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## Young people with Tunisian origins living in Italy: A case of transnational lived citizenship?

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### **Abstract**

*In recent years, the merging of the lived citizenship approach with the transnational perspective has shed a brighter light on the spatiality of everyday citizenship practices. Starting from this premise, the present study investigates whether and how a group of young people, aged between 22 and 28, with Tunisian parentage residing in the province of Modena (Northern Italy) live their citizenship transnationally. It involves questioning what their citizenship practices are, whether their transnational ties translate into lived citizenship, and what are the sites in which these people live their citizenship. The study draws on 14 in-depth interviews collected between 2020 and 2021, offering fresh insights into the role of transnational bonds in shaping the geographies and the contents of citizenship practices among young people with migrant parents. The findings confirm the heuristic validity of merging the transnational perspective with the lived citizenship approach, especially when inquiring into the practices of citizenship among migrants' descendants.*

**Keywords:** *Transnationalism; citizenship; everyday life; youth; Italy; Tunisia*

### **Introduction: Transnationalism and citizenship as two converging fields**

In recent decades, the transnational perspective in migration studies and the lived citizenship approach in citizenship studies have deeply questioned the bounded and formal perspectives once hegemonic in their own disciplinary fields, thus fostering their radical reshaping (Glick-Schiller et al., 1992; Bauböck, 1994; Isin & Nielsen, 2008; Kallio et al., 2020). The transnational perspective, in particular, has drawn attention to the 'social process in which migrants establish social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders' (Glick-Schiller et al., 1992: IX), hence questioning the implied nationalism of social sciences (*ibidem*: X). Over time, transnational studies have also broadened their focus by developing an interest towards everyday life, regarded as a significant site for transnational practices (Boccagni, 2012a), and towards the structural dimension and intergenerational reproduction of cross-border ties (Boccagni, 2012b: 38), central issues for comprehending transnationalism among migrants' descendants.

Within transnational migration studies much research has therefore focused on *second generations*<sup>2</sup>, showing how their transnational ties result in a multiplicity of belongings and identifications (Kyei et al., 2022: 1181). Migrants' descendants seem to reunite tensions between a number of dichotomies, such as: fluid identifications (*ibidem*) and essentialisations of their identities (Anthias, 2002: 510); belonging and exclusion (Kılınç et al., 2022: 4); as well

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<sup>2</sup> Although widely used in literature (Riniolo, 2020: 104), the term *second generation* has been questioned since it might suggest a linear reproduction of first-generation migrants' conditions and identities (Acocella, 2018: 47). Hence, I prefer to use the term *migrants' descendants*.

as orientations towards one country and another (Wessendorf, 2007: 1097). Due to these characteristics, migrants' descendants question nation-state's idealised congruences, representing an interesting case for inquiring the transformations of citizenship.

While the transnational approach underwent these developments, citizenship studies overcame the previous formal paradigm. In this case, once recognised the substantive dimension of citizenship rooted in social, political, cultural, and symbolic practices (Isin & Nielsen, 2008: 17), the lived citizenship approach put under the spotlight 'people's everyday lived experiences of *being* citizens, which occur through relational and daily acts of participation, care and belonging' (Laksana & Wood, 2018: 808). These advancements also increasingly challenged the nationally bounded conception of citizenship (Wood & Black, 2018).

The recognition of an existing 'civic stratification' (Morris, 2003) also supported the criticism towards discrete conceptions of citizenship. In particular, attention was paid to *denizens*, 'persons who are foreign citizens with a legal and permanent resident status' (Hammar, 1990: 15). In fact, since their embeddedness in the country of residence and their legal bonds with it (Brubaker, 2010: 66) do not result in participation in the exercise of State's sovereignty (Bauböck, 1994: 88), they exemplify the desynchronisation between substantial and formal aspects of citizenship.

These developments in migration and citizenship studies are at the core of Kallio's and Mitchell's elaboration on *transnational lived citizenship* (2016). Criticising fixed, state-based notions of citizenship, the authors pursue a *respatialisation* of citizenship, which focuses on 'the situated practices and geographical imaginings that constitute transnational space' (*ibidem*: 261) to comprehend 'how people, as political subjects, on the one hand, position and reposition themselves differently in their communities and societies and, on the other hand, seek new political stances and take new actions in their transnationalizing worlds' (*ibidem*: 261). In formulating this proposition, Kallio and Mitchell (*ibidem*: 263) also promote a *repolitisation* of citizenship to avoid the risk of considering 'citizenship as everything'.

