Chapter 2
Co-Optation, Social Navigation and
Double Presence of Muslim Moroccans in Italy
The Case of the Italian Islamic Confederation

Nicola Di Mauro

Introduction

Events that have shocked Europe in recent years, the latest being Samuel
Paty's assassination in Paris, the political response to these events – in par-
ticular of the French and Turkish presidents Emmanuel Macron and Recep
Tayyip Erdoğan – as well as the Nice and Vienna attacks of October and
November 2020 have repeatedly brought into the spotlight the issue of the
presence of Muslim communities and their compatibility with the societies
and legal systems of European countries. Without delving into the debate on
the current political agenda, it may be stated that Europe is now a mobile
context for Islamic communities. In spite of a now stable and definitive pres-
ence that several studies have long confirmed,[1] the legitimacy of their pres-
ence keeps being questioned.[2]

[1] A wealth of data is available on Muslims in Europe, and several sources are available for
reference. Here I refer to a major collection of data and analyses entitled *Yearbook of Muslims
in Europe*, that Brill has published every year since 2009. Concerning Italy, the most reliable
institutes publishing yearly reports, alongside the government ones, are Istat, Caritas-
Migrantes, Fondazione Ismu, and Centro Studi e Ricerche Idos.

[2] The illegitimacy of the presence of Muslims in Europe also becomes evident in the defi-
nitions that are attributed not only to migrants from Muslim-majority countries or with large
Islamic minorities, but also to the children of that migratory experience: "According to Wihtol
de Wenden (2004), the consequence of talking about 'second generation' is that the parents'
origin prevails over any other mode of socialisation. Yet is this really their experience, or is it
a fate they are given by some external observer? The scholar believes that the multiple at-
tempts to define immigrants' children reflect a difficulty of the French society [that can be
extended to our case study as well – *author's note*] to consider them as fully entitled citizens.

Abdelmalek Sayad's work revealed, earlier and better than others, the fundamental contradictions of the migrant's condition [*émigré-immigré*], of the *provisoire qui dure* (temporary that lasts) and of the *ubiquité impossible* (impossible ubiquity) of a "double absence" as in the fortunate phrase used as the title of the work edited with Pierre Bourdieu (Sayad, 1999). In his analysis, the children of migrants occupy an even more critical position than their parents at the symbolic level. In this chapter, I will outline the strategies and tactics adopted by some young Moroccan Muslims in Italy in order to inhabit a dense transnational space and, in a mobile context, to achieve what may be called, paraphrasing Sayad, a "double presence".[3]

In the first section, I will outline the theoretical framework within which I have developed my analysis, referring to Sayad's work as well as to a few studies that consider transnationalism critically (Lacroix, 2003; Salih, 2001), and in particular to the concept of *social navigation* developed by Vigh (2009) that several scholars have applied to contexts other than the Danish anthropologist's one.

In the second section, I will briefly describe the transformations of the Moroccan institutional device, which starts from a control system and ends up devising a co-optation system (de Haas, 2007a) that is useful to reaffirm the country's legitimacy and consensus even among those officially defined as the *Marocains du monde*, with special reference to the religious dimension (Bruce, 2019). Furthermore, another factor needs to be taken into consideration in the case of Italy, namely the role of Italian institutions: due to the lack of a well-defined legal system regulating the relationship between the state and the Islamic faith, in the past few years they seem to have involved Morocco and the Moroccan community in Italy in the management of the religious field.

In the third section, I will analyse the case of the *Confederazione Islamica Italiana* (CII – Italian Islamic Confederation), the main subject of the re-

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According to Rea and Tripier, it is as if in the analysis of immigration in Europe there were a red thread that risks pointing out the *illegitimacy of the presence* of immigrants and their children. In particular, the latter are the group whose loyalty to the receiving countries is mostly questioned" (Frisina, 2007, p. 54 – translated by the author).

[3] The phrase "double presence" with reference to Sayad's work is not new. For the specific topic of young people of Moroccan origin, see Barthou (2013). In 2018, at the University of Naples "L'Orientale" my colleague Chiara Anna Cascino and I held a seminar entitled *Islam and Citizenship. Transnational paths of the Moroccan community in Italy*, coordinated by Carlo De Angelo, one of whose lectures was entitled precisely *Double presence. Citizenship beyond borders*. My analysis in this chapter is partly based on that joint work.

search I carried out in Morocco and in Italy between 2016 and 2019. More specifically, it is precisely in this section that I will try to bring to light the strategies and tactics adopted by the members of the youth branch of the organisation who, being able to use the tools provided by the various institutional devices, share in the management of the religious field and try to give themselves a leading political and religious role. In the conclusions, I will relate a few outcomes of my research to the theoretical framework provided in the first part of the chapter.

Smooth sailing

Vigh's theoretical framework rests on long-lasting fieldwork in Bissau, West Africa and with West African migrants in Lisbon – both fluid contexts characterised by uncertainty and quick changes. With the concept of social navigation, the author insists on the idea of movement:

> [It] highlights motion within motion; it is the act of moving in an environment that is wavering and unsettled, and when used to illuminate social life it directs our attention to the fact that we move in social environments of actors and actants, individuals and institutions, that engage and move us as we move along (Vigh, 2009, p. 420).

