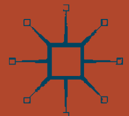
Welfare Activities by New Religious Actors

Islamic Organisations in Italy and Switzerland

PALGRAVE POLITICS OF IDENTITY & CITIZENSHIP SERIES

Elisa Banfi



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Elisa Banfi
Genève, Switzerland

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This scientific effort would not have been possible without the hardship that all my genealogy has experienced, especially my grandparents Giuseppe and Bambina. It would also not have been possible without the sacrifice that my partner, Slim, endured for the last seven years. He has helped me in any possible way. It would, moreover, not have been possible without the support of my parents Franca and Cesare and my brother Michele.
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Preface

A growing body of research has demonstrated that Islamic associations have diffusely implemented heterogeneous social programmes across European countries, especially over the past two decades. Recent studies have focused on how Islamic welfare activities and projects have striven against social inequalities concerning Muslims and, sometimes, non-Muslims. Immigration is a central issue in studying Islamic social engagement across European countries. On the continent, Muslims still have limited access to social rights because the majority of them are still immigrants, asylum seekers, or refugees.

The academic discourse on welfare religious services, especially on the Islamic ones, diverges: some scholars have criticised the contribution of religious organisations in combating social injustice; others have described it as a particular engagement of civil society with poverty and exclusion. Political sciences stress the relevance of these associations acting as mediators between individuals and state institutions. Other scholars have outlined how these associations may improve the quality of democracies. Some scholars describe the negative effects of faith-based welfare services on public welfare systems. Finally, there is no consensus regarding the role of religious organisations in fighting social exclusion.

Studies on Islamic welfare engagement in Europe are very recent and do not yet concern all European urban realities. The lack of research in this area is not accidental. The design requirements for a systematic

examination of the issue demand a relevant number of intra-disciplinary competences. Furthermore, quantitative and qualitative data are difficult to gather and little attention has been focused on institutional factors that may predict forms by which Islamic actors develop social activities in determinate space-temporal contexts. Outcomes of the Islamic welfare engagement are also often neglected.

This book represents a preliminary effort at providing a complete case-study comparative examination of urban areas in two neglected, but relevant, locations: Switzerland and Italy, two countries that have never been analysed from the aforementioned perspective. For that reason, the purpose of this thesis is, indeed, twofold. On the one hand, it aims to describe how Islamic welfare has been organised in four urban contexts not yet analysed (Geneva, Milan, Rome, Zurich) by the literature on this topic. On the other hand, this study aims to analyse the institutional opportunities and constraints that can influence forms of social activities at the local level.

To perform my analysis, I use concepts developed in social movement studies, such as institutional opportunity structures. Following this approach, I focus my investigation on three explanatory factors: (1) models of citizenship and migratory regimes, (2) church–state cleavages and the institutional recognition of Islamic organisations, and (3) the degree and typology of subsidiarity in welfare systems.

Finally, I suggest how Islamic welfare in Europe can have relevant consequences that impact inclusion. Islamic social services can have contradictory repercussions: on the one hand, they can encourage equal access to social resources for poor citizens and immigrants; conversely, they can produce social fragmentation and increase inequality among different subgroups of the population.

