



Citation: C. Pasini (2019) Double loneliness and double belonging. *Cambio* Vol. 9, n. 17: 51-59. doi: 10.13128/cambio-25204

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Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

Monographic Section

Double loneliness and double belonging¹

Fighting against loneliness: the international movement to support *Hirak*² Rif, the Italian case study

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Abstract. In experiencing migration, some actors may take political action to contrast their own loneliness and to claim the belonging both to the host country and the country of origin. For the foreigners living in Italy, approaching to the social and political struggles of the community of origin can be a way to claim the belonging to a group, or to several groups. The objective of this contribution is to analyse the transnational networks of the political mobilisation at the time of globalization, the migration flows and the increasing use of online social networks.

The Moroccan movement *Hirak Rif* was born in the region of Rif during October 2016 to advance social, political and economic demands. This work's aim is to examine the mobilisation of the Moroccans living in Italy, in particular of those from the Riffian region. They use Facebook as a tool of struggle, to fight the loneliness that they consider the end of the *Hirak*'s strength. In this contribution, the role of the social networks as means of separation among individuals is questioned, supporting instead their unifying function. The social networks as political tools are essential to the existence of the Moroccan diaspora's political action. This comes clear both from the observation of the movement's action and from the interviews with the activists.

Therefore, the assumption of the movement's loneliness and the methods used in order to oppose it, seem to be strategies to fight the loneliness of the activists themselves. This can be seen as a migrant's double loneliness, echoing the migrant's double absence of Sayad's analysis. The activists' actions put in place to support the Riffian movement would lead, on the one hand, to the strengthening of the links between the individuals and the group of origin; on the other hand, to the creation or to the consolidation of the group in the immigration country. The political action, made possible and easier thanks to the social networks, is used by the activists to create and legitimate both groups. In this way the double political belonging of the activists is built and strengthened.

Keywords. Migration, Morocco, Double solitude, Movements, *Hirak*.

¹ The title of this article is inspired by the condition of "double absence" of the migrant theorized by Abdelmalek Sayad [Sayad 1999].

² The word *hirak* means «movement» in Arabic.

INTRODUCTION

Migration as a matter of research lets new issues rise about the link between loneliness and political engagement. The political activity concerning the country of origin is a useful perspective to study the relation of the political actors with the «national» imagined community [Benedict 1996] and with other local, national and transnational communities and groups. In this sense, the migration, as a complex process, implies not just the host country, as it is seldom assumed, but also the country of origin [Sayad 1999]. The political engagement is conceived as a way to contrast loneliness, intended in an arendtian way as a phenomenon of atomization and depoliticization [Arendt 2009], as well as a more general isolation. In this sense, it is interesting to question loneliness as a modern attitude, analysing the strategies of resistance put in place by the political actors, the new and different ways they act in groups with social and political purposes and the new political space that emerges.

The “migrant” is here conceived as an e-migrant, aside as an in(m)-migrant [Waldinger 2013]. The emigrant lives a particular condition of atomization. In a certain sense, it is a multiple/double one: he/she might be lonely in respect to the country of origin, the host country and, at the same time, the diaspora community. The groups originated from the political activities, with their meaning systems [Halbwachs 2001], shared ideas, practices and language, are the frame in which these multiple lonelinesses are questioned and overcome.

The political engagement of Moroccans living in Italy, particularly linked to the Riffian region, is the empirical case to study the mentioned issues. Some questions rise: Can informal politics aside institutionalized democratic engagement, considered by Arendt the contrary of loneliness, be a way to contrast its drifts? May the experience of Riffian community, inside and outside Morocco, be considered an exception to its diffusion? Which are the differences and the similarities between the two movements (inside and outside Morocco) and by what are they generated?

The analysis conducted in this article is the result of a field research started in June 2017. The empirical basis consisted in the direct observation of the meetings and the assembly promoted by the members of the informal political group *Hirak Torino*, the qualitative analysis of the contents shared by the members on the social networks and on the on-line press, and 5 semi-structured interviews with some of the more active members of the group (4 by phone and 1 live)³. Interviews have been held in Italian, translated in English for this article. Interviewees’ names have been changed for privacy reasons.

