*PA*rtecipazione e *CO*nflitto
** The Open Journal of Sociopolitical Studies*
http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/paco
ISSN: 1972-7623 (print version)
ISSN: 2035-6609 (electronic version)
***PACO*, Issue 12(3) 2019: 871-897**
DOI: 10.1285/i20356609v12i3p871

Published in November 15, 2019

RESEARCH ARTICLE

EMOTIONAL POLITICS, ISLAMOPHOBIC TWEETS
The Hashtags #Brexit and #chiudiamoiporti

Giulia Evolvi
Ruhr University, Bochum, Germany
Erasmus University, Rotterdam, the Netherlands

ABSTRACT: Contemporary far-right politicians increasingly diffuse messages through social networks. This article argues that online communication may prove effective for political engagement because it can create emotional reactions against certain groups, in a process that I call "emotional antagonism." An example of emotional antagonism is online Islamophobia, which considers Islam as supposedly incompatible with democratic values and tends to conflate Muslims with migrants. Through qualitative observations and textual analyses of tweets, this article explores the following questions: How do certain online exchanges emotionally frame Muslims as the social "others" in relation to European culture? Why and how does the Internet facilitate the spread of emotional antagonism? What type of political propaganda and participation is connected to affective online Islamophobia? The article analyses two case studies: 1) Islamophobic tweets sent in the aftermath of the British referendum in 2016, with the hashtag #Brexit; 2) Anti-Muslim tweets that contain the hashtag #chiudiamoiporti (close the ports), launched by Italian Vice Prime Minister Matteo Salvini in 2018 to support anti-migration measures. The article shows that exploring emotional antagonism can add complexity to the current understanding of Islamophobic conflicts, of social media platforms' characteristics, and of political participation based on online communication.

KEYWORDS: Brexit, Islamophobia, migration, Matteo Salvini, Twitter

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR: Giulia Evolvi, email: evolvi@eshcc.eur.nl

1. Introduction

Donald Trump, in July 2019, sent a Twitter thread against the four American congresswomen Ayanna Pressley, Ilhan Omar, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and Rashida Tlaib. The thread reads as follows:

> So interesting to see "Progressive" Democrat Congresswomen, who originally came from countries whose governments are a complete and total catastrophe, the worst, most corrupt and inept anywhere in the world (if they even have a functioning government at all), now loudly.....
>
> ....and viciously telling the people of the United States, the greatest and most powerful Nation on earth, how our government is to be run. Why don't they go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came. Then come back and show us how....
>
> ....it is done. These places need your help badly, you can't leave fast enough. I'm sure that Nancy Pelosi would be very happy to quickly work out free travel arrangements! (14 July 2019)

These tweets are an example of how Donald Trump engages with the public and expresses his political ideas. Because they talk about four non-white American citizens and invite them to "go back" to their country, the tweets can be read with white supremacist undertones. Trump's claims are often also Islamophobic, and it is not surprising that two of the four congresswomen he attacked self-identify as Muslims. Islamophobia on Twitter, for Trump, is a strategy to instill nostalgia to validate his political sentiments (Ouassini and Amini 2018).

The example shows how some politicians are currently changing traditional communication strategies and increasingly rely on social networks. Trump's tweets also suggest that the content and form of these messages are generally colloquial, but also abusive and violent. Scholars have been studying how new forms of communication, particularly Twitter, influence contemporary politics and voting behaviors (Ausserhofer and Maireder 2013; Bracciale, Martella and Visentin 2018; Conway, Kenski and Wang 2015; Gruzd and Roy, 2014). The Internet arguably plays a key role in fostering political participation because it offers venues for people to follow and message politicians.

My argument is that a certain type of Internet communication, spread by Trump and other far-right politicians globally, is effective because it can involve people emotionally. Emotion and affect are central in the creation of nationalistic discourses, especially

when they engage physical or symbolic actions against a certain group (Ahmed 2014). People tend to feel attached to an idea when they want to protect something they care for deeply, and when they feel angry or scared for a potential threat. It is for this reason that controversial topics (such as anti-migration or anti-Islam discourses) have the power to evoke strong emotional reactions. By taking advantage of these emotional mechanisms, some politicians establish a communication style that I define "emotional antagonism." Elsewhere, (2017) I analyzed emotional antagonism as a form of communication that is based on verbal abuses and harassment rather than constructive conversations and dialogue. In the next section of this article (section 2), I define emotional antagonism through an analysis of the work of Chantal Mouffe (2005, 2013), and I explain how it may be employed as a political stratagem to exploits people's emotions at the expenses of minorities.

Islamophobia represents an ideal case study of emotional antagonism for two reasons. First, contemporary religion has a public role that urges scholars to explore its political engagements (Giorgi and Polizzi 2014). Second, religion is intrinsically connected with emotions because, despite its publicness, it involves intimate feelings. As a result, the expression of religious sentiments may lead to affective conflicts among different groups, often entangled with social and cultural issues (Tarantino 2014). In particular, Islam in Europe tends to involve anti-migration and racist discourses. Anti-Islam feelings constitute a complex form of emotional antagonism, which individuates Muslims as primary antagonists of so-called "western values." According to Alessandra Vitullo (2019), Internet is a venue that promotes all kind of radical opinions, with anti-Islam hate speech being particularly prominent in the U.S. and Europe (110). In a previous study, I explored Twitter-based Islamophobia in the aftermath of the British referendum on European Union membership (Brexit), and discovered that Twitter may provide a fertile venue for anti-Muslim narratives (Evolvi 2018). Section 3 of this article explores the notion of Islamophobia and explains how it is entangled with various social discourses, such as ethnicity and migration, in instances of emotional antagonism.

