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Gendered Islamophobia in Italy: The Case of Silvia Aisha Romano

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ABSTRACT: This paper aims to investigate gendered Islamophobia in Italy through a significant case study: the hate campaign that affected Silvia Aisha Romano, a 24-year-old aid worker kidnapped in Kenya by a group linked to Shabab, who chose to convert to Islam. On May 10, 2020, after 18 months of detention, Silvia landed in Rome wearing a light green jilbab. The initial joy for her release was followed by very violent Islamophobic and misogynist insults, by both right-wing and left-wing politicians, newspapers, and opinion leaders, including some feminists.

This paper will carry out a discourse analysis on this debate, focusing on some pivotal aspects: the roots of contemporary gender Islamophobia in colonial Orientalism and epistemic Eurocentrism; the contemporary debate on Muslims and Islam in Italy, and the media's role in reproducing stereotypes and discrimination; the political convergence between very different actors in the systematic attack against Italian Muslim women.

KEYWORDS: gendered Islamophobia; Muslim women; media; veil; converts

INTRODUCTION

In November 2018 Silvia Romano, a 24-year-old Italian aid worker, was kidnapped in Chakama (Kenya) by a terrorist group linked to Al-Shabaab. After 18 months of detention in Somalia, she was released and landed in Rome on May 10, 2020, wearing a light green jilbab. In a challenging time for Italy, which was struggling to cope with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, her release was supposed to spread joy and hope across the population. Instead, this joy was immediately overshadowed by very violent Islamophobic and misogynist insults when it became clear that she voluntarily converted to Islam and changed her name to Aisha.

This paper investigates gendered Islamophobia in Italy, focusing specifically on how contemporary discourses on Muslims and Islam are produced and reproduced in the media through the recurrence of neocolonial strategies (Said 1981). With a feminist and postcolonial approach—aware of carrying out a partial and situated standpoint (Rich 1986; Haraway 1988; Mohanty 2003)—this paper proposes a discourse analysis (Fairclough 1995; Van Dijk 2008) on the debate about the kidnapping and release of Silvia Aisha Romano. Over 100 articles were collected between May 2020 and April 2021 from various printed and online newspapers and magazines. About 60 of these articles—collected from newspapers and magazines ranging across most of the Italian political spectrum—have been used as sources to support the arguments of this paper.

Firstly, we have introduced the concept of gendered Islamophobia starting from a theoretical perspective followed by a brief contextualization of Islam and Islamophobia in Italy. Furthermore, we have focused on right-wing newspapers and commentators' narratives, proposing a critique of the notion of “hate speech.” Then, we have analyzed left-wing newspaper
discourses, including some Italian feminists’ comments. Finally, we have tried to listen to the opinions of the concerned subjects. The conclusion proposes a general reflection on the status of the contemporary press while dealing with such issues.

**GENDERING ISLAMOPHOBIA**

To understand gendered Islamophobia (Zine 2006; Mirza 2013; Perry 2014; Rashid 2017), one must refer to Orientalism (Said 1978), and particularly to the concept of *gendered* Orientalism (Abu-Lughod 2001; Khalid 2014). Indeed, Orientalism has been described as a strongly gendered system of power, in which the racialized Other is (also) constructed through gender norms: on the one hand, the myth of the harem and the hyper-sexualization of the veiled woman (Mernissi 1975) while on the other hand, the non-virility, the feminization, and the homosexual practices attributed to colonized men (Boone 2014). These narratives have changed and almost reversed over time towards the image of veiled Muslim women as poor victims to be saved (Abu-Lughod 2002; Tayyen 2017) or the construction of the Muslim man as a violent terrorist (Puar 2007; Jazmati and Studer 2017).

