

Counter-Narratives against Prejudice: How Second-Generation Youth Reverse Media Representations*

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This paper deals with the OLTRE project (ISF - DG Migration and Home Affairs, EU), funded to counter the radicalization of second-generation migrants in Italy and created by a network made up of universities and private companies. This article shows the results of a study regarding the involvement of second-generation youth in the co-production of the social campaign for online communication, representing the outcome of the OLTRE project. The guidelines for the campaign came from our in-depth sociological field research (42 qualitative interviews of 2G youths, 18-30 years, in 7 Italian towns (Palermo, Cagliari, Rome, Bologna, Milan, Padua, Turin) and from theatre laboratories created by second-generation youth collecting narratives, representations, stories and emotions about their descriptions of the radicalization risk and protection factors, etc. This corpus was useful for the social communication campaign in preventing radicalization, engaging research participants as key players, co-designing counter-narrative content and studying their viral dissemination with the support of young, second-generation content creators, and working on social networks in order to promote cultural change. The paper analyses the process of creating media content intended for the social campaign of the OLTRE project: from the representation that second-generation youth perceive as distorted to the product that provides a counter- and/or an alternative narrative. This paper shows how the young content creators interacted with each other, creating new contents, and highlighting how counter-narratives may represent useful tools for deconstructing complex issues such as Islamophobia or radicalization.

Keywords: second-generation, media representations, Islamophobia, counter-narratives

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Introduction¹

The representation and image of Muslims and Islam as portrayed by traditional media, television programmes, films, TV series and entertainment products, and by current media, is a topical issue (Binotto, Bruno e Lai, 2016).

The literature and research on this subject has underlined that, on the one hand, despite the political and media changes over time, the paradigm of reference reinforces the old images of the other, while on the other hand the image of the “moderate” Muslim, as an “acceptable other”, is introduced (Poole, 2002, p. 16) with reassuring effects. The question of the perception and representation of other cultural systems (Durand, 1960) remains, however, problematic, along with the issue of pluralism within Islam; this can generate uncertainty due to the variety of situations that might be represented and that pose questions about the relationship between the perspective and the object as presented through words (Bourdieu, 1996; Couldry & Hepp, 2017).

In our globalized and hyper-technological century, the web amplifies the diffusion of representations and images that often do not correspond to reality, thus feeding prejudices and discriminations. This article presents some of the results of the European research project OLTRE. This project aims to prevent the radicalization (Tumminelli, 2020; Sieckelinck & Gielen, 2018) of the second-generation of migrants in Italy and intends to intervene with an interdisciplinary approach to mobilise academia, companies, and direct target groups in a co-designed communication campaign (Volterrani, 2019). The purpose of the “action-research” was to stimulate reflection, together with the interviewees, on the issues of the identity and representation of second generations, participation, the media and their utility, religion and the representation of Islam. By involving the young people, this “action-research” has the cognitive aim of operating on reality itself.

Action-research is an investigation moving from within the reality of which an initial analysis of knowledge is being attempted; it is aimed at subsequent, practical action on the same, to modify or assist change in the sense of evolution and growth (Archetti, 2004, p. 69).

This paper analyses the process of creating media content intended for the social campaign of the OLTRE project: from the representation that second-generation youth perceive as distorted to the audio-visual product that provides a counter-narrative and/or an alternative narrative.

In particular, the paper presents:

- an analysis of the in-depth interviews where the respondents talk about the most common media representation of second generations and about their perception of them;
- a backstage description and analysis of the creation of one of the final products;
- an analysis of the selected audio-visual and textual production.

Perceptions of media representations regarding migration and second generations

Below, the focus will be on the perception of how the image of the second generation is presented through the media. In fact, analysis of the cultural and media consumption of the 42 young people interviewed enables us to investigate this aspect as well as their use of media, their profiles and the content they choose to share.

The media used are diversified according to the purpose and type of information sought at local, regional, national, and international levels (Bentivegna e Boccia Artieri, 2019). However, the most popular way of consulting newspapers and magazines is online. Through the Internet, it is possible to find information on anything in real time, and in particular by smartphone. A central role is occupied by television, both via cable and wi-fi. In the first case, it is used to access programmes such as news, information and entertainment; in the second case, to access Netflix channels, Amazon Prime Video, etc.