Online Islamophobia is a timely topic for academic inquiries. Amnesty International (2019) finds that, prior to the 2019 European elections, Islam was among the groups that attracted hate speech the most from Italian politicians. Despite the proliferation of political actors who spread anti-Muslim Internet narratives, online Islamophobia remains generally under-researched (Awan 2014). As a result, studies on political participation and the Internet rarely focus on Islam and migration, and tend not to address the topic of emotions and affectivity. To address this gap, this article looks at Islamophobic discourses on Twitter and explores the following questions: How do certain online exchanges emotionally frame Muslims as the social "others" in relation to Euro-

pean culture? Why and how does the Internet facilitate the spread of emotional antagonism? What type of political propaganda and participation is connected to affective online Islamophobia? To answer these questions, I performed a digital ethnography and a qualitative textual analysis of Islamophobic tweets sent by users that participate in conversations about politics, as I will describe in section 4 of this article. Section 5 analyses two case studies: first, the circulation of the Twitter hashtag #Brexit in connection to Islam; second, Islamophobic tweets in response to the anti-migrant hashtag #chiudiamoiporti (close the ports) launched in summer 2018 by Italian Vice Prime Minister Matteo Salvini. These two cases do not only address Islam, but they are connected to a general fear of migration and social change which leads to instances of racism. In the conclusion, I will analyze how certain Twitter narratives frame Islam as "other" to European culture, in a way that echoes the problematic construction of Eastern subjects in relation to "the West" analyzed in Edward Said's work on Orientalism (1979). I will also address how Twitter evokes emotional reactions in social media users. This creates a model of political participation and communication that is not necessarily limited to Islamophobia, but may regard various religious-based conflicts and social and cultural tensions.

2. Media, Affect, and Antagonism

The Internet offers venues for affective interactions and political participation that has emotional value. Zizi Papacharissi (2016), for example, finds that Twitter can spread emotional narratives through hashtags. By analyzing the resignation of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and the Occupy movement, Papacharissi explains that people employ hashtags to connect with users who hold similar opinions. In so doing, they constitute "networked publics" that use Twitter to express their feelings about events and issues. This results in a "digital affect culture," which permeates Internet spaces where people find themselves reading, writing, and sharing narratives with an emotional content. (Döveling, Harju, and Sommer 2018).

The display of emotions, however, does not only involve social justice and mutual solidarity. According to Sarah Ahmed (2014), emotions are often determined by power relationships and reinforce social and cultural norms. Therefore, they may lead to practices of "othering," as happens in the case of fascist political organizations that circulate anti-Islam ideas to protect the alleged Christian identity of Europe. Drawing from Ahmed, Mona Abdel-Fadil (2019) contextualizes the expression of emotions online as fueling identity articulations and being performative. Through the example of a Face-

book group whose users promote Christianity, Adbel-Fadil explains that Internet-based emotions can be channeled towards a specific "object" that evokes feelings. For instance, the Christian cross can become a "sticky" object (to employ Ahmed vocabulary) that affectively mobilizes people who want to protect and wear it, and creates emotional conflicts among users belonging to different religious groups.

There are Internet venues that can exacerbate affective processes of "othering" certain groups. Social media, in certain circumstances, spread authoritarian ideologies because of their ability to impact emotions and circulate misinformation (Deibert 2019). Thus, far-right groups may employ Internet communication to spread hate for minorities, including religious minorities (Caiani and Parenti 2009; Dostal 2015). Caterina Froio and Bharat Ganesh (2018), explore the Twitter activities of far-right actors and find that the Internet can enhance cross-national connections among organizations. Twitter provides information streams and emotions to far-right groups, specifically in connection to the politicization of Islamophobic feelings. In this context, this article employs the term "far-right" politics to indicate what Cas Mudde (2007) defines "extreme right" or "radical right." Differently from classical right-wing politicians, radical right organization share three ideologies of nativism, authoritarianism and populism. The proliferation of such groups on social networks may result in the creation of hashtags such as the two analyzed in the present article, whose circulation extends beyond far-right politicians.

The potential of the Internet to create affective networks may encounter emotional practices that marginalize minorities and negatively conditions exchanges between groups. According to Chantal Mouffe (2013), groups can enter in debates characterized by *agonistic* or *antagonistic* relations. *Agonism* is the process in which various social actors debate and express their ideas. According to Mouffe, agonism has positive outcomes, because in a democracy it is vital that various groups have the possibility to participate in public discussions. Even if they do not agree with each other, social groups are involved in agonistic politics when they recognize the legitimacy of their opponents.

While agonism presupposes that every actor engaged in a public debate is granted equal participation, *antagonism* is a type of conflict based on the marginalization of one or more groups. In antagonistic exchanges, marginalized groups are often employed as scapegoats for social problems and they are prevented from taking part in public debates. An example of antagonism is found in Margaret Thatcher's strategy to win a part of the working class by turning it against feminists and migrants (Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006). Therefore, antagonism is a form of conflict with negative out-

comes because the power imbalance among actors often prevent the reaching of solutions for social issues.

As for the work of Ahmed (2014), scapegoating a given social group (for instance, Muslims) makes it the object of strong emotions, such as hate and fear. My argument is that the Internet, in some cases, creates antagonistic, rather than agonistic, conflicts against certain groups. Furthermore, it enhances the abusive character and the complexity of some narratives by offering a platform for the display of emotions. The notion of political antagonism can thus benefit from a focus on emotions that describes certain mechanisms of online communication. It is for this reason that I call "emotional antagonism" those Internet-based processes that characterize some narratives against minorities, such as Muslims.

3. Islamophobia as Emotional Antagonism

Islam is often considered as "other" in relation to a certain idea of white European culture. According to Talal Asad (2003), Islamophobia sparkles from the willingness of protecting a supposedly Judeo-Christian matrix of European civilization, and the anxieties for those, such as Muslims, that are considered as non-Europeans. It is for this reason that the diffusion of Islamophobia can be considered an example of emotional antagonism that excludes Muslims from social and political debates and makes them an object of hate and fear. Islamophobia is defined as "unfounded hostility towards Islam" and is based on prejudices and stereotypes (Runnymede Trust 1997, 4). It considers Islam as a monolithic and unchangeable entity that is inferior to "western values" and intrinsically violent. While Islamophobia has been exacerbated by recent episodes of Islamic terrorism and negative media representations of Islam (Saeed 2007), it can be traced back to the 7th century "orientalist" view of the Arab world (Said 1979).