The Orientalist discourse currently persists in the relationship of the West with its Other: neo-Orientalism (Spivak 1993; Samiei 2010) reactivated Orientalist narratives in the media and the political discourse (Said 1981). After 9/11, the US decision to invade Afghanistan was justified—among other reasons—by the desire to save Afghan women from the *burqa* imposed by the Taliban (Abu-Lughod 2002). In this regard, the anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) echoed Spivak (1983), who spoke of the rhetoric of the “white man saving black women from black men” to describe the representation of a modern, democratic, secular West, in contrast with a backward, despotic, theocratic East (meaning *Islam*). Islamophobia thus imposes itself as the paradigm of the so-called *clash of civilizations*, producing a monolithic and essentialized view of Islam. Decolonial and postcolonial scholars, however, propose to develop further the theorization of Islamophobia (Sayyid 2014): in this way, it would be possible to sociologically question the *common sense* according to which the feeling of “hatred” against the Muslim population and the Islamic religion would be the “natural” consequence of the terrorist attacks against the West since 2001 onwards. Moreover, decolonial and postcolonial perspectives consider Islamophobia not only as a prejudice that causes acts of discrimination (both physical and virtual) but also as a constant process of stigmatization that has material effects on Muslim people. Islamophobia is thus considered a form of structural racism, even in epistemic terms (Grosfoguel 2012; Hafez 2018).

The first European report on Islamophobia, the Runnymede Trust (1997), already described the dominance of gendered discourse in the public debate on Islam: in fact, according to the report, there is prejudice according to which “Muslim cultures mistreat women” (*Ibid.*, 7) in a significantly different and worse way than all other religions and cultures (*Ibid.*, 28). The first to describe gendered Islamophobia in detail, the Canadian scholar Jasmine Zine, defined it as a “specific form of ethnoreligious and racialized discrimination leveled at Muslim women […]”. Beyond representational politics, the epistemic violence behind these constructs bears material consequences for Muslim girls and women” (2006, 240). In particular, the representation of Muslim women in the West is characterized by “a pathological pattern of visibility” (Mirza 2013, 313). According to several observers, visible symbols are among the main factors in determining possible acts of aggression (Massari 2006). Additionally, between 54 and 90 percent of Islamophobic acts that occurred in Europe in 2016 were committed against women (ENAR 2016). Before analyzing the case of Silvia Aisha Romano, the next section will provide a brief context of Italian Islam and Islamophobia in the country.
Islam has been Italy’s second most widespread religion for about 20 years, both among residents and immigrants (ISMU 2022). Historically, the Muslim presence in Italy began well before the country’s unification: in particular in Sicily, it dates back to the 9th century. Although mass immigration into Italy started in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the presence of university students from Somalia, as a result of ex-colonial relations, has been reported since the Second World War (Deplano 2014), and since the 1970s university students from the Middle East have also arrived (Allievi and Dassetto 1993). The latter founded USMI, the Union of Muslim Students of Italy, in 1971. Furthermore, during the 1970s the economic downfall, linked to the oil crisis, provoked a shift of migratory flows from Northern to Southern Europe (Dassetto 1994): the northern countries applied restrictions to new arrivals, favoring family reunification instead. From the 1980s, these restrictions led to an increase in immigration from Muslim-majority countries to Italy. People from the Balkans, North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia (Pakistan and Bangladesh) established themselves in the country (Nocentini 2021).

The Italian Muslim community has been a stable presence for two decades now. It is composed of a large Sunni majority, and citizens from over 40 states, with a majority of Moroccans, Albanians, Bengalis, Pakistanis, and Egyptians. In fact, it is a community that portrays the image of “a multiethnic, multicultural and multinational Islam” (Ciocca 2019, 34), which questions the monolithic representation of the Muslim religion. The Muslim population regularly residing in Italy is estimated to be around 2.6 million, accounting for 4.3 percent of the entire population, following the European average (Ibidem). More than half of the Italian Muslim population (56 percent) does not have citizenship, due to the very restrictive Italian law, based on the principle of *jus sanguinis* (right of blood). People converted to Islam would be about 100,000, or 4 percent of the Muslim population in Italy (Ibidem): their presence is sociologically relevant, as it challenges the idea that Muslims are necessarily different and foreigners (Acocella and Pepicelli 2015).