The success of Vigh's theories has led to their application to different contexts (Triandafyllidou, 2015, 2019; Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2013; Sand, Hakim-Fernández, 2018; Tuckett, 2015; Østergaard Nielsen, Vigh, 2012; Wijntuin, Koster, 2018), in some cases apparently less mobile than those in the Danish anthropologist's work. In fact, the author himself underlined that all social environments are in perpetual motion; what differs from one case to the other is, rather, the "speed of change" (Vigh, 2009, p. 430). Here I am applying the social navigation to a context that is seemingly not as mobile as others, but is in fact subject to forces, thrusts and interferences that constantly change the agents' position, even though such changes are by no means traumatic. I am referring to the Islamic religious sphere in Italy, inhabited and navigated by Muslim Moroccan migrants and by the children of that migratory experience. Social navigation is, more precisely, a heuristic instrument that enables us to rethink the individual or collective agency:

> Invoking "navigation", we thus tacitly acknowledge that the agent is positioned within a force field which moves him and influences his possibilities of movement and positions. Yet, the consequences of this go

deeper than just mending an analytical flaw and adding external influ-
ences to our idea of agency. In fact, taking navigation seriously entails a
rethinking of the setting in which our lives are configured and reconfig-
ured and of the relationship between the two. Where many social scien-
tific illuminations of practice position people and their movement within
relatively stable and solidified social settings, indicated in the words we
use to describe the "ground" upon which we move – social structures,
arenas, fields or landscapes – something interesting happens when invok-
ing the concept of navigation: our analytical gaze moves toward the way
people not just act in but interact with their social environment and adjust
their lives to the constant influence (in *potentia* and *presentia*) of social
forces and change (Vigh, 2009, p. 433).

According to Foucault, power is a complex strategical situation in a par-
ticular society; it is the outcome of power relations between different sub-
jects in the interplay of uneven and mobile relations (Foucault, 1978). Pow-
er, therefore, is not held; it is not reserved for the dominant but is crossed by
dispute. The dominated, in a more or less conflictual manner, share in the
determination of the complex and *mobile* strategic situation within which
they move.

This sheds light on the interactions and interferences not only between dif-
ferent social forces and subjects, but also between local, national and interna-
tional spaces. Over the years, the debate about transnationalism has been quite
lively. Here I am referring to a critical analysis of the idea whereby transna-
tional networks seem to relegate national spaces to a marginal role through a
gradual de-territorialisation of activities and resources (Lacroix, 2003). Inter-
estingly, the works of a few scholars who have worked in Moroccan commu-
nities in Italy have highlighted the complexity of a dense transnational space,
including institutional and non-institutional subjects, organised and non-
organised subjects. In his work *Le prigioni invisibili. Etnografia multisituata
della migrazione marocchina*, Carlo Capello, who worked in the Moroccan
community of Turin, underlined the processes that make it possible to main-
tain economic, social and symbolic relations with one's or one's parents'
country of origin (Capello, 2008). Ruba Salih adopted a gender perspective in
her work on Moroccan women in the region Emilia Romagna, clearly showing
that the nation-state is far from being weakened:

> Particularly in some specific spheres, notably in the control and disci-
> pline of migration, the nation-state seems to be far from weakened.
> Analyses of diasporic groups and hybrids that ignore or overlook this

very fact, I believe, account for a very partial picture of the nature of contemporary migration and certainly fail to see how modern institutions still discriminate on the basis of gender. The ethnography of Moroccan migrant women thus contrasts with the celebratory stances that emphasise transnational agencies … The nature and quality of women's movements and practices should be understood in light of the nature and quality of their membership in the various contexts (that is the household, the state or the wider society at large). In this way, we can see how transnationalism may challenge or reproduce inequalities between genders and between places (Salih, 2001, p. 669).

With reference to this, quoting Sayad once again is quite natural, as he states that it is impossible to think of the epic of migration (*fait social total*) and of the foreigner without considering the "idea of the state" that provides the criterion to distinguish between "nationals" and "non-nationals" that describes the foreigner as *expulsable*, which defines the national order as being perturbed by the presence of the foreigner (Sayad, 1999).[4] Sayad (1999) states that the children of migrant families occupy an even more critical position than their parents – they can neither leave the country in which they are engaged, nor even pretend not to be concerned. They are forced to invent:

> Par une sorte de revanche ironique de l'histoire, ce sont, précisément, ceux qui on été et sont encore, à la fois, les premières et les dernières victimes des idéologies nationalistes, celles "de la terre et du sang", qui sont contraints aujourd'hui, pour réaliser leur identité, de s'inventer de toutes pièces la "terre", le "sang", la "langue", l'"ethnie", (qui n'est qu'un euphémisme pour dire la "race") ou la "culture", etc., tous les critères "objectifs" qui peuvent servir de "preuves" à l'identité et de motifs pour la revendication de cette identité (Sayad, 1999, pp. 450–451).