Far-right groups contribute to spread such Islamophonic ideologies. It is important to notice that Islamophobic and xenophobic right-wing narratives are often complexly entangled with core national values and tend to endorse liberal values. Radical right parties in various European countries posit that migrants and Muslims supposedly threaten tolerance and liberalism (Halikiopoulou, Mock, and Vasilopoulou 2013). As a result, these parties frame nativist discourses as an attempt to "protect" the core values of western democracies. For example, Caterina Froio (2018) analyzes Islamophobic narratives in the French far-right and discovers that they frame Islam as incompatible with women's rights, LGBTQ rights, and animal rights. By promulgating such frames, far-right parties can also employ liberal values as tools to appeal to the general population.

This happens, in particular, when they promote the idea that there is a sharp contrast between "the people," allegedly defended by far-right actors, and "the elites," supposedly characterized by political correctness and indifference for the voters (Brubaker 2017).

As a result, Islamophobia often involves racial, cultural and religious aspects. Islamophobic attacks may be provoked by visible religious symbols and include gendered aggressions against veiled women (Allen 2015). It can be compared to European anti-Semitism between the two worlds wars because it is a form of cultural racism triggered by religious belonging (Meer and Noorani 2008). Islamophobia is also connected with race and ethnicity because attacks often target non-white people. For instance, there are cases in which perpetrators harass non-Muslims because they have physical and ethnic characteristics that remind of Muslims, such as being of south-Asian descent (Awan and Zempi, 2018). It is for this reason that the Runnymede Trust, in its 20th-anniversary report (Elahi and Khan 2017), updated the notion of Islamophobia based on the United Nation definition of racism. Considering Islamophobia as a form of racism urges a focus on its broad social and political implications, which go beyond simple religious faith.

Furthermore, anti-Muslim racism tends to conflate Muslims with migrants, and vice-versa (Tibi 2010). Migration towards the European Union from non-member countries, estimated to count 2,4 million people in 2017 (Eurobarometer 2018), is one of the reasons Islam is growing in Europe. Muslims in Europe, indeed, accounted for 4% of the population in 1990, reached 6% in 2010 and are projected to be 8% in 2030 (Hackett 2016). Therefore, the media coverage of migrants and asylum seekers arriving in Europe often focuses on representations of the Muslim population (Smets and Bozdağ 2018). However, this may result in a simplistic assumption that all migrants and asylum seekers are Muslims, ignoring those who come from other religious backgrounds and reducing them only to their faith. It can also exacerbate the Islamophobic character of some parties that implement anti-migration politics, such as the French Front National (Davies 2010) and the British Britain First (Allen 2014).

Therefore, emotional antagonism connected with Islamophobia is multi-faced because it targets people simultaneously for their religious belonging, their ethnic and racial background, and their migrant status (real or perceived). In particular, anti-Muslim feelings may assume an intense emotional dimension in online platforms. According to the British Association Tell Mama (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks), online Islamophobia is as concerning as offline harassment, with 402 reports of online attacks occurred in the UK in 2015 (Littler and Feldman 2015). Similarly, the European Islamophobia Report (Bayrakli and Hafez 2019) finds an increase in online Islamophobia, and explains

that the anonymity of Internet platforms permits Islamophobic people to attack Muslims and to organize street-level Islamophobic protests. Online attacks include the circulation of specific and violent anti-Muslim hashtags, such as #KillAllMuslims (Awan and Zempi 2015). I would argue that this is a form of emotional antagonism that excludes Muslims from Internet debates and emotionally describes them as supposedly incompatible with secular democracies. In this article, I will explore the multifaced nature of Islamophobic emotional antagonism through an analysis of anti-Muslim tweets.

4. Exploring Twitter-based Islamophobia: Methods

There are social and political circumstances that may exacerbate emotional antagonism against Muslims. In this paper, I analyze two specific cases. The first case explores tweets containing #Brexit, the most-frequently-used hashtag during the British Referendum campaign (Howard and Kollanyi 2016). The second case regards tweets embedding the hashtag #chiudiamoiporti (close the ports), launched in 2018 by Italian politician Matteo Salvini when he did not let a ship dock at Italian ports because it was transporting rescued migrants. These two cases are not directly connected with Islam but regard the decision to secure national borders, by leaving the European Union or physically closing ports to migrants.

Exploring hashtags (Twitter keywords marked with the symbol "#") is a useful research practice to follow thematic narratives because they connect tweets that discuss the same topic (Naaman, Becker, and Gravano 2011). The two hashtags #Brexit and #chiudiamoiporti are interesting cases as they generated a high number of comments from a variety of actors who often discuss also multiculturalism and religious pluralism. They also give insights on how far-right politicians engage audiences on Twitter. While accounts who circulate these hashtags do not necessarily belong to far-right groups, the analysis shows how these ideologies are spread across digital platforms and reach a variety of users.

Both events provoked Twitter reactions immediately after the date they happened, which is the 23rd of June 2016 for Brexit and the 10th of June 2018 for Salvini's decision to close the ports. In the first phase of my research, I performed an online observation of the two events closely following the hashtags during these two dates and in the three days immediately after each of them. While I did not actively participate in discussions, this observation allowed me closely exploring how certain discourses developed during the time the hashtags were trending on Twitter. I performed an exploratory social media ethnography, a term borrowed from John Postill and Sarah Pink's

(2012) work on activism and social media. This allowed familiarizing with the predominant narrative patterns that followed these two events and individuate tweets that mentioned Islam. While my research focuses on Twitter, in this phase I also paid close attention to other media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and online newspaper articles on the topic.

The second phase of my research includes the selection of relevant tweets that mentioned the two hashtags #Brexit and #chiudiamoiporti together with the words "Islam" and/or "Muslim." I selected the tweets among those which the Twitter Standard Search API (application programming interfaces) considered as most popular in the days immediately after the events. While Twitter API follows algorithm logics that are not necessarily representative of all the conversations happening on the platform (Sharma 2013), it does provide an overview of some dominant narratives in a given context. Combined with the social media ethnography, this allowed for the selection of tweets that are relevant to understand certain facets of Islamophobia. Therefore, this study does not aim at being representative of all actors' opinions about the two events, but qualitatively analyses some examples of Twitter-based Islamophobia in the context of contemporary political debates.

