario: New Challenges for Muslim Second Generations”, in *The New Forms of Social Exclusion*, edited by Rosalba Morese and Sara Palermo, (Intech Open, 2019):10. doi:10.5772/intechopen.81280 Intech Open. doi:10.5772/intechopen.81280.

⁶ See, Toronto, J. A., “Islam Italiano: Prospects for Integration of Muslims in Italy’s Religious Landscape,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 28(1), (2008):61-82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602000802011069>

future developments has not been addressed in these works. Therefore, this study on “*Islam in Italy: Dynamics of Community Development and Contemporary Challenges*,” seeks to examine how Muslim communities in Italy have developed institutionally, socially, and culturally, including the major challenges they face in contemporary Italian society, which follows European standards. Its main objective is to provide insights on how Islam arrived in Italy and the way Muslims established and sustained their community including their adaptation to the Italian society.

The methodology employed in this research paper is qualitative by referring to library-based resources including the online published articles and books, as well as reliable websites. The methodology includes historical, descriptive, and analytical approaches. The historical approach is used to collect data from various historical sources addressing the early emergence of Islam in Italy and the development of Muslim community. Descriptive method is used to interpret the collected data and relate them to the themes and subthemes of this paper. Analytical method is employed to analyze historical facts and information in light of the contextual aspect concerning the contemporary challenges faced by Muslim community in Italy as well as the solutions. It is important to mention that the researchers know Italian, Arabic, and English languages, and therefore, have refereed to sources written in those three languages. The personal experience of one of the researchers, who resides in Italy and engages in many social-oriented activities with Muslims and others, especially the Italian Christians.

The data have been selected according to their relationship with the content of discussion in this paper. Looking at the early development of Muslim community in Italy, priority has been given to sources written in Italian language by both Muslim and other Italian scholars. Such sources have been translated to Arabic and have been kept in the Library in Sicily. Contributions of various Muslim organizations have been used as data for this study while browsing their websites to collect the required information. Besides, works written in English have been used to support this research. The selection of data resources has been made according to the themes

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covered in this paper. So, this study has limited its scope to selected data that are connected to the main themes of this research.

This study is very significant as it creates awareness about the arrival of Islam in Italy emphasizing the dynamics of how Muslim community developed and sustained itself and what are key challenges they faced while living in the Italian society. Also, it provides insightful information for people through which their perception about the presence of Islam and Muslims in Italy will improve. The following questions are raised: When did Islam emerge in Italy? How did Muslims develop their community? What are the contemporary challenges faced by Muslims in Italy? To answer these questions, this research seeks to investigate the following issues: (1) Historical background of Islam in Italy, (2) Contemporary presence of Islam in Italy, (3) Muslim Organization in Italy, (4) Italian Muslim population, (5) Challenges of Italian Muslim population, and (6) Solutions.

Historical Background of Islam in Italy

The first two European countries, which were conquered by Muslims were Spain and Italy. However, the history of Islam in the Italian peninsula is different from that of the Iberian Peninsula. The Islamic domain in Spain began in 711A.D. and lasted for almost seven centuries, while the presence of Islam in Italy, mainly in Sicily, began in 827A.D. and ended after two and a half centuries.

There are several reasons for this difference: *firstly*, a geographical reason related to the fact that Spain is closer to Morocco than Italy is to Tunisia; and, *secondly*, a political reason concerning the fact that in Italy there was and there is Rome, the seat of the Papacy, the most important Christian institution (now the Catholic Church).

Moreover, in the ninth century in Northern Italy, there was an important military influence of the Roman Empire, while southern Italy was part of the Byzantine Empire, whose capital was Constantinople. This does not mean that until 827A.D., there was not any Islamic presence in Italy.

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The arrival of Islam in Italy began during Mu‘awiya ibn Abi Sufyan’s Caliphate in 652A.D. Later it is reported that there have been more than 10 other conquests in 669A.D., 703A.D., 728A.D., 729A.D., 730A.D., 731A.D., 734A.D., 740A.D., 752A.D., 805A.D., 806A.D., 812A.D., and 821A.D.⁷ However, it was only in 827A.D., when a well-organized conquest was conducted by the 70-year-old Qāḍī Assad ibn al-Furat on behalf of the Aghlabi Amir Ziyadat-Allah the I of Qayrawān, namely, to help Euphemius of Messina in Sicily who asked for their help against the Byzantine Empire.⁸ To understand the arrival of Islam in Italy, it is important to discuss its presence in Italy including the remains of its rich heritage, such as mosques, Arabic scripts and masterpieces, as well as buildings with Islamic architectural designs.

The Presence of Islam in Italy

The arrival of Islam in Italy can be divided into four periods. *The first period* (827A.D.-909A.D.) is that of the Aghlabids, who in almost 30 years conquered all Sicily and part of Southern Italy (Bari, Taranto) and somehow Sardinia. The Aghlabids came to Sicily namely to help Euphemius of Messina (Sicily), who asked for their help against the Byzantine Empire for whom he was working. The 70-year-old Qāḍī Assad ibn al-Furat organized the invasion on behalf of the Aghlabid amir Ziyadat Allah the I of Qayrawān. *The second period* (909A.D.-965A.D.) is that of the Fatimids who took over the Aghlabids in Africa, as well as in Sicily. When the Fatimids transferred their capital to Cairo, they left Sicily to a trusted family of Yemeni origin, the Kalbids, who ruled

⁷ There are many Arabic texts treating the Islamic domain of southern Italy. It is, however, noteworthy to mention that a very interesting text is the one written by the Italian Michele Amari “Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia”. This five-volume masterpiece collects information from Arab-Islamic historiographers alongside from Southern European sources and was translated in 2004 to Arabic by an Egyptian staff coordinated by Prof. Moheb Sa’d Ibrahim, of the University of ‘Ayn Shams (Cairo, Egypt). Michele Amari (1806-1889), born in Palermo (Sicily), senator and minister of the Kingdom of Italy, wrote also other texts concerning the permanence of the Arabs in Sicily: (1) *Biblioteca Arabo-sicula ossia raccolta di testi arabici che toccano la geografia, la storia, le biografie, e la bibliografia della Sicilia* (1857, Arabic texts; Italian tr. *Biblioteca Arabo-sicula*, 1880, vol.1&2); (2) *Le epigrafi arabiche di Sicilia trascritte, tradotte e illustrate*, 4 vols. (1875-1885); (3) *Nuovi ricordi arabici su la storia di Genova*, *Atti della Società Ligure di Storia Patria* 5 (1867):551-635.