The image given by the media and politicians, nevertheless, is that of an “Islamic invasion” to the extent that Italians estimate Muslim presence at 20 percent (five times its actual number) (IPSOS MORI Institute 2016). This fear can be linked to both the consistent arrival of immigrants in recent years and its exploitation by right-wing parties with harshly xenophobic and nationalist tones and political measures. Studies on Islam representation claim that Italian media talk about Islam mainly in relation to traumatic events (wars, terrorism), conveying the imagery of the clash of civilizations that transforms “ideological wars” into “wars of religion” (Marletti 1995). Especially in the aftermath of 9/11, Islam has become a “routine” topic in the daily news, but without a critical gaze. It is often described as monolithic, without considering Islam’s cultural, social, and geographic heterogeneity (Bruno 2008).

There is still no systematic observatory of Islamophobia in the country, despite the efforts of the largest Italian Muslim association, UCOII (Union of Islamic Communities and Organizations), to constitute it. To understand the structural dimension of this phenomenon (Law et al. 2019), suffice it to say that Islam is the only majority religion in the country that does not have a bilateral agreement with the Italian state (Morucci 2018), even if the Republic constitution envisages that religions other than Catholicism should sign forms of mutual recognition with the State. Turning to those who act on discrimination, the Pew Research Center (2016) reveals that Italy is the European country with the greatest aversion towards Muslims (69 percent, compared to a European average of 43 percent). Furthermore, 61 percent of the Italian population believe that Muslims do not want to integrate, but rather prefer to maintain their habits and lifestyles; 46 percent, moreover, believe that many or most Muslims support...
ISIS and 51 percent do not want to have a Muslim colleague (Eurobarometer 2015). According to the Ministry of Equal Opportunity, 74.3 percent of discriminatory acts carried out for religious reasons are related to Islamophobia, compared with 18.9 percent of anti-Semitism cases (UNAR 2017). In terms of Islamophobic assaults, the period 2018–2019 was the worst in the past decade, although the proportion of reported acts remains low (Lunaria 2020).

Following what Mohanty called the monolithic image of the “Third World woman” (2003), the media reduced Muslim women to a few ideal types: the victim to be saved, the hyper-sexualized icon, and the militant extremist. In addition to this, there is the orientalist obsession with the veil (Yeğenoğlu 1998): whoever wears it would embody obscurantist traditionalism in a passive and submissive way; whoever does not wear it, would be “modernized” and therefore “westernized” (Laurano 2014, 195). Italian newspapers, as a result, mention Muslim women just to speak about the violence against them (arranged marriages, imposition of the veil, “honor” femicides): thus, the Islamic religion is represented as backward and violent against women. In addition, there exists a form of femonationalist rhetoric (Farris 2017) that exploits feminist issues, stigmatizing Islam and Muslim men, and pursuing xenophobic policies in the name of gender equality. To describe this process, the sociologist Sara R. Farris refers to it as a convergence of different actors: nationalist parties, neo-liberals, and some feminists and femocrats. Indeed, the hate campaign that affected Silvia Aisha was conducted not only by right-wing parties and newspapers but also by some feminists, influential left-wing journalists, and commentators. In the following two sections, we present and analyze the contents of the articles selected for this research.

**RIGHT-WING XENOPHOBIA: A CASE OF HATE SPEECH?**

Right-wing conservative newspapers violently attacked Silvia Aisha Romano right after her release and her subsequent arrival in Rome. On May 11, the most popular Italian right-wing newspapers printed their front pages with Silvia’s photos and provocative headlines. *Libero* titled “Silvia Romano: I have converted. We freed an Islamic one” (Feltri 2020). *Il Giornale* titled “A slap to Italy. Islamic and happy. Silvia the ungrateful” (Sallusti 2020) and went even further in the subtitle which states “the volunteer came back with the uniform of the jihadist enemy.” In both cases it is important to highlight the use of the adjective “Islamic” used as a noun, instead of “Muslim,” a widespread practice, not only a linguistic fancy. The use of the term “Islamic” refers, in common sense, to Islamic fundamentalism, and Islamic terrorism. Moreover, there is an unfortunate precedent in the derogatory use of “Islamic” in Italian right-wing press: after the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, the former editor of *Libero* titled the front-page headline “Islamic Bastards” (Belpietro 2015). The subtext echoes the usual neo-Orientalist trope according to which all Muslims are terrorists (Mahmood 2009) and goes even further: it has created a correlation between the two terms in the Italian audience, which become almost metonyms.