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Contents

1 Introduction 1

2 Analysing Islamic Welfare Activism in Western European Countries 31

3 Islamic Sociocultural Activism in Zurich 75

4 Islamic Sociocultural Activism in Rome 97

5 Islamic Sociocultural Activism in Geneva 127

6 Islamic Sociocultural Activism in Milan 153

7 Intranational and Cross-national Data Analysis 181

8 Conclusion 199

A.1. Operationalisation of IOSs 209

A.2. IOSs in the Fields of Immigration and Islam 215

A.3. IOSs in the Fields of Immigration and Welfare 229

A.4. Institutional Opportunity Structures in the Field of Religion 235

A.5. Survey Questions 241

Bibliography 257

Index 273

List of Acronyms

ACBG	The Cultural Association of Bosnians in Geneva (*Association culturelle des Bosniaques de Genève*)
ACMM	Meyrin Muslim Cultural Association (Association culturelle musulmane meyrinoise)
ADMI	Association of Muslim Women of Italy (*Associazione Donne Musulmane d'Italia*)
AFMG	Muslim Women of Geneva (*Association des Femmes Musulmanes de Genève*)
AGESMI	Muslim Youth and Students Association Italy (*Associazione Giovani e Studenti Musulmani Italia*)
AIASGE	Islamic Association of Ahl al-Bayt Switzerland Geneva (*Association Islamique d'Ahl al-Bayt de Suisse Genève*)
AIII	International Association for Information on Islam (*Associazione Internazionale per l'Informazione sull'Islam*)
AMI	Association for Italian Muslims (*Associazione Musulmani Italiani*)
CADR	Ambrosian Centre for the Dialogue with Religions (*Centro Ambrosiano di Dialogo con le Religioni*)
CADR	Ambrosian Centre of Religious Documentation (*Centro Ambrosiano di Documentazione per le Religioni*, CADR)

CAIL	Coordination of the Islamic Association of the Lazio (Coordinamento Associazioni Islamiche del Lazio)
CESAIM	Center for associations and entrepreneurship for migrants (Centro sviluppo associazionismo e imprenditoria migranti CESAIM)
CICI	Islamic Cultural Centre of Italy (*Centro Islamico Culturale d'Italia*)
CII	Committee for Italian Islam (*Comitato per l'Islam Italiano*)
CIML	Islamic Centre of Milan and Lombardia (*Centro Islamico di Milano e Lombardia*)
CL	Communion and Liberation (*Comunione e Liberazione*)
COREIS	Islamic Religious Community (*Comunità Religiosa Islamica*, COREIS)
Dialog Institut	Institute for Intercultural Cooperation and Dialogue (*Das Institut für interkulturelle Zusammenarbeit und Dialog*)
Diyanet	Turkish Directorate for Religious Affairs (İsviçre Türk Diyanet Vakfı—Islamic Türkisch Stiftung für die Schweiz)
EU	European Union
FAGS	Federation des Alevis Communities in Switzerland (*Föderation der alevitischen Gemeinden in der Schweiz*)
FEC	Foundation of Between-Knowledge (*Fondation de l'entre-connaissance*)
FCI	Islamic Cultural Foundation (*Fondation Culturelle Islamique*)
FCMG	Muslim community Geneva Foundation (*Fondation communauté musulmane Genève*)
FIDS	Federation of Islamic Umbrella Organisations (*Föderation Islamischer Dachorganisationen Schweiz*)
FII	Federation of Italian Islam (*Federazione dell'Islam Italiano*)
FIOE	Federation of Islamic Organisations in Europe
FUCI	Italian Catholic Federation of University Students (*Federazione Universitaria Cattolica Italiana*)

GMI	Youth Muslims of Italy (*Giovani Musulmani d'Italia*)
ICI	Islamic Cultural Institute (*Istituto Culturale Islamico*)
ICIO	Islamic Cultural Institute of Ostia (*Istituto Culturale Islamico di Ostia*)
IGMG	The Islamic Community of Millî Görüş (Islamische Gemeinschaft Millî Görüş)
IOS	Institutional opportunity structure
IRAS	Interreligious Working Community of Switzerland (Interreligiösen Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Schweiz)
KIOS	Coordination of Islamic Organisations in Switzerland
MWL	Muslim World League
RC	Communist Revolution (*Rivoluzione Comunista*)
SEL	Left Ecology Freedom Party (*Sinistra Ecologia Libertà*)
SGBA/GOIZS	Central Committee of the Islamic Community in Switzerland—*Hauptausschuss der Islamischen Gemeinschaft Schweiz*)
SIGZ	Islamic Community Foundation Zurich (Stiftung Islamische Gemeinschaft Zürich)
UAMI	Albanian Muslims Union (*Unione degli Albanesi Musulmani in Italia*)
UCOII	Union of Islamic Communities and Organisations of Italy (*Unione delle Comunità Islamiche d'Italia*)
UMMA	Islamic Cantonal Federation in Bern (*der Islamische Kantonalverband Bern*).
UOMG	Union of Muslim Organisations in Geneva (*Union des Organisation Musulmanes de Genève*)
USMI	Union of the Muslim Students (*Unione degli Studenti Musulmani*)
VIKZ	Association of Islamic Cultural Centres (Verband Islamischer Kulturzentren)
VIOZ	Federation of the Islamic organisations in Zurich (Vereinigung der Islamischen Organisationen in Zurich)