So, although the foreigner can acquire the citizenship of another country, a foreigner remains such in the evidence of his/her body, of his/her name and, with reference to the subject of this chapter, in the evidence of his/her "other" religious practice. The young members of the CII inhabit a dense transnational space in which they encounter not only other social forces but also the Moroccan and Italian institutions, and in the interplay of uneven and

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[4] In his essay "*Immigration et 'pensée d'État'*", Sayad relies on the concept developed by Pierre Bourdieu, applying it in his research on Algerian migration in France. Concerning the idea of the foreigner as a perturbing presence, see Di Mauro (2020).

mobile relations they try to navigate in a setting that changes, especially when it is the legitimacy of their very presence that is questioned.

This navigation is definitely smoother than others, with no major shocks, but it still makes it necessary to be constantly on the move to escape the terrible condition of the "double absence", to build one's individual and collective role in the Italian society and at least partly in the Moroccan society, in the European and, finally, transnational space. A number of dimensions are involved in this praxis – from the social to the economic-political, and many more – they are not separate entities, but are connected with one another. Here I focus my attention on the religious dimension, which becomes a symbolic and practical instrument for the affirmation of one's presence.

Co-optation

According to Mohamed Berriane (2018), there are 4 to 5 million Moroccans living abroad – about 12% of the total Moroccan population. Most of them live in Europe. According to the latest *Dossier statistico immigrazione* published by Idos in October 2020, there are about 420 000 Moroccan regular residents in Italy, and about 450 000 according to Caritas-Migrantes. Berriane is the editor of the latest four-year report "*Marocains de l'extérieur*" funded and produced by *Fondation Hassan II pour les Marocains Résidant à l'Étranger*. The *Fondation* is one of the most important state agencies that make up the Moroccan institutional device in charge of the populace living abroad.

Following the independence of Morocco in 1956, a mass emigration from the country was recorded, first towards north-western Europe, and then starting from the late 1970s, to the Euro-Mediterranean area. At first, Moroccans reached Europe through bilateral labour transfer agreements. Following the economic crisis of the 1970s, the policy of closing borders by north-western European countries and the global neoliberal political-economic restructuring, Moroccan migrants continued to arrive in Europe irregularly, reaching new host countries such as Spain and Italy through family reunification (de Haas, 2007b, 2013; de Haas, Vezzoli, 2010).

Moroccan migration changed, therefore. It was no longer only adult males able to work in factories and mines that migrated: the so-called feminisation of migration began, and families were reconstituted. Therefore, the needs of those who were no longer just workers, including religious ones, emerged in a more complex way. The official definitions of Moroccans abroad also changed. Moroccan workers abroad (*TME – Travailleurs Maro-*

cains à l'Étranger) became Moroccans living abroad (*MRE – Marocains Résidant à l'Étranger*), and finally Moroccans of the world (*MDM –Marocains du Monde*).[5]

The Moroccan institutional devices in charge of Moroccans abroad changed as a consequence of the new needs of foreign residents and in the framework of a wider-ranging transformation process. In the last two decades of the twentieth century, Morocco experienced a period of political normalisation (Iskander, 2010) after the riots and civic upheaval during the "years of lead"[6] triggered by the harsh reforms imposed by international financial institutions. This normalisation was achieved partly thanks to the co-optation of political and social forces that were previously in opposition to Makhzen (*Maḥzan* – the Moroccan government). In 1997 the USFP (*Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires*) won the elections and Youssoufi (*Al Yūsūfī*) – in exile until then – was appointed Prime Minister.

A similar process involved Moroccans living abroad. Until the 1980s, the management of relations with Moroccans abroad was the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and the *Amicales* (guilds, labour organisations tied to the embassies). In his work *Between Courting and Controlling: The Moroccan State and "Its" Emigrants*, the scholar Hein de Haas is quite straightforward in highlighting the harsh control system put in place through embassies, consulates and the *Amicales*: "control and spying networks consisting of Moroccan embassies, consulates, mosques, and government-controlled migrant associations such as the infamous *Fédération des Amicales des Marocains*, better known as "*Amicales*" (*Widadiat* in Arabic) across northwestern Europe" (de Haas, 2007a, p. 17). Later on, the Kingdom shaped new institutional instruments (Belguendouz, 2006; 2009a; 2009b; 2009c; 2013):

- 1984: Five seats in parliament reserved for Moroccans abroad.
- 1989: Foundation of Bank Al-ʿAmal for the management of remittances and investments of Moroccans abroad.
- 1990: Establishment of *Fondation Hassan II pour les Marocains Résidant à l'Étranger.*

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[5] On the definitions of migrants, once again Sayad (1999) comes to our aid, highlighting how the discourse on the *émigrés* in emigration countries is, at least in a first moment and above all concerning "*immigration de travail*", subordinated to the one on the immigration of immigration countries, the former of which makes use of definitions and categories. On the official definitions of Moroccans abroad by the Kingdom of Morocco, see my article entitled "TME, MRE, Marocains du Monde. Analisi e diagnosi di un dispositivo istituzionale" due in 2022.

