

## Perceiving Democracy in Migration: The Case of Moroccans in Piemonte

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### INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, migratory flows to Italy have multiplied and the presence of immigrants of various nationalities has begun to take on a considerable weight along with the stabilization of many immigrant groups (Masseey et al. 1998). In particular, immigrants from Morocco stand out not only in terms of sheer numbers, but also because of their patterns of settlement across the country.<sup>1</sup> This has largely been due to changes in many of these people's migratory project, where what was first thought of as a temporary move has, as we will see, become increasingly permanent.

With this change in plans and the decision to settle in the host country, many of the immigrants in Italy, and not just the Moroccans, have made some effort to enter into forms of civic participation at various levels, though these attempts have remained quite weak (Caponio 2005; Mantovan 2007; Kotic and Triandafyllidou 2005). The attention devoted to immigrants' involvement in voluntary associations and participation in the public and cultural life of their European host countries has grown over the years (Morales and Giugni 2011; Martinello 2007; Withol de Wenden 1994), as has the study of migrants' role as political bridges or mediators between their homeland and hostland (Shain and Barth 2003). The perception of politics, civic participation and human rights promotion has been studied through migrants activism and participation.

By contrast, how the perception of the concept of democracy takes shape, changes, and develops among groups of immigrants has been neglected. A part of the literature, for example, has concentrated on how groups of immigrants perceive the European Union (EU) and its values, and thus, indirectly, democracy and human rights (Timmermann, Heyse, and Van Mol 2010), and on how immigrants form their perception of democracy and the protection of human rights on the basis of whether or not they have lived in an authoritarian regime (Anderson, Regan, and Østergard 2002), have been politically engaged at home or in their new country (Østergard-Nielsen 2003), or have experienced a migratory process (Adamson 2002). In other cases, scholars have focused on the 'culture of migration', or in other words, on how the migratory process contributes to forming an original cultural substrate that starts from the culture experienced (and/or perceived in the country of origin) and is constructed from migrants' 'discourses' and those of the destination country (Collyer 2006). In other words, how migrants are related to a civic culture alimented by horizontal links that contribute to the creation of 'civicness' and provide resources to members that improve their political participation (Fennema and Tillie 1999, 2001, 2004, 2005; Vermeulen 2006).

While it is true that all of these factors have been demonstrated to weigh heavily on migrants' perceptions, aspirations, and behavior, especially as regards democracy and human rights (Collyer 2006), it is no less true that the role of the perceptions of democracy and human rights of migrating individuals remains understudied (Boneva and Frieze 2001).

Though this chapter builds on the considerations discussed above, it will take a different approach. Starting from an analysis of how a group of Moroccans in Piemonte (an Italian region) perceives the concept of democracy, the first hypothesis that will be advanced is that this concept is not constructed only from the experience of an authoritarian regime, past political engagement, "discourses," and the migratory process, but also from "living in a democratic country." In other words, how democratic the host country is regarded will affect more the construction of this perception.

This hypothesis springs from a research project sponsored by the University of Turin and Paralleli-Istituto Euro Mediterraneo del Nord Ovest, entitled "New Citizens and Political Participation. Immigration, Colonial Legacies and Perception of Democracy by Groups of Immigrants from the Southern Shore of the Mediterranean." Fieldwork was carried out in Piemonte between 2009 and 2010, with semistructured qualitative interviews of a sample of 30 individuals chosen according to gender, educational level, years of residence in

Italy and age.<sup>2</sup> The sample was selected after ten preparatory meetings with a series of experts in the field chosen on the basis of their skills and knowledge of the area and the issues addressed in the investigation. In addition, three focus groups with individuals who did not belong to the sample were held. The interviews were conducted in depth and in some cases were repeated.

In view of the study's goal and the difficulties encountered during the five pilot interviews that were conducted, an interview guide (given at the end of the chapter) was developed that, alongside the direct question "what does democracy mean to you?" also contains a series of questions that deal with immigrants' daily lives and helped the interviewees to "construct" their own concept of democracy. Accordingly, attention was focused on the perception of a number of rights (and duties) in the countries of origin and destination, which has proved useful in clarifying the perception of democracy. Apart from the objective difficulties that were often encountered, the interviewees' responses on the whole provided a full panorama that made it possible to achieve the study's goals.

The second and related hypothesis advanced in the following pages is that, in an increasingly globalized and hence ever more interconnected world, migrants' perceptions are not influenced only by the host country's level of democracy, but also by the fact that citizens of the so-called consolidated democracies are more and more likely to take democracy for granted. Our hypothesis is that for third-country nationals and aspiring citizens hailing from neodemocracies, pseudo-democracies, or authoritarian systems, living in a setting where democracy seems to be an entitlement that no one pays much attention to, can influence how democracy is perceived, both positively and negatively.

We believe that, analyzing this perception, both inside and outside long-established democratic systems, can shed light on the status of the consolidated democracies (and in our case, that of Italian democracy), revealing their strong points as well as their shortcomings.

#### WHAT DEMOCRACY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

The twentieth century's democratization processes and the global spread of democratic values (Grassi 2002; Johansson 2002) have paved the way to more thorough analyses of democracy, of its meaning (Miller, Hesli, and Reisinger 1997), and of its "quality" (Morlino 2003; Diamond and Morlino 2005). The increase in the overall number of democratic countries, moreover, has encouraged scholars to take a closer look at democratic consolidation (Munck 2001), the

patterns and prospects of democracies around the world (Lijphart 1999; Vanhanen 1997), and so-called transnational democracy (Held 1995; Clark 1999; Della Porta and Tarrow 2005). The literature has shown that in the consolidated democracies, the decline in the values that enabled them to grow and reach democratic maturity has often led to a retreat from political participation, a loss of confidence in institutions (Pharr and Putnam 2000), and antipolitical sentiments (Mastropolo 2000, 2011). While the democratic model has been called into question *per se*, it has chiefly been challenged as a result of the restrictive policies targeting minorities and certain social groups that have been put in place by consolidated democracies (Kenglerinsky 2007), or because of policies for promoting and exporting democracy that have had highly negative results (Gills 2000; Youngs 2001). At the same time, studies of the new democracies have highlighted the limits of the so-called "third wave" of democratization (Huntington 1991), pointing out the shortcomings of many of the new political systems that have arisen, where, what has often prevailed is a neoliberal view of democracy linked to the market and processes of globalization (Plehw, Walpen, and Neunhoefer 2006; Cowling 2008). Nevertheless, the emergence of new subjects of political action, the spread of a transnational culture of democracy, and the demise of authoritarianism have in some ways enabled many of the newly democratized countries to provide a new stimulus to the exercise of democracy.

