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# Territories of Conflict â Political Islamâ and Immigrants

By Emilio Quadrelli

In this series of interviews with young migrants living in different European cities, Emilio Quadrelli tracks the elusive subject of 'political Islam' as well as the intensive police actions which together shape the boundaries of a 'refugee subjectivity'. Translation from the Italian by Stefano di Cicco

So it is true that there exists a morality of the people, understood as a determinate (in time and space) totality of maxims and customs deriving from them or producing them. Like superstition, this morality is closely tied to real religious beliefs: there exist imperatives which are much stronger, more tenacious and more effective than those of official morality. Even in this sphere different strata must be distinguished: those which are fossilized and reflect conditions of past life, and are therefore conservative and reactionary, and those which are a series of innovations, often creative and progressive, spontaneously determined by forms and conditions of life in the process of developing, and which contradict, or are merely different from, the morality of the ruling class.

â Antonio Gramsci, *Literature and National Life*

## Winds of War

If we look at academic work in the various disciplines orbiting around the migrant question, two main aspects emerge. First, the migrant is considered by definition to be part of the world of marginality, deviance and/or micro-criminality; second, as a direct consequence of the discursive order to which he is allocated, he is rarely acknowledged the right to language.<sup>1</sup> This statement needs explanation, as it could be misunderstood in many ways. Academic discourse presents the migrant as incapable not so much of subjectivity in a generic sense, but of a public subjectivity, which implies a political subjectivity.<sup>2</sup> In the light of field research, this theoretical model appears questionable to say the least. The problems emerge clearly when some events of the present global war are looked at from an Islamic world perspective.<sup>3</sup> While our attention to the migrants is limited to the security question or, put otherwise, the humanitarian question,<sup>4</sup> in their world an intensely political discourse is going on, making a mockery not only of the rhetoric about the dangerous classes, but also of the set of perfectly specular frames which consign migrants to the apolitical and ultimately reassuring category of poverty and/or misery.<sup>5</sup> Let's take a look at some examples.

[IMAGE]

Image: Muslim district, Genoa, Italy

The historic centre of Genoa is an interesting nexus of various national and continental histories.<sup>6</sup> Within this small, concentrated space it seemed worthwhile to investigate attitudes to the Lebanon War of summer 2006.<sup>7</sup> The inhabitants of this area live as casual workers, transsexuals, thieves and muggers, small family business owners, occasional drug dealers, unevenly-skilled robbers, sellers of cheap goods, sweated and informal female labour, carers or prostitutes, in whose working days

distinctions between legal, illegal and semi-legal contexts mean little. Many of the migrant workers of central Genoa, then, belong to the invisible and faceless part of the population that is rarely listened to, least of all when geopolitical events keep public attention transfixed by the words of the *Palazzo*.

However, listening to these street voices proves to be interesting, and sometimes surprising. Suddenly we discover aspects which are not only unconventional, but have more to do with the *partisan* experience than with the stereotype that consigns migrant life to an *apolitical* marginality.<sup>8</sup> While in the *ourâ* world, blaming the politician seems to have become the prevailing strategy among the uncultured *faceless masses*, the conceptual opposition *friend/enemy* seems to be instinctively caught in its essence.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps, as Fanon said, descending to the humblest and most invisible layers of the wretched of the earth leads to surprising discoveries.<sup>10</sup>

The interview with A. took place in the early hours one day in September 2006 in the grocery shop where he works. Between two and four in the afternoon the shop is closed to the public. Breaks are used for stockpiling, restocking shelves, cleaning, etc.; work that involves the whole family. There is no ledger of hours worked, days off, holidays, pay packets, etc. Work begins at five in the morning when some people go to the wholesalers to buy fruit and vegetables and goes on to 10 or 10.30 in the evening. Earnings are derisory in terms of normal commercial activity, but become *attractive* once all put together. Few *luxuries*: the odd football match for some, the gym for others, or a few rare appearances in local bars and clubs are the only concessions to *consumer society*. Even these concessions to metropolitan lifestyles are restricted to the young, while the others (the older family members and mothers and aunts in particular), seem concerned only with saving one cent after another.

*Palestine, Lebanon and the Middle East are again under siege. Are you following what's happening there?*

Sure. But we don't speak of it with much pleasure. The condition of the migrant is already difficult in itself, so it's easy to imagine how an Arab immigrant feels during these times.