⁸ See, Koçinkağ, Mansur, “An Evaluation of Asad b. al-Furāt’s al-Asadiyya,” *THEOSOPHIA Journal*, Issue 5 (2022):67-81.

Sicily for almost a century (965A.D.-1053A.D.). Historically, the period under the Kalbids is considered the golden age of the presence of Islam in Sicily. In *the last period* (1053A.D.-1091A.D.), Sicily was divided into three regions, each with a different ruler (Qāḍī). It was one of these rulers, Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm, called Ibn al-Thumna (محمد بن إبراهيم المسمى بابن الثمينة) who, in 1061A.D., asked for the help of the Christians against his Muslim brothers. A French militia led by the Hauteville family, known also as the Normans, because they were from Normandy (France), came to help Ibn al-Thumna. But with Roger the I and Roger the II the Hauteville family conquered for themselves in three decades all of Sicily.⁹

For almost another 150 years, Italian Muslims under the Hauteville family, as well as under the German Hohenstaufen family, who ruled Sicily after the Normans, were not forced to leave Sicily although many of them did leave. Fredrik the II of Hohenstaufen in his last years (1223A.D.-1240A.D.) deported the remaining 60 thousand Sicilian Muslims out of Sicily in the city of Lucera, in Apulia. In 1300A.D. another French militia led by the Anjou family, which came to help the papacy against the Hohenstaufen family, under the direct order of Pope Bonifacio VIII, physically eliminated the Islamic presence from Lucera and thus from all Italy. When Muslims arrived in Sicily, they found in it the presence of Christian Orthodox Church related to the Byzantine Empire, which, when they left it (Sicily), was replaced by the Christian Catholic Church.¹⁰ Later the Ottomans tried small-scaled expansion in Southern Italy for a couple of centuries, but without significant success.

What Remains of Italy's Islamic Presence (827A.D.-1091A.D.)?

Regrettably, there is not much left. In a few decades the Papacy did all what it could to cancel completely the memory of the presence of Islam in Southern Italy. What remains is only important

⁹ For more information, see: Metcalfe, Alex, *Muslims of Medieval Italy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp.16-45; Ahmad, Aziz, *A History of Islamic Sicily* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1975), pp.1-52.

¹⁰ For more information, see: Metcalfe, Alex, *Muslims of Medieval Italy*, pp.286-327; Anne Taylor, Julie, *Muslims in Medieval Italy: The Colony at Lucera* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003), pp.15-48, and pp.123-146; and, Abulafia, David, *Frederick II: A Medieval Emperor* (London: Allen Lane, 1988), pp.276-285.

Arabic linguistic influences in the at that time new-born Italian language, and alimentary influences especially in the Italian sweet cuisine. In fact, Palermo with the presence of Muslims became the capital of Sicily, instead of the historical capital Syracuse, developed into one of the major cities of medieval Europe, renowned for its large population, economic prosperity, and numerous mosques.¹¹ The remains of Islamic presence in Italy are what the UNESCO defines as the Sicilian Arab-Norman heritage. Roger the II and Fredrik the II, both used the Arabic title *al-mu'tazz bi-llāh* (*the one who is proud because of Allah*) and were fluent in Arabic. In fact, what both of them left was mainly with the help of Muslim craftsmen. In support of this, it is very significant to mention some of the most important masterpieces of the Arab-Norman heritage, namely,¹² *the famous Roger the II royal mantle made of silk and gold*, which now is in a museum in Vienna. It is interesting to note that on the edge of the mantle there is a Kufic inscription (in Arabic) dated in Hegira calendar (528A.D.) and not in the Christian calendar.¹³ What is worldwide known as the *tabula Rogeriana* (the map of Roger the II), the best world map for several centuries in the middle ages, in which the world is shown upside down. The world is seen from the perspective of those who live in the south, not as it is now usually seen from the perspective of those who live in the north. It is the work of a Muslim geographer, Muhammad al-Idrisi in his "*Nuzhat al-mushtāq fī ikhtirāq al-āfāq* - The pleasure excursion of one who is eager to traverse the regions of the world."¹⁴

The famous Palermo's Ziza castle with its beautiful garden Genoardo, derives its name from the Arabic name "*Al-'Aziza and Jannat al-Ard* - the Splendid and the paradise in the Earth."

¹¹ See, Ahmad, *A History of Islamic Sicily*, pp.63-70; and, Metcalfe, *Muslims of Medieval Italy*, pp.52-58.

¹² See, Ahmad, *A History of Islamic Sicily*, pp.63-70.

¹³ The inscription states: "Work performed in the flourishing royal workshop, with happiness and honor, commitment and perfection, power and efficiency, approval and good fortune, generosity and sublimity, glory and beauty, fulfillment of desires and hopes, propitious days and nights, without cessation or removal, with honor and care, vigilance and defense, prosperity and integrity, triumph and ability, in the Capital of Sicily, the Hegira year 528".

¹⁴ Abu Abdullah Muhammad al-Idrisi al-Qurtubi al-Hasani as-Sabti, or simply al-Idrisi (1100-1165) was born in the city of Ceuta (north Africa, now belonging to Spain). Although he travelled through North Africa and the al-Andalus (Muslim Spain of the times) he preferred to spend his live in Palermo under the rule of Roger the II to whom he dedicated his masterpiece.