From an analysis of the interviews, a central focus emerges: namely that the threat from Islamism or radicalism is aimed at Muslims themselves, without the issue being problematized. There is underlying bias in the mechanisms of distortion in the perception of Islam. The focus on Islam, and the emphasis on its being seen as dangerous, is closely linked to the force of circumstances, e.g., the mechanism that sees Islam as the subject of conversation following events that put it at the centre of the news (as in the case of the Twin Towers in 2001), and rarely as a topic to be explored for its specific characteristics. Bad news is more newsworthy and is presented, according to the interviewed young people, without distinctions being made and contradictions initiated. The media, on the wave of emotion, only talk about Islam in connection with international events related, for example, to radicalisation. The dissemination of Islamic culture and religion has no place because of the “power” that the events that have taken place have and that lead to interpreting Islam through the “logic of the media” (Caliandro, 2018; Thorbjørnsrud & Figenschou, 2016; Haynes, Power, Devereux, Dillane & Carr, 2016; Altheide & Snow, 1979), i.e. through a set of routines, structural factors and organisational forms of information and their transformation into news, as in the case of the attacks in 2001 and 2003.

The common voice of those interviewed refers to the creation of stereotyped forms of representation of other Muslims that harm and slow down the integration process (Bentivegna, 2009). Reference is made, in particular, to television and print media representations that present Islam as a conflictual object and a threat to the Western world (Ranstorp, 2016).

Reading, for example, the newspapers, it has happened to me many times to read that they write “Muslim father beats his daughters, the mother”. I say: OK, you want to specify that he is a Muslim, do what you want, but whoever reads, whoever is ignorant on the subject, doesn’t know what Islam is, doesn’t know... doesn’t go beyond what they read in the newspaper, what would they think? What should they think? (CA, F).²

In addition to this, the interviewees complain about the lack of space devoted to in-depth thematic analysis:

In these 22 years I haven't seen much, nor songs that deal with these themes, as I see it. There are no films or TV series. For example, on Netflix, I have noticed there is neither a film nor a TV series that deals with Islam in a positive way. Islam is not wrong, it is the Arabs who are wrong, just as it is the Italians who are wrong. For example, there is a film about this girl who falls in love with another Muslim boy but then he has to leave her because he has to blow himself up, but what are we talking about? It's not like that, we're off track (PA, F).

Symbolic identity becomes an aggregating element for young people in opposition to the outside world. The idea that the news is distorted is a common belief. The tendency to amplify or belittle in order to confirm stereotypes and prejudices fuels fear of "Muslims" and accentuates distance (Bruno, 2008; Marletti, 1994; Said, 1997). The media present news in excessive and emphatic tones even when the situation does not call for it.

A few days ago I read this news item about a foreign boy who graduated in medicine...selling flowers. The headline was so absurd: "Son of immigrants who sold flowers graduated in medicine". People criticising... "these people have stolen our jobs". It's the way of representing that's wrong, it's not right (PA, M).

According to the young people, the media's image of Islam does not correspond to the essence and precepts of the religion (which are greatly simplified). The Muslim becomes a "scapegoat" on whom to lay blame, to unload individual and collective aggression, and to over-generalise Islam in a misleading way.

So... from the way it is, surely, because it is convenient, the terrorist, it is convenient for the West to have a scapegoat, the scapegoat is the Muslim, Islam, because it is seen as something different even if in reality there is nothing more similar, and it is absurd as a thing... compared to the other religions, the media does not... not even a tiny little word about Judaism, and well, Jehovah's Witnesses, we already know that they too are not doing well, but never as well as Islam, also because Jehovah's Witnesses keep very much to themselves so... (BO, F).

In this regard, the interviewees express disbelief that local people might believe in stereotyped images of Islam, such as "killing" being one of the religious decrees. The need to talk about, and raise awareness of, Islam in order to reduce prejudice and be better understood (Honneth, 2002) was central to all the young people encountered.

In the public discourse, religion is always spoken of in a provocative way, I don't follow these things so much here, but when I happen to hear it, I immediately get angry inside. Do you really think these things? We are terrorists and everything ... and all of us who live here, what are we doing? Are we killing you? Are we slaughtering you, for example? (PD, F).