*Do you feel observed, watched over, controlled?*

It's not that we feel like this. It is like this. You don't imagine how everything we do or say becomes, for a lot of people, good to exchange with the police. They filled the places where we work with informers. If you are an Arab it is easy to be blackmailed for whatever reason. Then come the other forms of control, the technological ones, every means is used against us. It is not the first time we've encountered these things.

*So, amongst yourselves, you maintain a certain reserve when you talk about what is happening?*

It depends. Certainly, there's the problem of not exposing oneself, because every word can be used to bring a charge. And I'm talking about serious charges. There have been identity checks and often openly provocative searches lately. Broken down doors, entire families terrorised, people being seized and held for hours without a reason, threats and insults of every kind, especially towards the Koran. Insulting the Koran is what happens most frequently. These have become daily routines. An Arab who openly says that the Zionist State is a terrorist assassin state risks a lot. And yet, what Israel is is obvious to everyone.

*Your opinion of Israel is quite clear. More important is the origin of such a dislike. In other words, what's the importance of the religious conflict in today's events?*

Bringing everything back to the wars of religion is a bullshit you invented. The problem with the Jews lies in what they do, not in their religion. The problem is not religion, but the terror that Israel stirs up against the Arab populations. You too know the history of Palestine, and religion has nothing to do with it. There is only occupation and domination of a State over a population. Israel is a marauding assassin state, that's the only truth. All the rest has nothing to do with it.

*But Islam seems to have an important role. How do you explain it?*

You know, perhaps it's better to say that some Islamic organisations have done for Arabic people what no one had ever done before. They gave us pride, and a view that shows us that not only is it possible to resist, but also to win. Besides that and no one thinks of this that many Islamic organisations have dedicated themselves entirely to doing good for people instead of just growing rich like many corrupt groups. They haven't just taken up the gun, they have built hospitals, social services, jobs, and offered some comfort for the poorest part of the population. This is what made them visible to everyone. But, most important, they gave us dignity. The Arabic peoples today are no longer just small-time cheats, capable maybe of ripping you off then running away when things get serious. You've always regarded us as smart but not intelligent. Shrewdness is something animals also have, while intelligence is something you think belongs to you alone. The same goes for the courage or the ability to fight. The Arab was the one who could stab you in the back, nothing more. At best we could be good marauders or thieves, but not warriors. The Arab is a coward incapable of fighting, he can only run away. Arabs don't have balls. How many times did we hear that?

This is not true any longer today. For this reason the war in Lebanon has excited admiration and approval. Israel thought it would swallow them whole, but at the end it found itself under siege. Its army, which, don't forget, was considered invincible, was kept stuck at the border, its soldiers falling under the fire of the guerilla fighters, and forced to live in shelters in their own cities. They had to pay dearly for the few inches of ground they conquered and yet, after a month, Hezbollah guerilla fighters were not far away from them, and still shooting them. Your television, your newspapers, they did not show anything of what has really happened there. They never showed the Zionist detachments coming back destroyed and defeated. But the defeat is causing a lot of problems in Israel now. Do you think there would have been such a reaction if things really went like your media claimed? For you, this has never happened. Israel has destroyed Lebanon, massacred women, children and the elderly, but the military strength of the guerilla fighters has remained untouched. Missiles continued to come down in buckets on their heads until the last moment. They arrived believing themselves to be giants, and came back as dwarfs. Your media did not show it but the entire population of Lebanon, Christians included, demonstrated for Hezbollah. This should suggest something to you. Lebanon is not a Muslim country, its people have many religions but everyone hates Israel, and everyone has rejoiced together for the successes of the guerilla fighters.

*Therefore the war in Lebanon has been very important for you?*

Of course. What it showed is important to all the Arabs. It said, 'the Zionists and their American friends can no longer do what they want. If they try to attack us now, they will find it's not their cup of tea.' For the Arab, the most important thing is not if the party of God or someone else is doing it. The important thing is that someone has demonstrated that it is possible to resist, to fight, and even to attack the Zionists in their homes. Every Arab round here will tell you that he is for Hezbollah, especially those who are less tied to traditions and prayer. You know some of them. All the ones who come to the gym. You know very well that they are Muslim so to speak, and don't get on well with old people, with Islam's traditions and regulations; on the contrary, real believers consider these guys

wasted, contaminated by western society, renegades, for the way they behave and live. But they are the ones who showed the greatest admiration for Hezbollah. (A.)