List of Figures

Fig. 1.1	Institutional opportunity structures as independent variable	9
Fig. 1.2	Theoretical framework	19
Fig. 2.1	Theoretical framework	63

List of Tables

Table 1.1	Runnymede Trust definition of closed and open views of Islam	3
Table 2.1	National patterns of interaction between state welfare systems and religious actors during the *Trente Glorieuses*	34
Table 2.2	National patterns of interaction between state welfare systems and religious actors after the economic crises of the 1970s	35
Table 2.3	Variations in *the ius sanguinis* model between Switzerland and Italy	51
Table 2.4	Variance in the regional welfare systems of Lombardia and Lazio	55
Table 2.5	Variations in the cantonal welfare systems of Zurich and Geneva	56
Table 2.6	Summary of mapping	59
Table 2.7	Intra-national patterns	65
Table 3.1	Presence of immigrants in Islamic associations interviewed in Zurich	84
Table 3.2	Main factors encouraging the foundation of Islamic organisations interviewed in Zurich	86
Table 3.3	Main objectives of Islamic organisations interviewed in Zurich	87
Table 3.4	Swiss born presence in Islamic associations interviewed in Zurich	88

Table 3.5 Islamic population in the canton of Zurich by gender 88
Table 3.6 Presence of female members in Islamic organisations interviewed in Zurich 89
Table 3.7 Main nationalities of founders, members and committee members of Islamic associations interviewed in Zurich 89
Table 4.1 Main nationalities of founders, common members, and committee members of Islamic associations interviewed in Rome 103
Table 4.2 Immigrant presence in Islamic associations in Rome by founders, committee members and general members 103
Table 4.3 Italian born members in Islamic associations interviewed in Rome 104
Table 4.4 Female presence on committees and associations in Rome 104
Table 4.5 The locations of Islamic organisations in Rome 112
Table 4.6 Main factors encouraging the foundation of Islamic organisations in Rome 115
Table 4.7 Main objective of Islamic organisations interviewed in Rome 117
Table 5.1 Main factors encouraging the founding of Islamic organisations in Geneva 129
Table 5.2 Main objectives of Islamic organisations in Geneva 130
Table 5.3 Presence of immigrants among committee and general members of Islamic associations interviewed in Geneva 132
Table 5.4 Presence of Swiss-born members in Islamic associations interviewed in Geneva 133
Table 5.5 Main nationalities of founders, common members and committee members of Islamic associations interviewed in Geneva 133
Table 6.1 Main factors encouraging the founding of Islamic organisations interviewed in Milan 171
Table 6.2 Main objectives of Islamic organisations interviewed in Milan 172
Table 6.3 Main nationalities of founders, common members, and committee members of Islamic associations in Rome 173
Table 6.4 Female presence on committees and in associations in Milan 173
Table 6.5 Average age of members in Islamic associations interviewed in Milan 173
Table 7.1 Social and cultural latent variables in Geneva 183
Table 7.2 Activities of the Islamic organisations interviewed in Geneva 184

Table 7.3	Frequency of service provision for Muslims and non-Muslims among the Islamic organisations in Geneva	185
Table 7.4	Social and cultural latent variables in Zurich	186
Table 7.5	Activities of Islamic organisations interviewed in Zurich	187
Table 7.6	Frequency of service provision for Muslims and non-Muslims among the Islamic organisations in Zurich	188
Table 7.7	Social and cultural latent variables in Milan	189
Table 7.8	Activities of Islamic organisations interviewed in Milan	190
Table 7.9	Frequency of service provision for Muslims and non-Muslims among the Islamic organisations in Milan	191
Table 7.10	Social and cultural latent variables in Rome	192
Table 7.11	Activities of Islamic organisations interviewed in Rome	193
Table 7.12	Frequency of service provision for Muslims and non-Muslims among the Islamic organisations in Rome	194
Table 7.13	Pearson's correlation—Geneva	195
Table 7.14	Pearson's correlation—Zurich	196
Table 7.15	Pearson's correlation—Rome	196
Table 7.16	Pearson's correlation—Milan	197
Table 7.17	Latent variables for social, cultural, and religious activities	197
Table A.2.1	Number of years of residence	215
Table A.2.2	Automatic attribution or facilitated naturalisation for second-generation immigrants	219
Table A.2.3	Dual citizenship	220
Table A.2.4	Cultural requirements for residence	221
Table A.2.5	Cultural requirements for naturalisation	222
Table A.2.6	Conditions for family reunification for non-EU nationals	224
Table A.2.7	Conditions for expulsion	226
Table A.3.1	Conditions for family reunification for non-EU nationals (welfare)	231
Table A.3.2	Contributory and noncontributory welfare benefits for residents	232
Table A.3.3	Welfare and social security dependence as an obstacle to naturalisation	233
Table A.3.4	Welfare dependence as a reason for expulsion	234
Table A.3.5	Welfare dependence as a reason for non-renewal for permit	234
Table A.4.1	State recognition of Islam	236
Table A.4.2	Economic benefits or subsidies for officially recognised religious organisations	238