Following this invitation to pose 'the question of citizenship's actually-existing spatiality' (Martin & Paasi, 2016: 347), in the present paper, I investigate the lived experience of citizenship of a group of young people of Tunisian origins living in Italy. I ask: Where and how do they live their citizenship? Do their transnational bonds influence their lived experience of citizenship? How useful is it to respatialise their practices to understand their lived experience of citizenship?

This paper shows how young adults with migrant parentage make claims for a more inclusive conception of citizenship through daily relations and practices within their transnational geographies. This provides evidence of the validity of the transnational respatialisation of citizenship studies for gaining a deeper understanding of lived citizenship among migrants' descendants.

## Methodology

The study focuses on a group of young people (aged between 22 and 28) with Tunisian parentage living in the province of Modena (Northern Italy), an area of historical settlement



for Tunisian migrants in Italy<sup>3</sup>. This case is particularly interesting due to the efforts of the Tunisian state at reinforcing the transnational ties with emigrants, through the allowance of double citizenship and the granting of external voting rights (Jaulin & Nilsson, 2015: 45). Moreover, the Tunisian revolution of 2010-2011 fostered a phase of political and civic activism among Tunisian communities abroad (Graziano, 2012). Hence, the young people included in this research, as migrant descendants brought up in a particularly thick transnational social space (Toivanen, 2019: 245), were deemed suitable for addressing the research questions about transnational lived citizenship.

The study draws on 14 in-depth interviews carried out in the towns of Modena and Carpi between November 2020 and January 2021 with young people born and raised in Italy or who arrived from Tunisia in their childhood, most of whom had Italian citizenship (Table 1)<sup>4</sup>. Different social networks were included, to encompass diverging sensibilities and positionings, comprising both people engaged in associative and political milieus and ‘young people in the middle’ (Harris et al., 2010: 14), disenchanted with traditional forms of civic and political participation, but instead, protagonists of ‘individualized and everyday practices in efforts to shape society’ (*ibidem*: 28). The research participants attended Italian schools and considered Italian their primary language<sup>5</sup>. To reduce power hierarchies with participants, I conducted in-depth and unstructured interviews in Italian (Mellor et al., 2014: 139), during which I invited the research participants to narrate ‘their everyday routine’ (Cardano, 2011: 150)<sup>6</sup>. Once written out *verbatim*, the interviews were thematically analysed using Atlas.ti.

The close attention paid to respondents’ everydayness during the interviews was a way to cope partially with the impossibility of conducting observations in associations and in private spaces due to the Covid19 pandemic. Although I have observed participants’ associative practices only to a limited extent, they emerge insistently in their narratives and appear as central activities not only in their lived experience of citizenship but also in their transnational relationship. Since I met several participants in outdoor spaces, such as bars and parks, despite pandemic restrictions, many interviews ended in ‘guided walks’ in which participants lead me ‘through locales of significance to them’ (Ross et al., 2009)<sup>7</sup>.

In this paper, I consider several everyday practices that, while not always having a formal or institutional character, share a political dimension or at least a claim for recognition (Lister, 2007: 50). For this purpose, I consider transnationalism as encompassing the subjective sphere ‘involving imagination, invention, and emotions’ (Levitt et al., 2003: 571), in order to investigate whether and how this symbolic and identity dimension of transnationalism, prevalent among migrants’ descendants (Viruell-Fuentes, 2006: 347), sustains and influences their lived citizenship.

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<sup>3</sup> Official figures indicate 5,300 Tunisians legally residing in the province of Modena (ISTAT 2021), but considering also dual citizenship, those with Tunisian origins are likely almost double that figure.

<sup>4</sup> All respondents hold Tunisian citizenship. The Tunisian Code of Nationality (1956), and subsequent amendments, states that children (born in Tunisia or abroad) having one Tunisian parent acquire Tunisian citizenship at birth.

<sup>5</sup> The only partial exception was represented by Abed who arrived in Italy after primary school, but who also felt comfortable being interviewed in Italian.

<sup>6</sup> All participants were informed about the scope of the research and the use of the interviews, and they gave explicit and written consent to the interview and to its use.

<sup>7</sup> This occurred in Carpi with Hicham, Oualid and Malek and in Modena with Adam, Ines, and Sania, whom I also accompanied to an association meeting.

**Table 1.** Biographical information of the participants. Names are fictitious and generations have been assigned according to Rumbaut's classification (2004).