In this respect, it is also interesting to observe the comments of other right-wing journalists and politicians: in a speech to the Chamber of Deputies, right-wing congressman Alessandro Pagano (Lega party) calls Romano a “neo-terrorist” (“Silvia Romano” 2020), since she converted during her kidnapping by the terrorist group Al-Shabaab. Both politicians and right-wing journalists claimed that Silvia Aisha “has returned in the uniform of the jihadist enemy” (Sallusti 2020) and that the volunteer’s dress was “an ad to Islamic fundamentalism” (“Live” 2020). According to them, Silvia Aisha’s *jilbab*, and Muslim women’s veils in general, are “symbols of submission” (“Giorgia Meloni” 2020), clear evidence that her conversion cannot have been a free choice. Another complaint of “outside participation in a terrorist association” comes from the ex-congressman and commentator Vittorio Sgarbi, according to which
Silvia Aisha should be arrested “if she doesn’t repent” (Gonzato 2020). Moreover, the editor-in-chief of Il Giornale, Alessandro Sallusti, in a tweet compared her conversion to a hypothetical Jew coming back from a concentration camp “dressed as a Nazi” (@alesallusti, Twitter, May 4, 2020). These individuals place Silvia Aisha “in the camp of the enemies of the (Italian) State, considering her—and all Muslim believers, Italian or not—not only as the racialized Other but at the same level as the terrorists” (Proglio 2020: 19).

In a response to these statements, Lea Melandri, an Italian well-known feminist, claims: “no one would give a man this vile treatment. The clothes, the religion, the pregnancy, the body. Women have always been judged for these aspects of their private lives” (Spenna 2020). Even other commentators have noted how the controversies following the kidnappings of Italian citizens have reached these levels only when the kidnappers were women: for instance, the journalist Annalisa Camilli (2020) noticed that “it has been pointed out that the last two Italian hostages to be released were men: they all have converted to Islam, without provoking either astonishment or indignation.” Silvia Aisha is not only a woman, but also she is a converted woman: her veil is unacceptable and unassimilable in the order of the nation, according to which (white) women are essentially considered to be the reproducers of the (white) nation (Proglio 2020). Silvia Aisha, by converting, lost her whiteness (Moosavi 2015) and betrayed her race and her nation (Di Mauro 2020).

Another consideration is pivotal to analyzing and understanding the phenomenon of Islamophobia from a decolonial and postcolonial perspective. Very often the literature on this subject refers to attacks on Muslim people as “hate speech.” This reading is problematic for several reasons. It trivializes the issue of the racialization of Muslim people, relocating these attacks to a generic form of non “acceptable speech” (Pohjonen and Udupa 2017). Furthermore, “hate speech” is not translated in the Italian debate, likewise the expression “social media,” making this a phenomenon confined to virtual space as if it did not impact Muslim people’s daily life. Finally, even though most of the harshest insults come from the right wing, the definable left-wing discourse is permeated by neocolonial imagery, veiled paternalism, and explicit racism. How can we explain this? Are these aspects disconnected from each other?