Brussels

Image: Muslim district, Brussels, Belgium

The next shadow is F., a 27 year old Algerian whose life has been spent crossing thresholds. He's a casual worker, small-scale dealer, occasional robber, street-trader and handicraft worker, among other things. If he was born in a different age he could have been the one who suggested to Shakespeare, 'one man in his time plays many parts.' In late summer he is easy to find in a city centre bar, adopting one of his personae. He is working on tourists, or rather on their wallets. He and his little gang use this typical 'dive' as a base for operations, targeting Germans and Japanese in particular. Talking to him and watching him for a few minutes it is easy to classify him as the kind of 'hyper-westernised' immigrant for whom 'fundamentalist obscurantism' holds little attraction. But he is among those who declare themselves willing to return home to fight the 'West'. A striking contrast if confronted with what surrounds him. His Nike trainers, his Japanese motorcycle which he seems to be very proud of and which he has customised with great care, his tribal tattoos displayed on a body fit from constant training, his military trousers and expensive mirror sunglasses, together with the revealing dress of his current girlfriend, do not suggest him as the ideal model of the Muslim soldier. And yet we are talking of a potential guerilla fighter.

*What did the war in Lebanon change for you?*

I think there's a great chance for redemption for all of us now. I started to think seriously about a choice. I'm willing to go and fight in Lebanon at once, not only for my faith, but above all against Israelis and Americans. My enemies are all those who oppress us, and anyone who shows that they know what to do about it, as the Shiites are doing, is fine with me. Many of us here see it the same way. We are ready to go and fight because finally we see a light, a hope. If Hezbollah is giving us that hope, it's ok by me. My problem is to shake all this shit off me. I left Algeria because I thought I could find a different reality here, a possibility. I thought I could do by myself, but now, after many years, I realise it is not possible. For this reason I'm willing to leave and go to Syria, then Lebanon or Palestine.

*Is it a personal project or something worked out collectively?*

It's something we worked out little by little. Many things changed between us after this war. What happened there has brought many people to see things differently. Before that, we were not interested in anything, we just thought how to survive. Then we started admiring those who were fighting there, and we started to follow things much more. Before, we never read Arab newspapers, now we follow everything that happens carefully, and we watch Gulf TV channels with fresh interest.

*Is there a link between the discovery of an 'Arab cause' and your experience in our societies?*

Yes, the two things are linked. You arrive with an idea in mind, and then you find that everything was an illusion. Whatever you do, you're doomed to be a slave of the Westerners. At the beginning you think you're the one who cannot adapt to the new reality, but then you discover it is something that has nothing to do with you. The problem is that you are an Arab foreigner in the

eyes of the Westerners, and an Arab deserves to be treated as an Arab. What you offer us here is not different from what you do to our countries. You are the masters and we the servants, and if we don't accept that, there's no alternative. It is not about individual abilities but about being or not being from a certain part of the world.

*So you're saying that you developed the need to have a strong identity during and through your experience in Europe?*

Yes. It is here that I understood that there are no individual solutions, and that the conditions of non-western peoples can be tackled only if we manage to free ourselves from our condition as servants. In order to do that it is necessary to fight. Peoples who cannot oppose the occupation have no possibility of being free.

*How and where did you reach these views?*

I can only speak for the experience of my group. None of us are, or have been linked to any organisation. For the same reason, we have no relations with prayer groups or anything like that. We were and we are small street groups who knew each other and sometimes clashed about conflicting opinions. Then we became friends and started talking about many things. So, to answer your question, we started to look at what was happening from a different perspective. No one suggested to us the idea of joining and fighting with Hamas or Hezbollah.<sup>11</sup> If this is what you want to know, no, nobody came to enlighten us, it was a choice we made. A choice that was born from the conviction that we cannot walk keeping our head low any more.(F)

## **DIY Islam**

The implications of what we have just heard are considerable. It seems to make a clean sweep of our most cherished cultural or multicultural common places.<sup>12</sup>

In order to understand the Islamic revival fully it seems of little use to look for improbable cultural impulses which return to the surface by some seismic effect.<sup>13</sup> It is much more useful and realistic to take the Islamic revival for what it is – the ideological covering of a material conflict – in order to grasp the tensions and contradictions underlying it.