NAME	AGE	GEN-DER	PRESENCE IN ITALY	GENE-RATION	CITIZENSHIP(S)	CITY	MAIN ACTIVITY
Hicham	27	M	6 years old	1.5	Dual	Carpi	University student and occasional jobs
Insaf	25	F	Few months old	1.75	Only Tunisian	Carpi	Dental assistant
Abed	26	M	12 years old	1.5	Only Tunisian	Modena	Factory worker
Adam	25	M	9 years old	1.5	Dual	Modena	Factory worker
Ash	28	M	Few months old	1.75	Dual	Carpi	Educator
Ines	22	F	Born in Italy	2	Dual	Modena	University student and occasional jobs
Sania	23	F	Few months old	1.75	Only Tunisian	Modena	University student and occasional jobs
Sajid	23	M	Born in Italy	2	Dual	Modena	University student
Oualid	22	M	Born in Italy	2	Dual	Carpi	Logistical worker
Nadia	25	F	Born in Italy	2	Dual	Carpi	University student
Selma	22	F	Born in Italy	2	Dual	Modena	Hairdresser
Safiya	27	F	Born in Italy	2	Dual	Carpi	Educator
Malek	26	M	Few months old	1.75	Only Tunisian	Carpi	Warehouse worker
Souad	25	F	Born in Italy	2	Dual	Carpi	University student

### The emotional geographies of a transnational relations

The present analysis starts with a description of the emotional geographies inhabited by the research participants, where belonging, 'shaped by spatial and relational interactions' (Wood, 2013: 56), is formed. In fact, the notion of belonging assumes a central significance for the construction of citizenship and nationhood since 'feelings of belonging or not belonging are inseparable from the experience of both being and feeling a citizen' (Wood & Black, 2018: 191).

In the accounts of young people with Tunisian parentage, Modena appears as the place of the most significant relations: 'My mum is here, my dad and my family. I know that if I have to go anywhere in the world, I always have this city. I always have a home, it's like a yo-yo'. (Sania, 23)<sup>8</sup>. Also, Italy is generally acknowledged as the place of personal formation: 'I've spent my whole life here. I can't be incoherent and say that Tunisia is my country, no, it's my second country' (Nadia, 25). However, this condition does not prevent the construction of strong bonds with Tunisia, materialised in the routinary visits to the extended family: 'We are mostly linked to the family down in Tunisia, to the relationship with my grandparents, with all my cousins, my uncles and I have been there mostly in the summer' (Sajid, 23). As the literature shows, this sustained relation with the country of origin translates into multiple embeddedness, enabling the construction of a transnational sense of belonging and identity among migrants' descendants (Viruell-Fuentes, 2006: 357-358). '[Having dual citizenship]

<sup>8</sup> Respondents are quoted using pseudonyms.



mirrors me: I was born and raised here, so I feel Italian, but I also feel Tunisian. In my opinion, it's a good thing' (Selma, 22).

The double belonging and double biography (Acocella, 2018: 47) characterising Tunisian migrants' descendants, nevertheless expose them to the long-lasting question of multiple loyalties (Frisina, 2010: 558): 'When you are here you are not 100% Italian, you are actually Tunisian, but at the same time when you go to Tunisia you are not 100% Tunisian, because you are Italian [...] There is always a polarisation based on how the outside classifies you' (Sania, 23). This external classification exposes young people with Tunisian parentage to a twofold process of internal exclusion (Balibar, 2015 [2012]: 69): one in Italy, where, from the mainstream members' perspective, they inherited the condition of *strangers* (Ricucci, 2016), and another in Tunisia, where they are accused of being *detached* from the country's traditions, of 'not being raised properly' (Levitt, 2009: 1233).

Therefore, while experiencing relations and belongings across political borders, these young people seem to stand, if we adopt a substantial understanding of citizenship, between 'citizenship's inclusionary and exclusionary sides' (Lister: 2007, 49), both in Tunisia and in Italy. In the next paragraphs, how this uncomfortable position can fuel tactics of 'dealing with misrecognition' (Andreouli & Howart, 2012: 364), inspiring a claim for a more inclusive conception of citizenship (Lister, 2007: 50), is considered.

### **The individual pursuit of recognition in daily relations**

Starting the analysis from the everydayness of these youth, it seems worth to signal that the Modenese context appears to reproduce the patterns of exclusion that Muslims face in Italy and in Europe, linked to security and culturalist frames (Sarli & Mezzetti, 2020: 448; Riniolo, 2020: 107). The school and the labour market are important sites where these exclusionary dynamics are experienced and 'new boundaries of citizenship and belonging are enforced' (Staeheli, 2010: 395). 'Obviously when someone gets angry, they say 'shitty Tunisian' or similar expressions and you can't answer 'shitty Italian' because you also feel it [Italian], right? [...] then also my sister couldn't stand it anymore when in high school she was looking for internships and she had a lot of difficulties because of the veil, Italy wasn't her place, unfortunately' (Hicham, 27).