**LEFIST ISLAMOPHOBIA: BETWEEN A CIVILIZING MISSION AND A SAVIOR SYNDROME**

Alongside the general shift to the right in Italian and European politics, there has been a noticeable backlash from the liberal left. This is clearly shown in the rhetoric used by a part of the Italian left-wing journalist and commentators to describe Silvia Aisha’s case. A rhetoric connected to a (neo)colonial cultural archive that acts as an implicit substratum (Said 1993) revealing a more general neo-Orientalist and “white savior” attitude. An illustrative example is the title of one article published in the liberal left-wing newspaper La Repubblica: “The story of Silvia, betrayed by the village she wanted to save” (Foschini 2020). Indeed, the so-called rescue narrative applies numerous tropes about international cooperation: the “remote villages in the heart of the forest” (Gramellini 2018) or the “terrible condition of Kenyan children” who just need someone to play with and smile to (Saviano 2020). Often, the articles reveal a barely concealed paternalism toward Silvia Aisha and the others unaware, dreamy little girls, wrapped in pink clouds like the glossy “Out of Africa”-type movies, on which they have wandered their personal representation, without any actual feedback about their destination. (Pellizzetti 2020)
The fact that part of this affair took place in Somalia, where Silvia Aisha spent much of her captivity, is not neutral concerning Italian history. Somalia—together with Libya, Eritrea, and Ethiopia—was part of the Italian colonial empire between 1889 and 1936. Even after the end of actual colonization, Italy held the territory by UN mandate to lead the country towards independence, declared in 1960. Rather than facilitating the transition to democracy, the Italian trusteeship has further exploited Somali territory for its economic interests (Virgilio 2020). These two periods, colonization and trusteeship, have often been identified as one of the root causes of Somalia’s contemporary sociopolitical instability. However, the analyzed articles hardly mention the role of Italian colonialism in the country’s fortunes or do so in a very problematic way. Repubblica’s journalist Davide Riccardo Romano (2020), for example, mentions the cooperation between Italy and Somalia, without ever referring to how the “privileged” relationship between the two nations was established. Other authors criticize the processes of decolonization instead of colonization itself (Pellizzetti 2020), while some of them look to the past with a certain “nostalgia for the colonies”: “in order to free Silvia, we had to ask for the help of Turkey, which […] has become the true «ruler» of what was «our» Somalia” (Micalessin 2020).

Another crucial problem emerging from these articles is the neo-Orientalist obsession with the veil (Yeğenoğlu 1998), combined with general ignorance about Islam: for instance, Silvia Aisha’s green jilbab has been called in many improper ways: hijab, burqa, chador, dirac, ibaya [sic]. Here is an example of the description of Silvia Aisha’s body:

She wears a green hijab (the color of Islam) rather wide, over another dress with strong colors, typical of the local tradition. The coverage is not complete, the face is framed by the veil, but it is exposed. […] The impression is that of a woman wrapped in trauma, protected by a mystery who is trying to come to terms with the recent past in order to move forward. (Romagnoli 2020)

As noted by Professor Renata Pepicelli, this was “a wasted opportunity” to “discuss veils, talking about them in the plural and not in the singular” considering also “those decolonal perspectives, elaborated in contexts other than white and Western ones, that show how women’s liberation paths are plural” (2020). Islamic veils, in addition to their religious connotations, are influenced by traditional, cultural, and geographical aspects, as well as class, and fashion, as the Italian-Somali writer Igiaba Scego pointed out:

there is no traditional Somali dress, in the same way, that there is no traditional Italian, French, or German dress. In Somalia, fashion is like everywhere else, and it changes over time. […] Even if it seems unbelievable to many people, fashion changes even in the global South of the world. (Virgilio 2020)

Finally, the well-known feminist Nadia Riva, who recently passed away, literally referred to Silvia Aisha in a Facebook post as “the affliction of a smiling woman wearing a green trash bag.” Interviewed by the newspaper La Repubblica, Riva claimed that hers was not an insult against Silvia Aisha Romano, but a provocative statement about how “for a lifetime, men have been trying to erase women’s bodies” (Dazzi 2020a). It is significant, among other things, that her comment was quoted as a good example by Il primato nazionale (The National Supremacy), the online newspaper of Casa Pound, an extreme right and neo-fascist inspired movement (Paoletti 2020). The post generated a debate among parts of the Italian feminist movement: indeed, it is an excellent example of those civilizing forms of feminism.
(Vergès 2019) according to which women’s choices are free only if they correspond to the Western, secular ideal of liberation.