Media and political analysts show the Islamic world as a basically monolithic reality with a particular inclination to respect strict hierarchies, totally dominated by and subject to hypothetical command centres which the adherents follow blindly and fanatically. A totalitarian reality where there is no room for heresy. However if we look at these worlds more carefully, we discover a complex and multiform dimension which is anything but united or unitary. With all due caution, what seems to emerge again and again is the independent discourse of subjects who find in political Islam not a complete identity but an affinity. This dimension is full of contradictions, but precisely for this reason it provides an insight into Islamic worlds which differs significantly from the version constantly presented both by mass media and specialist studies.<sup>14</sup>

Fair in Belleville, Paris

Image: Street fair in Belleville, Paris

We will try to discuss this with O., a Palestinian involved in political Islam for some time, taking as a starting point the proliferation of spontaneous Islamic activism inside the globalised European metropolis. This allows us to tackle less conventional but more interesting aspects of a complex, many-sided and non-homogeneous reality. The interview was possible thanks to the mediation of a gatekeeper close to the social worlds of our interviewee, whose activity as a militant in the Palestinian resistance makes him very cautious in approaching people. The interview took place in August 2007. In order to avoid possible surveillance, it was conducted at a table outside a bar in the Belleville neighbourhood of Paris. The opinions we will hear come from a clearly partisan standpoint. The speaker is directly concerned in the matter and cannot be asked to adopt the evaluative sobriety of a Weberian method, which, by definition, is excluded from the partisan perspective. It is exactly this, though, that makes the testimony particularly interesting.

The amount of information he supplies offers the reasonably attentive reader an exhaustive and convincing survey of a world in relation to which disinformation usually prevails. In many passages, as could hardly be avoided, the interview sometimes tends towards generic affirmations, showing the speaker's expertise in getting round situations and subjects where the reader would have preferred more concreteness. This is a limit not easily overcome. It shouldn't be forgotten that movements fighting imperialism and colonialism face, on the one hand, the urgent need to break out of political and cultural isolation and confinement and, on the other, the strategic necessity of avoiding giving information to the enemy. This difficult balance has to be lived with. As already indicated, the main subject matter of the interview is the proliferation of groups inspired by political Islam which are not linked to the more structured and better-known parts of the movement.

*According to your information, one has the impression of a sort of 'DIY Islam', determined through individual or collective formulations which take shape around Islam and the Koran. Is that what mainly happens among young people living in the Western metropolis?*

Yes, you could say something like that is going on. The central role of the Koran has to be emphasised: it is the Book that gives form and substance to a basic sense of belonging. The Book takes on many roles, depending on the circumstances. It has a central role in prison or in detention centres where the Book is insulted and profaned by the men who have power; it is central to the defence of an independent space around which the first embryonic forms of resistance can be organised, first on an individual level, then collectively. It's not unusual in fact it may be this way in most cases for young people who have had anything to do with any sort of prayer outside to read the book and then start to profess the faith inside the prison. They're not just reading the Book to make use of it for their own advantage, as it might seem: it's something that works in a profound way on the individual conscience. It is never a superficial reading, even though for obvious reasons it's nothing like erudite, scholarly study. The reading turns into a weapon, a model, a way of behaving in life that re-establishes one's way of being and acting in the world. The Book makes it possible to embark on a journey, starting from a new self-esteem, which is easily verified through the degree of social recognition the believer gains among his friends or social group. It equips him to look the world in the face with pride, instead of having to suffer it continually. Reading the Koran allows him to find the ground from which fear can be overcome, so that attacking the aggressor really becomes feasible.

You have to start from the experiences that make up the young man's life. Tough as he may be, he always has to settle for the least bad option, one day after another. Humiliated at work, followed by the police, always looking over his shoulder because someone wants to settle a score. If, in the best instance, he avoids drugs and doesn't get stuck in some bad business, his only horizon will be a wretched and segregated life caught between unemployment and low wages. Reading the Koran introduces him to a different world, where the life of the believer has a purpose. Maybe the best demonstration of what you've called "DIY Islam" lies in the constant formation of Salafite groups. I'll give you an example. There was a gang - one of the many in the vast urban sprawl - made up of 18 to 22-year-old Arab and African guys. They clashed several times with the police, eventually reaching a high level of antagonism. They had no great ideas in mind, but they soon realised that their way of behaving was leading nowhere. They understood that in order to have a perspective and a meaning, their rage and hate had to be shifted where there was something capable of giving a purpose and a project to their acts. They found the answer on the internet. They visited some websites and took their inspiration from one of them. This was how their Islam started. Things like this are going on everywhere now. Islamic groups defining themselves as Salafite are being formed all the time.

