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SOCIETÀ PER GLI STUDI SUL MEDIO ORIENTE

TITOLO/TITLE: Circulation of Ideas, Practices, and Knowledge in and across *Peripheral* Islam

PROPONENTE/I – PROPONENT/S: NICOLA DI MAURO E CHIARA ANNA CASCINO

ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):

Islamic expressions have crossed MENA borders for centuries, building historic religious traditions in other places or creating newer communities, such as in Western Europe. Religious ideas and practices have migrated, often taking new forms in dialogue with existing substrates. However, this exchange should not be seen as unilateral, i.e. from a centre (the MENA region) to a periphery, since the transmission and circulation of Islam has been multilateral. Many religious expressions that have marked the evolution of contemporary Islam have originated outside the birthplaces of the religion or, more generally, outside the traditional centres and majority currents. With this in mind, the panel aims to explore practices, ideas and affiliations in the alleged peripheral Islam.

Besides the classic division between Centre and Periphery, the analysis of circulation and dissemination of ideas, practises, and knowledge triggered by religious actors (i.e. individuals, institutions, and organizations – Green 2020) could stretch and reshape theoretical and concrete rigid boundaries. The so-called West has been and continues to be considered the Centre of a capitalist world system, as per the theory of Wallerstein, which is also acknowledged as such by at least part of Muslim communities (Ramadan 2006). The MENA region is the primary production centre of Islamic ideas, practices, and knowledge. However, their supposed peripheries have contributed and are contributing to the production and the re-elaboration of these ideas, resulting in the expansion and restructuring of political, spatial, and religious scopes. Thus, it is reasonable to consider that polycentrism exists instead of a rigid separation between the Centre and Periphery. For instance, polycentrism can also be seen when considering religious authority. Within the Islamic religion, religious authority is a complex process involving individuals, but also institutions, historical events, media and modes of dissemination (Sunier-Buskens 2022). It is a negotiation conditioned by time, space and the actors involved. It creates a circulation of ideas and practices that does not run along a centre-periphery axis but implies a circularity.

What kind of “peripheral” Islam do we want to discuss? We highly encourage papers that discuss, problematize, and redefine 1. geographical peripheries, which therefore include Islamic religious expressions that occur outside the MENA region; 2. political-religious peripheries that include Islamist or religiously inspired political and social movements that suffer from isolation or exclusion; 3. socio-economic peripheries, including the North-South, urban-rural, class or gender divide; 4. doctrinal peripheries involving minority religious communities or religious groups that are underrepresented.

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PROFILO ACCADEMICO DEL/DELLA/DEI/DELLE PROPONENTE/I – SHORT BIO OF PROPONENTS

Nicola Di Mauro earned his PhD at the Department of Asia, Africa and Mediterranean Studies of the University of Naples "L'Orientale" where he is currently a post-doc researcher. His research deals with Islam in contemporary Italy; it has a specific focus on Islam in Naples and Islam in the South of the country. He is Adjunct Professor of Human Rights related to migration and religious freedom at the John Felice Rome Center, Loyola University of Chicago.

Chiara Anna Cascino obtained her PhD at the Department of Asia, Africa and Mediterranean Studies of the University of Naples "L'Orientale". She is currently a post-doc researcher at the Department of Human Sciences of the University of Verona. She is also adjunct professor at the University of Naples "Federico II" and the University of Bari "Aldo Moro". Her research interests include Muslim minorities in Italy, Islamic da'wah, Jurisprudence of Muslim minorities in Europe.