But, in my opinion, we could already start teaching at school that Islam is not always terrorism, it is not suppression, because, in any case, since first grade I have always been taught that we have to be respectful towards the Jews, and then the massacre of the Jews, there is, so, in my opinion, we could do something also from this point of view (BO, F).

Strong opposition and disappointment also emerge in the face of the tout court representation of Muslims as "terrorists", the binomial Islam-fundamentalism and the

attribution of fanaticism as a “typical mental category” of Muslims. The representation of Islam suffers from poor interpretation, re-proposing old stereotypes loaded with new prejudices and a hyper-Islamic reading of facts: everything that comes from the Muslim world is linked to religion.

I think the media try to describe my religion, but if you don't know something you can't talk about something you don't know (BO, 1).

Terrorist acts, condemned by all interviewees, contribute to perpetuating the image of Muslims as fanatics by proposing an incorrect connotation that associates Islam with the political and military struggle of a minority that uses Islamic religiosity as a set of symbols and ideologies.

I myself am against terrorist incidents, but like all Muslims who are really Muslims, because that is not Islam (BO, F).

For example, the fact that now they say that terrorists kill, and here it is written in the religion they do it in the name of God, it is absolutely not true, here, I would like to... In our religion it is not written that it is necessary to kill (PD, F).

The backstage of the creative process of content production

This paragraph analyzes the backstage of the creation of one of the final products, highlighting how, through a participatory method, the content creators of our campaign selected a theme and the perspective from which to treat it, how they de-constructed the circulating representation, built counter- and an alternative narratives and converted the idea, through a process of creative co-construction, into audio-visual content, to which a caption was then added.

A specific post on Islamophobia and terrorism was selected. This post was part of the section called “I am-seen”³ that played on a terminological level on the duplicity (concretized in the hyphen) of being (I am) and being seen (I am seen). In addition to the need to sever the Islam-terrorism link conveyed mainly by the media, among the topics on which the contents of the posts focused we may also find:

- the issue of the lack of recognition of second-generation young people at interpersonal and institutional levels, expressed by some of them through a sense of feeling “foreign and yet at home”;
- the complexity and richness of multi-belongingness, of “hybrid identities” in which different traditions, tastes, languages and values are co-present.

The post selected to describe the process of creating content for the campaign is among the last posts produced by the young people involved in the campaign, and it highlights the remarkable maturity of the co-creation process. This maturity represented a point of arrival for the work done with these young people during the OLTRE project. In line with the action-research approach, at first they were involved in the research phase as privileged witnesses,

whose narratives made it possible to identify the main topics on which to base the communication campaign itself. In a second phase, some of them became “social media moderators” of the campaign, and finally, at their own request, producers of part of its audio-visual and textual content. Only at the end of their path did they become “conscious” co-producers of content aimed at preventing the radicalization of young people with migrant backgrounds.

The creative process of content production can be summarized in four phases:

- ideation, which consists in the identification of the content to be covered and the purpose of the post;
- storytelling, which clarifies the narrative modes of the message;
- visual transposition into images and videos;
- drafting of a caption aimed at summarizing the essence of the content in a few lines.

Each post produced by our content creators was the result of group work. The groups were mainly made up of young second-generation Italians, who were supported by young non-second-generation Italians with technological skills. The working groups were not fixed, but established from week to week depending on availability and on the topics selected for that week. The only rule (not to be transgressed) was to form groups that were as heterogeneous as possible in terms of skills, points of view, narratives, background, gender, etc. The inclusion of young, native Italians, supposedly to provide a “technical” support, was a way to re-propose in a small way the social dynamics of co-existence of multiple cultures. This triggered the dialogue, and sometimes conflict, ultimately leading the young people to find shared solutions transversal to different points of view which could “turn off” any controversy and conflict on the Internet.

Within the groups there was always a natural subdivision of the tasks, as a result of the heterogeneity with which they were formed. From time to time a member of the group took the lead, integrating individual contributions and assigning tasks to each member.

As regards the ideation and storytelling phases, the group members confronted each other and shared the final decision on what they would like to accomplish. The actual creation of the video and the drafting of the caption were the responsibility of single members of the group, supported by the whole group for the final work of archiving the product.