I selected tweets connected with issues of migration and multiculturalism and holding an Islamophobic character. There are various resources which help classifying narratives as Islamophobic. For instance, the Counter-Islamophobia Toolkit (Law, Easat-Daas, and Sayyid 2018) considers that Islamophobic discourses frame Islam as being a threat to security, unassimilable, a demographic threat, a theocracy, a threat to identity, against gender inequality, ontologically different, intrinsically violent, unable to attain European citizenship, and homophobic (9-10). To determine which tweets had an Islamophobic character I employed eight criteria developed by the Runnymede Trust (1997, 4). Therefore, I classified as "Islamophobic" the tweets that had at least one of these characteristics: 1) depict Islam as monolithic; 2) negatively see Islam as "other" to "Western" culture; 3) frame Islam as "inferior" to "Western" culture; 4) describe Islam as aggressive and violent; 5) consider Muslims as manipulative; 6) reject Muslim criticism of "the West"; 7) defend discriminatory behaviors against Muslims and 8) characterize anti-Muslim discourses as acceptable. I thus selected a sample of 308 tweets containing the hashtag #Brexit and 179 tweets connected to the hashtag #chiudiamoiporti, sent either by Salvini or other users, for a total of 487 tweets. These tweets are those that were deemed as "popular" by the Twitter API. The difference in volume between the two hashtags is likely due to the greater international attention to Brexit and the fact that English is spoken by a higher number of people. I did not place any geographical or linguistic preference in my search, but the majority of tweets con-

taining #Brexit were in English and those with #chiudiamoiporti in Italian, which I translated in English for this article. In the analysis, I took into account the specific characteristics of the two countries. However, because Twitter facilitates global connections, the hashtags kindled narratives that go beyond national borders.

After selecting a sample, the third phase of the research involved a textual analysis of the tweets inspired by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Paying attention to social inequalities and power relationships, CDA is a method that helps to understand narratives produced by or about social minorities, such as Muslims in Europe (Wodak and Bush 2004). In my analysis, I took into account both the text of the tweets (which included 140 characters in 2016, and 280 in 2018) and the pictures that are sometimes posted. The qualitative manual coding allowed also exploring whether tweets contained other hashtags, links to news outlets, or if they were referencing another tweet. I only considered original tweets, but I noted the number of retweets as part of my analysis to identify those posts that gained the most attention.

In analyzing the tweets, I focused on how emotions are expressed. Following the work of Abdel-Fadil (2019), I considered that there is often a lack of distinction between different emotions. Abdel-Fadil focuses on the "making of emotion" and "what emotions do" (13) in relation to online conflicts. I adopted Abdel-Fadil's approach by considering tweets' terminology that indicates anger and hate, but also disgust, sarcasm, pride. For example, disturbing terms such as "global cancer" in reference to Islam (as analyzed in section 5) suggest that the user who wrote the tweet feels hate; at the same time, the term likely tries to provoke an emotional reaction in people reading the tweets, either of anger and support, or indignation and disgust. By so doing, I coded tweets and expressions not in specific emotional categories, but in relation to the narrative patterns and the type of affective conversations they were likely to provoke.

In this way, it was possible to understand the predominant discursive patterns and the ideological connections among tweets, and to analyze some characteristics of emotional antagonism and online Islamophobia. The two hashtags were created in the framework of specific campaigns, but the dataset showed that some users embedded them in narratives unrelated to these cases. This suggests that the analysis of #Brexit and #chiudiamoiporti can show patterns applicable to Islamophobia in more general terms.

5. Islamophobic Twitter Narratives: Two Case-Studies

The analysis of Islamophobic tweets shows that there are some predominant narrative patterns, which often mention politicians and political parties, as well as gender, ethnicity, and migration. Here below, I will present the data collected about the two case studies of #Brexit and #chiudiamoiporti, with a focus on the narratives that show how Twitter users participate in and comment on political decisions. I will then discuss the two cases by explaining why I consider them examples of emotional antagonism.

#Brexit

On the 23rd of June 2016, the UK held a referendum on the UK withdrawal from European Union (EU) membership, commonly known as "Brexit." The referendum resulted in almost 52% of the voters supporting the Leave position. Migration was an important issue during the referendum campaign, because one of the consequences of leaving the EU is the prevention of free circulation of goods and citizens across UK borders. While not all supporters of the Leave position were motivated by concerns with migration, the campaign often assumed racist and xenophobic tones. Nigel Farage, one of the most vocal advocates for the Leave position, unveiled a poster which shows a long line of migrants, mostly young men who appear to have a Middle Eastern or North African background. The poster says "Breaking Point: the EU has failed us all" and "We must break free of the EU and take back control" (van Houtum and Lacy 2017). This episode shows that Brexit was connected with a specific idea of British identity that largely marginalizes migrants for being non-white and (supposedly) belonging to Islam. Indeed, the aftermath of the referendum was characterized by a surge in racist attacks (Cuerden and Rogers 2017). In this timeframe, the aforementioned British association Tell Mama denounced a spike in Islamophobic crimes (2016), many of which occurred on social networks. The Center for the Analysis of Social Media at Demos found that, between the 27th of May and the 2nd of June, 28% of pro-Brexit tweets related to the EU campaign contained references to immigration; discussions about immigration and tweets with explicit anti-Islamic wording peaked over the day of the Brexit announcement (Miller, Arcostanzo, Smith, Krasodomski-Jones, Wiedlitzka, Jamali, and Dale 2016).

The hashtag #Brexit was used both by supporters of the Leave and the Remain position. During my social media ethnography, I observed that, when used to discuss Islam, the hashtag tends to contain racist and Islamophobic undertones. This suggests that the connection between Islam and Brexit was stronger among those groups holding anti-Islam feelings. At the same time, Islamophobic tweets are almost always in support of Brexit; this does not mean that all Leave supporters are Islamophobic, but suggests that people who are against Islam probably also tended to see the EU negatively. In-

deed, Islamophobic tweets sent immediately after the referendum praise it as a solution that would allegedly protect the UK against Muslims by preventing migration, even if leaving the European Union would limit the circulation of people and goods among states that are predominantly Christian. Tweets that assume this viewpoint describe Islam as a threat that arrives from abroad, rather than a religion that exists and has a place in the UK.