Similarly, the Palermo's Church of San Cataldo is clearly built by Muslim workers. It is very interesting to note that in the cathedral of Palermo there is a column that has an inscription in Arabic that the scholars think is the 54th verse of *Sūrah* al-A'rāf. Other two columns present in the Fardella library in Trapani have inscriptions in Arabic: "*Bismillah al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm, Thiḡati bi-Allah*" and "*Bismillah al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm, Ḥasbi Allah*" (respectively "In the name of Allah, the Especially Compassionate, the Especially Merciful I trust in Allah" and "In the name of Allah, the Especially Compassionate, the Especially Merciful, Suffice Allah"). In the Regional Museum of Sicily there is another column where in the upper part there is the Basmala and in the middle part the Shahadah.¹⁵ So, what steps can Italians and Italian Muslims take to strengthen their connection with the historical presence of Islam in Italy? The researchers are of the opinion, although it could not be easy, they can explore themselves to data dealing with historical facts, which are presented by authoritative authors or scientific studies on archaeological sites. For instance, there is a need for a study on the beautiful poems that Muslim poets, who lived in Sicily left as an inspiring legacy like those of Ibn Hamdis, Ali al-Billanubi, and Muhammad Ibn al-Quatta.¹⁶ In this sense, what was left behind by Muslims while residing in some parts and major cities in Italy, had a great impact on the Italian society that made them to survive until today.

Contemporary Presence of Islam in Italy

As discussed above, historically, Islam has been present in Italy since the early periods of Muslims' conquests and expansion of their territories outside the Arabian Peninsula, especially through

¹⁵ The Basmala (Arabic: بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ, basmalah; also known by its incipit Bi-smi llāh; اللَّهُ بِسْمِ, "In the name of Allah" is the titular name of the Islamic phrase "In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful" (Arabic: الْرَّحِیْمِ الرَّحْمٰنِ اللّٰهِ بِسْمِ, bi-smi llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīmi). The Shahada (Arabic: الشَّهَادَةُ aš-šahādah - the testimony), also transliterated as Shahadah, is an Islamic oath and Creed, and one of the Five Pillars of Islam and part of the Adhan. It reads:

أَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ - أَشْهَدُ أَنَّ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ - أَشْهَدُ أَنَّ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ - أَشْهَدُ أَنَّ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ - أَشْهَدُ أَنَّ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ

I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah - أَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَّسُولُ اللَّهِ - أَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَّسُولُ اللَّهِ - أَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَّسُولُ اللَّهِ - أَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَّسُولُ اللَّهِ - أَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَّسُولُ اللَّهِ

¹⁶ In recent decades there has been a growing interest by Italian scholars in these poets born in Sicily, but who in most cases died in North Africa or Andalusia. There have been several translations of their poems into Italian and in some cases into the Sicilian dialect to try to better grasp the musicality of their poetry. Just as an example can be recalled the recent collection of Prof. Francesca Maria Corrao: "Poeti arabi di Sicilia" 2005 - MESOGEO by GEM s.r.l. Via Catania, 62 - 98124 Messina. ISBN 88-469-2036-6

commercial relationships. The presence of Islam continued to reemerge in different periods over time. Also, contemporary presence of Muslims in Italy remains an important part of Italian society, contributing to the country's social and economic aspects of life, while gradually integrating into the wider community. To provide better understanding about this subject, the researchers discuss in this section, the contemporary situation of Muslims in Italy, which is examined based on the following two phases or waves.

The First Wave

The recent history of the foreign presence in Italy is different from that of the other European countries. In the last century, while countries like France, UK, Germany, and the Benelux witnessed an immigration process mainly from their colonies for the need of manpower, Italy instead contributed with millions of emigrants to Northern Europe and the Americas. After the World War I, tens of thousands of Italians emigrated to the Italian colonies in Africa. Only after the Sixties some immigrants, most of them students and businessmen, began to arrive in Italy. Thus, after a long period when the Islamic presence in Italy was almost absent, some students, mainly from Arab countries and Iran, arrived in Italy to achieve technical studies, mainly architecture, medicine, and engineering. At their arrival, these students, who in their country of origin were part of the in-power political classes or of the most advantaged economic classes, generally had a cultural and economic level above that of the average of their peers both at their native countries or Italy. Those students with religious interest in 1971 formed the first Italian Muslim Association, namely, the Italian Muslim Student Association: USMI (Unione degli Studenti Musulmani in Italia):¹⁷

¹⁷ The USMI (Union of Muslim Students of Italy) was established in 1971 starting from students mainly coming from Syria, Palestine and Jordan who, before entering the other Italian Universities, used to study the Italian language in the University of Perugia. The USMI inaugurated one of the first places of worship in Italy, a small room in the historic center of Perugia, called the "mosque of Via dei Priori", which is still open and functional. Most of the Italian Muslim leaders have passed through this center like Dr. Mohamed Nour Dashan, Dr. Aboulkheir Breigheche, Dr. Ali 'Abd al-Latif Abu Shwaima. Dr. Mohamed Abdel Qader (Abu Sumaia) for decades was the imam of

Despite ancient and medieval presences, which left significant monumental traces not only in Sicily, modern Sunni Islam in Italy, was a modest reality until the late 1960s. During this decade, a presence of a few hundred students (mostly Syrians, Jordanians, and Palestinians) began to organize, joining the few businessmen and embassy staff. The late 1960s also saw the first organized Sunni Muslim presence in Italy with the formation of the student movement that led in 1971 to the establishment of the USMI (Union of Muslim Students of Italy), which developed in university cities starting with Perugia and opened a dozen places of prayer between 1970s and 1980s. Meanwhile, in Rome, the Islamic Cultural Center of Italy was established, with a board of directors composed primarily of ambassadors of Sunni countries to Italy or the Holy See¹⁸. Plans for a large mosque in Rome began in 1974, but the official inauguration did not follow until 1995.¹⁹

As it is portrayed in the above statement, in that period the migration was mainly from the Middle East and North Africa and in that area the Islamic sentiment was mainly related to the Muslim Brotherhood. It is interesting to remark that the autochthon Italians, who embraced Islam in this period, generally did so independently from Muslim immigrants. Italians approached Islam through a cultural and sometimes even political dimensions, both right and left factions. In this period also the autochthon Italian Muslims had a cultural level above the average of their peers.

The Second Wave

It was, however, during the worldwide migration process, which began in the last three decades of twentieth century that the Islamic presence in Italy increased significantly. Muslims arrived in Italy as economic and climatic migrants, with some cases of political refugees, from North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East, and South-East Asia, especially Pakistan and Bangladesh. Significant

Perugia's Mosque until his recent death due to Covid. The center is currently directed by the wife of Dr. Mohamed Abdel Qader, Zubaida Khalil. This is based on the researchers' knowledge.