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Paper 1

Title: Salafism as Periphery: From (Self-)Exclusion to Post-Salafism

Author: Théo Blanc

Short Bio: Théo Blanc is a postdoctoral researcher in the ERC-funded project MENA-PERC (Political Elites and Regime Change in the Middle East and North Africa) based at Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna (Pisa), a Visiting Fellow at the European University Institute (EUI, Florence), and an associate researcher with the Mediterranean Platform at LUISS University (Rome). He received a Ph.D in social and political sciences from the EUI in 2023. His doctoral dissertation, written under the supervision of Prof. Olivier Roy and Prof. Stéphane Lacroix, addresses the genealogy of Salafi currents in Tunisia and their political trajectories before and after the 2010/11 revolution. Théo was previously associate researcher with the ERC project TARICA 'Political and Socio-institutional Change in North Africa: Competition of Models and Diversity of Trajectories'. He holds a M.A. in political science and Middle Eastern Studies from Science Po Grenoble. His publications include articles in English in *The International Journal of Middle East Studies* (co-author), *Middle East, Law & Governance* (co-author), *Journal of Political Ideologies*, and *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal*, and in French in *L'Année du Maghreb* and *Confluences Méditerranée*. He co-edited with Olivier Roy the e-book *Salafism: Challenged by Radicalization? Violence, Politics, and the Advent of Post-Salafism* (2021). His book reviews appear in *Sociology of Islam*, *Journal of Development Studies*, *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée* (REMMM), *Lectures* (ENS), *Journal of Arabian Studies* (forthcoming), and *Les Clés du Moyen-Orient*.

Abstract:

Salafism has often been depicted as a sectarian and exclusivist brand of Islamic activism developing at the doctrinal, sociological, and political peripheries of Islam (Meijer ed 2009, Wagemakers 2016). The purist model of Salafism that imposed itself since the 1970s (Lauzière 2016) indeed claims ownership of the "correct doctrine" (*al-'aqida al-sahiha*) derived exclusively from the Qur'an and the emulation of the Prophet and his Companions (*al-salaf al-salih*), while casting other Muslims as deviants. Salafis notably present themselves as "the saved group" (*al-firqa al-mansura*) and the "victorious sect" (*al-fi'a al-najiha*) who live as "strangers" (*ghuraba*) among nominal Muslims. In their eyes, their minority status is consubstantial to their salvation, be it individual or meso-level for the minority that wants to stay a minority (sectarian project) or collective for the minority that wants to become the majority (sociopolitical project). As a result, Salafis self-posit in a paradoxical space that claims both a central and a peripheral position within Islam.

In parallel, political authorities in the Arab world, the West, and beyond, usually present Salafis as a threatening periphery, generally connected to foreign countries and entities, alien to local (religious or non-religious) customs, and even generating violence and terrorism (Blanc and Roy eds 2021). Their targeting by authorities thus contributes to maintain Salafis in the periphery of Muslim and Western societies.

Overall, these two centrifugal forces leave only limited space for Salafis who seek to reinvent ways of interaction and integration in society. Yet, in the past decade there has been an increasing trend towards criticizing and exiting Salafis' sectarian logic and marginalized status on the part of Salafis themselves. Trends towards the revision of Salafis' isolationist and exclusivist attitudes at the political, religious, and cultural levels appear in Muslim-majority and Muslim minority alike. Building on previous (Blanc and Roy eds 2021)

and forthcoming publications (Blanc and Roy eds 2024), this presentation intends to conceptualize and document these trends towards what we call post-Salafism based on ethnographic and qualitative research in various country case-studies. This post-Salafi shift encompasses a threefold phenomenon of localization, politicization, and re-culturation of Salafism. As such, it raises the question of the advent of a more inclusive, tolerant, and participatory Salafism moving out of the doctrinal, sociological, and political peripheries.

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Lauzière, Henri. *The Making of Salafism. Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).
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Paper 2

Title: Islamic Activism's hybrid trajectories: evidence from the Maghreb

Authors: Ester Sigillò, University of Bologna & Massimo Ramaoli, Al-Akhawayn University in Ifrane

Short Bio: **Ester Sigillò** is Assistant Professor (tenure-track) at the University of Bologna. Her research interests include politics in the Middle East, international relations in the MENA region, democratization, social movements and Islamic activism in the Maghreb. She obtained her PhD in Political Science from Scuola Normale Superiore in 2018. In the framework of her doctoral activities she served as visiting fellow at the Institut de recherche sur le Maghreb Contemporain (IRMC) in Tunis and as a research fellow in the ERC project TARICA. After her PhD she served as a Max Weber Fellow at the European University Institute at the Robert Schuman Center for Advanced Studies, under the supervision of Olivier Roy. From 2020 to 2022 she was a postdoctoral researcher in the ERC funded project BIT-ACT. She has published in the Third World Quarterly, International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, among others. Her recent monograph is titled Rethinking Civil Society in Transition: International Donors, Associations and Politics in Tunisia and published by Amsterdam University Press.