Tweets that discuss Brexit and Islam in terms of migration often have a strong emotional character, sometimes further enhanced by violent expressions and pictures. For instance, a tweet, sent on the 24 June 2016, embeds an Islamophobic cartoon. The cartoon is divided in two parts: on the left, there is a picture of the queen of England with a guard, wearing the typical tall fur cap, and the date "2015." On the right, the queen is portrayed as wearing an Islamic *burqa* that covers her entirely, and instead of the guard there is an Arab-looking man with a menacing attitude and holding a weapon; here, the date is "2050." The picture is commented upon as follows:

> God saved the Queen & Britain from Islam tonight! #Brexit (24 June 2016)

The tweet hints at the emotional attachment of British people for the monarchy and suggests that Brexit would protect the British nation from Islam. Tweets that similarly mention national values and symbols as being threatened by Islam often contain hashtags and keywords such as "islamization," "terrorism," "jihad," #Islamexit. This is consistent with the findings of the Italian Observatory Vox (2019), which individuates among the most-frequently used Islamophobic terms in online venues "terrorist" and "jihadist."

Islamophobia is expressed in these tweets through narratives that frame Muslims as intrinsically violent and misogynistic, or as manipulative and insincere. These are common tropes of Islamophobic discourses, as explained in the Runnymede Trust report (1997. These two narratives coexist in many of the tweets in the dataset, and I will further illustrate them with some examples.

The first type of narratives, which sees Islam as misogynistic, opposes Muslim migration because Muslim men are allegedly unable to control their sexuality and sexually attack women and children. In this context, Islamophobic narratives tend to offer the portray of the "dangerous Muslim" as male. These narratives almost exclusively concern white British women and girls, framed as powerless victims of predatory Muslim men. These exchanges rarely talk about Muslim women, and when they are mentioned, they are frequently described as problematic because they have numerous children to supposedly spread Islam in the UK. These discourses unveil a specific un-

derstanding of gender norms, sharply divided in racial and religious categories: white British women and girls need to be "protected" by white British men against Muslim men. The emotional character of such narratives is exacerbated by direct references to rape and sexual abuse:

> It's not xenophobia when Muslim migrants are gang raping kids. #Brexit (27 June 2016)

This Islamophobic tweet suggests that all Muslims sexually assault children. It is part of a narrative trend that depicts an image of migrants as mostly male and young, likely echoing the poster unveiled by Nigel Farage mentioned earlier in this article. In this way, migrants and Muslims are conflated in the character of the dangerous man who, because of his religion, is unable to respect British white women and children and would become a violent threat if let in the country.

The second type of narratives, which frames Muslims as manipulative and insincere, includes descriptions of a supposed "Muslim agenda" to conquer Europe. These narratives are based on the idea that Muslims try to spread their religion (and, consequently, their violent and misogynistic attitude) in Europe through migration. The European Union, indeed, is often framed as supporting a so-called "Muslim invasion" through pro-migration policies. These narratives frequently mention transnational politics. For instance, many tweets denigrate German chancellor Angela Merkel, accused of facilitating irregular immigration and secretly trying to spread Islam in Europe. Similarly, Barak Obama is criticized for being a "friend" of Islam, sometimes also with references to the conspiracy theory that wants him to secretly be Muslim. In addition, many tweets refer to Donald Trump, at the time campaigning for U.S. presidency, and embed hashtags such as #MAGA (Make American Great Again, Trump's slogan). These tweets praise Trump as a strong political leader able to stop Muslim immigration, something that Brexit would also allegedly do. For example, a tweet sent of the 24th of June 2016 says:

> Kudos to Great Britain and their #Brexit. We'll do our part electing Donald Trump, ridding the global cancer known as Islam (24 June 2016)

This tweet shows that Brexit was largely understood as a global phenomenon connected with the rise of far-right ideologies. Islamophobia becomes a way to endorse certain political leaders and reject others based on their alleged religious belonging and allegiances. Such tweets may also be the product of political propaganda that instills

fear for certain social groups (such as Muslims) to claim protection for a given set of values and lifestyles.

These two narratives are often entangled in Islamophobic tweets that frame Muslims as violent and manipulative, supposedly engaged to destroy British and European values. Islamophobia, in this case, is powerful in denying Islam the status of religion, rather describing it as an ideology that is antagonistic. This narrative is strongly emotional because, on the one hand, it frames the EU as a dangerous place that tries to undermine British values by favoring immigration, hence the need to "take back control." On the other hand, Islam is described as incompatible with British and, paradoxically, European values. Both nuances largely ignore non-Muslim migrants and refugee seekers, as well as British-born Muslims. Tweets that support such viewpoints diffuse extremely simplistic narratives, which construct Britishness based on being ethnically white and religiously Christian (or belonging to a Christian background). It is a narrative that affectively engages users by creating a sharp division between what needs to be protected (a certain understanding of Britishness) and what can pose a threat (Islam and migration). The circulation of such narratives reinforces the antagonistic character of Twitter Islamophobia as it does not invite conversation with Muslims as possible interlocutors, but rather considers them as unable to enter public debates because of their alleged violent character.

#Chiudiamoiporti

The hashtag #chiudiamoiporti (close the ports) was launched by Italian Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Matteo Salvini. He took the leadership of the far-right party Lega Nord (Northern League) in 2013, radically changing the party's focus: while, at the beginning, it supported regionalism and independentism for the northern Italian regions, Lega Nord came to mainly promote nationalistic politics and anti-immigration measures (Albertazzi, Giovannini, and Seddone 2018). Salvini also extensively employs social networks, counting 1,04 million followers on Twitter and 3.5 million likes on Facebook (as per May 3, 2019). According to a report published by Amnesty International (2019), Salvini is the Italian politician who had the most social media interactions before the 2019 European Elections, diffusing also offensive and discriminatory posts. Froio and Ganesh (2018) choose Salvini's Twitter account as a prominent example of transnational far-right online exchanges.