¹⁸ The Holy See is the central governing authority of the Roman Catholic Church, led by the pope and headquartered in Vatican City, which became an independent state in 1929. For more information refer to: Ostberg, R., "Holy See," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Holy-See> (accessed April 19, 2026).

¹⁹ Islamic Movements in Italy, *Sunni Islam: An Introduction*, <https://www.rassegnastampa-totustuus.it/cattolica/i-movimenti-di-matrice-islamica-in-italia/> (accessed 25 March 2026).

contributions to the Italian Islamic community are given also by migrants from Albania and former ex-Yugoslavia (Bosnia and Kosovo).²⁰ Unlike the first Muslim immigration wave, these new immigrants generally came from rural areas or from poor urban districts. At the beginning the Muslim community was formed mainly by males, but later with the family reunification process, arrived also the wives and the offsprings. Now the Italian Islamic community is formed also by second and sometimes third generation Italian Muslims born and raised in Italy.²¹ In the meantime, the members of the Muslim community increased as a result of a significant number of autochthon Italians embraced Islam. They were very much impressed by the positive attitude of Muslims, which encouraged them to express their desire to embrace Islam, not only from a religious point of view, but also through social interactions, living together, and celebrating mixed marriages.

The second wave of the presence of Islam in Italy, which is seen through the lens of immigrants and autochthons, lies in the lower cultural, economic, and social strata of the Italian society. The vast majority of these Muslims, who often used to participate in the religious/social activities (Friday sermons, religious weekend meetings) and read *al-Qur'ān* in Arabic by reciting it by heart, have poor theological knowledge. In addition, most members of Italian ethnic Muslim communities remain linked to the religious organizations of their country of origin. For instance, Muslims from the Indian subcontinent are attached to the movements close to the *Jamaat Tabligh* missionary movement, and those Muslims from Sub-Saharan Africa to the Sufi movements. Many of these Muslims are often influenced by the Islam of Wahabi and Salafist backgrounds.²² Based on the researchers' knowledge and reflection on the Muslims in Italy, the majority of them are Sunnis, with a Shi'ite minority, including a few Ahmadis. Therefore, under an apparent homogeneity, the Italian Muslim community has numerous internal currents, which, however, are

²⁰ See, Allievi, Stefano, "Islam in Italy," in *Muslims in the Enlarged Europe: Religion and Society*, ed. Brigitte Maréchal et al., (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp.214-218.

²¹ Ambrosini, M., *L'integrazione quotidiana: famiglie migranti e relazioni di vicinato*, in "Lingue migranti e nuovi passaggi", a cura di M.V. Calvi, I. Bajini, M. Bonomi, https://www.ledonline.it/LCM/allegati/700-0-Lingue-Migranti_Ambrosini.pdf (accessed January 15, 2026).

²² Bamoshmoosh, M., *Social determinants on young people from ethnic and religious minorities*, in "Law and freedom of belief in Europe," Pacini Giuridica, Pisa 2018.

not always able to organize themselves with autonomous mosques, mainly due to economic and bureaucratic difficulties. This great ethnic variety and religious sensibility do not facilitate the formation of a unified agency through which Islam is presented to Italy's society. The lack of this essential element continues to pose a significant challenge for Muslims in Italy. While the community is characterized by its cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and racial diversity, achieving unity remains an important objective. Their shared Islamic identity serves as a common bond that brings Muslims together and encourages their active engagement within Italian society.

Muslim Organizations in Italy

There are several organizations that represent Italian Muslims in Italy. The oldest and probably the biggest Italian Islamic organization is the UCOII: (Unione delle Comunità e Organizzazioni Islamiche in Italia), which in 1990 took over from USMI (Unione degli Studenti Musulmani in Italia). Actually, those who were in charge of the USMI founded the UCOII. UCOII is very active culturally and socially and has good knowledge of the Italian reality. As written on its website, the UCOII works very hard to make the integration of Muslims into the Italian society effective, in compliance with their religious principles, their own identities and culture and in harmony with the principles of the Italian Constitution and international charters. In the Italian society, the UCOII is responsible for the management of about 150 mosques, which directly participate in electing the governing bodies of the association.²³

The CII (Confederazione Islamica Italiana) is another association with strong Moroccan background and organizes the religious and social activities of the Moroccan community, which is the biggest Italian Islamic ethnic community. The Italian Islamic Confederation (CII) was established in Rome on 21st March 2012 and is a national organization that brings together 14 regional Italian Islamic federations.²⁴ The COREIS (Comunità Religiosa Islamica Italiana), is

²³ See, *The Union of Islamic Communities of Italy* <https://ucoii.org/> (accessed September 1, 2025).

²⁴ See, *Confederazione Islamica Italiana*, <http://www.conf-islamica.it/confederazione-islamica-italiana/> (accessed September 1, 2025).

another Muslim organization that represents the 150 thousand Italian Muslim natives.²⁵ COREIS was founded by Shaykh Abd al-Wahid Pallavicini and since 2005 has been accredited by the Italian Ministry of the Interior. Its national headquarters are in Milan next to the al-Wahid Mosque, which is a place of worship officially recognized by the Municipality of Milan and in 2008 received the certificate of civic merit for interreligious and intercultural dialogue. This is due to the fact that COREIS is largely made up of native Italians, which facilitate the dialogue with the Italian institutions and population. COREIS beside Lombardy has also representations in a few other Italian regions.²⁶

Since September 2001, another actor is the GMI (Giovani Musulmani d'Italia), which is an independent, non-profit social promotion association representing the Muslim youth (14-30 years old), born and/or raised in Italy. Due to its excellent knowledge of the Italian society GMI has become very active in the Italian cultural, social, and interfaith dialogue initiatives.²⁷ The Islamic Cultural Centre of Italy Grand Mosque of Rome, which plays a particular role in representing Italian Muslims, is also one of the first Islamic institutions in Italy, established in December 1974. This Centre, with its economic and political domains, helps of the Embassies in Rome, especially those of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Kingdom of Morocco. The commissioned architect Paolo Portoghesi was assigned to build the beautiful mosque of Rome, which was inaugurated in 1995 A.D. The Grand Mosque of Rome is the largest mosque in Europe in terms of space as it accommodates up to 12,000 worshipers at the same time.²⁸

Unfortunately, although in Italy there are almost 800 mosques, distributed especially in the Northern part of the country, only few of them have the impression of a real mosque, i.e., Ravenna,

²⁵ See, COREIS (Comunità Religiosa Islamica Italiana- Italian Islamic Religious Community) <https://www.coreis.it> (accessed September 1, 2025).