THE HIRAK RIF MOVEMENT: BETWEEN SOLITUDE AND NATIONAL BELONGING

The Hirak Rif movement was born after the spontaneous demonstrations that followed the death of Mouhcine Fikri, a fishmonger in Al Hoceima who threw himself into a garbage truck to recover his wares, which were confiscated and thrown away by the policemen on October 28th, 2016 [Aidi 2017, Rannou 2017, *TelQuel* on-line]. This event shook the public opinion at a local, national and international level, as it happened after Mohamed Bouazizi’s death in Tunisia on the eve of the Arab Spring. Fikri’s death put emphasis on the social, economic, political, and cultural issues that formed the aftermath core of the activists’ demands. Indeed, the episode gained notoriety because it underlined, on one side, pervasive presence in the region of the security forces and their arbitrary conducts⁴. On the other side, it highlighted the economic hardships and the high unemployment rates.

In Al Hoceima and in the Rif, informal economy is an essential resource for the majority of the population to make a living, especially for the youth [Aidi 2017, Rannou 2017, International campaign of solidarity with *Hirak Rif* on Facebook]. The claims of the movement concern unemployment, the demilitarization of the area, as well as the development of infrastructures, notably schools, hospitals, and transport routes.

³ For job reasons I had to move to Morocco right after the *Hirak Torino* mobilization, so with the people I met during the direct observation of the meetings, I had phone interviews on the issues related to the research I was carrying on.

⁴ Conference «Sur les traces de l’Etat» held by Badiha Nahhass on the 27th November 2017.

Rif is a Moroccan region in the northern area of Morocco. It was under Spanish colonial power from 1912 until 1956, when Morocco gained the national independence. In the Moroccan collective imagination, the region is considered to be an isolated area with respect to the rest of the country. During the protectorate and afterwards it has been considered a «rebel area», a *siba* region⁵, and it has been marginalized [Nahhass 2016].

Several rebellions took place there before⁶ and after⁷ the independence, drawing the ire of the *Makhzen*⁸. These revolts have been harshly repressed and contributed to form an image of the Rif as a rebel area. These reasons attracted on one side military repression and, on the other side, they encouraged the central government to marginalize it from a social, economic and political point of view [Nahhass 2016]. The condition of isolation described above is tightly linked to the motivations behind the 2016-2017 demonstrations and the creation of *Hirak Rif*. Some of the movement's demands aim to boost inclusion into the national dynamics, especially in the process of economic and social modernization of the country⁹.

In this case, the exclusion-inclusion tension, concerning the national and international debate on the Rif, should not be oversimplified as a mere desire of belonging and inclusion. The longstanding opposition of the region to the Moroccan central government is still present in Riffian sensitivity. Moreover, narratives on the Rif are closely related to a Berber identity claimed by the inhabitants. The ethnical, cultural and linguistic belonging of the region contributed to the tensions between the «Berber minority» and the «Arab majority» that leads the government. The main opinion on the Riffians is that they recognize themselves as belonging to a «Berber identity». This recognition comes both from the «Berber» inhabitants of the region and from the «Arab» residents of other areas of the country [Nahhass 2016], as well as from the Berber citizens living outside the Rif¹⁰. This recognition is reproduced in the migration process, as it will be stressed below.

During the unification process, the Riffian population did not accept the way national central power, led by the *Istiqlal* party unified the country, tried to uniform its lifestyles and languages¹¹.

From a political and cultural point of view, since the Eighties, several associations promoting the Berber culture were created. This ferment resulted in the recognition in 2011 of the *Tamazight*¹² as one of the country's official languages along with the Arab. This period's achievements concerned mostly the cultural and linguistic aspects, but not the economic, social, and political ones. Some efforts to develop the area with the massive development project *Al Hoceima Manarat al Mutawassit* failed¹³, as well as the effort to build a museum that should have casted new light on the history of the Rif [Nahhass 2016].

⁵ The *dar al siba*, the part of the country which has a difficult relationship with the central government, is opposed to the *dar al makhzen*, the part which is easily controlled. The label *siba* is employed to define a rebel area, an area which resists to the central power. [Hibou, Tozy 2015] The region of the Rif is a military area after a *dahir* (royal decree) on this subject that has been issued in 1958.