Regardless of how it is judged, the Western democratic model has become a benchmark, especially as regards certain rules of the game that seem to be unanimously accepted (Dahl 1971). Over the past 20 years, an expanded procedural minimum definition of democracy (Collier and Levitsky 1997) has been in vogue, which extends the minimal formulation by adding a series of adjectives to specify subtypes. In this view, democracy has a number of defining attributes that have received general acceptance, such as the protection of basic rights of citizenship and civil liberties, participation, full contestation, and elections.

At the same time, it must be recognized that the term democracy designates not only a political system, but also a set of ideals that can be summed up in a number of definitions of the principles of liberty and equality (Held 1997; Sartori 1957), which have been translated empirically into the rights of citizenship guaranteed by the consolidated democracies (Beetham 1999).

In this setting, where human flows and movements are ever more conspicuous, citizens of consolidated democracies often take democracy for granted. Can the same be said of those who emigrate from a

country with nondemocratic characteristics to a democratic country? In this case, how is the perception of democracy constructed, and what factors influence it? Is democracy, for these individuals, something to be taken for granted?

Individuals form their perception of democracy and of the protection of human rights based on the background of where they were born and live, and, above all, on a range of local and international sources that have a major impact on them from the social and cultural standpoint (Anderson, Regan, and Østergard 2002). Groups in migration must obviously come to grips with the migratory process itself, as well as with the migratory tradition in their country of origin. As de Haas (2008) has stressed, in those areas of the world with a long tradition of migration, immigrants have been able to form broad communities that over time have created their own self-sustaining channels of representation. Considering the massive migratory flows that took place in the course of the past century, we can say that a "culture of migration" (Collyer 2006; Theo 2003) has developed, and is fueled by the discourses and the imagined stories of compatriots who have already immigrated (King and Wood 2001), the media (Mai 2004), the social networks, and the cultural artifacts (Koser and Pinkerton 2004). These "discourses" are to some extent formulated in the country of origin, but then take their full form in the host country.

While scholars have, as we have seen, addressed various interpretations of democracy, little attention, has been devoted to how this concept becomes relevant to individuals (Aguilar 2008), or to how it is perceived in non-Western cultural contexts (Carlson and Listhaug 2007; Arab Barometer).<sup>3</sup>

In the following pages, we will first give an overview of the Moroccan migration in Europe and Italy. We will then examine how the concept of democracy among a group of Moroccans living in Piemonte is constructed both from the factors mentioned above, and from the level of democracy in the receiving country. Democracy is a concept that is built up, in other words, not only from individuals' past experience, but also and primarily from the characteristics of the host country and from how its citizens perceive to live in it.

#### THE MOROCCAN IMMIGRATION IN EUROPE AND ITALY

Morocco is one of the Mediterranean countries with the highest level of out-migration. According to 2010 data, the Moroccan emigration to Europe has now exceeded 2,800,000 units out of a population of

over 32 million inhabitants, with net migration totaling 3 million units (World Bank 2011). Moroccan emigration to Europe began in the 1960s and has not stopped since, despite restrictions imposed by Europe. Among the Mediterranean populations living in the countries of the EU, the Moroccan Diaspora is second only to the Turkish Diaspora in order of importance. Moroccans abroad are dispersed, but are heavily represented in several countries. Moroccan migrants rank first among non-EU nationals in Italy, Spain, and Belgium, and second in France (after the Algerians) as well as in the Netherlands and Germany (after the Turks).

During the postindependence period, the Moroccan government regarded emigration not only as a "safety valve" for preventing social tensions (especially in the Berber areas), but also as a means of economic growth. Initially at least, the Moroccan government thus did not encourage Moroccans abroad to integrate, but sought to maintain control over its citizens inasmuch as was possible. In view of the nondemocratic nature of the Moroccan state, especially during the reign of Hassan II, this policy had at least two goals (Belguendouz 2006): on the one hand, to prevent the migrants of the diaspora from organizing themselves politically and thus forming an opposition force to the regime from abroad; on the other hand, greater integration in the host country would probably have endangered the flow of remittances to the home country (de Haas and Plug 2006).<sup>4</sup>

Given the failure of this policy, the Moroccan government's stance changed in the course of the 1990s (and in particular after Mohammed VI acceded to the throne in 1999): this has meant a more positive attitude toward naturalization and dual citizenship, voting rights for emigrants, and the creation of institutions to assist Moroccans residing abroad (de Haas 2007; Fargues 2005).<sup>5</sup> In general, however, we can say that the Moroccan government's policy during the 1990s and since the year 2000 has changed not only as regards immigrants, but also for Moroccans living in the country: like other North African and Middle Eastern nations, Morocco is engaged in a process of economic (and political) liberalization, though this has not led to structural reforms and, above all, an effective democratic system (Cavatorra and Dalmaso 2009).<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, these reforms have made Morocco a transit country for other African migrants (de Haas 2005).