When the NGO Sos Mediterranee boat Aquarius rescued 629 migrants (including 123 children and seven pregnant women) after a shipwreck, in June 2018, Salvini refused to let it dock in Italian ports. Italy, a natural bridge between Europe and Africa, has re-

cently seen an increase of migrants arriving in dinghy boats from Africa and the Middle East to seek asylum. According to the Dublin III Regulation (EU Regulation 604/2013) , migrants must generally seek asylum in the first European country they reach. This makes Italy a nodal point for the management of migration, but also fosters the formation of anti-migrant groups, often fomented by Salvini's political ideologies. Salvini communicated his decision to close the ports to ship Aquarius by launching the hashtag #chiudiamoiporti on the 10th of June 2018. The hashtag was first circulated on Twitter together with a picture of Salvini with crossed arms, looking at the camera with a provocative demeanor. This Twitter post provoked 2984 comments, 2635 retweets and 10548 likes, and attracted 182k reactions, 18k comments and 40k shares on Facebook (as of 12 June 2019). The project Hatemeter (2018) individuates, among keywords used to spread Islamophobia online in Italy, also the hashtag #chiudiamoiporti (19-20). This hashtag is only one example of how Salvini and the Italian government promote anti-migration measures. In summer 2019, for instance, ship Capitan Carola Rackete decided to dock on Italian shores to rescue migrants despite not having obtained the authorization to do so. The event sparked new conversations about the need of closing (or opening) ports to migrants and refugee seekers, with people continuing to employ #chiudiamoiporti to discuss it.

The exploration of narratives around the hashtag, which includes a live observation of responses and retweets of the original #chiudiamoiporti tweet, shows that Islam is predominantly framed as entangled with migration. This reflects a discursive strategy of Salvini, who tends to mention Islam and migration indistinctively in many of his tweets. This attitude is exemplified in a tweet he sent on the 28 January 2018, almost six months before launching #chiudiamoiporti, where he wrote:

> Islam in Italy? Either it becomes more open, or otherwise it's a danger. With Salvini in power STOP to any irregular or illegal Islamic presence in Italy. Do you agree? CIRCULATE THIS! (28 January 2018, emphasis in original, translated by the author)

The tweet contains a link to an article from the right-wing Italian newspaper *Il Giornale*, which talks about Salvini's decision to close Italian borders to migrants and asylum seekers. The tweet is Islamophobic in implying that Islam is intrinsically "irregular" and that migration primarily involves a "dangerous" Islam. The analysis of tweets that mention the hashtag #chiudiamoiporti and the word "Islam" shows similar narrative patterns as this tweet. They usually do not explicitly talk about Muslims, but mention Islam mirroring Salvini's claim that migrants and Islam are intrinsically connected.

Tweets that embed the hashtag #chiudiamoiporti may either strongly support Salvini's decision or criticize it, in both cases often employing emotional and abusive lan-

guage. The analysis shows that Islamophobic tweets embedding #chiudiamoiporti also support and praise Salvini. Among them, it is possible to find various narrative patterns. For instance, many tweets talk about violence in relation to Islam, employing terms such as "afroislamic" to belittle migrants. Predominant hashtags that express these narratives are #StopIslam, #NoIslam, #StopInvasione (stop invasion). Various tweets, indeed, describe Islam as planning an "invasion" against Italy and Europe. For example:

> #Marocco #Tunisia #Libia #Egitto #Iraq #Siria #Libano #Armenia #Kurdistan #Azerbaijan before 700 [there was] #Christianity, then #Islam with Holy #war. #NoIslam #StopIslam #chiudiamoiporti #ngo #immigration #EU #Italia #Europa #Asia #Africa #Salvini (13 June 2018, translated by the author)

Through the repetition of multiple hashtags, including "Holy #war" ("#Guerra santa" in original), the tweet powerfully evokes the crusades to imply that Islam is intrinsically dangerous for Christianity. This narrative does not elaborate on why Islam is supposedly problematic, but assumes that Muslims have been antagonistic "others" in relation to Christian civilization from the time of the crusades.

Another dominant pattern in these Islamophobic tweets is nationalism. Several emotional and nationalistic tweets describe Italians as hard-working and good-natured people, as opposed to migrants who allegedly leave their countries in hope to live out of humanitarian help. These narratives are Islamophobic because they conflate Muslims with migrants and describe all Muslims as manipulative and cunning individuals. In these tweets, it is possible to find various other hashtags, such as #Italexit and #fuoridaquestaeuropa (out from Europe), or #primagliitaliani (Italians first), a reference to international far-right politics that recalls, for instance, the xenophobic British organization "Britain First." For example:

> #Macron can think about the problems that happen in his place, he has plenty: in Paris it feels like Nigeria and Islamist attacks in France are countless. These are the results of the savage immigration they would like to impose on us! #Aquarius #primagliitaliani #chiudiamoiporti (10 June 2018, translated by the author)

This tweet comments on French President Emmanuel's Macron criticism of Salvini's politics. The tweet hints at anti-elitist discourses that criticize politicians for allegedly not having the best interest of citizens in mind. It is likely connected to the transnational far-right idea of regaining national sovereignty through anti-migration politics. It invites political participation that considers the needs of Italians as mutually exclusive

with those of migrants. In this way, two essentialized categories emerge: on the one hand, the "Italians" who have rights to economic resources and safety because of their citizenship and their alleged superiority; and the "Muslim migrants," who try to steal such resources and propagate violence by entering Italian ports.