The idea of the video we are analyzing here arose from a post circulating on FB that proposed an alternative point of view to the mainstream representation of the Islam-terrorism link. Eya, for example, in the WhatsApp group-chat writes: “Today I came across this post that made me think a lot”. In the post a second-generation young man tells how his life has changed since the attack on the Twin Towers:

The only certain thing is that that day changed everyone’s life. The life of millions of innocent Muslims who had to justify themselves with every attack from that day on.

Eya, inspired by this post, proposes the storyboard for the video:

The main idea is to make a connection between the attack on the Twin Towers, which happened twenty years ago, and the somewhat more recent attacks in 2015. Making a single video! First the attack on the Twin Towers, the reaction of the media, with newspaper headlines, some excerpts from national and

international news that were present there, interviews with people about what had happened, their reaction and how to behave towards those who are Muslim. Afterwards, showing the other side of the coin, with the experience of Ali who had spoken about this very episode and who was in school, at high school if I'm not mistaken. Therefore, doing the same thing, 15 years later, with the attacks that took place in Europe between 2015 and 2016. Starting with the media reaction and a few interviews...several TV shows addressed these issues. Then having another person who can tell us about the downside, from the same time perspective as Ali...Ali was in high school. Finally, finding a person who was asked questions in high school, which were a little uncomfortable as s/he had to explain or justify his/her beliefs while continuing to emphasize that Islam is in fact something else, trying to calm the situation down a little bit and give a truer picture of Islam.

It took very little to find two similar testimonies within our partnership: another of the content creators of the campaign (Omar writes: "we could talk about the fact that we are the first victims of these attacks") and a representative from a partner organization (Eya writes: "I remember that once Ali spoke of an experience he had when the Twin Towers were attacked").

Two young people of different ages give voice to the feelings of many other young people like themselves, who, because of those attacks mentioned in the video, have repeatedly suffered discrimination of all kinds.

The video was graphically produced by Isabel, an Italian girl (not a second-generation migrant), who perfectly translated the experience into images, the emotions, the feelings of the second generation youngsters, while Federica selected excerpts from videos and other images to be included. All members of the group collaborated in the final honing of the post.

Some interpretative notes: the power of co-creation

Through this video – which we will analyse in-depth in the next paragraph – the young content creators propose a counter-narrative and an alternative narrative to the Islam-terrorism link in order to reduce stereotypes and prejudices against Muslims living in Italy and in the world.

The way in which they carry out their narration shows how it is possible to make a critical analysis of what is circulating on the Internet, in order to learn how to deconstruct prejudices and, if the occasion demands, also the propaganda messages of terrorist and extremist groups circulating on the net. And this is exactly what the youngsters did.

The process that led to the production of this post was based on three irreplaceable elements:

- creativity, fundamental to guarantee the originality of the product;
- dialogue, necessary to take into account different perspectives;
- sharing, useful to find a common way to achieve the shared objectives.

The participatory method, in the realization of this video, as for all the contents produced during the campaign, allowed the generation and regeneration of bonds, through which the subjects could reinforce their sense of belonging to a community (in this specific case the community of OLTRE) and to a local community. These bonds would allow them to become

more and more resistant to the recruiting “call” from possible extremists and to the promises of “radicalized” identity where they can have a cultural recognition that sometimes is denied to them.

The participatory method was used throughout the OLTRE project, thus ensuring the active involvement of young people in both offline and online contexts. As a matter of fact, the project envisaged local, “in-presence” activities (i.e., theatrical and photographic workshops in seven cities: Bologna, Padua, Milan, Turin, Rome, Cagliari and Palermo) involving young Italians with a migrant background and native Italians who then became, directly or indirectly, the “protagonists” of the campaign.

From an operational point of view, the project gave a “voice” to these potentially vulnerable young people, involving them in participatory processes, creating permanent and open communication spaces and co-constructing possible alternatives and positive narratives that would reduce their social vulnerability.

We started from the assumption that in order to prevent radicalization it is necessary to reduce the vulnerability of subjects considered “at risk”. In our specific case the condition of young people with migrant backgrounds is considered a risk factor, as it might expose them more strongly to social exclusion and consequently make them more sensitive to the attractive power of extremist and radicalizing propaganda.