It should be emphasized that the shift in Morocco's policy toward its immigrants has gone hand in hand with changes in outward flows and the stabilization of Moroccan emigration, to Europe in particular. While the first wave of migration in the 1960s was fairly unstructured and consisted essentially of single males (like the other immigrants

from the Maghreb area), from 1974 onward, and partly as a result of the oil crisis, rising unemployment in the West sparked a tightening of immigration policies that curbed the flow of Moroccans (and others) departing for Europe. This was accompanied by a diversification in emigration, with changes in flows and in the migratory project. Family reunification replaced individual emigration, while the migratory project began to contemplate permanent settlement rather than temporary residence. The demographic profile of the Moroccan Diaspora thus changed radically: immigrants included more younger people and, above all, more women, while the level of secondary education increased (Pace and El Mounatamid 2006). The 1980s saw an increase in seasonal emigration and in the number of woman migrants, who began to be independent of the dynamics of family reunification. Since 1990, emigration flows toward the traditional receiving countries have dropped sharply. The measures introduced after the Schengen Convention in June 1990 drastically reduced legal emigration, and at the same time created perverse effects that encouraged the spread of undocumented emigration, which has thus become increasingly common. Migratory projects changed: there are very few return migrants, and in a process that had begun in the previous decades, the number of family reunifications multiplied (partly out of a fear that the borders would be closed suddenly, but also because of Morocco's political instability and repression caused by the iron fist of King Hassan II).

In Italy, Moroccan residents numbered as of January 1, 2011, over 452,000 (out of a total of more than 4 million immigrants), and were the country's third-largest foreign-born group, after the Romanian and Albanian communities.<sup>7</sup> The total number of Moroccan nationals in Piemonte was over 64,000 units, accounting for 16.1 percent of the region's entire immigrant population (398,910). The Moroccan community is the region's second-largest, coming after the Romanians and before the Albanians. As was the case for other countries on the Southern shore of the Mediterranean, the number of people emigrating from Morocco rose gradually from the 1960s, becoming a significant social phenomenon. The pattern of Moroccan emigration to Italy has gone through the metamorphosis discussed above, and is now characterized chiefly by a process of stabilization: Moroccan immigrants are becoming a permanent and increasingly important part of Italian society. Starting from statistical data and the observation of social reality—and especially the changes in the demographic and occupational structure of this community—we can see that this emigration has matured and taken root. Despite the difficulties,

then, the Moroccan presence has grown and become much more stable (Pugliese and Maciotti 2003) but Italy seems increasingly to be concerned about the multiple impacts of the immigration process (Ambrosini 2012).

### MANY DEFINITIONS FOR A SINGLE CONCEPT: HOW THE MOROCCAN DIASPORA IN PIEMONTE PERCEIVES DEMOCRACY

"What does democracy mean to you? Could you define it?" This was the direct question put to a sample of Moroccans residing in Piemonte. A general analysis of the interviewees' responses indicates that the prevailing definition they give is procedural: democracy is seen chiefly in terms of the presence or absence of laws protecting the citizens and a series of constitutional and political guarantees. If we go into the details of the responses, however, we can find that democracy is not just a "procedure," but involves the immigrants' life experience, their everyday difficulties, the fact that they are at the center of a process of social growth and maturation. In this sense, what we see is a "maximalist" approach that takes a different level of democracy into account that, in addition to procedures, is alert to the substance of the democratic process, or in other words, to how democratic principles are put into practice, not only through the classic participation mechanisms—elections, competition, and debate—but also in the private sphere, where citizens are directly and personally involved. Democracy is a "container" that must be given substance through an engagement and participation that go beyond those envisaged "through procedures" (Sen 1999). This is an interesting point: even where the interviewees could not give a clear, concise definition of democracy, they were always able to express what they see as the essential principles of a democracy, its "practical" implications. The most frequently mentioned principles were equality, justice, free speech, and mutual respect: democracy means equality of rights and duties between citizens in a society where basic human rights are safeguarded.

While democracy thus assumes a practical aspect, its perception changes in passing from the country of origin to the receiving country, particularly among immigrants who have long resided in the host country. This can be attributed to a number of factors. First, there is the question of age: with the passage of time, the perception changes, matures, becomes more nuanced. Second, it has changed

because of the migratory experience itself: living in a country that is seen as more democratic than the home country affects the meanings assigned to the democratic experience. The everyday rules of democracy, and democratic practice, despite the limitations encountered in certain Italian settings, have in some way modified perceptions. As one of the interviewees stated, "my perception of democracy has been changed by the fact that I can benefit of it."<sup>8</sup> Personal growth would also appear to play a fundamental role. Democracy is perceived both positively and negatively. Positively, because of the opportunity to live without being conditioned by the institutional context; negatively because the marginalization faced by many immigrants in Italy, partly as a result of inadequate legislation, is an experience that changes people, undermining confidence in the institutions and, consequently, in the democratic system. Often, however, perceptions have also changed through a reverse process, that is, by the fact of going abruptly from a condition of full citizenship in the home country to one of suspension, of absence of citizenship in the strict sense, in the host country.

The perception, moreover, changes because the conditions of political action change. Many of the immigrants we interviewed said that when they arrived in Italy, democracy and its meaning was far from their thoughts. Having to cope with daily life and its problems made them more aware, more interested in participating in public and political life. In this sense, the interviews confirm the findings of other studies carried out in Italy (Carli 2007) that the question of participation, and of active participation, is a duty, a matter of assuming responsibility, chiefly—but not only—toward one's own community.

Also, perceptions change in relation to what it means to live in a non-Islamic country. Many of the interviewees remarked that in Italy they have finally been able to look at politics and democracy without being conditioned by religion, and thus form an opinion that is different from the one they had in their home country. They now have a secular view of Islam and its role in the social and political system. For most of the interviewees, Islam (like other religions) should be relegated to the individual's private sphere: when Islam becomes political and seeks to regulate areas that do not concern it, when it intrudes into the public sphere, it becomes incompatible with democracy.