Against this regime of symbolic and social exclusion, the daily response of these youth seems to lie in the demonstration of their *deservingness* to be considered, at least within the social networks they inhabit, as fellow citizens, rather than strangers (Bloemraad et al., 2019: 86). As Abed (26) tells, 'I started working in this company that was racist: I was the first Tunisian. You felt that maybe when you worked alongside someone... you felt the difference and even heard some jokes. Then they got to know me and my family, it happened slowly. After five years, I managed to run the company when the foreman was in hospital'. Also, Nadia (25) illustrates how, through acquaintance, she gained recognition of her Italianness: 'Maybe those who don't know you are curious or surprised that a veiled girl does voluntary work with the senior centre. But then they get to know you and they are amazed when you speak in perfect Italian: "How is it...? You speak so well!", "I was born here", "Then you're more Italian than me!?"

These examples show how these young people try to gain acceptance as members of the Italian citizenry through *visibility tactics* (Frisina, 2010: 561), seeking individual recognition as good, hard-working, citizens, while not questioning the overall frame of exclusion towards migrants and Muslims, which still operates outside their network of acquaintances: 'I have never experienced in Italy, at school or at work, problems of discrimination or racism, never. But from passers-by yes, even on the train, but they are people who don't know you' (Nadia, 25). Also in this light, Nadia and Hicham's sister's experiences show that, especially for girls wearing the veil, the body can become both an object of attention and control and a means of practising politics (Kallio, 2007: 126).

The need to demonstrate in everyday life both cultural membership and moral blamelessness to participate in the citizenry (Bloemraad et al., 2019: 74) characterises also the experience of these young people in their locality of origin in Tunisia. In this context, since they can rely on a high social position as, supposedly rich, emigrants, their exclusion is justified by their long-time physical absence, which hinders the recognition of their 'Tunisianess': 'When you start talking about certain topics, they say "but you haven't lived in Tunisia"' (Adam, 25). Yet, to overcome this exclusion, these young people have to learn how to master several suitable cultural repertoires in their transnational daily life (Levitt, 2009: 1226), demonstrating that they know how to be *a Tunisian*. As Selma (22) explains: 'I don't feel like going to Tunisia and behaving like an Italian and I don't feel like staying in Italy and behaving like a Tunisian. - What's the difference? - Honestly, it doesn't change much, but maybe there are small things, maybe the way I dress'. Therefore, the capability of reintegrating family and friendship networks in Tunisia, a 'key attribute of both transnational and translocal belonging' (Smith, 2011: 190), plays a central role in their experience of citizenship, which 'is contingent on being made welcome within "a community of membership"' (Wood & Black, 2018: 191).

Depending also on the intensity and the scale of relations cultivated in Tunisia, these periodical returns can unfold significant symbolic practices, such as the celebration of marriage in Tunisia or even projects of temporary settlement: 'A small dream of mine is to live a whole year in Tunisia... because I am a Tunisian who has lived in Europe, and I'd like to live like a Tunisian and feel like a Tunisian in Tunisia' (Malek, 26). Selma (22) actually managed to move to Kairouan for a two-year hairdressing course: 'I wanted to try to live a little bit there, just to see how things work [...]. I went, I stayed, I had many friends, and so I saw little things that I didn't know and that now make me feel good about myself'.

As shown by these accounts, young people with Tunisian descent experience in their everyday life the continuous questioning of their membership, being called upon to prove their suitability as fellow citizens. Hence, claiming to belong to Tunisian and Italian locales and citizenries 'become a strategic way of positioning oneself in relation to exclusionary forms of nationhood' (Khan, 2021: 138). In this sense, the old Modenese lady telling Nadia 'You're more Italian than me!' or Selma's capability of 'living as a Tunisian' appear as interesting examples of substantive, yet individualised, entrances into citizenship.

### **Active citizens: searching for recognition through groups**

In Tunisian descendants' narrations of everyday life, a cross-border quest for inclusion and recognition was observed. The same claim also seems to characterise their associative practices. For several participants the first venue of collective engagement was the local group



of *Giovani Musulmani d'Italia* (GMI)<sup>9</sup>, the first association of young Muslims in Italy, which calls for ‘the public recognition of an Italo-Muslim identity’ (Cigliuti, 2018: 80). The association is engaged in ‘local and national inclusion strategies’ (Frisina, 2010: 563), mobilising on citizenship issues<sup>10</sup> as well as supporting its members in harmonising “‘integration” and “Muslimness”” (Priori, 2021: 101), a sensitive issue in Europe, where religion constitutes a strong boundary between the ‘natives’ and immigrants (Sarli & Mezzetti, 2020).