[6] "Years of lead" – years of brutal repression by armed forces.

- 1990: Establishment of the *Ministère délégué auprès du Ministre des Affaires Étrangères et de la Coopération Internationale chargé des Marocains Résidant à l'Étranger et des Affaires de la Migration.*
- 2007: Creation of the *Conseil de la Communauté Marocaine à l'Étranger.*
- 2011: Constitutionalisation of the role of Moroccans abroad (articles 16, 17, 18 and 163, Constitution).

In addition to these features, it must be remembered that, in different forms and operating at various levels, all Moroccan institutions participated in the management of the "Moroccans abroad" dossier. Amongst these, the *Ministère des Habous et des affaires islamiques* has taken on an increasingly important role spreading the Moroccan version of Islam,[7] viewing Moroccans abroad as a *vector* (Bruce, 2019). There are quite a number of entities and institutions tied to the royal Ministry extending their activities beyond the national borders; among these is the *Conseil Européen des Ouléma Marocains* (CEOM).

Despite the highs and lows in the lives of the above-mentioned bodies,[8] Morocco uses these institutional devices to "intercept" part of the Moroccan communities abroad and bring them into the Kingdom's political-religious system in the transnational space. In other words, if Moroccans living abroad, namely in Europe and Italy, take the institutional, official entity of Morocco as their point of reference in terms of values and political-religious view, then the Kingdom is able to affirm its own political-religious and value systems beyond its national borders, thus gaining consensus and legitimacy among the communities of Moroccans abroad on the one hand and, on the other hand, acquiring more credit in its relationship with European governments and, specifically, that of Italy.

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[7] I am referring to the official Moroccan version of Islam, as defined in the Constitution: "The Nation relies for its collective life on the federative constants [*constantes federatrices*], on the occurrence of moderate Muslim religion, [on] the national unity of its multiple components [*affluents*], [on] the constitutional monarchy and [on] democratic choice" – art. 1 Constitution, translated (from French) by J. J. Ruchti, available at: https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Morocco_2011?lang=en (22/02/2021). For the official texts see Dahir n° 1-11-91 du 27 chaabane 1432 (29 juillet 2011) portant promulgation du texte de la Constitution, in Bulletin Officiel n° 5964 bis, 28 chaabane 1432 (30-07-2011), p. 4. In the Arabic version of the Constitution, "moderate Muslim religion" ("*religion musulmane modérée*" in French) is *al-dīn al-islāmī al-samḥ.*

[8] On this topic, see in particular Belguendouz's activities and works.

It should also be pointed out that the Islamic religious field is a contested space inhabited by subjects with different references among transnational networks, institutions and agencies of Islamic majority countries, as well as Islamic associations and organisations. In the religious experience it is a dispute among multiple subjects, with different stances and orientations, some of whom have their main field of origin and expression in Morocco and can decide whether or not to adhere to the Kingdom's option.[9] This dispute concerns the Italian space as well, in which the Italian institutional device is clearly the other protagonist in the management of the Islamic religious field.

Article 8 of the Italian Constitution provides that the *Intesa* (Agreement) regulates the relations between the state and the religious faiths other than the Roman Catholic one. As early as the 1990s a few drafts of agreements were submitted by Islamic organisations to the Italian Presidency of the Council.[10] As of today, however, unlike other religious faiths and their organisations, Islam and its representatives have not reached an *Intesa* with the Italian state. Without an organic law on religious freedom that transposes in full the constitutional provisions on the matter (artt. 3, 8 and 19 Const.), the relevant legislation is still that dating back to Fascist times, i.e. Law no. 1159 of 24 June 1929 on *culti ammessi* (allowed worships) and following amendments, which provides for the recognition of the legal person by means of a decree of the President of the Republic for an organism of a religious faith wishing to benefit from the rights reserved for institutions of worship. Paolo Naso clearly states that Italian legislation regarding the relations between the state and the religions other than the Catholic one creates a hierarchy, a pyramid of rights, at the bottom of which lies Islam, which does not enjoy any of the benefits envisaged by the Italian legal system (Naso, 2018, pp. 93–

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[9] I cannot delve deeper into a topic that is not the focus of this chapter. For my purposes, it will be sufficient to say that the dispute in the Moroccan Islamic religious sphere, between the Kingdom and the political forces somehow belonging to Moroccan political Islamism, is one that has taken on various forms outside the national borders, including in Italy. For a more in-depth analysis of this phenomenon, see Di Mauro (2021).

[10] Drafts of an *Intesa* have been submitted by *Unione delle Comunità Islamiche d'Italia* (Union of Italian Islamic Communities – UCOII) (1992), by *Associazione dei Musulmani Italiani* (Association of Italian Muslims – AMI) (1994) and by *Comunità Religiosa Islamica Italiana* (Italian Islamic Religious Community – COREIS) (1996); a request was also submitted by *Centro Islamico Culturale d'Italia* (Italian Islamic Cultural Centre – CICI) (1993). The drafts of the *Intesa* can be found in the journal *Quaderni di Diritto e Politica Ecclesiastica* as indicated by Mancuso (2012). Several texts discuss in depth the topic of the drafts of *Intesa* of the 1990s: see Cilardo (2002).