Other interviewees, by contrast, maintain that the Islamic model is an important example of how to live together democratically and that the diaspora can have a key role in its spread. The problem that the interviewees complain about most frequently is that in Italy,

very much under the Vatican's sway, religious minorities are poorly protected.

Interestingly, much depends on what is meant by Islam and the Islamic system. Here, interpretations cover a wide range, from the orthodox to the more "personal." We can thus find a "feminist" version of Islam, where "religion is used politically to justify sexism and politicians."<sup>9</sup> Or a version that sees Islam not just as a religion, but as a system that pervades society and provides a foundation for the state, harkening back to the idea of Islam at its origins, when there was no distinction between religion and politics. An Islam that takes different shapes to reflect different needs and times, that changes without losing the features that made it what it is. An "anticapitalist" Islam, a bastion in the struggle against imperialism to free the Arab peoples from the West.

Issues involving the Islamic system are significant in all the interviews, whether they maintain that it should be kept in the private sphere or tend in the opposite direction. In both cases, Islam, in the broadest sense as a religious and cultural system, plays—or could play—an important part in the interviewees' claim for a fairer democratic system, even for those who would prefer the system to have a secular basis.<sup>10</sup> In the majority of the interviews, even those who sided in favor of a secular society do not oppose the Koran and religious teachings, but affirm that religion and politics should remain in separate spheres. It is politics that "spoils" the Koran, not the other way around. The opposing thesis has been carefully constructed by the media or by dominant Western thought (EUMC 2006).

Several points emerge from the analysis we have just outlined: that the perception of democracy is built up in daily practice; that the perception of democracy changes over time and according to life experience, contexts, and outside stresses; that cultural and social baggage has an important role in this process. In the following paragraphs, we will see how a group of Moroccan immigrants living in Piemonte has constructed this perception from the experience of the host country and of the home country, and how the "discourse" of the host country intersects that of the home country and vice versa.

### DOES LIVING IN ITALY STRENGTHEN OR LIMIT THE "SENSE OF DEMOCRACY"?

As we have seen, how the concept of democracy is perceived and constructed changes and diversifies according to a number of factors. Two of these factors in particular are emphasized in the interviewees'

answers to the question "What does democracy mean to you?"; the first regards the fact of living as an immigrant in a democratic country (and of having experienced the migrant's condition), while the second is the fact of coming from a nondemocratic home country. In the first section, we will analyze whether and how the concept of democracy is constructed (and changes) on the basis of the level of democracy perceived of the receiving country. To do so, we sought to understand how Moroccans living in Piemonte consider the condition of Italian democracy.

One point is clear from all of the interviews: for the Moroccans we spoke with, Italy is a country that on the whole is democratic in form, but undemocratic in its treatment of immigrants.<sup>11</sup>

Generally speaking, Italy has its bright spots and shadows: while almost all of the interviewees see the move from Morocco to Italy as an improvement in terms of their living conditions, at least in certain respects, the same cannot be said of a series of civil and political rights. The Moroccans "like living in Italy," but feel that racism and discrimination are still very strong, particularly against Muslims, their traditions, and their culture. This is an attitude that worsened dramatically in the aftermath of September 11, especially with the stereotyped portrayal of Islam in the Italian media (Belluati 2007; Negri and Introvigne 2005; Di Peri 2008). Italy is considered to be a country that grants a measure of acceptance, but a correct approach to otherness and to the foreigner is lacking. This creates "problems in the exercise of democracy with foreigners."<sup>12</sup> The most serious problems mentioned in the interviews concern chiefly the difference in the treatment accorded to Italian citizens and immigrants.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, Italy is a country that has become part of the interviewees' identity, especially for the young people. Those who, like part of the young people we interviewed, went to school or attended a course in Italy and reached intellectual maturity here, are aware of the problems involved in integration, but put them on a different level, making a concrete distinction between the two facets of their identity: myself as Moroccan (immigrant) and myself as Italian. This enables them to have a more carefully thought-out perception of democracy, constructed starting from the host country but also nourished by the other. This also happens among the interviewed immigrants who have had "political" experience in Italy or their country of origin. They point out, for example, that Italian democracy reflects many other Western democracies in form, but not in substance. They note that Italy has an important democratic past to its credit, but that there is much room for improvement, particularly as regards second- and

third-generation immigrants, who are highly resentful of the uncomfortable condition into which they are often forced. The perception of what a democracy should or should not be is thus clearer among those immigrants who have a deeper and more engaged relationship with the host country.

At the same time, however, the perception of the host country's level of democracy (and, consequently, of democracy itself) is built and transformed through the migratory experience: before emigrating from Morocco, most of the interviewees did not regard Italy as a democracy because of its corrupt political system, the lack of any real turnover in the state, and its structural political instability. This perception of the host country changed while living in Italy; above all, however, what changed was the perception of democracy in the strict sense—the respect of human rights—as opposed to democracy in the broad sense of participation in the political game. The interviewees now acknowledge that fundamental rights and the rule of law are one thing, and the problems of the Italian political elite are another.