⁶ The experience of the Riffian Republic is still vivid in the national and regional collective memory. In 1921 Abdelkerim Al Khattabi led the Riffian army to gain the independence of the region from the Spanish protectorate. The Republic remained independent for 5 years before being re-conquered by the Spanish power.

⁷ The most well-known rebellions, harshly repressed, took place in 1958-59, 1965 and 1981. The first of these revolts and its consequences have been described in a documentary produced as part of the Communal Reparations Program: *Rif 58-59 : briser le silence*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lQmd3n19IUg>

⁸ *Makhzen* is the pervasive Moroccan central government.

⁹ « Décryptage du mouvement *Le Hirak* », *Monde Afrique*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=266JetRiO28>

¹⁰ Telephone interview with Mahmoud, on November 6th, 2017, telephone interview with Ahmed on December 19th 2017.

¹¹ The *Tarifit* (the language spoken by the Berbers in the Rif) and Spanish, were replaced by Arabic and French in the schools and in the administration. The national unification was experienced by the population as a new colonization and the *Istiqlal* as a power that wanted to prevent the population to express its own habits.

¹² The Berber languages spoken in Morocco are three: *tarifit*, spoken in the Rif, *tamazight* spoken in the central region on the Atlas mountain range, and *tashelhit* in the southern part of Morocco. The language that has been chosen as official language is a synthesis of these three and is usually called *tamazight*, while the term *amazigh* («free man») has currently replaced «Berber» in official discourses and on the press.

¹³ *Dalle proteste nel Rif al «terremoto politico»: il Marocco continua a tremare*, in ISPI on-line: <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/dalle-proteste-nel-rif-al-terremoto-politico-il-marocco-continua-tremare-19352>

The Rif's Berber belonging and the narratives on the region as a rebel area created a hostile context for the *Hirak Rif*, especially compared with the one in which was born and developed the 20th February Movement in 2011¹⁴. On the one hand, *Hirak Rif* gained solidarity from left-wing activists and Riffians of the national diaspora, who demonstrated in several Moroccan cities even outside the regional borders, notably on the occasion of the greatest demonstrations (June 20th, July 9th 2017). On the other hand, the media close to the *Makhzen*, some members of the government and several religious figures described the *Hirak* as a separatist movement and tried to discredit it.

This phenomenon is a good example for what Arendt argues [Arendt 2009]. Political loneliness is a massive characteristic among the population in the Moroccan monarchy. People feel far away from the institutions and the official parties. Particularly after the end of the expectations provoked by the Arab spring, the public opinion often appears totally distrusted in respect to political engagement and scared by social movements. The population mostly fears the *fitna*, the separation, worrying about the possibility of «falling into a civil war like the one that is destroying Syria», like Mohammad¹⁵ said and like stated by Badiha Nahhass during her conference¹⁶.

The accusations of separatism against the Riffians want to discredit *Hirak* that is becoming a pervasive movement and are far away from the movement's demands. Moreover, the *Hirak* members have tried to clarify the difference between their movement and the Berber activism. They have tried to underline the social and economic nature of their demands, neglecting cultural or linguistic requests¹⁷.

Even though the movement is only based on the demands, it refuses a specific leadership and to identify a precise course of action [Rannou 2017], several local political forces (like the left-wing and extreme left-wing parties, the republicans and the cultural *amazigh* associations) claimed the closeness to the movement. During the demonstrations the activists held often in their hands the Berber flag or the Riffian republic one¹⁸.

The hostility of authorities against the movement actualized in the end of May 2017. Hundreds of activists were imprisoned, and among them two of the most well-known: Nasser Zefzafi and the singer Silya. From this moment forward, the repression against the movement has become harsher, culminating in the repression of the 20th June demonstration [Aidi 2017].

The isolation of the movement and of the politically active Riffian region, seems going in a different direction in respect to arendtian loneliness [Arendt 2009]. The Riffian people want to engage and requires a more active form of politicization in respect to the majority of the Moroccan population. They try to find a space of participation at a local and national level but they find mostly hostility and political repression, that make them more isolated. So they try to find a better political space on-line and outside national borders, seeking for interlocutors in Europe and among the Riffian diaspora.