Massimo Ramaoli is Assistant Professor in Political Science and Coordinator in the School of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities at Al-Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco. Previously, he was Assistant Dean in the School of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and Assistant Professor, Social Development and Policy Program at Habib University (HU) in Karachi, Pakistan. He obtained an MA in Middle Eastern Studies at School of Oriental and African Studies, London, and then received a PhD in Political Science from Syracuse University. His main research interests are contentious politics, political Islam, Gramscian theory and International Relations theory. Before joining HU, he taught for two years at the Center for International Exchange and Education in Amman, and studied Arabic in Tunis, Damascus, Beirut and Fes. He is a regular contributor for *Nuovo Mondo Economico* of the Centro Studi Einaudi of Turin, Italy, and a research fellow at the German Institute of Global Area Studies of Hamburg, Germany.

Abstract:

The literature on post-Islamism, as investigated by scholars like Bayat and Roy, highlights a significant shift underway within Islamic political ideology. This change is variously attributed to various factors, including disillusionment with the inability of Islamist movements to achieve their objectives, shifts in socio-political contexts, and the confounding impacts of globalization and (late) modernity dynamics. This paper challenges the prevailing notion of the 'failure of political Islam' by proposing a new theoretical framework, drawing inspiration from social movement studies. Referred to as hybridization, this framework seeks to investigate how Islamic activists incorporate concepts, strategies, and modes of action from diverse social spheres. By doing so, without compromising their Islamic normativity, they articulate Islamic based political activism even as they incorporate new elements from non-Islamic contexts. Through in-depth case studies from the Maghreb, this paper explores how two Islamic movements adapt their ideology, repertoires of action and objectives in order to articulate a renewed Islamic project.

Paper 3

Title: Muslim communities in Salerno: A case of peripheral Islam

Author: Salvatore Senatore

Short Bio: after volunteering in the West Bank, **Salvatore Senatore** perfected his Arabic at the « Dar Comboni School » in Cairo. In 2022, he carried out a mission as a volunteer in some Syrian refugee camps in Lebanon. He is currently engaged in the mission « Caschi Bianchi – for the inclusion of fragile people in Morocco » for the Alternative civilian service. He obtained a Master's Degree at the University of Naples « L'Orientale », focusing his research on the presence of Muslims in South Italy. His thesis entitled « Islam in the Agro Nocerino Sarnese » became part of the podcast « Islam in Campania ». In addition to the topic of Islam in Europe, he is delving into the history of Italian colonialism.

Abstract:

The passage of Islam into Western Europe led Muslims to reformulate their religion in the new context. The Islamic religious authorities who contributed to shaping new forms of local Islam appear to be in crisis. The growing competition between religious specialists and the diversification of religious audiences have changed how religious practitioners perceive religious authority. For these reason, the contemporary landscape should be understood in the sense of a field of competition for audiences (Sunier 2018). In this scenario, new preachers, transnational movements and associations joined in this polycentric religious market, each of which contributes to the circulation of ideas and doctrines in a broad framework defined as Global Islam (Green 2020). However, the action of religious specialists is influenced by negotiations with social and political local institutions. In Italian case, Muslim communities are usually not recognized as a religious creed and, for this reason, they cannot fully affirm their autonomy as a religion (Alicino 2020). The Ministry of the Interior has achieved the "National Pact for Italian Islam" with several national Islamic associations who have become privileged interlocutors of national institutions. The predominance of these associations, that express a "domesticated" Islam (Bowen 2018), is challenged by other religious movements especially the ones settled in areas of the Italian periphery.

Salerno, a city in Southern Italy where migrant workers experience conditions of extreme mobility (Avallone & Niang 2020), hosts two muşallayāt: the historical one, managed by the Senegalese community, frequented less and less and the most recent one that, contrariwise, is more frequented. Given its proximity to the city centre, it hosts Muslims of different origins, bearers of a plurality of visions. The majority of them is from Bangladesh. They define themselves as followers of the teachings of Ilyās Kāndhlawī, the founder of Ğamā'at l-tablīġ . Their goal is to preach a return to a correct version of Islam through a da'wa tour dedicated to Muslim to join ṣalāt (Masud 2000). The objective of this paper is to investigate the reception and apparent success of the Ğ amā'at over other associations in Salerno. Undoubtedly, it is an Islamic movement with its transnational references destined to expand exponentially in proportion to the growth of the Bangladeshi and Pakistani component in Southern Italy.