LISTENING TO THE CONCERNED SUBJECTS

In the analyzed articles, from both left- and right-wing newspapers, what seems to be absent, are the voices of those directly involved, namely Silvia Aisha herself, other Italian Muslim women, and the Italian Muslim community more generally. Indeed, only a few Muslim women have been interviewed by the mainstream press about the Romano case. One of them is the above-mentioned author Igiaba Scego (Virgil 2020). The other is scholar Rosanna Maryam Sirignano, also a convert, who said in an interview to a local newspaper:

Like all the people who have said their opinions in these days, I do not know Silvia Romano, but even if I knew her deeply I would not have the right to speak my mind about what she experienced. I have nothing to say about her, except that I deeply regret what she suffered during the kidnapping and what she has to suffer today: both those who insulted her and those who try to defend her by analyzing the details of the affair, but also those who rejoice in her conversion, seem to reduce her to a symbol, to support their already entrenched beliefs and reinforce their worldview. Perhaps everyone cares little about Silvia. (Spinelli 2020)

Since the beginning, the attention to Silvia Aisha’s voice has been oriented toward morbid voyeurism for her private life (Fabbretti 2021). Several journalists obsessively scanned her social profile in search of signs of radicalization: an article appeared in Il Giornale, for example, reports the number of “likes” given by Silvia on “Islamic” Facebook pages (Giacalone 2020). Other newspapers reported her Facebook posts, in which Silvia Aisha asks her contacts not to make trouble to defend her from the insults and defamation she is receiving because “the worst for me has passed. Let’s enjoy this moment together” (Dazzi and Pisa 2020). And she adds:

I couldn’t wait to get off that plane. All that mattered to me was to hug the most important people in my life again, feel their warmth again, and tell them how much I loved them, despite my dress. I felt that they and you would look at my smile and rejoice with me because in the end I am alive and I am here.

The only interview the volunteer granted to the press was published in the online magazine Luce News, a conservative newspaper, founded and run by two Italian brothers who converted to Islam. In the interview, Silvia Aisha talks essentially about her path of faith: the prejudices that, although considering herself an open-minded person, educated in a multicultural context, she felt towards Muslim people and veiled women; the existential questions she asked herself in the first days of the kidnapping; the encounter with the Quran and with religion; her return to Italy and the first steps within the Muslim community (Piccardo 2020). To the journalist’s question about the Italian media’s perplexity regarding her conversion while she was a prisoner of a terrorist group, Silvia Aisha answers:

After reading the Quran I found no contradictions and I immediately felt that it was a book that led to good. The Quran is not the word of Al Shabaab! At one point I felt it was a miracle, so my spiritual search continued, and I became more and more aware of the existence of God. At one point I began to think that God, through this experience, was showing me a guide to life, which I was free to accept or not.
The mainstream media’s only reaction to the interview was to reaffirm their doubt about Silvia Aisha’s free choice, adding some insinuation about her sympathy for terrorism (Ciavardini 2020). As time passed, press attention to this story waned, turning up again on special occasions: the anniversary of her return to Italy (Fabbretti 2021); Silvia’s marriage to a childhood friend, who also converted to Islam (Dazzi 2021); and her participation as a stakeholder in a European project to counter Islamophobia (Sablone 2021).

**CONCLUSIONS**

In this essay, we proposed an analysis of gendered Islamophobia in Italy through a significant case study: the kidnapping and the homecoming of the Italian aid worker Silvia Aisha Romano. After a theoretical contextualization of the concept of gendered Islamophobia, based on the Otherization typical of Orientalism and neo-Orientalism, we then provided a brief introduction to Italian Islam, naming a few of the crucial problems connected to the issue of Islamophobia in the country. Afterward, we focused on the rhetoric employed by right-wing newspapers and commentators which is steeped in the equation between Islam as terrorism and Muslim people as enemies. Furthermore, we analyzed liberal left newspapers and white feminist comments, revealing their neo-Orientalist obsession with the veil and the widespread imaginary of Western superiority. Eventually, we turned our attention to the opinions of the directly concerned, Silvia Aisha herself, and to the other Italian Muslim women’s opinions, whose voices have been the great absentees from the media representation of the Romano case.