FIGHTING AGAINST LONELINESS: THE INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT SUPPORTING *HIRAK RIF*

The activists' imprisonment and the repression gave a new momentum to the international movement of solidarity. The events linked to *Hirak Rif*¹⁹ have provoked an immediate interest on European newspapers (especially

¹⁴ The 20th February Movement (in French: Mouvement du 20 Février M20F) was born in the first part of the 2011 and has been considered the leader movement of the Moroccan Arab spring. The movement didn't arouse great interest in the country and, after the promulgation of the new constitution in March 2011 and the imprisonment of numerous political activists, the M20F lose its momentum in few months.

¹⁵ Interview with Mohammad, occurred on the January 8th 2018.

¹⁶ Badiha Nahhass's conference already mentioned.; conversations with the activists during *Hirak Torino*'s assemblies.

¹⁷ *Rif: elements of context and why the international campaign of solidarity was created*, in: Facebook page «International campaign of solidarity with Hirak Rif» <https://www.facebook.com/SolidarityHirak/>

¹⁸ Badiha Nahhass's conference «Sur les traces de l'Etat» already mentioned.

¹⁹ Facebook page «International campaign of solidarity with Hirak Rif» <https://www.facebook.com/SolidarityHirak/>

in France, Belgium, Holland, and United Kingdom, not in Italy) as well as in social networks; some actions have taken place in the European cities, notably by the members of the Moroccan diaspora living in Europe. The main organizational tools for these actions have been social networks, especially Facebook and YouTube.

The first group born in Italy and linked to *Hirak Rif* has been the *Coordinamento Mouhcine Fikri* (Mouhcine Fikri coordination), which has organized political actions since October 2016 to protest against the brutal death of the Rifian fishmonger²⁰. It organized demonstrations, sit-ins and informative conferences in order to make the Italian and public opinion aware of the problems of the Rif and of the demands raised by *Hirak*. Moreover, it carried out on-line activity on the social networks to spread information on the movement. The activities of the movement have been organized in different cities in Italy: Milan, Brescia, Modena, and Turin²¹. They are partly organised by a «Berber *amazigh* movement», partly by a «radical left-wing movement», as Mahmoud describes it. He says «we (*Mouhcine Fikri coordination* and Berber groups) met few years ago and we started our activity together»²².

During June 2017 a new group was born independently from the *Mouhcine Fikri coordination*: the group *Hirak Torino*. It became a network whose members communicated through Facebook and eventually they started to meet in the area of the squat *Fenix*. They created a Facebook group to share articles about *Hirak*. During their meetings, usually once every two weeks, they spoke mostly about the importance to share information in a way that would have been effective for both Italian citizens and Moroccan diaspora. They decided that a public assembly would have been the best situation to speak about the movement and that Facebook and some fanzines would have been the ways to publicize it.

At the squat *Fenix* they organised the first public assembly on *Hirak Rif* took place on Sunday July 9th 2017. It is on occasion of this event that the two groups, *Hirak Torino* and the *Mouhcine Fikri coordination* met. The members of the latter learnt of the assembly through Facebook and the *Partie Socialiste Unifié*²³ (PSU) network in Italy. To the assembly participated activists coming from the whole northern part of Italy, university students, members of the Berber movement and some inhabitants of the city.

Social networks have been a fundamental organizational tool to maintain the contacts among the activists living within the whole northern Italy. The movement in support to *Hirak Rif* has involved few dozen activists. «We don't have time. We are few, we need to broaden our network» says Mahmoud²⁴.