The logic behind their birth is no different from that inside the Nahr al Barid Palestinian camp.<sup>15</sup> Everyone knows, I suppose, how things were going there. The group was formed by mercenaries hired by the Lebanese government, by Hariri himself, with an anti-Hezbollah role. It was made up of Saudi, Yemeni, Egyptian and North African combatants, plus a small group of Palestinians. Its function was to offset the military force of Hezbollah. Formed by first-rate combatants, it also functioned as Hariri's personal guard. Then suddenly something went wrong. Hariri did not pay them their wages any more, and they decided to take it by raiding the bank of Amiun. This set off Hariri's reaction, and he used the army against them. In order to do that - considering the structural weakness of the army - he had to turn to the United States for armaments and ammunitions. Up to this point, the story seems closer to hard boiled novels than to real politics. But something changes among the mercenaries. The group starts to lose its exclusively military dimension and discovers - rediscovers - a different one, quickly transforming itself into a Salafite grouping in open disagreement with its old masters. To the eyes of the world - and this is the real paradox - these masters represent the most orthodox agenda in the Islamic and wider world. If orthodoxy exists, it's represented by the one who hired that group several times. So how can their decision to proclaiming themselves Salafites be explained, if not in relation to the way that group started to interpret the Koran? Let's go back to what you called, a bit disrespectfully perhaps, "DIY Islam". From the moment when that group broke from its past, it took its name from the only source capable of showing the way. They started again from the Book. They rediscovered it and took a polemical position as Salafites as a way of clearly opposing those who in their eyes had now become traitors or, if you prefer, apostates.

The story is not so unusual. The Christians who broke from the official Church did not choose to call themselves something else, on the contrary, they insisted on the authenticity of their Christianity, clashing polemically with the bearers of the official theology, calling themselves more Christian than the Christians. Something similar happens in the Islamic world. Those who belong to the Islamic world and break from the powers that dominate it do not become something different, but rediscover a different model of Islam which, in their eyes, becomes the authentic Islam. It's an old story, which only the racist propaganda of the West has managed to transform into an exotic and folkloric strangeness typical of inferior peoples. I don't get the reason why, in the world of the dominators, it's perfectly legitimate to question the essence of real America, real Europe, real socialism, real democracy, or real liberalism while, if it is Islam that does that, it becomes a sign of cultural backwardness, fundamentalism, anti-modernism, etc.. What happened in the Palestinian refugee camp happens every day, even if it is not in the spotlight every day. Those who want to resist rediscover Islam following - let's say - non-official paths. In this sense it is partly correct to talk about "DIY Islam". I have to insist, though, to put it in simple terms once again, that "DIY Islam" does not mean "disposable Islam", there is nothing superficial in discovering Islam. On the contrary, we have to

remember that this path leads to joining the cause of resistance where one's own life is at risk. This is a passage that cannot be approached in a superficial way, and anyone who does it like that ends up quickly turned back. There is no reason to confuse an easy enthusiasm that melts like snow in the sun when things get difficult with the ripening of a fighting consciousness which, as with every choice of this kind, accepts the possibility of dying. (O.)



Image: Outskirts of Pontoise, France

Although public, political and sociological discourse continues to ignore it, spontaneous militancy is a booming phenomenon across significant sections of Islamic social worlds. In many respects it emerges from the DIY Islam movement whose genesis we have briefly outlined. We will try to discuss this with M., a Briton of Tunisian origin who occasionally goes to France and is associated with political Islam. I met him thanks to the mediation of the Palestinian militant we've just heard. Our meeting takes place at the end of August 2007, in a public space in the north part of the *banlieue* between Argenteuil and Pontoise.