The chosen approach is based on the precise assumption that participation and social engagement are fundamental conditions:

- to increase social and digital resilience, so as to subvert the appealing power of radicalization messages and counter stereotypical representations;
- to reduce the vulnerability of those “at risk”;
- to promote the independent and critical thinking of the recipients of project actions.

In accordance with this perspective, change would begin with knowledge producing a reframing process, i.e., a change in the mental frames (values, beliefs, language, speech, behaviours, narratives) that determine one’s representation of the world and the perception of what surrounds the individual and, consequently, his/her actions and their outcomes.

Promoting and developing communicative action contributes to the in-depth transformation of the collective imagination, values and symbols that constitute the frames in which the action is accomplished (Volterrani, 2011)

The co-creation of content enabled a space for dialogue and sharing, in which it was demonstrated not only that different imaginations can coexist, but that they can enrich each other. It is precisely this method that becomes exportable to the outside world, to a society that wants to be, and must be, increasingly inclusive.

Counter-narrative to terrorism: a concrete example

The previous paragraph illustrates the link between research results and the OLTRE communication campaign, showing the co-creation process. Here we move on to an analysis of an exemplary video, of which the creative process of co-production was previously explained. We chose this video, on the representations of Islamic terrorism and

their effects, because it is a central theme for the prevention campaign against radicalisation. The choice is also linked to the young participants' perceptions of media images about Islam and their attempt, via this video, to formulate counter- and alternative narratives to those of the mainstream media.

The contribution, published on both Facebook and Instagram (cf. OLTRE Oltre l'orizzonte, 2020a; Oltre_contronarrazioni, 2020), consists of a caption and a video. The post summarises the turning point represented by the 11 September attacks in New York:

September 11, 2001 caused the death of almost three thousand innocent people, and radically changed the lives of hundreds of millions of people.

Since then, there has been increasing talk of "Islamic terrorism", intrinsically linking a religion, and all its nearly two billion believers, to international terrorism. A misleading and discriminatory link that has changed the way we view Muslims in the West.

Regardless of our various origins and faiths, we noticed that we were looked at with different eyes, full of distrust, resentment, hatred. We came into the crosshairs of certain political and popular currents that helped legitimize Islamophobia, racism and discrimination, through words, gestures and sometimes aggression and violence.

Even though, like the Islamic communities around the world and many other Muslim believers, we have always publicly condemned every act of terrorism, remembering that the Islamic religion teaches: "whoever kills even one man, it is as if he had killed the whole of humanity".

How many times do we still have to justify ourselves personally for actions committed by others?.

The post highlights the false terrorism-Islam equivalence and the generalisation that in prejudice connects a religion and its believers to actions, which, through the killing of "innocent people", change the image of the entire Muslim community in the West, ignoring its internal differences and expressing violent sentiments and actions towards it. It is reported that the various Islamic communities and individual believers have publicly condemned the attacks, quoting a verse from the Koran that contrasts the individual who kills with the affected community as a whole. The final question redefines the we-they relationship, the exclusive "they" isolates the terrorists. The "I am-seen" section contrasts second-generation young people's perceptions of self-representation with an 'outside' view. But who is watching, telling and judging? The answer is better defined by looking at the images and listening to the story proposed in the video.

The video (cf. OLTRE Oltre l'orizzonte, 2020b) starts with the attack on the World Trade Center and is initially presented through archive material of the air attacks on the Twin Towers, described by the voiceover of a journalist in an Askanews report. The international and local macro-sociological dimensions represented in the video are combined with the micro dimension of the effects on one's own existence, as per the narration in the first person. Journalistic reconstruction is intertwined with the personal stories of the young participants in the OLTRE project. In the transition, the video format also changes. The autobiographical plan is told through OLTRE protagonists' selfie videos, recounting the impact of the terrorist attacks on their lives. Ali tells his story in the first person; his gaze turns to the viewer (see fig. 1):