²⁶ See, Ibid., *Who we are*, <https://www.coreis.it/chi-siamo> (accessed September 1, 2025); The al-Wahid Mosque, <https://www.coreis.it/moschea> (accessed September 1, 2025).

²⁷ See, GMI (Giovani Musulmani d'Italia), <https://gmitalia.org/chi-siamo> (accessed September 1, 2025).

²⁸ See, *Islamic Cultural Centre of Italy Grand Mosque of Rome*, <https://mosqpedia.org/masajid/islamic-cultural-center-of-italy-grand-mosque-of-rome/> (accessed September 1, 2025).

Forli, Colle di Val d'Elsa, and Piacenza. In particular, the Mosque of Sagrate (Moschea di Segrate) in Milan also known as *Masjid al-Rahmān* or Mosque of the Merciful, is the first mosque built in Italy with a dome and minaret after the demolition of the last mosques in Lucera in 1300A.D. Hence, the mosque of Sagrate was inaugurated on the 28th of May 1988A.D.²⁹ Based on the researchers' observations, the rest of mosques in Italy are at best apartments in condominiums, if not in basements, storerooms, or garages. Such situation reflects the difficulties associated with legal and financial constraints.

Italian Muslim Population

The real number of Italian Muslims is unknown although it is believed that it ranges between 1.600.000 and 2 million subjects. Italy like many European countries does not and cannot classify their citizens by religion for fear of what happened last century due to the Nazi-fascist racial laws. Thus, the actual number of Italian Muslim citizens is unknown. Muslims with Italian citizenship are Italian autochthons, first-generation immigrants who became Italians by naturalization and Muslims born in Italy from first generation migrants or mixed couples. It is also not easy to know the real number of Muslims without Italian citizenship. Most of these Muslims have a regular status, although there is an imprecise number of Muslims, mainly refugees, without a legal permission to stay in Italy. Among the organizations that provide statistics on non-Italian citizens almost the only one that treats religion is the catholic Caritas organization. The 2024 Caritas statistics report that more than 53.0% of the migrants in Italy are Christians, while Muslims are 29.8% accounting for 1,582,000 million subjects.³⁰

Morocco, Albania, Bangladesh, and Pakistan are the main countries as contributors for Italian Muslims, followed by Egypt and Senegal. Muslim population is present especially in northern Italy and around the big cities in center Italy like Rome and Napoli. This is because

²⁹ See, *Segrate Mosque*, <https://mosqopedia.org/masajid/mosque-of-segrate/> (accessed September 1, 2025).

³⁰ CARITAS | MIGRANTES. 2024 Immigration Report. <https://pop.acli.it/rubriche/post-it/724-caritas-migrantes-rapporto-immigrazione-2024> (accessed April 20, 2026).

northern Italy is where are most Italian industries and commercial activities.³¹ Recently, interesting research has been embarked on Italian Imams or those who manage the mosques. Most of Italian Imams come from north Africa, mainly from Morocco. Unfortunately, less than half of Italian Imams have an appropriate theological preparation; more than 50% of them do not have a bachelor's degree and only half of them seem to have a good knowledge of the Italian language.³² If this is the situation of Italian Imams, what could be the challenges faced by Muslims and the presence of Islam in Italy.

Challenges of the Italian Muslim Population

The challenges of the Italian Muslims can be divided in two parts: those related to the surrounding Italian society (external), and those related to the Muslim Community itself (internal). These challenges are discussed in this section as follows:

External challenges

Although now Italy does not have a state religion it has an important relationship with the Christianity presented by the Catholic Church, which is followed by most Italians. The relationship between the Italian State and the Catholic Church (Vatican) has always been regulated by international agreements between the two sovereign states. The Italian government in 1984, by putting in practice, Article 8 of the Italian Constitution, began a process to recognize its religious minority realities.³³ This process is known as “Intesa”, which is an agreement between the Italian

³¹ Ibid.

³² Data has been collected, but has not been published by *Cadini Group*, www.gruppocadini.it See, Schiavinato, Valentina, and Rhazzali, Mohammed Khalid, “Training of Imams, Murshidat and Muslim Religious Leaders: Experiences and Open Questions—An Overview of Italy,” *Religions*, 15(868) (2024): 4-7. <https://doi.org/10.3390/re115070868>; and, Alicino, Francesco, “Imams and other Religious Authorities in Italy,” *Stato, Chiese e pluralismo confessionale Rivista telematica*, n. 1(2014):1-28. (www.statoechiese.it) <https://doi.org/10.13130/1971-8543/4609>

³³ The 8th article of the Italian Constitution states: “All religious confessions are equally free before the law. Religious denominations other than Catholic have the right to organize themselves according to their own statutes, as long as they do not conflict with the Italian legal system.” See, *The Constitution of the Italian Republic*, <https://codices.coe.int/codices/documents/constitution/b5bade63-beeb-4846-858b-bf0ef83b6220> (accessed February 20, 2026).

State and a religious confession different from the Catholic one. The Intesa is an internal contract under public law, for which the State has no international responsibility. Since 1984 the Italian government signed 12 “Intese” with Christian (different from Catholic), Buddhist, Hinduist and other Italian religious minorities.³⁴

Through the Intesa the Italian state gives its religious minorities important advantages: recognizes those who represent the religious communities as ministers of worship, gives a legal value to some of their activities, such as marriage certificates, and allows them to teach their religion inside public spaces (schools, hospitals, prisons), and last but not least gives them economic advantages: direct (share from the ‘otto per mille’ national annual income tax return³⁵) and indirect (deduction from the taxes of the contributions to religious organizations).