*How does what has been referred to as the spontaneous Islamic militancy develop?*

Its development is above all a direct consequence of a consensus and the kind of images it stirred up across vast swathes of the former colonial world even before concentrating in areas directly associated with Islam. It's important to make this clear because it helps in shifting the approach to the question. The spread of Islamic spontaneity could be the litmus test. First of all, let's see where these groups form, then second, the previous history of actors involved. If there's one thing this milieu is far removed from, it's traditional religion. We just need to go back to the French revolt of Autumn 2005. In that instance the traditional Islamic groups tried to claim a representative role. Everyone knows very well that no one took any notice of them, and in some cases they even had to flee from acts of open hostility. And yet it's in this youth context which at first glance seems closer to anarchism than to any kind of religious impulse that Islamic spontaneity has taken hold. And this is not just a French phenomenon. The situation in the UK, a country I know much better, is almost exactly the same. So perhaps we have to understand the meaning, between the mythical and the imaginary, that Islam has taken on, and what has brought this about. If we were to go to these groups — although it would be better to say social areas — and start talking about Islamic theology, they would look at us like we were aliens. What has a hold on them is certainly not the construction of an Islamic state, the restoration of the Caliphate or careful observance of Islamic law.

Maybe for a quicker understanding of what weâre talking about, it will mean more to pass on something I heard recently from some French friends. The police patrolling some parts of the *banlieue* have recently taken to using exactly the same equipment and technology that the Israelis use in Lebanon and Palestine. The immediate response of these young groups has been: 'we are like Hezbollah.' Thatâs the point: if they have to face the police, they identify themselves with that winning model of resistance to domination. Hezbollah becomes a point of reference, a model to identify with, not just because it embodies one Islamic theological tendency rather than another, but also because it represents an actual model of opposition to the enemy. Then maybe itâs better to start from the perception, the identification of who and what is the enemy, rather than looking for unlikely kinds of attachment to some kind of social model which in any case no one has any idea about. In todayâs world the most 'Islamic' society and political model in absolute terms is that of Saudi Arabia, which is a model that nobody wants to live under or fight for. To put it very clearly, what could be called as Islamic revival is not based on a model of society to be founded, but on opposition to a political, social and economic model which is seen as oppressive, unjust and racist, in which colonial logic never ended. In this light Islam is everything that best synthesises the will and the ability to oppose the rulers.

None of those who feel attracted to Islam here has ever directly experienced the reality of the Middle East, but they have directly experienced the meaning of oppression, domination and racism here in the European metropolis. To a lot of people this may sound strange, but the Islamic revival is a product of the western world. And maybe it should also be said that today the east/west division is totally misleading because in reality everything is west. For better or for worse, thatâs the scenario we have to begin from and think about. Itâs certainly no coincidence that Hamas or Hezbollah come up more often than Islam â or better still, that Islam *is* Hamas and Hezbollah. The process starts from these two movements and goes to Islam, and not the contrary. The reasoning is simple: if Hamas and Hezbollah â which I identify with because of what they have been able to do â are Islamic then so am I. Maybe thatâs simplifying a bit too much, but it gives enough of an idea of the heart of the matter. Buried within all this thereâs a predisposition towards resistance, which is very important. While itâs true that Islam has an essential role in this process, the fight against imperialism has no particular geographical or religious nature, aspects of it apply in objective, general terms and concern sectors not necessarily influenced by Islam. From this point of view the experience of Hezbollah in Lebanon needs to be considered. It now has a strong presence in most European countries, especially France and England, but also Spain, Germany and Italy. The fact is that many people are willing to struggle, thatâs the most important thing.

I would like to end by pointing out one thing. In the social world of Muslim immigrants the memory of the national anti-colonial liberation struggles plays an increasingly important role in building a strong identity. Just think of the attention devoted to the Algerian war. This is probably the example that best illustrates the prevailing feeling in much of the immigrant world. This strikes me as very important since, as everyone is aware to some extent, the Algerian revolution can be seen as the event that more than any other combined elements of social and political justice with national and religious feeling, while strongly pushing the development of a cultural identity not subject to the western colonialist logic. Anyone seriously wanting to understand the movement or movements of political Islam should probably start from there. (M.)

Belleville

Image: Street in Belleville, Paris

At this point it seems possible to draw some conclusions. Whether or not one agrees with what we have heard is beside the point. One thing, however, is beyond argument: that there is a strong presence of an active *political* discourse within migrant worlds and those associated with Islam. This discourse merits particular attention because it is not restricted to the narrow circles usually focused on by specialists, whether politicians and/or intellectuals. On the contrary, in a way that recalls the best-known grass roots political militants, the main social actors come from the ranks of the lowly [*minuto*] people to whom attention rarely turns.<sup>16</sup> Infamous women and men apparently excluded from every kind of public protagonism.<sup>17</sup> However, some indicators contradict the presumption that these subjects lack agency, and call for more attentive study of the *discursive orders* coming from their worlds. Particularly worthy of serious consideration are the final speaker's last statements regarding the Algerian war: a call whose origins are far removed from the field of political Islam.