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Paper 4

Title: Decentring the gaze on Muslims in Italy

Author: Chiara Anna Cascino, University of Verona

Short Bio: **Chiara Anna Cascino** obtained her PhD at the Department of Asia, Africa and Mediterranean Studies of the University of Naples "L'Orientale". She is currently a post-doc researcher at the Department of Human Sciences of the University of Verona. She is also adjunct professor at the University of Naples "Federico II" and the University of Bari "Aldo Moro". Her research interests include Muslim minorities in Italy, Islamic da'wah, Jurisprudence of Muslim minorities in Europe.

Abstract:

After more than thirty years of academic literature on Muslims in Italy, there is still a gap on some communities that are underrepresented or ignored. Scholars have focused their attention on those communities that are more 'identifiable' as Muslims, namely groups from SWANA countries or people with immigrant family backgrounds from the same countries. What about other religious groups whose origins are still considered *peripheral* in some way, such as Albanian-speaking Muslims? Their absence from the scholarly literature is linked to many factors. One is the peculiar character attributed to Albanian Islam(s) even before the communist regime, when Muslim elites sought to create a local Islam more compatible with Western

modernity (Bougarel 2005:5). Despite the long history of Balkan Muslims, their position at the crossroads of East and West has led them to be portrayed as hybrids, less 'Muslim' than others, far from traditional Islamic centres of religious production and majority currents.

During the last century, the communist regimes threatened and suppressed religious freedoms. The revival of Islam after the fall of the regimes raised many questions and opened up a religious market in the Balkans (Elbasani, Roy 2015:2). As a result, Albanian-speaking Muslims are generally portrayed as more secular than other groups present in Italy. Moreover, Albanian-speaking Muslim groups in Italy are scattered throughout the country, especially in medium and small cities, also due to the politically planned distribution in the 1990s (Bonifazi, Sabatino 2003:976). This geographical distribution has made them less visible than other Muslim groups in Italy, together with a general tendency to dissimulate their Muslim identity.

The paper aims to decentre the scholarly gaze on Muslims in Italy by presenting the findings of an ethnographic and qualitative research on the Union of Albanian Muslims in Italy (UAMI). By exploring the ways in which some UAMI members frame their religious identity and their relationship to Islam, the paper challenges the idea of an allegedly *peripheral* Islam and discusses the transmission and circulation of the Islamic religion in Italy.

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Paper 4

Title: The Genesis of the Muslim Organizations in Contemporary Naples as Outcome of Circulation of Religious Ideas, Practices, and Personnel in and across Peripheral Areas.

Author: Nicola Di Mauro – University of Naples "L'Orientale" – John Felice Rome Center, Loyola University of Chicago

Short Bio: Nicola Di Mauro earned his PhD at the Department of Asia, Africa and Mediterranean Studies of the University of Naples "L'Orientale" where he is currently a post-doc researcher. His research deals with Islam in contemporary Italy; it has a specific focus on Islam in Naples and Islam in the South of the country. He is Adjunct Professor of Human Rights related to migration and religious freedom at the John Felice Rome Center, Loyola University of Chicago.

Abstract:

The first Muslim organization in contemporary Naples was formed during the 1980s by Muslim students who had arrived in the city earlier in the decade for their university education. During this period, the Union of Muslim Students in Italy (*Unione degli Studenti Musulmani in Italia* - USMI), established in Perugia in 1971, stood out as one of the most dynamic Muslim organizations in Italy, with a primary emphasis on disseminating religious ideas, practices, and personnel across the nation. The aim of this paper is to examine the evolution of Muslim organizations in Naples, focusing on the Neapolitan division of USMI. This will entail analyzing the dissemination of religious pamphlets published by the organization, religious practices within and beyond educational institutions, and religious personnel. The Neapolitan branch of USMI transitioned into the Islamic Community of Naples (*Comunità Islamica di Napoli*) in the early 1990s, establishing a more independent position in its interactions with the municipal government, local society, and the enlarged Muslim communities. This shift positioned Naples as an important knot within an Islamic network that crosses *peripheral* areas too, e.g. Southern Italy which undergo continuous transformation due to high levels of mobility and precarity.