1

Introduction

1.1 Islamophobia, Islamophilia and Anti-Islamophobic Discourses

More than 300 years have passed since the battle of Vienna, during which the Ottoman Empire nearly conquered the Hapsburg capital. However, the possibility of an alledged Islamic invasion still seems to haunt the European nations, whereas present-day European societies seem to be unconsciously rearming to counteract an attack from within their borders. The renewed fear of an Islamic offensive against European countries is spreading and growing in intensity at both popular and institutional levels. This fear has taken different forms in recent decades: the fear of a demographic threat (Fargues 2000), an economic offensive after the oil shock (Deltombe 2005), the Islamisation of Europe, and terrorism (Geisser 2003). Presently, this fear of Islam increasingly expresses the economic/identitarian crisis of the middle class and poorest populations in Western countries. Many scholars have investigated the historical roots of Islamophobia. A first group of studies has illustrated the articulation between the fear of Muslim and their racialisation. Before the arrival of Europeans in the Americas, European states had already begun the racialisation of religious subjects, such as Muslims and Jews, by laying the groundwork for

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Islamophobic categorisations (Meer 2013). Islamophobia has been nurtured by the racialisation of religion during the *Reconquista* period and the fight against Moors in Spain (Rana 2007). A second group of studies has analysed the relation between Islamophobia and Orientalism (Meer 2014; Marwan 2010). In fact, the construction of postcolonial Islamophobia is strongly linked to the alleged incompatibility of European and Islamic values founded on an Orientalist analysis of Muslim societies. This alleged incompatibility is rooted, as Armando Salvatore suggests (2013, 8), in a 'reluctance to attribute a transformative potential to non-Western social formations, with a corresponding devaluation of their religious and more broadly cultural traditions'. A third group of scholars has analysed the relation of Islamophobia with the accumulation of capital in the modern world system (Grosfoguel and Mielants 2006). They have defined Islamophobia as a 'Western religious, cultural, Orientalist and epistemic racism', a constitutive element (Tamdgidi 2012) and an 'organizing principle' (Bazian 2007) of the 'modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system' (Grosfoguel and Mielants 2006).

Beyond the academic debates and theoretical nuances, currently, anyone can verify in his or her daily life that this fear has become a crucial watershed for European debates on democracy and public policies. Since the end of the last century, a fear of Muslims has become a point on the agenda of several extreme-right political parties in Europe and has resulted in susceptibility on the part of all political actors to Islamophobic discourses. European institutions, scholars, and civil-society actors increasingly employ the concepts of *Islamophobia, Islamophilia,* and *anti-Islamophobia* in debates concerning the future of European societies. For instance, the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) has repeatedly outlined (ECRI 2000, 2002, 2004) how, as a result of the fight against terrorism, Muslim communities are subject to prejudice, 'which manifests itself in different guises, in particular through negative general attitudes but also to varying degrees, through discriminatory acts and through violence and harassment' (ECRI 2000, 3). Additionally, the European monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia stated in 2001 that '… in all countries a latent Islamophobia has used the present circumstances to come to light, finding its expression in the mentioned acts of physical and verbal abuse. These episodes and other signs (i.e., the results of opinion polls in the Netherlands) seem to indicate that in some countries

the gap between the main population and the minorities is still large' (EUMC 2001, 2). In 2005, the European Council published the report *Islamophobia and Its Consequences on Young People*, in which it affirms that Islamophobia is 'a threat to social cohesion' (Ramberg 2004, 6).