96).[11] Naso has also related this Islamic exception to a bias against Islamic communities caused by an overlapping of these communities with the *jihadi* trends, and thus to their identification with a risk for security: "this fear has brought about an attitude of extreme caution among policy-makers in carrying out actions and making decisions that might sound in favour of the Islamic community" (Naso, 2018, p. 73, translated by the author).

Proof of this, in my opinion, was the establishment, in 2005, of a specific consulting body called *Consulta* – later *Comitato* (Commission) – for Italian Islam at the Ministry of the Interior, supported in the past few years by the Council for Relations with Italian Islam, the latter coordinated precisely by Paolo Naso, who is my recommended source for the changing fortunes of these institutional tables (Naso, 2018; 2019). The framework of the relations between institutions and Islamic communities is therefore a mobile one. On the one hand, the security-based approach questions the formal recognition of the country's second-largest religious community in terms of number of members after Catholicism;[12] on the other hand, the alternation of political forces determines the priorities of the governments and, with them, the alternation of steps forwards and backwards in the management of the Islamic religious field in Italy.

Since the early 1990s, the issue of the formal recognition of the Islamic religion was gradually brought onto the government's political agenda. In 2017 the *Patto nazionale per un islam italiano* (in full, the "National Pact for an Italian Islam as the expression of an open, integrated community accept-

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[11] The legal person has been granted only to the CICI, whose limit is that it is not representative, in spite of its relations and complementarity – on the basis of a common reference in the Kingdom of Morocco – with *Confederazione Islamica Italiana* (CII), which is made up of regional federations and groups in a number of worship centres. There is no religious staff appointed by the ministry in compliance with the law on *culti ammessi* (Naso, 2019).

[12] It is difficult to estimate the number of Muslims present in the country. There is no classification based on religion. All data is based on the migrants' nationalities and on the percentage of Muslims out of the total population of the countries of origin with an Islamic majority or with large Islamic minorities. It is therefore difficult to take into account the various faiths or beliefs and to understand how many have been converted. In spite of the wide margin for error, it can certainly be stated that, with a population ranging between 1.5 and 2 million people according to the survey, Islam in Italy is the second most widespread faith after Catholicism. However, it should be pointed out that another religious minority in Italy challenges the primacy of Islamic communities – depending on the year and the method of survey. It is the Christian Orthodox minority, which is made up mainly of migrants from Eastern Europe. For updated data, see the above-mentioned *Dossier statistico immigrazione 2020*.

ing the values and principles of the state's legal system") was established. The *Patto*, written with the collaboration of *Consiglio per i rapporti con l'islam italiano* (Council for Relations with Italian Islam), has been seen by many as a major step towards reaching the *Intesa* to which the text makes explicit reference. However, it should be admitted that the *Patto* has produced no result whatsoever and that it seems biased by an evident security-based approach. The then minister Minniti presented the document at a press conference, calling it the "Convenant of the Lost Sheep"; the text stresses transparency concerning funding and preaching, and there are many references to the fight against religious radicalism.[13] The *Patto* was undersigned by the Ministry of the Interior and by the most representative Islamic organisations, including *Centro Islamico Culturale d'Italia* (CICI), *Comunità Religiosa Islamica Italiana* (COREIS), *Unione delle Comunità Islamiche d'Italia* (UCOII) and *Confederazione Islamica Italiana* (CII). It seems that these organisations have accepted the approach and cooptation by the Italian government, though in varying forms. It would be more appropriate to talk of a continuous, complex negotiation which emerges at the local level in particular (Giorgi, 2018). However, we may say that the approach of the Italian institutions has contributed to the affirmation of a self-defined moderate option in the Islamic religious field. It looks directly to the Kingdom of Morocco and to the CICI, in which Morocco and its diplomatic corps play a leading role – surpassing the economic power of the Saudis, who sponsored and funded the building of Rome's Great Mosque, where the CICI is based – and to the CII, which supports and spreads the Kingdom's official version of Islam.[14] The CII is an independent organisation set up in 2012, also thanks to

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[13] The Ministers of the Interior appointed after Minniti have not continued that type of work so far. Salvini did not convene a table during his office. Lamorgese met Islamic organisations during the Covid emergency to subscribe a protocol for the re-opening of mosques after the lockdown; in addition, other members of the Government Conte II (XVIII legislature) have resumed relations with the Islamic communities. In particular, I am referring to the Minister of Justice Bonafede and, with him, the Penitentiary Administration Department who have subscribed protocols for religious support to Muslim inmates with UCOII (June 2020), CICI and CII (October 2020).