As Alastair Horne (2007) recently pointed out, a curtain seems to have been drawn over the eight year long Algerian war, leaving only historians of decolonisation interested.<sup>18</sup> But these episodes offer many insights into today's world and the wars waged across it. In many ways the Algerian revolution seems like the starting point of a present tense in which, from the revolt of the *banlieue* and the endless western metropolitan ghettos to the Palestinian Intifada, the battle of Falluja and the Abu Ghraib events, the story is far from ending. Its relevance extends beyond the limits of specialist studies: not yesterday's history, but the cipher of the present.

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## Footnotes

[1] For a discussion see F. Sossi, *Autobiografie negate. Immigrati nei Lager del presente*, Roma: Manifestolibri, 2002; F. Sossi, *Migrare. Spazi di confinamento e strategie di esistenza*, Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2007.

[2] Among the many readings of the political behaviour of migrants see Sandro Mezzadra (ed.), *I confini della libertà. Per un'analisi politica delle migrazioni contemporanee*, Roma: Derive Approdi, 2004; E. Quadrelli, 'Militanti politici di base. Banlieuesards e politica', in M. Callari Galli (ed.), *Mappe urbane. Per un'etnografia della città*, Rimini: Guaraldi, 2007.

[3] Concerning rhetoric about global war see *Conflitti globali n.1, La guerra dei mondi*, Milano: Shake Edizioni, 2005.

[4] It is not of secondary importance to underscore how the rhetorics used inside the geopolitical and geoeconomic areas of the Western territories regarding the migrants question are identical to the ones they (the migrants) use to justify the necessity of actions on a global scale. See: D. Zolo, *Chi dice umanità. Guerra, diritto e ordine globale*, Torino: Einaudi, 2000.

[5] George Simmel, 'Il povero', *Sociologia*, Milano: Edizioni di Comunità, 1989.

[6] For an ethnographic description of these worlds see A. Dal Lago, E. Quadrelli, *La città e le ombre. Crimini, criminali, cittadini*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2003; Quadrelli (2003).

- [7] For an overview on these events see Limes, 2006. On the birth of Hizbollah see Charara & Domont, 2006; S. Mauro, *Il radicalismo islamico. Hizbollah, da movimento rivoluzionario a partito politico*, Marina di Massa: Edizioni Clandestine, 2007 and Walid Charara & Frédéric Domont, *Le Hezbollah: un mouvement islamo-nationaliste*, Fayard: Paris, 2004.
- [8] Carl Schmitt, *Teoria del partigiano*, Milan: Adelphi, 2005.
- [9] Carl Schmitt, 'Il concetto di "apolitico"', *Le categorie del "politico"*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1972.
- [10] There seems to be more sense today in talking of wretched of the metropolis. I have tried to argue this position in E. Quadrelli, *Evasioni e rivolte. Migranti Cpt resistenze*, Milan: Agenzia X, 2007.
- [11] Concerning Hamas see R. Balducci, *La bomba Hamas. Storia del radicalismo islamico in Palestina*, Rome: Datanews, 2006; K. Hroub, *Hamas. Un movimento tra lotta armata e governo della Palestina raccontato da un giornalista di Al Jazeera*, Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2006.
- [12] C. Galli (ed.), *Multiculturalismo. Ideologie e sfide*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006.
- [13] As in the well known and vastly argued theories of S.P. Huntington, *Lo scontro delle civiltà e il nuovo ordine mondiale*, Milano: Garzanti, 2000.
- [14] G. Kepel, *Fitna. Guerra nel cuore dell'Islam*, Roma & Bari: Editori Laterza, 2006.
- [15] For a partial reconstruction of these events see Limes, 'La Palestina impossibile', No. 5, 2007.
- [16] The reference is to D. Montaldi, *Militanti politici di base*, Torino: Einaudi, 1971.
- [17] See Michel Foucault, 'La vita degli uomini infami', in A. Dal Lago (ed.), *Archivio Foucault* Vol. 2, 1971 & 1977. *Poteri, saperi, strategie*, Milan: Feltrinelli, 1997.
- [18] The works of Fanon remain still topical today Franz Fanon, *Scritti politici. L'anno V della rivoluzione algerina*, Vol. II, Roma: Derive Approdi, 2007.