In general, institutional reports agree that Islamophobia produces a predisposition to—in an ahistorical way—conceptualise any Muslim actor operating within European borders in the same way as within an Orientalist paradigm.[1] The institutional current use of the concept of Islamophobia is very indebted to its first definition proposed in the report *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* published by the Runnymede Trust organisation.[2] In the report, eight features were attributed to closed views of Islam and eight to open views of Islam as Table 1.1 displays.[3]

Table 1.1 Runnymede Trust definition of closed and open views of Islam

Closed (insular) views of Islam	Open views of Islam
1. Islam seen as a monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to new realities.	1. Islam seen as diverse and progressive, with internal differences, debates and development.
2. Islam seen as separate and other—(a) not having values in common with other cultures, (b) not affected by them and (c) not influencing them.	2. Islam seen as interdependent with other faiths and cultures—(a) having certain shared values and aims (b) affected by them and (c) enriching them.
3. Islam seen as inferior to the West—barbaric, irrational, primitive and sexist.	3. Islam seen as distinctively different but not deficient and as equally worthy of respect.
4. Islam seen as violent, aggressive, threatening, supportive of terrorism and engaged in 'a clash' of civilizations.	4. Islam seen as an actual or potential partner in joint cooperative enterprises and in the solution of shared problems.
5. Islam seen as a political ideology used for a political or military advantage.	5. Islam seen as a genuine religious faith, practised sincerely by its adherents.
6. Criticisms made of 'the West' by Islam are rejected out of hand.	6. Criticisms of 'the West' and other cultures are considered and debated.
7. Hostility towards Islam used to justify discriminatory practises towards Muslims and exclusion of Muslims from mainstream society.	7. Debates and disagreements with Islam do not diminish efforts to combat discrimination and exclusion.
8. Anti-Muslim hostility accepted as natural and 'normal'.	8. Critical views of Islam are themselves subjected to critique, lest they be inaccurate and unfair.

Runnymede Trust, Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia and Conway (1997)

Among these, the second closed view of Islam is the most relevant for the subject of this study, that is, 'Islam seen as separate and other'. It does not have values in common with other cultures, is not affected by them and does not influence them' (Runnymede Trust, Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, and Conway 1997).

Unfortunately, Muslim European populations often are represented as if they were cut off from the state structure, any historical relationship between secular and religious powers, the national or regional labour market, typical patterns of popular mobilisation or the degree of federalism, and the welfare state system. In doing so, an epistemic Islamophobia has fostered a crystallised conception of the Muslim presence in Europe. Therefore, the 'Islamophobic approach' has analytically isolated individual and collective expressions of the Muslim faith from other social actors.

From this perspective, Islamophobia imposes a perspective on Islamic social realities that does not consider interactions and interchanges between Muslims and non-Muslims or in Muslim different actors. The Islamophobic perspective ignores the historical permeability of social actors and denies contextual influences. When such a 'primordial perspective'[4] pervades all social actors, including institutions and associations, collective identities are likely to be fragmented into ghettoising identities. In particular, social policies based on such 'primordial' conceptions (Crepaz 2008) could fracture European societies by destroying the common sense of collective belonging based on the respect of mutual and plural coexistence.

Needless to say, 9/11 significantly affected the social representations of the Muslim segment of the global population (Telseren 2016; Cousin and Vitale 2012; Modood et al. 2006). The war on terrorism has irreversibly affected the public representations and studies of the Islamic presence in Europe and in the West in general. Since 2001, the segment of the population professing Islam has progressively conceptually been reduced to its religious identity by media, scholars, and political authorities. Other sociodemographic characteristics, such as age, gender, professional skills, and resident status, appear to be subsumed by religious identity in the case of Muslim believers.