[14] Over time, the Kingdom of Morocco and Moroccans in Italy have taken on an increasingly important role, not because of their relationship, but rather thanks to the transformations that have occurred within Islam and the Islamic communities in Italy – with reference to this, Conti speaks of a delay of Moroccan Islam on the Italian scene (Conti, 2014). It is no coincidence that the presidency of UCOII, with which CICI and CII have been in – sometimes harsh – contrast, has been given to Yassine Lafram, of Moroccan origin. Another Islamic organisation in Italy is *Partecipazione e Spiritualità Musulmana* (Muslim Participation and Spirituali-

the major support of the Moroccan institutional device, and today is one of the most representative organisations at the national level.[15]

The youth of the Italian Islamic Confederation

In order to be put forward as the model for Italian Islam, the official version of Moroccan Islam should be recognised and practised by the community of Muslims in Italy and, above all, by the Moroccan community. The Moroccan institutional device has dedicated its efforts to this purpose, using all the instruments in its power. These include sending imams and preachers (including women) to courses in Islamic sciences and language for people born or grown up in Italy, coordinated by the Hassan II Foundation; European meetings for young Muslims organised by the CEOM; international conferences for Islam in Europe organised by CCME and the organisation of summer journeys back to Morocco. In this way the Moroccan institutional device has come into contact with a growing number of Moroccan Muslims in Italy, who have begun to recognise themselves in the Kingdom's political-religious action and have chosen to take part and play a leading role in it. This contact takes place in the CII, and especially among its young members. According to Ghoufran Hajraoui,

> Imams here are only self-taught volunteers who take care of religion; they learn by themselves, without formal education. Therefore, if we organise an event, Morocco and the Ministry take care of sending [staff] to educate imams abroad. Again, contextualising it, that is to say, taking into account the social context, providing them with the instruments that

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ty), whose reference is Moroccan *al-ʿAdl wa al-Iḥsān*. The latter is linked to the personality of *šaīḫ* ʿAbd Al-Salām Yāsīn, who passed away in 2012 and who, in his famous open letter addressed to King Ḥassan II in 1974 and entitled 'Islam or the Deluge', had questioned the adherence to the religious principles of the King's conduct and government, which caused him to serve a sentence in a psychiatric prison. Such detention was no hindrance to the growth of the organisation that took the name it still has today, *al-ʿAdl wa al-Iḥsān*, in 1987, after some successful publications and after failing to receive the authorisation to formally set up the group. We may say that in Italy there has been a gradual Moroccanisation of Islam: on this topic, see Di Mauro (2021).

[15] A great deal of information about CII was given to me by Massimo ʿAbd Allāh Cozzolino, Secretary General of the organisation. More specifically, here I am referring to my interview to him in 2017 at the Mosque of Piazza Mercato, Naples, managed by the Islamic cultural organisation Zayd bin Ṯābit.

are necessary in that particular context. Because being in Morocco is not the same as being in Europe or in the West.[16]

Ghoufran Hajraoui was born in Turin in 1997 and is the eldest of four sisters; she is the daughter of the CII's President Moustapha Hajraoui and one of the leading figures among the Young members of the Italian Islamic Confederation. She graduated at University of Turin with a thesis on the ecological transition strategies of Morocco; she speaks Arabic, the first language she learned at home, Italian, English and understands French. She is married, the nuclear family is in Turin, in Italy there are her other uncles and cousins, especially in Piedmont. Ghoufran's parents arrived in Italy from Bejaad, in the Khouribga province. From her words one can infer the significance of the Moroccan institutional device for Moroccans in Italy concerning the transmission of religious knowledge. Ghoufran sees an opportunity for education and growth in the field of religion. The strategy is to benefit from the resources provided to have well-prepared religious figures and become able to have a new leadership in the Italian setting. With reference to this, an important initiative that involved several academic centres and in particular the University of Padua, is the PriMED project (*Prevenzione e interazione nello spazio Trans-Mediterraneo* – Prevention and interaction in the Trans-Mediterranean space) which, over the last two years, has been providing training courses for imams, Murshidats and Muslim ministers.[17] The CICI and CII are project partners, or more specifically the collaborating bodies of civil society. Some of the young members of the CII took part in the project's initiatives, including Ghoufran herself and Walid, one of the main informants in my research work, who describes the relations between Italy and Morocco concerning the management of the Islamic religious field as follows:

> Things are moving ahead, the world is changing, Europe is changing, and when faced with certain difficulties, what do you do? You ask those who know more or, if you need to solve a problem concerning Muslims, you call or contact a Muslim country. Unfortunately, geopolitics has led to a situation where there are countries with which it's better not to have any relations. In spite of this, there are countries with which there is a certain political convenience, a certain attention to try and collaborate to solve a problem together. There is Italy, and there is this collaboration with Mo-

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[16] Interview with Ghoufran Hajraoui at the main offices of CII in via Ernesto Lugaro, Turin, 2018 (All the interviews' extracts have been translated by the author from Italian).