Islamophobic tweets show support to Salvini with hashtags such as #SalviniNonMollare (Salvini do not give up). Many Twitter users display an affective attachment by calling him by his first name "Matteo" or referring to him as "Capitano" (captain). These narratives are contrasted by tweets that criticize them. For instance, Italian journalist Arianna Ciccone counteracted #chiudiamoiporti by creating the hashtag #umanitàaperta (open humanity), which also became trending on Twitter in support of migrants and refugees. Together with tweets that praise multiculturalism and solidarity, some responses to Salvini are violent and emotional. For instance, some users define him as a fascist and compare him to Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, sometimes sharing pictures of Mussolini's dead body taken in 1945. While people express antithetical opinions about the decision of closing ports, they rarely engage in constructive debates. When users respond to each other, they usually belittle the opposite positions through insults and abusive language, often without being pertinent with the argument of their opponents.

The analysis of tweets containing #chiudiamoiporti shows communicative patterns largely inspired by narratives circulated by Salvini himself. Arguably, the politician creates political messages that legitimate generalizations about Muslims and migrants, and employs a colloquial and abusive language. He also frames and diffuses the idea that the terms "migrants" and "Muslims" both indicate generic "dangerous others" he seeks to prevent from entering Italian borders. The hashtag #chiudiamoiporti generated tweets that, similarly to those mentioning #Brexit, are emotional in considering Islam as violent, dangerous and opposed to Italian values. Also, the antagonistic character of these discourses is exacerbated by a nationalistic attitude that considers Italians in competition for resources with migrants and threatened by the presence of asylum seekers. It invites political participation following affective interactions provoked through straightforward and colloquial Twitter messages, as happened when Salvini launched the #chiudiamoiporti campaign through a tweet and a picture. Therefore, Islamophobic tweets containing #chiudiamoiporti are examples of emotional antagonism because they rarely seek dialogue with other Twitter users and arguably sparkle from fear and hate of Muslims and migrants.

#Brexit and #chiudiamoiporti as Emotional Antagonism

The two hashtags #Brexit and #chiudiamoiporti helped to spread Islamophobic narratives. Both are connected to specific events, the referendum on EU membership in the UK and Salvini's decision to close ports to a ship rescuing migrants in Italy. They hold differences, especially because they are created in two social and national contexts that have specific characteristics. At the same time, both hashtags are responses to a general fear of migration and discuss the idea of closing borders. They also include transnational connections through references to far-right groups in other countries. #Brexit and #chiudiamoiporti point to an understanding of "western" identities that excludes certain subjects and privileges a notion of national belonging based on whiteness and Christian values. These two hashtags are examples of emotional antagonism because they elicited affective conversations on Twitter by abusing Muslims instead of including them in critical debates.

The emotional character of tweets containing #Brexit and #chiudiamoiporti is expressed through words and sentences that contain a high degree of symbolic violence. In both case studies, the analysis reveals that Twitter users expressed anti-Muslim feelings in tweets involving anger, fear, hate, pride, sarcasm. They often embed words such as "invasion," "Islamization," "dangerous," "cancer," "savage," and hashtags such as #StopIslam or #Islamexit. References to sexual aggressions and wars exacerbate the disturbing character of some of the tweets. At the same time, some tweets pair Islamophobic words with expressions of love and support, especially directed towards political actors. This results more prominently from the analysis of #chiudiamoiporti, because Salvini's supporters tend to address their comments and thoughts to him directly and praise him with affective words. In the case of #Brexit, it is also possible to find examples of strong support for some political characters, such as Nigel Farage or Donald Trump, which are symbolically described as able to protect a certain idea of "western" culture.

This display of emotions can be explained through the work of Sara Ahmed (2014). According to Ahmed, emotions are social and cultural practices that involve individual and collective bodies. Certain bodies are identified as not being part of the dominant understanding of national belonging. In the tweets analyzed in this article, Muslim bodies attract hate by becoming the scapegoat for all that is undesirable in society. In this way, Islamophobic narratives describe Muslims as responsible for the loss of economic resources, rise in crime and violence, social and cultural changes that allegedly threat dominant values. This form of hate, Ahmed writes, is connected with love. Islamophobic groups frame the hate for the "other" as a form of nationalistic love. In the analyzed tweets, the UK and Italy as nations are described as "objects of love" that need to be protected. Besides the two cases, it is possible to find these narratives in various

other contexts: Trump's abusive suggestions that the four congresswomen "go back" to their countries is also paired with a description of America as the "greatest and most powerful Nation on earth." From this perspective, emotional interactions merge hate and love in narratives that see Muslims as visibly different bodies posing a dangerous threat to a beloved set of nationalistic values.

The emotional description of Muslims as "others" results in antagonistic exchanges. Islamophobic narratives essentialize Muslims as a homogeneous and monolithic group that holds solely negative characteristics. Tweets containing #Brexit and #chiudiamoiporti often suggest the existence of two mutually exclusive categories: "us" (British, Italians, Europeans, westerners) and "them" (Muslims, migrants, non-white and non-Christian people). The category of "them" is also associated with "foreign" people, and thus implies that Islam forcefully enters national borders through migration. This dichotomy dehumanizes Muslims and deprives Islam of the status of religion, framing it as a dangerous ideology instead. As a result, Muslims are attacked and verbally abused, but rarely directly involved in conversations. The majority of the analyzed tweets do not mention specific examples of the supposed dangerous character of Islam, but belittle all Muslims as a generic category only because of their religious belonging.

These wide generalizations provoke interactions that are antagonistic. As for the work of Chantal Mouffe (2013), conflicts can be agonistic or antagonistic. Agonistic politics create conflictual debates where all parts have the same possibility of participation and can express their viewpoints. This is something that rarely happens in the dataset of tweets taken into account. Instead, Islam is talked about almost exclusively by non-Muslims. While there are situations where Muslims employ social networks to fight Islamophobia (Vis, van Zoonen, and Mihelj, 2011; Zoonen, Vis, and Mihelj, 2011), this does not appear to be the case of the two analyzed case studies. Rather, users who self-identify as Muslims tend not to respond to Islamophobic claims connected to #Brexit and #chiudiamoiporti. These hashtags seem to predominantly generate antagonistic debates where people holding different viewpoints belittle each other rather than creating constructive conversations. Therefore, the majority of tweets follow Mouffe's model of antagonistic politics because they depict Muslims as passive subjects who do not have the status or the possibility to intervene in conflictual debates. These two examples of emotional antagonism also suggest some conclusions on the character of Islamophobia, the role of social networks in spreading hate speech, and the transformations of transnational political communication.