Acting against this trend, as Said hoped for,[5] this thesis focuses on combining various theoretical tools to describe the factors shaping Islamic social activities in Switzerland and Italy. Similar to other religions, Islam concerns both an individual and public sphere. When Muslim believers mobilise themselves collectively in the name of Allah, they overcome individual religious practise to constitute a new social actor. Mosques and Islamic schools are only two of the organisational possibilities. In this study, I analyse mosques, Koranic schools and Islamic associations in four spatiotemporal contexts and investigate the organising process employed by Muslim believers, focusing on the constitutive relationship between Islam and immigration in Europe.

Moreover, this study seeks to explain the influence of institutional context on the Islamic organisational presence in two European countries, with a particular focus on the social activities Islamic collective actors have developed.

Instead of focusing exclusively on the theological reason encouraging Islamic actors to develop their social activities, this study will investigate how institutional structures influence this kind of social agency. Three research questions will lead the empirical analysis of this book:

How do welfare national and local structures influence the birth of Islamic organisations?

How might the relationship between state and religious groups shape the organisational strategies of Islamic social organisations engaged in welfare activities?

How do institutions and civil society interact with the network of Islamic organisations?

By answering these questions, this thesis aims to analyse the variety of social programmes that Islamic organisations develop in different contexts. To investigate casual factors that drive Islamic organisations to focus on welfare activities, I select four pertinent case studies that have never been analysed by this theoretical approach: Geneva and Zurich in the Swiss Confederation and Milan and Rome in the Italian Republic.

Three factors motivated the selection of these two countries. The first reason pertains to the lack of direct colonial consequences on the presence of Islamic organisations in these countries. Each country experienced the immigration of Muslim believers; this only began in the second half of the twentieth century. Both countries differ from ex-colonial powers, such as the Netherlands, United Kingdom or France, where the colonial experience shaped the variety of immigrant nationalities residing in national frontiers. In both countries, immigrants practising Islam do not necessarily originate from former colonies. Switzerland began only at the end of 1980s to observe the growth of ex-Yugoslav and Maghrebian immigrants, who constitute only a part of the Muslim population residing in the country. In Italy, immigrants from its former colonies, Somalia and Libya, do not constitute the majority of Islamic immigrants, and the Albanian immigrant presence in Italy does not depend on special ex-colonial agreements between Italy and Albania but rather on the geographical exposure of the Italian peninsula to immigrant arrivals. In both countries, Islamic mosques or organisations are not *colonial consequences*, such as the Great Mosque of Paris (Liauzu 2007). In summary, in Switzerland and Italy, the colonial past does not directly influence the Islamic organisational presence by shaping its quantitative or qualitative characteristics. The second reason relates to the *ius sanguinis* migratory regime adopted in both countries that creates favourable conditions for studying the social activities of networks of Islamic organisations. In fact, the greater difficulty immigrants face in *ius sanguinis* countries when attempting to access social, political, and civil rights creates a pool of potential Muslim immigrants who are forced to find social services outside of public institutional offerings. Conversely, in countries adopting the multicultural model of citizenship, such as the United Kingdom, Islamic organisations are often systematically integrated with state policies designed to assist immigrants in properly accessing public services. In *ius sanguinis* countries, public financing for Islamic associations is rare or nonexistent. Therefore, Islamic organisations have two primary means of developing their welfare activities: they can use their social programmes to pave the way for state recognition and cooperation with other civil-society actors; or they can provide social programmes by compensating for the lack of institutional services for the most disadvantaged segments of the population by bypassing insufficient public services.

The third reason concerns the different forms of federalism pursued in Switzerland and Italy that increase the impact local factors have on Islamic organisations and their activities. Furthermore, the recentness of the Islamic immigrant presence and absence of postcolonial influences have eliminated many transnational factors that can interfere in the activities of Islamic organisational networks, such as postcolonial legacies. Moreover, other local institutional specificities related to state–church cleavages and welfare programmes are relevant in explaining the development of Islamic social programmes. For instance, I take account of different forms of state religious recognition within a single country (in Switzerland, Geneva represents a secular model and Zurich a church-state model) and different forms of state recognition of Islamic organisations within a single country (in Italy, Rome allowed the construction of the Saudi Arabia Mosque in the heart of the city, whereas the municipality of Milan obstructed the construction of Islamic prayer space for 20 years).