At times, the interviewees even manage to find a justification for the difficulties that Italy puts in the way of integration and assimilation, for the imperfections of Italian democracy: a justification that lies in the fact that migration to Italy is still a recent phenomenon, unlike in other European countries such as France or Germany. This is not an acritical defense of the host country, but we can see that it reflects a desire to find an explanation for a state of things that seems to do more harm than good to immigration. In this sense, the Moroccans we interviewed are by no means naive: some have lived in Italy for many years (10 or 20), others have had experience as migrants to other European countries and are familiar with the models of integration or ways of handling migratory flows found outside of Italy. Yet others have already become Italian citizens. This awareness contributes to creating a “political situation” even where the immigrants are not active in parties, political associations, or trade unions. The need to deal with questions regarding their residency card or changes in flows decrees obliges migrants to follow the host country's politics, expanding their horizons past their own personal concerns and condition.<sup>14</sup> Immigrants feel that they should take an interest in the “state” of Italian democracy, bringing their own experiences from the home country to it (Jones-Correa 1998). This is also because they feel that they are an active part of the changes that are taking place. Many interviewees recognize that immigration has contributed to bringing problems and economic and social tensions to light (even though the media has often amplified this impact). However, they

complain of the Italian political class's shortcomings, saying that the country's leaders “should be able to provide ideas, to look ahead. They shouldn't just pander to society's fears.”<sup>15</sup>

Italy is indeed a democracy in certain respects, but is considered on the whole a fragile country, unstable, a country that cannot be expected to provide the same civil and political guarantees as other European countries, the same standards of democracy. This is confirmed not only by the interviewees, but also by a series of studies carried out in Morocco (Pellegriño 2009). Italy is by no means the preferred destination for Moroccans who decide to emigrate, but comes after Canada and the United States (which, despite the cultural differences, are regarded as the countries that hold out the greatest opportunities). Italy is often thought of as a transit country, a bridge between the Southern shore of the Mediterranean and Northern Europe. As many interviewees emphasize, Italy is closer to Morocco than Europe.<sup>16</sup>

Those who decide to cross the Mediterranean to Italy know that they are not coming to a country where the rules are as strict as in France or Belgium, and in certain respects this is an advantage: they know that in Italy, an immigrant will be able to “get by” in one way or another. This fact divides and breaks up the Western world, which is thus not perceived as a single, defined entity, but as many different “West” (Pellegriño 2009). At the same time, it contributes to creating a “discourse” and a mental picture that is reinforced by the narratives of immigrants who return home on vacation, and can talk about the positive aspects of life abroad, not its difficulties.

What we see from the interviews, then, is a country that is demarcated on paper but not in substance. The gap between these two levels is widest in the area of rights and of the relationships between immigrants and Italian citizens. The question is problematic chiefly because of the Italian immigration laws, which are seen as discriminatory and often oppressive. By far the most discriminatory aspect is that regarding the residence permit and the importance it assumes in the migrant's life, especially in terms of political rights and active participation in the life of the host country. And not only that: even if they have equal rights, immigrants often feel that they are mistreated and, though they have Italian citizenship, are regarded as second-class citizens. The problem is not so much one of being able to access a series of services, but what some interviewees called “social relationship.” This essentially refers to the difficulties that immigrants (and those of Muslim faith in particular) have in integrating in the host country: renting a house, standoffs with neighbors, the difficulties in obtaining citizenship, family reunification, finding a job or religious freedom.

The interviewees feel more protected when they have a thorough knowledge of their rights.<sup>17</sup> In this regard, there is a huge difference in social scale, as was very apparent from the interviews. And this in turn also depends, obviously, on the areas of origin of the Moroccan immigrants living in Torino, who chiefly come from the rural region of Khouribga, where there is a high illiteracy rate (Coslovi 2007; Capello 2003).<sup>18</sup>

Finally, the question of immigrants' representation and the lack of active and passive voting rights is a sore point (Mantovan 2007; Kotic and Triandafyllidou 2005). How is it possible to be full citizens without being able to participate actively in the life of the country (Carpot et al. 2003; Caponio 2001; ASGI-FIERI 2005; Caritas 2005)? But here is also an awareness that granting voting rights to immigrants is a question that, as several interviewees emphasize, is instrumentalized for electoral purposes both from the Right and from the Left.<sup>19</sup>

#### ... AND DOES COMING FROM MOROCCO?

In the preceding paragraph, we saw that the perception of democracy among the group of interviewees takes on different shades, according to the issues discussed, each interviewee's analytical capacity, level of political knowledge, and, above all, their ability to see themselves as part of one group—or community—rather than another. In the interviews, passing from the perception of democracy in the host country to that in the home country offers a change in perspective that we found particularly interesting in furthering an understanding of how the perception of democracy is constructed in the migrant's thoughts.

While Italy is seen as a democratic country "with reservations," the panorama for Morocco is more diversified. Though all interviewees feel strong ties with Morocco, as it is there that they have their origins, family, friends, and cultural roots, the picture becomes more intricate when we go into the details of democratic practices. In some cases, criticisms of the home country are quite harsh, especially as regards the reign of Hassan II (1961–1999), while in others Morocco is described as a democratic country, where corruption does indeed exist but fundamental rights are guaranteed. For all interviewees, the death of Hassan II (1999) and the accession to the throne of Mohammed VI marked the end of a time that all see as a period of repression and tyranny.<sup>20</sup> Half of the interviewees agree in saying that Morocco is changing, that under the new king the country is being transformed, is looking for "its own model," and that the changes

that are now taking place are real and not simply a façade, both on the social level and in terms of gender equality, as well of greater political liberty and freedom of speech. One of the factors that is most often cited in order to emphasize that the changes affecting the home country are genuine is civil society and, more generally, the population's greater maturity in dealing with the country's problems: the widespread involvement in voluntary associations and the greater freedom of the press and of expression.

But the changes also appear to bring new problems, with the erosion of traditional society and the marginalization of weak groups, the diminishing sense of "community." A full 50 percent of the interviewees concur that the change has not been effective: living conditions have perhaps improved, but not because the sphere of social and political rights has broadened. Here, despite the promises, little has been done, and the political elite's internal mechanisms remain the same. The claims to alternation of power are seen as a sham, the parties do not represent general interests, and voting, rather than being an occasion for expressing the popular will, is regarded by the Moroccans as a meaningless exercise.<sup>21</sup>

A minority of the interviewees describe Morocco as a nondemocratic country and attack the role of the king, but most of the immigrants we spoke to expressed no opinion of the ruler and his work, though they acknowledge that the country is still afflicted by many ills.<sup>22</sup>

The yardstick against which Morocco's level of democracy is gauged is Italy. In this connection, there can be no doubt that the experience of migration, the fact of having lived for years in a country that, even with the distinctions underscored earlier, is democratic, has heavily influenced the perception of the home country, probably also changing it over time. Morocco is seen as very close to Europe and to Italy: both in corruption and, above all, in the similarities shown in political behavior during the elections, the electoral campaigns, the waning voter turnout, and so on. Some of the interviewees thus draw a picture of their home country as having problems similar to those of the most mature Western democracies.<sup>23</sup> Finally, one particularly striking point emerging from the interviewees' statements is that the democracy of a system is often connected with the form of government: Italy is said to be a more democratic country because it is a republic, whereas Morocco is considered less democratic because it is a monarchy.