6. Conclusion

This article analyzed how Islamophobia exemplify some characteristics of far-right political discourses that spread on Twitter. It argues that online Islamophobic narratives may have an emotional character, because they involve a strongly affective language that individuates Muslims as objects of negative feelings. Among emotional Internet interactions, Islamophobia is an interesting case study because it regards also social and religious change, migration, ethnicity, and race. For instance, the two hashtags #Brexit and #chiudiamoiporti have been circulated to comment on migration, but they also exemplify how certain events can sparkle Islamophobic narratives. This analysis focused on Islamophobic tweets to explored how far-right actors employ Twitter and how users engage with and circulate far-right ideologies. Further studies may take into account online social conversations between Muslims and Islamophobic actors, or quantitatively explore anti-Islam online narratives, adding complexity to the current understanding of Internet-based Islamophobia. Also, this study is time-sensitive because it is connected to two specific events, and different results may be found by performing the analysis in different periods. Focusing on specific timeframes, the present article highlights some changes in how people use media and engage in political debates, and suggests three main conclusive reflections.

First, Islamophobic narratives tend to ignore the complex and multifaceted character of contemporary Islam. The two case studies show that Islam is often entangled with discourses about migration. However, these narratives present a simplistic understanding of Islam as a monolithic entity sharply opposed to "western" liberal values and democracies. They also tend to falsely equate all migrants with Muslims, producing two interconnected narratives: Muslims do not belong to "western" culture because they are only recently immigrating, and migrants are supposedly incompatible with secular democracies because they belong to Islam. This arguably results from a lack of knowledge about Islam, but it may also be a characteristic of emotional antagonism. Excluded from social and political debates, Muslims are essentialized as "others" that provoke negative emotions, but whose emotions are never taken into account. Therefore, their complexity as individuals and communities gets erased to focus solely on religious belonging.

Second, the Internet may facilitate the spread of emotional antagonism in the form of Islamophobic narratives because of some intrinsic characteristics of online platforms. Social networks such as Twitter allow circulating in a short time a high amount of information, providing the possibility for instant reactions. Online anonymity may lead users to hateful exchanges characterized by impulsivity (Brown 2018). Also, Twitter users can embed pictures, videos, re-tweets, and links to other media sources. This

may narratively and visually legitimize certain Islamophobic claims and facilitate the diffusion of the so-called "fake news," which are news that aims at deliberate disinformation (Douglas 2018). Elizabeth Davis and Megan Boler (2018) identify this phenomenon as belonging to the "post-truth era" and characterizing contemporary affective politics, which are often based on disinformation crafted to appeal to a given public. The analyzed tweets do not necessarily make strong use of fake news, but may employ pictures, videos, and links that establish misleading connections. For instance, news about Muslims involved in violent episodes are used to prove that all Muslim migrants are potentially dangerous, even when the original news does not mention migration. Therefore, the possibility of connecting Twitter messages to multiple platforms may exacerbate the emotional character of Islamophobic narratives.

Third, Islamophobic emotional antagonism is connected to a type of political participation that increasingly depends on colloquial and straightforward conversations, as showed by Trump's tweets quoted at the beginning of the article. The two case studies suggest that far-right politicians may gain success through a skillful use of social networks and a deep understanding of media logics. Even when they regard complex political decisions such as leaving the EU or closing the ports to migrants, messages are extremely simplified and made to fit short tweets. They tend to overlook social and economic issues in favor of Islamophobic narratives that individuate Muslims as scapegoats for a variety of problems. The present article focused on two hashtags created in the British and Italian context, but found patterns that can likely be found in other contexts. For example, Salvini provokes emotions by employing a colloquial style and establishing a sense of affective proximity with the voters. This is a type of political communication that, as the tweets quoted in the introduction of this article suggest, is found also among other politicians, such as Trump. This suggests that emotional antagonism is an increasingly important characteristic of contemporary politics and helps the creation of transnational networks among far-right actors. It also arguably enhances the success of these actors by engaging people in new forms of Internet-based political participation.

Therefore, these three characteristics (anti-Muslim feelings, use of the Internet, a new style of political communication) frame emotional antagonism as a process that marginalizes minorities by denying their participation as interlocutors in political debates, and abusing them through the spread of online affective narratives. This allows understanding some nuances of contemporary political discourses, especially for what concerns migration and the growth of Islam. As far-right parties seem to gain increasing attention in Europe and elsewhere, it becomes compelling to explore emotional an-

tagonism as a model that can explain some of the current political behaviors in terms of hate speech, anti-migration, and anti-Muslim feelings.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

I would like to thank Dr. Megan Boler for inviting me to the *Affect, Propaganda, and Political Imagination Symposium* at the University of Toronto in June 2019. I presented a draft of this article at the symposium and I received invaluable feedback from Dr. Bo-

ler and the other participants. In this respect, I would like to thank also Elizabeth Davis for reviewing the paper and helping organizing the symposium, and Hoda Gharib for acting as respondent to my paper. Furthermore, a special thanks goes to Dr. Alberta Giorgi, member of *Partecipazione e Conflitto* Editorial Staff, who greatly helped me publish this article. I would also like to thank Dr. Mauro Gatti for support of many kinds.

AUTHOR INFORMATION:

Giulia Evolvi is Research Associate in Religion and Media at the Center for Religious Studies (CERES) at Ruhr University Bochum, Germany, where she coordinates the focus group "Media and Materiality" for the Käte Hamburger Kolleg project. She also works as Lecturer in Media and Communication at Erasmus University, Rotterdam, the Netherlands. She obtained her PhD in Media Studies from the University of Colorado Boulder, United States, where she was affiliated with the Center for Media, Religion and Culture, and also holds a Master's degree in Religious Studies from the University of Padua, Italy. Her research interests are religious change in Europe, secularization, digital media, Catholicism, Islam, and Islamophobia. She has published the book *Blogging my Religion: Secular, Muslim, and Catholic Media Spaces in Europe* (Routledge 2018).