Finally, I decided to focus on the local characteristics of the host societies that have shaped the emergence of social activities among Islamic organisations over the last three decades. By investigating how institutions manage the material and spiritual needs of immigrants and believers, I observe how the local institutional setting affects Islamic organisations offering social, cultural, and religious services to their members.

These four urban case studies—Rome, Milan, Zurich and Geneva—are selected to test specific intranational differences in Islamic welfare activities and the related Islamic organisational networks. Many scholars in this field have demonstrated the relevance of urban areas when focusing on new forms of welfare and social inclusion (Friedrichs et al. 2012). Rome, Milan, Zurich, and Geneva can become areas in which Islamic organisations, fostered by specific and local contexts, can foster exclusive or inclusive experiences by increasing their welfare activities.

Moreover, the urban areas studied present a relevant variety of Islamic organisations with local, national, or transnational scopes, such as Millî Görüş, the Muslim Brotherhood, Ahl al-Bayt, or the Gülen Movement. In each city, data allow the illustration and explanation of how these transnational organisations develop various strategies in each urban context by variously exploiting the opportunities institutions and civil-society actors provide.

In both countries, and especially in the cities examined here, the international interests of the Swiss and Italian political authorities were not the unique reason for the foundation of Islamic prayer rooms or mosques in the 1970s. After the 1973 oil crisis, the Swiss and Italian governments allowed Saudi Arabia to establish vast mosques, such as in Rome (the city council donated the land in 1974) and Geneva (1978). However, the four case studies reveal that since the 1980s, Muslim residents have frequently founded Islamic organisations and prayer rooms to aid their immigrant members in both countries concerning housing, employment, and economic issues. Therefore, the Italian and Swiss contexts are enlightening cases to assess the impact of local context on the welfare services offered to immigrants through a network of Islamic organisations.

To perform my analysis, I use concepts developed in social-movement studies, such as institutional opportunity structures (IOSs). Scholars have defined IOSs as 'consistent but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements' (Tarrow 1996, 54).[6] Following this approach, I focus my investigation on three explanatory factors: (1) models of citizenship and migratory regimes; (2) church–state cleavages and the institutional recognition of Islamic organisations; and (3) the degree and typology of subsidiarity in welfare systems (particularly the degree of cooperation among institutions and private religious actors providing social services to the resident population) (Fig. 1.1).

Migratory regimes regulate the quantity and quality (sociodemographic characteristics and nationalities) of the immigrant presence in a national territory. The presence of immigrants directly influences the welfare services in manifold ways. Immigrants become providers[7] of or benefit from welfare services. Church–state cleavages directly shape Islamic social activities due to the bias of institutional recognition. As Islamic groups are recognised, they have more possibilities to obtain places and subsides to develop their religious, cultural and social activities. Welfare structures influence religious social agency in general by authorising forms of subsidiarity for the provision of welfare services. The three factors jointly function as the explanatory variable shaping Islamic welfare activities across empirical case studies.

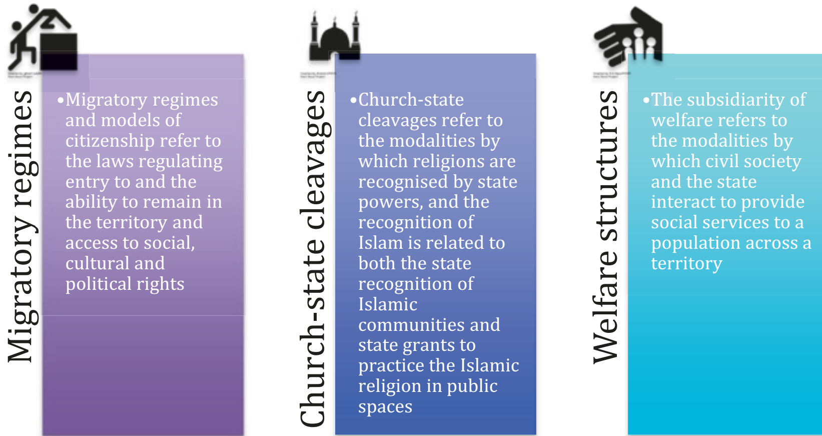

Fig. 1.1 Institutional opportunity structures as independent variable

1.2 Aims and Research Questions

A voluminous body of literature studies and discusses how institutional policies regulating immigrant issues, welfare structures and the state–church relationship influence religious social activities (Jawad 2012; Friedrichs et al. 2012; Hackworth 2012; Davis and Hankins 1999). This research clarifies the interconnections between these three factors (migratory regimes, the church–state cleavage and welfare policies) and their impact on Muslim social activities. Taken separately, these three factors have a direct impact on welfare activities from a religious standpoint. Moreover, their interaction is the more useful tool to assess the different evolution of Islamic social activities in a specific context. For each interaction, a direct effect can be detected:

1. *Interactions between migratory regimes and welfare structures*

The presence of immigrants can encourage the state to delegate the provision of welfare goods to civil-society actors. In this case, welfare services for immigrants are increasingly organised by civil-society actors, such as churches, non-governmental associations (NGOs) or trade

unions. Immigrants who cannot access certain state services therefore use intermediate civil-society services, so their arrival expands these actors' roles.

2. *Interaction between church-state cleavages and welfare structures*

This interaction concerns religious authorities' role in providing social services instead of or in cooperation with state institutions. By recognising religious communities, the state can provide them with subsidies to pursue social activities. Conversely, the social role religious organisations play in subsidiary welfare systems can facilitate the state recognition of religious organisations.

3. *Interaction between migratory regimes and church-state cleavages*

This concerns the extension of state religious recognition to Islamic organisations. Ethno-assimilationist regimes can delay the recognition of non-traditional religions, whereas multicultural regimes can easily recognise new religions. Moreover, particular forms of state recognition of religious organisations can stimulate the immigration of certain religious groups more than others. For instance, Protestant countries can grant equal recognition to persecuted, non-orthodox or reformed Islamic organisations as much as orthodox ones.

The three explanatory factors serve as a framework governing Islam organisations' pursuit of social activities. Italy and Switzerland differ in their regulation of the state–church relationship, the coexistence of religious diversity, and the delegation of welfare competencies to various civil-society actors. In addition, subnational factors can shape the social activities of Islamic organisations. The presence of local religious actors that public institutions sponsor may affect the political behaviour of Islamic associations. For instance, in secularised[8] Geneva, the lack of public economic resources allocated to religious actors might encourage Islamic organisations to collaborate on cultural projects with nonreligious organisations more frequently. In Protestant[9] Zurich, the existence of a formal relationship between church and state encourages Islamic organisations to develop centralised organisational structures to obtain

the public recognition other religions receive. In the Catholic capital, Rome, diplomats from Islamic countries built one of the largest mosques in Europe and obtained 'soft' public recognition from the Italian state. Conversely, in the diocese of Saint Ambrose in Milan, Muslim associations seem to emulate the approach to social and political engagement local Catholic organisations practise. They establish welfare services for the poorest segment of the population (immigrants) to obtain the public recognition local political parties would otherwise deny them. The aim of this thesis is to explain why the social activities of Islamic organisations vary within neighbouring countries and make adjustments based on the local characteristics of cities.

In fact, the state can distribute social services based on universalist principles (i.e., to citizens, residents, and undocumented individuals) or reserve special services for a particular subgroup of the population. In many countries, access to welfare is linked to the duration (long or short) of a residence permit or the reason (family reunion or work) for residence. Western countries confront numerous controversies related to the provision of social rights to guest workers, especially Islamic ones. Islamic organisations in Switzerland and Italy provide social services to their members, who are nearly all immigrants. These organisations evaluate every day the services their members require, the resources that state-sponsored religious communities can mobilise with respect to welfare services and the opportunities institutions offer to Islamic communities to organise their activities in a manner similar to those of other religious associations.

This book will describe whether and how Swiss and Italian institutional policies and their effects directly or indirectly encourage Islamic organisations to provide welfare services and social activities in addition to religious and cultural activities. The purpose is to explain if and how migratory regimes, church–state cleavages, and welfare structures directly influence the social, cultural, and religious activities of Islamic organisations and the structure of their network in four cities in Switzerland and Italy.

In some cases, institutional factors may encourage Islamic organisations to provide social services, especially for Muslim immigrants. In fact, Islamic organisations can be involved in institutional social policies or cooperate with local actors to provide social services to immigrants.