In some cases, the lack of information about the home country is evident. Immigrants are often so completely absorbed in their new



lives that they have no time to find out what is going on in their country of origin, or, in other cases, have preferred to sever all ties, leaving a troubled past behind them and thus living through a difficult "double absence" (Sayad 1999). In general, however, there is a lively interest in the changes that are taking place in the home country, which interviewees follow closely on the Internet and satellite TV, as well as through trips to Morocco in the summer and talking to relatives.

### CONCLUSION

The Moroccans we interviewed have a view of the concept of democracy that springs from each individual's lived identity, but there can be no doubt that it also depends on the level of interaction with the host country.

Democracy is not only an ideal aspiration to be pursued in a perceptible world, but also the stuff of everyday life. Migrants see it with their own eyes, touch it with their own hands, continually: when they have to fight to have a residence permit, when their civil and political rights are not recognized, when they are treated as second-class citizens. What we see, then, is a perception that hinges on how a series of fundamental human rights are guaranteed and how the conditions are established for fulfilling a series of duties. But democracy is more than this. We have seen that many of the interviewees are perfectly able to recognize the qualities of a good democracy, first from the minimum requirements that correspond roughly with those identified by Dahl (1971), and even considering the institutional guarantees, as the many positive comments about the Italian constitutional demonstrate. On the whole, however, the interviewees feel that democracy as a value is in danger. It is in danger in Italy, chiefly because of the immigration laws, and it is in danger also in Morocco and, more generally, in the world. Without doubt, all of the interviewees perceive democracy as a precious asset to be safeguarded, to be guaranteed, to be fought for, day after day. In this connection, more than one interview reveals a certain puzzlement about the state of democracy in Italy and the West: people who come from a country that is perhaps taking its first steps toward a more open system cannot understand a country where the social state is being dismantled and hard-won rights are being lost every day. Here, the fact that the interviewees have lived in an authoritarian system plays a very important role. It is clear that experiencing the Moroccan regime during the reign of Hassan II has left deep marks on many of the interviewees, contributing to forming a much more informed "democratic conscience."

If, as was often said, Italy is wasting an opportunity (to benefit from full integration of migrants in the social and political spheres, as well as in labor, for instance), in some respects it is still seen as a model of protection that offers a series of guarantees. Italy gives with one hand and takes away with the other. It gives in terms of health care (with a few exceptions), housing (though some problems were reported), and education (despite a few gaps). It takes away in terms of political rights, equality of rights for all citizens, or in other words, in those realms where, according to the interviewees, recognizing that Italian citizens and foreign nationals should be treated equally could spark a backlash of resentment among the Italian population, which according to many of the interviewees is not yet ready for true integration on the part of immigrants.

Italy, moreover, is also missing an opportunity for democracy within the European context. Though on the whole the EU is rarely mentioned (and this in itself is an interesting point), as if the supranational considerations governing the Union's states had little real influence on the individual member states, it is clear from the interviews that Italian democracy is seen as a model in crisis. By comparison with countries such as France, Belgium, and Spain, Italy is on the sidelines because of a series of shortcomings (chiefly, but not only, as regards immigrants). According to many of the interviewees, this fact, which has worsened since the early 1990s—the period when migratory flows to Italy increased—is not recent, but firmly rooted in the Italian political system, in the actions of its institutions and population. Historically, Italy is perceived as a country that is unstable from the political and institutional standpoint, and in many ways quite similar to Morocco (especially as regards the issues related to corruption). In some respects, this similarity creates a feeling of brotherhood between Moroccan citizens and Italian citizens, which many interviewees say has made it possible (at least in some cases) to overcome the problems resulting from the lack of clear rules and rights in Italy.

From this perspective, being an immigrant does not help Moroccans forge links with their own community. This shift in interests influences both the construction of a new and diversified sphere of identity and, accordingly, of a better perception of the concept of democracy. In this sense, the fact of having migrated has contributed to changing the interviewees' political interests: interest in their country of origin is gradually flanked by (and at times replaced by) interest in the host country. This does not depend only on the "level of democracy" of the host country or of the home country, but is part of an inevitable process of substitution that affects whoever migrates. On the one

hand, this is seen as the price to be paid in order to have a better life; on the other hand, however, the expected safeguards often turn out not to be the ones that can in fact be achieved, and this aspect also contributes to changing the terms of the perception: the immigrants we interviewed have "sized up democracy." This aspect, in addition to being linked to the experience of migration, is doubtless influenced by the personal growth and changes in expectations that come with age. Democracy as a perfect ideal, if mentioned, is supplanted by a more realistic vision that, though not losing its ideal aspirations, takes day-to-day experience and life's difficulties into account. It should be noted that the disenchantment and, often, the disillusionment that life in the host country has engendered in the immigrants has not destroyed their hopes that a full and effective democracy can one day arise in their home country.