Unfortunately, the Muslim community does not have an Intesa with the Italian state. The official excuse is that the Islamic community doesn’t have a unified national agency. To achieve this goal, the Italian governments invited the different Italian Islamic organizations to seat together and form a common national agency. Also, in Italy governments change frequently, as well as their political agenda, and the time given to the various Islamic consultative tables was never sufficient to form a common Islamic national agency. On the other hand, the Italian Islamic community, made up of members from various countries and continents including a significant number of

³⁴ The 12 Intese are: (1) Waldensian Evangelical Church (August 11, 1984); (2) Italian Union of Adventist Christian Churches (November 22, 1988); (3) The Assemblies of God in Italy (Pentecostals) (November 22, 1988); (4) The Union of Italian Jewish communities (March 8, 1989); (5) The Baptist Evangelical Christian Union of Italy (March 29, 1993); (6) The Lutheran Evangelical Church in Italy (April 20, 1993); (7) The Archdiocese of Italy and exarchate for southern Europe (Orthodox) (July 30, 2012); (8) The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (July 30, 2012); (9) The Apostolic Church in Italy (July 30, 2012); (10) The Italian Buddhist Union (December 31, 2012); (11) The Italian Hindu Union (December 31, 2012); and (12) The Italian Buddhist Institute Soka Gakkai (June 28, 2016). See, Italian Ministry of the Interior, “Confessioni diverse da quella cattolica che hanno stipulato intese con lo Stato.” *Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration*, <https://libertacivilimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/confessioni-diverse-da-quella-cattolica-che-hanno-stipulato-intese-con-lo-stato/> (accessed February 20, 2026).

³⁵ Eight per thousand (otto per mille) is an Italian law under which Italian taxpayers devolve a compulsory 8‰ from their annual income tax return to an organized religion recognized by Italy or, alternatively, to a state-run social assistance scheme. There is another Italian law with a similar scheme to found entities that carry out socially relevant activities (non-profit, scientific research) with five per thousand (cinque per mille).

autochthon Italians and different religious sensibility, does not understand why the Italian Government insists to deal with a single Islamic national agency while it signed several ‘intese’ with the Christian and Buddhist galaxies. The main problem probably is related to a political issue due to the increasing islamophobia of many Italian political parties.³⁶

Without Intesa the Muslim community cannot have all the privileges that other religious minorities have as previously described. Moreover, without Intesa the Muslim community leaders are not recognized by the Italian State at the local and national level, but also by the social and other religious institutions. All the Muslim community risks to live in the society as a “corpo estraneo” a foreign body, not completely accepted. In the meantime, others choose, each time, who should represent Muslims at the national and local level and dictate the agenda of the cultural and religious dialogue. Indeed, this often causes disagreements between those who are in charge for the Muslim community and, what is most harmful, creates confusion both within the community and outside of who really represents the community. If possible, this further complicates the possibility to have an autonomous Italian Islamic national agency. So, the Intesa with the Italian State is the most important external challenge that Italian Muslims must achieve.

Internal Challenges

Nevertheless, the most important challenges of Italian Muslims are the internal ones, and of course the most important one is related to the religiosity itself.³⁷ As previously described Italian Muslims can be divided in those who are part of the first wave of Muslims, both autochthons and first-generation migrants, who have a well-structured religious knowledge. This is related to the fact that, as previously mentioned, this group of Muslims have a cultural and religious knowledge above that of the average of their peers both at their native countries or Italy. Unfortunately, those who are part of the second wave, both autochthons and first-generation migrants, have a poor

³⁶ Bamoshmoosh, M., *Islamofobia*, in “Coscienza e Libertà”, 2015, no 15, <https://coscienzaeliberta.it/coscienza-e-liberta/rivista-n-51/islamofobia-mohammed-bamoshmoosh-n-51-anno-2015/>

³⁷ Ramadan, T., *To be a European Muslim, A Study of Islamic Sources in the European Contest*, (Islamic Foundation, Leicester 1999).

knowledge of the Islamic religion. This problem increases enormously when we deal with second and third generation Muslim youth, born and raised in Italy, who find it difficult to achieve a healthy and correct religious life. There are important limits to improve and increase the religiosity especially of the last two groups.³⁸

The first important limit is related to an economic issue. In fact, most first-generation immigrants came to Italy to achieve for themselves and for their family a better condition of life, and thus they use almost all their time looking for work even at the expense of their religious sphere. Although in the new host country, compared to their countries of origin, the work is better paid, life is, however, more expensive and the needs of children and family are undoubtedly greater, without forgetting that the work of ethnic minority subjects is generally underpaid.³⁹

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, Muslims who are part of the second wave as well as those born and raised in Italy lie in the lower cultural and social strata of the Italian society.⁴⁰ Thus, for all Italian Muslims the economic issue is one of the most important challenges, which ultimately impact their religiosity. A second limit is linked to the fact that nowadays it is not so easy to declare your own Muslim religious affiliation. Most migrants come from third world countries where the State in words professes to be tolerant, but in reality, obstacles are any form of religious activity except that imposed by the regime to maintain the status quo. Having in mind this heritage, migrants in the host country, where they hope to rebuild for themselves a new life, are not enthusiastic to declare their religious affiliation. Some of these Muslims profess their

³⁸ Allievi, S., *Conversioni: un nuovo modo di credere? Europa, pluralismo, Islam*, (Guida Editori, Napoli 2017).

³⁹ Saraceno, C., Sortor, N., and Sciortino, G., *Stranieri e diseguali. Le diseguaglianze nei diritti e nelle condizioni di vita degli immigrati*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2013.

⁴⁰ There were several publications during the Covid Pandemic showing that in Italy and Europe ethnic-religious minorities were those who most suffered not only from a health point of view, but also from an economic point of view. Italian state tax breaks reached more difficulty ethnic-religious minorities precisely because of their social location. This has further aggravated the social and economic condition of the Italian Muslim Community and what is more dangerous risk to have a greater impact on the future of the younger generations.

religiosity in a completely personal way and do not participate with the rest of the community to common prayers such as on Fridays or holidays.