[17] Information about the courses is available at https://primed-miur.it (22/02/2021).

rocco. Why? Because, in my view, Italy has realised first of all that most of the immigrants here are Moroccans. Secondly, they have realised that the Moroccan model, which is not a model created by politics, but is part of the society, of the culture and history of the country – it's the closest model to what Italy would like to achieve.[18]

Walid, born in Turin in 1993, is one of the leaders of the CII Youth and adheres completely to the Kingdom's political-religious system. Walid is married to Ikram who lives in the Biella area. Walid's father arrived in Italy in 1989 and was joined by his two brothers and sister as well as by his wife immediately after the wedding. As a child, Walid attended almost all the mosques in Turin. In the last 15 years he has moved to the suburbs of the city and started attending the South Turin Mosque named after Muḥammad VI, King of Morocco, which is part of the Regional Islamic Federation of Piedmont. In his words, the mobility of the Italian context appears evident. With some countries it is better to have no relations, because – we infer – they are carriers of ideals that each time are defined as conservative, rigid or even radical, and are not, in public discourse, compatible with the societies and legal systems of European countries. The compatibility of the Moroccan model with the Italian society and legal system in particular is due to a moderate, tolerant orientation – adjectives that are both used in the official definitions.

> To be tolerant does not mean not to be traditional or traditionalist in the way we view Islam. Morocco has a strong, deeply rooted Maliki tradition. Better, I would say that it is the only school of thought existing in Morocco, which is quite rigid on certain aspects: it isn't very open on all fronts. The Muslim Brothers in Egypt are light years ahead in certain matters, in certain social issues. Here [the word] tolerance is probably meant more as a sort of "warranty seal", a way to say "there is no room for extremism with us. We have our own way of viewing Islam – the view developed by Moroccan Ulemas who study the Maliki school [...], but we will never accept any extremism [...]".[19]

These are the words of 32-year-old Hassan, who was born in Morocco and has lived in Ferrara since 1993. He has a degree in sports science, a Master's on immigration at the Ca' Foscari University in Venice, and a Master's in

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[18] Interview with Walid Bouknaf at the main offices of CII in via Ernesto Lugaro, Turin, 2018.

[19] Interview to Hassan Samid, Turin 2018, at the CII offices during a meeting of the CII Youth.

studies on Islam in Europe at University of Padua. He has worked since the age of 19 in the social field, mainly with refugees and children. He also is a soccer and gymnastics trainer. Hassan comes from Fkih Ben Salah, a town known for its strong emigration, in the Béni Mellal-Khenifra region. Hassan independently attended the mosque from an early age, until he became head of the Centre for Islamic Culture in Ferrara and its province, a centre that has had the same leadership since the 1990s. He highlights the key point very clearly. Tolerance as a "warranty seal", no room for extremism, which – in the Italian mobile context, where the presence of Muslims is questioned precisely because it is considered a synonym of closeness to Jihadism – becomes a symbolic instrument to reaffirm their being part of the political, social and religious body of the country. When discussing the official version of Moroccan Islam as a model for Italy, Hassan's words express very clearly their strategic re-positioning in the changing context and with reference to the strategic goal of receiving a formal recognition for the Islamic communities:

> To tell the truth, if you had asked me the same question ten years ago, I would have answered, No, that's not good, we need an Italian Islam. But I also think we must be wise and keep our feet on the ground [...]. I come from a mosque that has been a member of UCOII. And this is what we are talking about: we know that this is probably not the best time – let's say – to rely on organisations that have very close relations with Gulf countries. ... This doesn't mean giving up the idea of an Islam independent from other nations. It doesn't mean giving up. Rather, it means to look at the real situation, to consider several factors. The first is that the majority of Muslims in Italy are Moroccan – and this is by no means a secondary factor. Immigration is still strongly connected to Morocco, this is not the Netherlands or France, which do retain some relationship with Morocco anyway: ... here there are people who were born in Morocco ..., there is still a strong bond. On top of that ... Morocco, beside being a socially and politically stable country, is also a country that gives a major contribution to Europe through its intelligence. It is also well structured as an Islamic country, with a solid religious education. In my opinion, it has all that is needed to be a guide for Islam in Italy. I don't think it's a bad thing to help each other .... Of course, this shouldn't be a form of control, but must become a form of support – maybe a guarantee.[20]

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[20] Interview to Hassan Samid, Turin 2018, at the CII offices during a meeting of the CII Youth.

On both the symbolic and practical levels, then, the CII Youth make use of the instruments provided by the various institutional devices, share in the management of the religious field, try to build a political and religious role for themselves, re-position themselves in the changing context and even with respect to their parents' generation, who still make up the main part of the leadership. With reference to this, Ghoufran, the CII President's daughter, clarifies the difference between the so-called first generation who were always concerned with the same things, namely questions regarding practice and worship, and the so-called second generation, who are capable of a more fruitful projection outside the community: "Our goal is also to open mosques to others and turn the whole of the social context into one thing".[21] On this particular aspect it is Ezzedine, another member of the CII Youth, who talks about the definition of a repositioning for his generation, who will have to be able to reshape the symbolic and practical matters they have to handle in order to adapt them to the context in which they operate:

> The differences between the first and second generation lie in the wider knowledge that young people have of the country, of the Italian language and of the Italian society. Because yes – we are originally from Morocco, some were born in Morocco, some were born here – but we grew up here and we are by all means Italian. We reason the way Italians do, we think as Italians, we study at Italian schools and universities. We know the Italian context better. We know how Italians think. ... The first generation think as Moroccans, while young people tend to understand more, the dialogue is easier, as it is easier to avoid misunderstandings and mistakes. We do thank the first generation for the great work they have done at all

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[21] Here is the full text of part of the interview focusing on the above-mentioned issue, to give a better sense of her words.