On 11 September 2001, I got ready for school as I did every day, unaware of what it would mean for me and millions of others. Everything started as it should in the daily routine [*images show smoke, skyscrapers and the bloodied faces of firefighters and injured people at the site of the attack*]. But during the intermission something changed, we saw what was happening and my classmates and I couldn't understand why it was happening and what was happening [*newspaper front page and the headline "Act of War", photo of the towers implosion*]. But one thing was certain, I saw something different in the eyes of my companions, and the questions became more and more direct and even biting, even accusatory, and I could not understand why. I wasn't aware of what September 11, 2001 was going to be, I didn't realize until a little while later when [*the shot returns to Ali*] a whole community took on a whole different meaning in the eyes of the public, and for a 12-year-old to go through that, being aware of it and trying to change a story that didn't concern him, didn't belong to him was not easy and it left its mark not only on my life, but on the lives of millions and millions of people all over the world" (our own transcription, background images in italics in square brackets).



Figure 1. Ali's video selfie

The video proceeds with archive photos and the narration is continued by a woman wearing a veil (see fig. 2) given as an example of the effects of the attacks on people's daily lives. The interviewee tells how once she met a boy in the underground, who started shouting "terrorist!" at her, and how she got very scared that the police might suddenly arrest her.

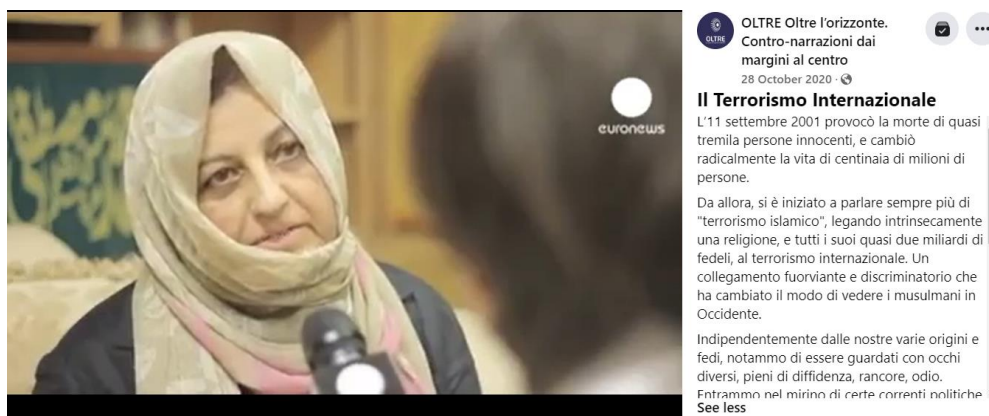


Figure 2. A post-September 11 interview with a Muslim woman reported from the Euronews archives

The video continues with images of a Muslims' collective prayer. A man in traditional dress affirms: "The media spread the idea that Muslims are bad so they started to hate us"

(ibid). From the singular first person the interviewer moves to the pronoun “we” as opposed to “they” in response to perceived stigmatisation of Muslims. The creators of the video represent in this part the potential risk of polarisation in the contradistinction between Islamophobia and a reaction of closure in an exclusive “we” on the part of the Islamic community.

The effects of the attacks are represented from a diachronic perspective. A fil rouge connects the 2001 attacks with the more recent ones in 2015 in Paris. A Euronews report introduces the Charlie Hebdo attack. Then public discourse is intertwined with the private story of Omar, a second-generation Italian boy, then shifting to a video selfie, interspersed with archive material and newspaper front pages:

In 2001 I couldn't even walk, I lived through the consequences of what was then the beginning of a whole series of reversals that transformed us in the eyes of public opinion [*images of the attacks in Paris alternate with the close-up of the young narrator*]. However, I lived through Charlie Hebdo 2015, I was in high school at the time [*front page of La Stampa “Attack on the heart of Europe”*] and after the attacks the phrase “You have done, you have combined ...” echoed in all the circles I frequented [...]. [*newspaper front pages, Libero headlines “Attack in Paris. Islamic bastards”*] (see fig. 3) “Guys, me? Who is it that I am allied with?”. And then the initiative #Notinmyname [*demonstrations images, banners “Islam is peace”, “Isis is not Islam”*] (see fig. 4) emerged, many Muslims contributed to it in order to defend themselves against this defamation. We don't blow anybody up. Guys, there are people and people, let's always remember this is important” (our transcript, background images in italics in square brackets).