Only in a few cases is the home country depicted as an ideal world to be returned to some day: most of the interviewees painted Morocco in dark colors, a country where wealth has perhaps increased (though only for the few), but where social tensions, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, corruption, and political problems remain. Almost all the interviewees feel that the attempts at change have been ineffective, but that much remains to be done. One aspect in particular seems to be significant: virtually none of the interviewees ever spoke of returning; if they intend to move at all, they talk about emigrating to another "Western" country. Even though certain things have changed and the outlook in Morocco is better, our interlocutors show that they have put down roots in the host country, and many have become citizens. Theirs is now a stable, long-term migratory project, and the improved conditions in the home country do not alter the basic prospects, nor does this seem to influence the perception of the concept of democracy in any way. What does change are the prospects for cooperating with the home country, which many of the interviewees see as positive opportunities, both in business terms and as regards cultural exchange or cooperative projects.

The transformations that are now taking place in Morocco should help dismantle the stereotyped and often negative image that the country has in the eyes of a certain portion of the public opinion and, in turn, the world's perception of Moroccan immigrants, who are all too often associated only with the equation Moroccans = Muslims = Not Democratic. The Moroccans we interviewed are aware of the political implications of this perception, and of how it is also constructed from a stigmatization of the Islamic system as a whole. What we have

witnessed in the past 20 years, especially since theories regarding the clash of civilizations began to circulate (Huntington 1993) is a media instrumentalization of Islam in its most radical versions, which represent only a minority, and not the real Islam. The interviewees call for a true democracy, a "right to their image."

Democracy, then, is first a value that must be defended, and second a right that must be earned. It is not something that is acquired once and for all, but changes according to conditions, way of life, and lifecourse. It is here that the perceptions of new citizens are farthest from those of the native-born, for whom democracy, rights, guarantees, and protections are a given, something that can be taken for granted. We thus believe that over the next few years, these new social actors' experience of identity and democracy could play an increasingly important role in our societies, and in time will be able to instill fresh life in consolidated democracies (where the concept of democracy is in crisis) and spark a new debate about the issues of democracy, political participation, and rights.

#### NOTES

\*I thank Prof. Ada Lonni for his encouragement during the various phases of the project and Prof. Alfio Mastropalo for discussing with me the original idea. I also thank Dr. Tiziana Caponio for reading the first draft of the chapter and Dr. Paola Rivetti for the useful comments and suggestions during the final draft of the chapter. Any error, of course, is my responsibility.

1. Moroccans are one of the principal immigrant communities in many regions of Italy. The region with the highest number of resident Moroccan immigrants is Lombardia (109,245 in 2010), with Piemonte coming third, with 19,185. Torino ranks first among the Italian provinces in number of Moroccan immigrants. ISTAT (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica) data available at <http://www.istat.it/it/archivio/39726> (accessed April 25, 2012).
2. The sample consisted of an equal number of men and women. Age of the interviewees ranged from 21 to 56: 10 interviewees from 21 to 31 years old, 10 from 32 to 42 years old; and 10 from 43 to 56 years old. Two-thirds of the interviewees have lived in Italy for at least 10 years, and two-thirds hold a university degree.
3. The Arab Barometer is an Institute that conducts surveys of democracy in the Arab world (<http://www.arabbarometer.org>).
4. According to World Bank data, remittances entering Morocco totaled 6.4 billion dollars in 2011, accounting for 6.8 percent of the country's GNP. Morocco is thus one of the top ten remittance receiving

- countries in the Middle East and North Africa. See <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/0,,contentMDK:21924020~pagePK:5105988~piPK:360975~theSitePK:214971,00.html#fragment-4> (accessed November 6, 2012).
5. In particular, the Hassan II Foundation was created in 1990.
  6. The events of the so-called Arab Spring led to mass protests in the country. These manifestations, led by the 20 February Movement, have forced king Mohammed VI to approve a series of constitutional reforms. Most part of the analysis of this phenomenon, however, are agreed on the fact that these concessions do not change in a significant way the true authoritarian nature of the Moroccan regime. See, among others, Molina (2011); Volpi (2012); Maghraoui (2011).
  7. ISTAT data available at <http://www.istat.it/it/archivio/39726> (accessed April 25, 2012).
  8. Interview with a 45-year-old translator who has lived in Italy for 15 years.
  9. Interview with a 49-year-old business woman who has lived in Italy for 2 years.
  10. Only a couple of the interviewees took a strong stance against Islam, maintaining that it is clearly incompatible with democracy.
  11. The interviewees' opinions tend to converge irrespective of their age, gender, and level of education.
  12. Interview with a 40-year-old male educator who has lived in Italy for 10 years; italics added by the author.
  13. Though the interviewees are critical of the Berlusconi governments, in connection with immigration the finger of blame is pointed at all political parties in general, center-right and center-left alike. "The parties' slogans change, but the substance is often the same." Interview with a 46-year-old man, a cultural mediator, who has lived in Italy for 20 years.
  14. The immigration in Italy is regulated by the Legislative Decree 25/07/1998, n° 286, then modified by the Law 30/07/2002, n° 189. This law became operative in 2005 and in 2009 was further modified by the so-called Pacchetto Sicurezza (Law 15/07/2009, n° 94). Italy has quotas for immigrants who arrive in Italy to work. These quotas are subordinated to the "contratto di soggiorno," which is a requirement to obtain the residence permit.
  15. Interview with a 47-year-old man, a company official who has lived in Italy for 20 years.
  16. The interviewees see this as a loss for the host country that, after years of investing in these people, sees its human capital disappear from one day to the next. The Moroccans who arrive in Italy often have academic and job qualifications, speak at least three languages, and are a potential resource that is not put to good use (e.g., the interviewees emphasize on the enormous difficulties involved in having their academic degrees recognized).
  17. One case in particular was mentioned by many interviewees. The 2006 Italian Budget Law contemplated a 1,000 euro payment to mothers with newborn babies, regardless of citizenship. Subsequently, however, after granting the bonus, the Italian government decided that it would not be given to foreign nationals. In the past few years, many foreign citizens have appealed this decision and won.
  18. Between the 1980s and 1990s, rural areas such as Beni Mellal and Khourbga in Morocco's backcountry became an inexhaustible source of immigrants to Italy, and Piemonte in particular. Morocco's poor harvests during those years and the crisis of the phosphate industry (which had sustained the region's fragile productive fabric) triggered an exodus toward nontraditional European countries such as Italy and Spain. This emigration initially consisted of people with a low level of education and large numbers of illegal immigrants.
  19. In the past ten years, there have been a number of failed attempts in Italy to encourage immigrants' participation at the local level. In particular, mention should be made of the "consule per l'immigrazione" offices set up in town halls to advise immigrants and the introduction of "adjunct city councilors" representing the immigrant population in the City Council.
  20. The current political scene in Morocco is complex and shifting. The year 1999 was the beginning of a new era for the Alaouite dynasty. Expectations were very high when the youthful new sovereign rose to the throne: there was talk of a "break with the past," of "democratization from above," of "war without quarter on corruption," and so forth (Willis 1999). Nevertheless, the political challenges facing the new king were arduous indeed: the demand for greater freedom, for the restoration of civil rights, advanced chiefly by new, often Islamist-inspired, political groups such as the Justice and Development Party (PJD). The new king's democratic rhetoric would appear to assign a decisive role to the people. But the real test lies in abolishing or controlling the so-called *makhzen*, or the royal court and its entourage, which has always pulled all the major strings of Moroccan life, from the economy to religion (Tozy 2008). The changes at the political level seem to be little more than window-dressing, and even the new parties often readjust their policies to toe the king's line. However, over and above his democratic rhetoric—which has not translated into democratic results—the king has promoted a series of social reforms, like the new Family Code or the Labor Code, which have tangibly signaled his commitment to change. The recent events of the Arab Spring, the new reforms and the criticisms voiced through the 20 February Movement are once again calling the Moroccan establishment into question. See, among others, Denoex (2000, 2007); Boukhari (2010); Cavatorta (2005); Destries and Moyano (2001); Laskier (2003); Maghraoui (2001).