Ghoufran Hajraoui: "The first generation might be a little more sedentary, they always seem to think of the same things – prayer, Ramaḍān, the celebration – they always rent the hall – they take care of the community. Conversely, the Young, having grown up here, feel that they grew up with Italians … they have that group of guys who are friends, but brothers too … You don't feel that difference that much anymore".

Nicola Di Mauro: "Is it as if the first generation were more concerned with the community, while the second generation were more projected towards the society?".

Ghoufran Hajraoui: "Exactly. Our goal is also to open the mosques to others and to turn the whole social context into one thing only. This is the advantage that the adults obtain from us, so to say … They invest in our energy and in our will to do things. They are often reluctant, they don't want to do certain things … we are a little more confident … The first impact is always a little difficult … We need to find a balance" (Interview with Ghoufran Hajraoui at the main offices of Confederazione Islamica Italiana in via Ernesto Lugaro, Turin, 2018).

levels. They have contributed, for what was in their power, to the opening of worship centres, to the possibility for Muslims to gather. The harder work will be on the next generation, however: to take the legacy of the adults and put it on the agenda of Italy in an Italian Islamic context. So, as we said earlier, the starting point is a moderate and tolerant Islam with its European, Italian peculiarity.[22]

Ezzedine was born in Morocco in 1992 and arrived in Italy at the age of seven to join his father in the province of Turin. He studies at university and works in an engineering company that does quality control on car components. The nuclear family is made up of the parents, two sons and two daughters. The rest of the family is divided between Italy and Morocco. They come from Settat, in the Casablanca region, but they moved to Khouribga before getting to Rivarolo Canavese, a small town in the province of Turin. His view of the European and Italian society is his most evident trait as well as the main concern of the action of CII as a whole. Still, we may state that the young members of CII inhabit a dense transnational space in a more intense manner. They affirm the principle of a different religious existence, travel to Morocco, endow themselves with the instruments they deem necessary and then return to Italy, to be protagonists in the management of the Islamic religious field and in the negotiation with the Italian society and institutions for the full enjoyment of citizen rights.

Double presence

This chapter shows how the national institutional devices, with all their ideological legacy, occupy the transnational space in which power relations between dominant and dominated intensify, especially when we talk of migrants and children of the migratory experience. In this space, the interplay takes place of *uneven and mobile relations* mentioned at the beginning. In this dense transnational space, the young members of CII move, changing their positioning. What the fieldwork seems to bring to the surface most clearly is their concern with the legitimacy of the action in the religious field, in a context in which Islam has become an issue of security (Cesari, 2012). Faced with the hypothesis of being left out of the processes concerning the management of the religious field, the CII Youth choose to adopt the

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[22] Interview to Azzedine Ramli at the mosque named after Muḥammad VI, King of Morocco, in via Genova, Turin, 2018.

option provided by the Kingdom of Morocco, accepting the idea of an Islam that describes itself as moderate and tolerant. Thus, they enter into a complex relation with the Moroccan institutions and at the same time, share with them in the management of the Islamic religious field in Italy producing a complex strategic situation that is itself the outcome of power relations between different subjects. The young members of CII are positioned within a force field which moves them and influences their positions and possibilities for movement. They not only act within their social environment but interact with it, and with all actors crowding the transnational space. Their agency lies precisely in their interaction with institutional, social and political subjects, with religious communities, with society. This constant interaction constantly reconfigures their positioning and determines the next movement.

This interaction allows the youth of CII not only to establish relations with the institutional subjects that determine the management of the religious field. In a context without resources in Islamic religious terms, Ghoufran, Walid, Hassan and Azzedine have access to the resources, religious knowledge and symbolic matter that are necessary to gain leadership in the Italian Islamic religious field. As Azzedine stated, these are made available by the Kingdom of Morocco as a starting point; the strategic aim is to give life to an autonomous religious experience fully within the Italian context – a minority context for Muslims, a secular context with a Catholic majority. This goal is achievable thanks to the tactical positioning that I have tried to describe in this chapter, of aligning themselves with the moderate, tolerant form of Islam officially promoted by Morocco, compatible with Italian laws and religiosity. In this way they reaffirm the legitimacy of a presence that is constantly questioned.

The result for now seems to be a *double presence*. On the one hand, young Moroccans in Italy recognise their role as they take on the burden of a religious and symbolic legacy reproduced beyond Morocco's national borders. On the other hand, in the Italian society they live in they reaffirm their own being as an integral part of those political, social and religious bodies. In conclusion, however, it can be stated, that this is not a mere reproduction of their original position – which might even risk reproducing power relations and inequalities. The words and actions of the CII Youth show a will to shape the symbolic matter they make their own in order to give life to an entirely autonomous religious experience – independent even from that of their parents. In this sense they tactically reconstruct their individual and collective profile so as to be able to strategically determine the management of the Islamic religious sphere in Italy.

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