Most parents do not ask their children to practice religion and do not even teach them their mother tongue⁴¹ because they hope, by doing so, to remove from them the distrust they had to suffer as first-generation immigrants.⁴² These parents hope that by avoiding adding the adjective ‘Muslim’ to their children, they could help making their life easier. Moreover, the daily chronicle tries to link Islam to terrorism, which is an ‘oxymoron’ since Islam (peace) is opposite to terror. Thus, declaring one’s affiliation to Islam, especially in increasing European and Italian Islamophobic contexts may be seen as an implicit admission of guilt.⁴³ For this reason, some Muslims have a schizophrenic religiosity only at certain times of the day, at certain times of the week, and at certain times of the year. It must not be also forgotten that most recent immigrants in Italy are poorly literate, coming from peripheral realities with ancestral taboos and habits, which have nothing to do with religion. Another issue is related to worship ministers.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, the recent migrant diaspora has very few subjects who have good theological knowledge. To overcome this gap some migrants, decide to become cult ministers.⁴⁵ However, many of these self-referenced Imams as well as those who often expressly come from the country of origin do not

⁴¹ Bamoshmoosh, M., *Vecchie e nuove barriere (linguistiche) metropolitane*, in “Quale città per un nuovo umanesimo”, Rivista Associazione Incontri, Edizione Polistampa, Firenze 2015.

⁴² Unfortunately, this bad habit is found in many ethnic minorities who are not necessarily also religious minorities. Italy encourages the teaching of the mother tongue of ethnic minorities (Arabic, Filipino, Chinese, Spanish...) with the aim of increasing interculturality in the schools and in the society for the good of all the Italian population as well as to prevent the cultural impoverishment of its young students belonging to linguistic minorities. For more information on this argument see also the doctoral thesis of Prof. H. Alsakkaf in intercultural pedagogy: “*Lingua materna e pluralismo linguistico, apprendimento della L1 negli alunni arabofoni di seconda generazione nella realtà toscana*”. Sophia University 2018-2021.

⁴³ What is observed is actually the opposite. Young people belonging to the Muslim community try to conform to their more transgressive native peers not only in clothing, but also in sexual, criminal, and drug consumption habits. There are no statistical data, but the number of young people belonging to religious minorities, not only Muslims, but that also participate to private or public religious activities is very low, perhaps even lower than that of native Italians.

⁴⁴ This term is used in Italy for religious leaders in Christianity, such as the priest, or clergy.

⁴⁵ Allievi, S., “Di imam, di conflitti culturali e d’altro ancora,” *Corriere della sera – Corriere del Veneto*, editoriale, 24 Novembre 2019, p.1.

have the ability to deal with the religion doctrines considering the space-time differences between the host and the country of origin: they do not have the knowledge of *Fiqh al-Wāq'i* 'فقه الواقع'.⁴⁶

Moreover, many of these worship ministers/leaders are unable to explicit their thoughts in the new host language and in particular to teach the religious principles to the migrant offspring, who have a different spiritual and semantic vocabulary. Another important internal challenge of the Italian Muslim community is the gender one. Italian Muslim females face a double burden inside and outside the community. Inside the community, they must struggle to get their place to actively participate to community life. Outside the community, those who want to denigrate Islam, see them (Muslim females) as the worst expression of a retrograde religious minority where females are completely subordinated to males. Thus, Italian Muslim females must struggle more than males to prove their worth.⁴⁷

It has to be commented that what Christianity experienced during the humanist movement, Islam is branded from the secular point of view as “Secular Islam”.⁴⁸ Such notion is related to a deculturation of religion, where there is an Islam without the culture of Islam, an Islam dissociated from its fundamental sources. The concept of “Secular Islam” is present especially in the youth, who consider religion as a personal issue not related to the family or community of origin. Hence, religion is seen as a private matter, where the single subject chooses what to keep and what to leave

⁴⁶ *فقه الواقع* is the jurisprudence of reality, jurisprudence of calamities, or jurisprudence of events. It is a jurisprudence created by Imam Ibn al-Qayyim based on the study of living reality, a careful study that comprehends all aspects of the subject. Shaikh Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī in his discussion on *Fiqh al-Wāq'i* ('فقه الواقع') defined it by saying, “It is to find out what concerns Muslims regarding their affairs... to warn them and advance them realistically, not theoretically.” (Al-Albānī, Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Su'āl wa-Jawāb Hawla Fiqh al-Wāq'i* ('Ammān, al-Urdun: al-Maktabah al-Islāmiyyah, al-Ṭab'ah al-Thāniyah, 1422H), pp.29-30.) The jurisprudence of reality is the science that helps Islamic scholars stand up and understand the reality of Muslims and link it to the contemporary lifestyle wherever they live and to its pressures and problems.

⁴⁷ Qader, S. Abel, *Quello che abbiamo in testa*, Mondadori, Milano 2019. For more information on this issue, it is interesting to read the results of Acocella and Pepicelli (I. Acocella, R. Pepicelli. *Giovani mussulmane in Italia. Percorsi biografici e pratiche quotidiane*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2015) on the processes of development and in particular of the religious identity of young Muslim girls of Moroccan, Bengali and Pakistani origin gathered in the cities of Rome, Florence and Padua on four central themes: second-generation, gender, Islam and citizenship.

⁴⁸ Roy, O., *La Sainte Ignorance, Le Temps de la religion sans culture*, Editions du Seuil, Paris 2008.

from the Islamic prescriptions and sometimes adds to his or her private religious beliefs from other religions. This issue is also known as the “supermarket” of the religions. For those who believe in a secular Islam, religion is only a cultural heritage identity marker, only during holidays or Ramadan and for food and clothing styles.⁴⁹ Thus, the most important internal limit of the Italian Muslim community is its insufficient cultural preparation, which is related to the fact that it is very young, culturally, and economically poor.

The last internal challenge is related to the place of worship.⁵⁰ Italian Muslims know that mosques are the very heart of the Muslim community. The building of a Mosque as the first place of worship for Muslims, was the first action of the Prophet (ﷺ), when He arrived in Medina. However, because of economic constraints, many Muslims in Italy are unable to construct mosques with traditional architectural features such as domes and minarets. As a result, the question of establishing proper places of worship remains an important issue that deserves renewed consideration within the context of a third-millennium, multi-ethnic, and multicultural society. Debates surrounding mosques in the Italian media have become highly contentious and are often shaped by Islamophobic attitudes. In many cases, opposition groups prefer that Muslims continue to pray in improvised spaces such as garages, basements, and warehouses; rather than in officially recognized mosques integrated into the broader social landscape.