«The assembly has been an important moment. Before the different political groups didn't know each other. Afterwards, we met and we started working together.» says Mohammad²⁵. The movement consists in a composite group: there are both people from Morocco and from Italy. The latter are mostly young left-wing or anarchist activists who are active in other informal political movements. The Moroccan diaspora component, which is the focus of this research, is formed mostly by men of different ages. Some of them, the majority of whom created the *Hirak Torino* group, are university students, part of a double-degree master program between the University of Turin and the University of Rabat, living in Italy for one year like Mohammed²⁶. Other young Moroccans who have spent in Italy less than 10 years like Mahmoud²⁷ or almost their whole life like Leila²⁸, some of them are workers and other students. There are people who are, or have been, active in other political, social or cultural movements, like Amine who is an exponent in Italy of the Moroccan *Partie Socialiste Unifié*. Others are part of Berber associations. Some of them claim to have a strong Berber background, while other deny it as energetically. An Algerian activist, Ahmed, calls himself a «cross-border Berber», part of a Berber identity that unifies movements and demands in North Africa, remembering a Berber transnationalism particularly in vogue during the

²⁰ Telephone interview with Amine occurred on December 19th 2017.

²¹ Telephone interview with Ahmed and Amine.

²² Telephone interview with Mahmoud occurred on November 8th 2017.

²³ United socialist party.

²⁴ Telephone interview with Mahmoud.

²⁵ Telephone interview with Mohammad.

²⁶ Direct observation of the movement's activities; interview with Mohammad.

²⁷ Telephone interview with Mahmoud.

²⁸ Telephone interview with Leila.

Eighties. «*Hirak* has stricken a lot of people's sensitivity. Several activists woke up with *Hirak* after years of inactivity» says Ahmed²⁹.

Similarly to the movement in Morocco, the cohesiveness of the Italian group supporting *Hirak* does not consist in the belonging to a party or to an ethno-cultural group, but in the movement's claims, the desire to improve life conditions in the Rif, and in the demand for the political prisoners' release³⁰.

The circulation of information and of the political momentum concerning *Hirak Rif* have been spread in a wide range of spatial contexts. The Riffian local demands have been transposed on a global level, encouraged by the use of social networks, as it seldom happened with the social networks during the last years, especially on the occasion of the Arab Spring [Najam 2013].

The activists who support *Hirak* in Italy consider the social networks an essential tool for their political activity³¹. In this respect, during the interview, Ahmed says, describing a previous political experience similar to *Hirak's* one: «Without social networks it would be hard for *Hirak* to survive»³². He carries the experience of a movement that was born in the Algerian *Cabylia* in 2001 and that gave origin to a solidarity movement in Italy. Nevertheless, it rapidly faded because it turned out to be difficult to maintain contacts among the activists, with, as only tools of communication, telephone calls and emails.

THE ACTIVIST'S LONELINESSES AND BELONGINGS

builds the *Hirak Rif* as a movement, as already mentioned, is mostly that they share demands, instead of political or ethno-cultural belongings. Nevertheless, claims for material needs are strongly linked to the local context they developed in. For this reason, they seem not to be appropriate to explain the political engagement of the activists in Italy.

Migration can be considered as a transnational experience [Basch, Schiller 1994] and we can think about it as a process in which migrants «Create social environments that exceed national boundaries and connect the country of destination with the one of origin» [Capello 2008]. Nonetheless, the relationship between the protests' material demands and the militants in the Rif on one side, and the activists in Italy on the other, is not visible. After all, the diaspora activists mobilize their militant capital [Neveu 2011] to engage with the population of a country which is far away from their everyday lives. As Mahmoud said³³, for some of them Morocco is «the country of summer vacations»³⁴. In spite of that, the sample population of this research (and even Mahmoud) continues to be concerned with Moroccan political and social life. Other activists feel strongly attached to their country of origin, and others³⁵ describe themselves as part of a Berber community that crosses national borders, extending across the whole North Africa³⁶.

When the diaspora activists are asked if they are in contact with the militants in the Rif, the answer is mostly negative³⁷. «In Rif I don't know anybody. I know some Riffian living in Italy. In order to follow the movement I signed up to several activists' Facebook pages, but I don't know them personally.» says Mahmoud³⁸. What connects them to the movement is neither a direct contact with the militants nor a material link to the demonstrations' context. Their relationship with *Hirak Rif* is based on what it symbolizes for them. On one hand, the activ-

²⁹ Telephone interview with Ahmed

³⁰ Telephone interviews with Mahmoud, Ahmed, Amine and Leila; contents analysis of the movement's Facebook page.