21. The most recent elections in Morocco (November 2011) saw rather low voter turnout (around 45 percent, but still better than 2007's 37 percent) and resulted in a victory for the Islamist PJD.
22. When the tape recorder was off, some of the interviewees expressed opinions that were highly critical of the king and his actions, but showed reluctance and fear of criticizing him publicly or saying something unfavorable about Morocco.
23. The question of Morocco's depoliticization dates back to the 1960s. In using this term, however, we do not mean that there is no defined political context. The country's first constitution, adopted in 1962, provided for a multiparty system with a legislature elected by universal suffrage. The constitution called for a National Assembly consisting of a Chamber of Representatives, whose members were elected directly, and an upper house, or Chamber of Councilors, whose members were elected indirectly. However, their powers were granted directly by the king. Dozens of national and local elections were held between 1963 and 2002; constitutional amendments made the system more open and liberal. Nevertheless, the reforms that took place after independence had only a marginal effect on the general configuration of power and the political system. See Dalmaso (2012); Hibou (2011); Maghraoui (2002).

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# Appendix 1

## INTERVIEW GUIDE

### 1 Personal Data

Age

Gender

Work (employed/unemployed)

Marital status

Qualification

How many years have you been living in Italy? In Turin?

Is Italy the first country of destination after leaving Morocco?

### 1. Definitions

- What is democracy for you? Could you give a definition?
- Are there, according to you, basic principles that define democracy? If yes, which ones?
- According to you, are democratic principles compatible with Islamic system?

### 2. Host Country

- What is your opinion about democracy in the host country?
- Do you feel protected by Italian state during your everyday life?
  - at work
  - at school
  - in your family
  - in health facilities
  - in judicial structures
  - in your search of job/house
  - in the streets
- Do you feel that your rights are respected?
  - at work
  - at school
  - in your family

in health facilities  
in judicial structures  
in your search of job/house  
in the streets  
in politics/political participation  
in the streets

### 3. Comparison between the Country of Origin and the Host Country

- Which bond do you have with your country of origin?
- How are, according to you, from a democratic perspective, the Italian specificities? And how are Morocco's specificities?
- Did you find some differences in the rights protection?
- Did you find some differences in the political process (political class and representation process)? Could you give me some examples?
- Please express an evaluation about some aspects of Italy and of Morocco in a range between 1 and 10:
  - freedom of movement
  - freedom of expression
  - freedom of association
  - freedom of press
  - freedom of religion
  - freedom of sexual choice
  - political rights (representation, participation)
  - trust in institutions

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## CHAPTER 5

### Diasporas as Political Actors: The Case of the Amazigh Diaspora

*Eva Pfostl*

#### INTRODUCTION

The emergence of diaspora studies is fairly recent. They first emerged from cultural studies, anthropology, and sociology: migration studies and political science followed this trend starting in the 1990s (Sheffer 2003; Shain and Barth 2003; Kaldor 2001; Østergaard-Nielsen 2006; Smith 2007).

The term diaspora is derived from the Greek *diaspeirein*, meaning “dispersal or scattering of seeds.” Originally, the concept referred only to the historic experience of particular groups, specifically Jews and Armenians. Later, it was extended to religious minorities in Europe. Since the late 1970s the term diaspora has undergone an impressive broadening of definition. The classic description is based on Sheffer's three criterias (from his work of 1986): the dispersed group must hold a distinctive collective identity across international locations; the group must have some internal organization of its own; the group in dispersion must keep ties with the homeland (be it symbolic or real). Changing realities modified this understanding of diaspora and in 1995 Sheffer introduced the concept of ethnonational diasporas, and in 1997, Cohen changed the concept of voluntary migration, focusing on the requirement of internal organization that keeps diasporas together in contemporary times. Recent literature is framing diasporas as almost any population on the move and no longer referring to the specific context of their existence (Vertovec and Cohen 1999; Castles and Miller 2003). This formulation, however, makes diaspora hardly