Solutions

To overcome these limits, it is necessary to have *al-A`immah*⁵¹ (the Imams) who are well prepared in the theological doctrines and know how to deal with the space-time religious differences (**فقه** (الواقع)). They should also master Italian language and be able to speak to the youth. These well-prepared Muslim leaders will be of great help also in improving the relation of the Muslim

⁴⁹ Frisina, A., “Le nuove generazioni,” in “Le religioni nell’Italia che cambia”, a cura di E. Pace, Carocci Editore, Roma 2013, p.236.

⁵⁰ Bombardieri, M., *Moschee d’Italia. Il diritto al culto. Il dibattito sociale e politico*, EMI, Bologna 2011.

⁵¹ In Islam this title is granted to those who (1) have sufficient knowledge to uphold the responsibility of leading Muslims in congregational prayers; (2) are respected scholars and religious authorities, and (3) are prominent leaders in religious matters.

community with the Italian society increasing the inter-cultural and interreligious dialogue.⁵² The mosque should not be just a place where people come only to pray on Fridays: by the way, for the moment this right is not recognized by the Italian law because there is not an Intesa with the Italian State. The mosque should be a place where Muslims receive proper religious teaching and correct answers to their religious demands by well-trained worship ministers who are also able to help them in their religious/social needs (marriage, illness, imprisonment⁵³, burial⁵⁴). Mosques should be also places where non-Muslims Italians can find people with whom have inter-religious/cultural dialogue.

To overcome this problem, Italian Muslims use the term “Islamic cultural center” rather than the term “mosque”. Inside the Islamic cultural center there should not be only the prayer hall, but also classrooms for Arabic and Islamic lessons, conference rooms, library. This is precisely what the Florentine citizenry, during a participatory process promoted by the Tuscan region, proposed on how the mosque of Florence should be realized. Also, in Florence “a storehouse is used as a Muslim prayer place is not large enough to receive all the prayer attenders, but the construction of a new mosque is disappointed by the population....The solution can be a new type of religious building....”⁵⁵ According to this participatory process, where more than 90% of the participants were non-Muslim Italians, the Islamic building was supposed to be architecturally and urbanely qualified to make Florence more civil and more inclusive. This building was supposed to

⁵² Bamoshmoosh, M., *Moschea, non solo luogo di culto*, in “Metamorfosi della città”, Rivista Associazione Incontri, Edizione Polistampa, Firenze 2017.

⁵³ “Of the 64,760 detainees as of September 30 (that number decreased to 62,500 people behind bars as of the end of 2013) approximately 23,000 were foreign, and 13,500 of these came from Muslim-majority countries, mostly Morocco and Tunisia.” See, Italy: 13,000 prison inmates from Muslim countries, ‘Bring in moderate imams against extremists’ says prison report. https://www.meforum.org/islamist-watch/italy-13000-prison-inmates-from-muslim-countries?utm_source (accessed March 15, 2026)

⁵⁴ The burial issue became crucial during the Covid Pandemic. In the past, most Muslims who died in Italy preferred to be buried in their country of origin. Only a few municipalities had activated the possibility of having cemeteries for Muslims. During the pandemic, the various Islamic associations and in particular the UCOII took action to obtain special spaces where to bury Muslims.

⁵⁵ Consorti, Pierluigi, “The ‘Mosque Affaire’ in European Divided Societies. The Florence Case: A New Participatory Model,” in *Politica e Religione* (2015):3-8.

be also a way to put into practice what is established by the Italian Constitution regarding the equality of citizens also from a religious point of view.

The Mosque of Florence was supposed to be an open space to permit a better control of the situation not only from a cultural-theological aspect, but also from a security point of view. It was supposed to be a place where to study the bilateral scientific and cultural contribution of the Arab-Islamic-Eastern world and the Italian-European-Western Renaissance, by retrieving the writings and the books of which the Florentine libraries are as rich as in few other places in the world, including the Arab-Islamic countries, which in recent years have seen much of their archives destroyed. According to the participatory process the Mosque of Florence is considered for all Florentine citizens and all of them should participate in building it. This prospective means having a vision that wants to project the city of Florence into the multi-ethnic, multicultural society of the future. Another important step is to increase the educational offer to the Italian Islamic community. On this regard recently the first Islamic university institution was inaugurated: the BAYAN institute for Islamic and humanistic studies.⁵⁶ The objectives of BAYAN is to be the place where to study the past and present of the Italian Islamic community and prepare those who will guide it in the future for the interest not only of the Islamic community but also for all the Italian society.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Italian Muslims have greatly contributed to the social, cultural, and economic domains of the Italian country. Through places of worship (mosques), cultural centres, educational initiatives, youth organisations, interfaith activities, and inter-religious cooperation, Muslims have worked to preserve their religious identity while engaging with members of Italy's diverse society. Also, the dynamic development of the Italian Muslim community reflects an ongoing effort to balance Islamic values with the realities of living in a modern Italian society. However, this paper has shown that Muslims residing in Italy still face a number of challenges,

⁵⁶ For more information, refer to: *Bayan Institute*. <https://www.bayan-edu.it> (Accessed March 20, 2026)

such as the issue of legal recognition, Islamophobia, media representation, and identity rights among younger generations born and raised in Italy as key contemporary challenges faced by Muslims in the country. Also, religious education, economic difficulties, generational identity struggles, and the shortage of well-trained religious leaders remain major concerns for the community. Despite these challenges, the research finds that Muslims in Italy continue to demonstrate resilience, adaptability, and a strong commitment to social participation. The younger generation, in particular, represents an important bridge between Islamic identity and Italian citizenship, contributing to the development of a more inclusive and multicultural society. In this context, qualified religious leadership, stronger educational institutions, and meaningful interreligious dialogue are essential for strengthening mutual understanding and social harmony. *Finally*, the experience of Muslims in Italy reflects both the complexities and the possibilities of religious diversity in contemporary Europe. The future of Islam in Italy will largely depend on constructive cooperation between Muslim communities, Italian institutions, and the broader society. Through dialogue, education, and mutual respect, Muslims in Italy can continue to contribute positively to the country while preserving their religious and cultural identity within an increasingly pluralistic society.

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