³¹ Telephone interviews with Mahmoud, Ahmed and Amine.

³² Telephone interview with Ahmed.

³³ Mahmoud is a young man native of Agadir who lives in Italy since nine years.

³⁴ Telephone interview with Mahmoud.

³⁵ Telephone interview with Ahmed.

³⁶ This approach dates back to a Berber universalism that developed in North Africa during the Eighties and the Nineties.

³⁷ Telephone interviews with Mahmoud, Ahmed, Amine and Leila.

³⁸ Telephone interview with Mahmoud.

ists have the aim to save *Hirak Rif* from the exclusion it experiences in Morocco. They want to avoid that it «dies because of its isolation»³⁹ like it happened for regional movements in other countries, like the Algerian *Cabylia*. «It is important to captivate Moroccans living in Italy. Especially the non-politicized ones coming from the Rif» says Leila. On the other hand, they engage for *Hirak*, but it seems they have a need to engage generally and they look for movements that have claims they recognize in. The members of *Hirak* in Italy are mostly left-wing activists. Here seems reproduced what Neveu analyses in his work [Neveu 2011] on 1968 activists: some activists have dormant engagement that they mobilize for specific issues or movements. Similarly, it happens for the activists of *Hirak* in Italy: «For a lot of years I have fought against dictatorships» says Ahmed. At the same time, they seem skeptical in relation to the institutionalized politics and to the parties. «I have always been interested in politics, I am the only one in my family. I am not part of any party. I engage in politics for myself.», says Mahmoud⁴⁰. Additionally, they use the anarchic space of *Fenix* and they prefer the dialogue with the extra-parliamentary groups than with parties, on-line newspapers, fanzines and social networks instead of newspapers.

It's a double loneliness that consists in being distant from their country of origin, on one side and, on the other side, in living in a context in Italy where they feel excluded from the rest of the Moroccan diaspora [Sayad 2002]. In fact, in their discourses, they describe themselves as completely different from the rest of the Moroccans living in Italy, especially because of divergent political objectives and opposite narratives on their country of origin. After the actions they carried out in some cities in Italy, the activists complained about the negative way the Moroccan diaspora community received their activities. The militants consider the rest of the diaspora, as related to the *Makhzen*, or at least as too frightened by the Moroccan control system which is regarded as too pervasive even outside Moroccan borders. During the assembly, the Moroccan narratives that marginalize the Rif and its inhabitants' requests are reproduced inside the diaspora. In the words of the interviewees it emerges often: «The idea other Moroccans have is that we want to ruin the country. We act for the collective best: we want to improve the health care and the workers' rights. (By the rest of the Moroccan diaspora) we have been insulted. Moroccans living in Italy are sided with the system» says Mahmoud. «The diaspora is frightened. Moroccans abroad seem having a fresh memory of Hassan II's years. (...) Inside diasporas ideas are always taken to extreme. Moroccans in Italy fall behind.»⁴¹ says Ahmed.

In this respect, it is profitable to show two examples observed during the research fieldwork. The first one concerns a distribution of fanzines at *Porta Palazzo* market in Turin. The location was chosen by the movement because it is attended by a large number of diaspora members daily. During the action, the activists have been repeatedly verbally attacked and blamed for wanting a *fitna*, a Riffian secession from Morocco and for wanting «a civil war like in Syria». This experience did not surprise the majority of the activists. During a meeting which took place right after the end of the distribution, some of them told other episodes of verbal attacks by compatriots they endured especially during the demonstrations in Milan⁴².

The second example concerns the July 9th assembly. During the assembly two people have been particularly attacked. The first one has been a young man who had an institutional perspective. For him, the movement should have spoken to formal parties, in Italy and in Morocco. The answer of some people inside the movement have been that Moroccan parties, as part of the *Makhzen*, are not available counterparts, because they are too far from the movement's ideas and practices. On the other side, Italian parties have never been interested in the dialogue with diaspora movements, even if some of *Hirak's* members have tried to speak to the left-wing parties. The other person attacked during the assembly is a man recognized by some activists as a *Makhzen* secret agent. A confusing moment took place during the assembly, and they asked for him to be removed.