Restricting subjects’ access to discourse production is one way of keeping them in a subaltern state; moreover, this practice reflects the epistemological intention of not considering them as autonomous subjects (Benhadjoudja 2015). Instead, acting independently from the discourses produced about them, Italian Muslim women resist, organize themselves and seek alternative horizons. Indeed, in recent years, the voices of Muslim women have become increasingly active and present throughout the country: women active in national and international community-based associations; women who stand up for the rights of other women, both Muslim and non-Muslim; women who take part in institutional politics; as well as writers, journalists, influencers, and artists. Despite this presence, it seems that the stereotypes about the Muslim community and Muslim women have remained unchanged in the Italian mass media.

Furthermore, as the Italian sociologist, Anna Simone noted, “the truth is that even traditional journalism has become gossip, and therefore uses the same categories of social media to follow trends” (Sabaghi 2020). From this perspective, a broader analysis of the relationship between newspapers and social media in contemporary times is needed. A consideration that is very important for the entire news industry, which in this case has behaved like tabloid paparazzi, checking Silvia Aisha’s Facebook page daily and lurking under her house to track her every single move. Even ANSA, the most prominent Italian news agency, publicly apologized for having given the news of Silvia Aisha’s first exit from home after her release, accompanied by the information that “she was going to the beautician” (ANSA 2020a):

> […] the way we did it [reporting on the end of Silvia Aisha’s quarantine], the images we chose, were not up to the standard of what we should expect of ourselves and the role that ANSA information should play. We made a mistake, and when that happens, the only way to cope with it is to admit that and not dance around it. (ANSA 2020b)
ENDNOTES

1Twenty years after the US invasion of Afghanistan and the recent return of the Taliban to power after the withdrawal of troops, it is necessary to continue to reflect on what these events have meant for the fortunes of Afghan people and for the history of our disciplines.

2In 2015, mostly due to the war in Syria, more than one million refugees arrived in Europe. This situation was referred to as the “European migrant crisis,” since the “regular” migration flow from the Middle East and Africa to Europe is around 100 to 200 thousand arrivals each year. Right-wing media and politicians exploited the crisis, denouncing the danger of invasion. See Fiore and Ialongo (2018).

3Nonetheless, many associations, organizations, and foundations occasionally publish reports that take it into account (Amnesty International, ISPI, Lunaria, Vox Diritti). In addition, various study centers, foundations, and the European Union itself publish annual dossiers and reports on Islamophobia in Europe, which contain in-depth chapters on individual states, including Italy (ENAR, EUMC, LADIS, Pew Research Center, Runnymede Trust, Seta Foundation).

4The consequences of this absence are numerous: among others, religious holidays are not recognized, and therefore absences from work and school are unjustified; religious communities do not have access to a whole range of funding; imams do not have automatic access to hospitals and prisons, but they must submit specific requests each time; and finally, Islamic marriage does not have civil efficacy for the State (Coglievina 2009).

5Moreover, gender equality is represented as an inherently Western concept, completely removing the historic struggles to achieve women emancipation milestones conducted by European feminists, and the contemporary daily attack on women body rights.

6The full tweet states: “Silvia is back and that’s good, but it was like seeing a concentration camp prisoner coming back proudly dressed as a Nazi. I don’t understand, I will never do.”

7See also Perina (2020) and Chirico (2020).

8The same newspaper, after her return, published a video in which many Muslims were welcoming Silvia back to Italy and to the community. Silvia thanked them as follows: “Assalamualaikum wa rahmatullahi, to all of you, may Allah bless you for all this affection you are showing me. Thank you God, thank you thank you!!! This video is beautiful, it is a great emotion. Bye brothers! See you soon in sha’Allah!” (Dazzi 2020b).

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