Figure 3. The 14 November 2015. Libero's front page



Figure 4. Anti-terrorism demonstration by the Islamic community of Cento Celle (Rome).



Figure 5. Anti-terrorism demonstration by the Islamic community of Cento Celle (Rome).

The video ends with footage of the demonstrations in Manhattan on the tenth anniversary of 11 September, also celebrated by Muslims' collective prayer for the victims, followed by Vittorio Feltri's statement "I have never seen oceanic demonstrations of Muslims against terrorism", fading into a news item on the Islamic communities' protests against terrorism and prejudice in Italy, in which a demonstrator states: "Religion has nothing to do with it and the terrorists are not Muslims". A woman adds: "we are all people, mothers and fathers of families here all together [*banners "The Islamic community of Centocelle condemns: terrorism is the enemy of Islam"* (see fig. 5)]". It closes with the OLTRE logo and the payoff "The voice of the new Europeans".

We can consider the construction of the video as a good example of a participatory production and reception of media content that takes up the model proposed by Volterrani (2021). The fruit of the concerted, mutual decision of the group of creators on form and content is expressed in a polyphony of voices and images that act as a counter-narrative to dominant visions, expressed in the video through the narrative of some media and journalists. An effect of empathy is produced and a potential change of perspective in the observer by reporting, through common experiences – "everyday social practices" (ibid., p.142) such as school routines – and therefore also experienced by the public, the reactions of classmates or passengers on the underground, by describing through the eyes of children and young people the accusatory looks encountered by people who do not identify with the ideology and terrorist actions, but are homologated and overwhelmed by the cliché that associates religion and terrorism. Re-reading the attacks from the point of view of the Muslim community, which is represented as comparably damaged in the short and long term by the effects of international terrorism, alternative communicative practices are used in an attempt to make the public change their point of observation by "putting themselves in the shoes of others" and using a "ritual repetitiveness to facilitate the process of incorporation" (Volterrani, 2021, p. 143).

Conclusion

Second-generation young people who participated in the OLTRE project made a significant contribution to the research (Peruzzi, Anzera e Massa 2020; Macaluso, Siino e Tumminelli 2020) and communication campaign (for a more in-depth study, please refer to Gola, Macaluso, Siino, Tumminelli e Volteranni, 2022; Macaluso, Tumminelli, Spampinato e Volteranni, 2020). Their contribution was useful in providing a reflection on the perception of media images about Islamic religion, migration and second generations, showing how it is possible to propose new perspectives for these topics creatively and inclusively. Respondents say they see distorted images of their religion, because in the media, Islam is often shown as a threat to the Western world, without distinction or insight. But how can new stories be conveyed to challenge such a homogeneous and stereotyped vision? The creative process fostered a growing awareness of such stereotypes and the difficulty in proposing shared alternative visions. This was achieved through lively group-discussions and co-deciding which figures and words would be best suited to create alternative counter-narratives and narratives. Local and second-generation individuals from different backgrounds, religions and ideas, together created original communication products, providing multiple points of view through creative negotiation and peer debate. The video on Islamic terrorism exemplifies the result of storytelling that aims to provide testimonies, which, through emotion, prevent hardening into polarised positions, inspire reflection and open up dialogue.

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Note

¹ The paper is the result of collaboration between the authors. Giuseppina Tumminelli wrote the Introduction and the paragraph "Perceptions of media representations regarding migration and second generations", Marianna Siino wrote paragraphs "The backstage of the creative process of content production" and "Some interpretative notes" and Marilena Macaluso wrote the paragraph "Counter-narrative to terrorism" and the conclusion.

² At the end of each interview excerpt the following details are abbreviated: the city in which the interview was conducted and the gender of the interviewee.

³ The editorial plan proposed a distinction between *information* sections, with more "formal" content, proposed by the partner institutions and taken from other project actions, and *protagonism* sections, with original and more empathetic content, produced by the moderators and taken from their own experiences. The protagonism sections focused mainly on three topics – multiple identity, prejudices and Islamophobia – and they proposed excerpts of interviews or stories on how second-generation youth live their double identity. In particular, the posts mentioned the most common problems they experience in their daily life; difficult or simply embarrassing questions they are often asked or would ask themselves; clichés and misunderstandings about their life; and the most common prejudices about them.