The result is, on one side, the isolation of the members of the group by their compatriots, even if they would have willingly been included in the actions of the movement, according to the discourses of its members. On the other side,

³⁹ Telephone interview with Ahmed.

⁴⁰ Telephone interview with Mahmoud.

⁴¹ Telephone interview with Ahmed.

⁴² Group's meetings during June, July, August, and September 2017; telephone interviews with Mahmoud and Amine.

when some diaspora Moroccans participated in the group's activities without being part of it and expressed different demands and opinions, they were attacked. The legitimacy of their participation in the activities was questioned in itself. In this way, the group's solitude was fed by both the reception of the rest of the diaspora, and by the group's attitude.

Concerning the relationship with the host country, Morocco and Italy are compared by the members of *Hirak Rif* especially about the freedom of expression. The Moroccan political situation is described by the members of the group as non-democratic, a country where the freedom of expression is seriously threatened. On the contrary, Italy is considered a country where the group's political ideas can be freely expressed. Nevertheless, the manifestations the activists promoted in Northern Italy were of small relevance and never reached the main information media. They remained marginal in the political debate. «Italy doesn't have a relationship with the other side of the Mediterranean Sea. Diasporas don't have any link with Italian politics. In Netherlands and in France, for instance, Rif-fian immigrants have political clout. They have relations with the parties.»⁴³ says Amine. The assemblies were held in squats and the information media that covered them were those usually used by the anarchists and left-wing extra-parliamentary political movements. Mahmoud says: «I have always been interested in spontaneous demonstrations. I know that this is the way to change. It is the sign that the population is moving. (...) The only strength to change the country are people's demonstrations»⁴⁴.

In Italy, the movement operates in the spaces of informal politics. Its members do not use the institutional channels. The activities of the movement have been hosted in squats and the *Hirak Rif* has been mentioned for the first time in the ordinary anarchist assemblies. Nevertheless, reaching the Italian militants does not seem to be the main objective of the diaspora activists. The persons they want to speak to are mostly their compatriots, who are considered by the members of the movement as barely interested in politics and difficult to reach. Therefore, the members of the group are not confident to fulfill their objective. Nonetheless, the members of the movement in Italy still hope that their compatriot will change their opinion.

CONCLUSIONS

The empirical case study that has been described outlines some observations on the loneliness-belonging dynamics of the diaspora Moroccans who live in Italy. The context from where *Hirak* originated, the region Rif in Morocco, is generally considered isolated in respect to the rest of the country. This isolation is exacerbated thanks to the political engagement, that is considered a «tradition» in the region and it lets the rest of the population of the country consider it a rebel region, threatening the *Makhzen*.

The diaspora is the context where political activity becomes a way to create new groups. The members of this group engage in the Moroccan national political scene and try to dialogue with their compatriots and with Italians, in order to share with them information on the movement. They engage politically and fight a diasporic loneliness with the creation of a new group, whose members are linked by the same social and political demands.

The political engagement has also the outcome to reproduce the exclusion dynamics in respect to the compatriots living in Italy who are not part of the group. This exclusion dynamic is similar to the situation in the country of origin and the majority of the Moroccan diaspora seems hostile to their political activity. The political activity, in particular of left-wing inspiration, is seen by the majority of the Moroccan diaspora, wanting to set the *status quo* upside down.

The *Hirak Torino*'s activists are attached to the Rif-fian demands, but in the lack of a real relationship with the Moroccan *Hirak* members, we can see an urgency to engage in a political cause, that is now linked to *Hirak* but that has been connected to the 20th February movement in the 2011 and, for some of them, to the *Amazigh* movements or to the Panarab movement, like a dormant energy [Neveu 2011].

Concerning the Italian political space, activists from the Moroccan diaspora mostly regard the situation in Italy as a democratic context where they can freely practice their political activity. However, they organize demonstra-

⁴³ Telephone interview with Ahmed.

⁴⁴ Interview with Mahmoud.

tions and assemblies in the frame of informal politics, and they don't seek the dialogue with the institutions and with the official political spokespeople. It seems like also the Italian loneliness is fled, and the groups the movement relate with are the most engaged ones.

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