GMI’s activities have adapted to contextual conditions. For instance, the local group in Carpi, hosted by the mosque and supervised by the imam, engaged primarily in religious activities being ‘a bit like catechism’ (Safiya, 27). This religious education, detached from family’s ethnic and cultural origins (Acocella, 2018: 58), has fostered for some people, an identification with the supranational *Umma* (Grillo, 2004)<sup>11</sup>: ‘The strongest link for me is with the faith: I feel Muslim; I don’t identify myself in a nationality’ (Malek, 26). This translated also in body practices: ‘[during Ramadan] we had the party to stop fasting and we went to McDonald’s with some friends, dressed in the Turkish hat and the tunic... a long time ago this would have made me [ashamed]...’ (Malek, 26). Generally, the religious activism promoted by GMI in Carpi was also regarded as a way to shape good citizens (Nyhagen, 2015: 775): ‘We saw that many of our generation were deviating from Islam. They were drinking, taking drugs and so on, so the goal was not to inculcate religion, but to get them out from that’ (Hicham, 27). This promotion of a moral sense of community was criticised by some young people who left or stayed out of GMI, worried about the risk of community-based participation in the Italian society: ‘in my opinion, you close yourself off; it’s a reality that tends to ghettoise people’ (Safiya, 27).

Nevertheless, the participation in GMI was, for many, a way of socialising into activism. Then, the Tunisian revolution (2010-2011), in which Tunisian emigrants participated extensively through the Internet (Graziano, 2012), inspired a new mobilisation in transnational politics: ‘I did it [the Facebook account] at that time just to see these things, because videos were coming... there was a sense of enthusiasm’ (Hicham, 27). In this context, Ennahdha, the main moderate Islamist party in Tunisia, capitalised (both in Tunisia and abroad) on its previous opposition to Ben Ali’s regime: ‘They got so many votes because they were also good at taking young people who grew up here and getting them into a Tunisian political group, it is not easy’ (Insaf, 25). Once constituted, the activities performed by Ennahdha’s youth branch in Italy overlapped with those of GMI: conventions, camping and chats<sup>12</sup>. However, the two organisations have different outlooks: while GMI brings together daily life in Italy with Islamic worship (Cigliuti, 2018: 80), Ennahdha fosters the possibility of participating simultaneously in different political arenas. ‘Supporting al-Nahda gives many young people the chance to feel

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<sup>9</sup> Young Italian Muslims.

<sup>10</sup> A long-lasting objective of GMI is the revision of the strict Italian citizenship law (91/1992), but the association also organised workshops and campaigns promoting a substantial vision of citizenship (see: Frisina, 2010: 565).

<sup>11</sup> For Ralph Grillo, Islam, encompassing both bi-national circuits and trans-ethnic communities, has a transnational dimension. The latter meaning is the one stressed here, but in order to avoid any confusion with the bi-national transnationalism of our respondents’ accounts, I have labelled it ‘supranational *Umma*’, rather than ‘transnational’.

<sup>12</sup> The limited space of this paper does not allow me to delve further into the experience of Ennahdha. I refer on this point and for a comparison with the experience of young people of Moroccan origin in the MSP to: Pepicelli, 2018.

closer to Tunisia, without this meaning a betrayal of Italy' (Pepicelli, 2018: 123)<sup>13</sup>. In Modena's province, before undertaking any political activity, Ennahdha's youth branch pointed to repositioning its participants as full members of the Tunisian citizenry, despite the fact of living abroad: 'We did some Tunisian activities; we did some intercultural parties to *represent* Tunisia' (Hicham, 27). In this context, an interesting activity was the organisation of trips to get these young people to know *their own* country: 'Many of the young people didn't go to Tunisia very much or even didn't go there at all [...]. And so, my aim was to introduce them to this world, also because, being Tunisians, in the future we could also be helpful to Tunisia' (Hicham, 27).

Beyond these two experiences, currently facing a down-cycle, several people also participated in other Italian organisations. For instance, Safiya (27), after leaving GMI, began to participate to the *Consulta per l'integrazione dei cittadini stranieri*<sup>14</sup>. The *Consulta* is an advisory body of the Municipality of Carpi and reunites migrants' associations, Italian associations, and individuals. 'A world opened up to me, I discovered that this thing existed in Carpi, and it was exactly what I wanted: for the experience you have, for your background, for everything you carry with you, to be *a bridge* between the origins of your parents and the area where you live' (Safiya, 27). Finally, I can also cite the case of Sania (23). A left-wing university student, she engaged in various initiatives with unions and NGOs, where she discovered the influence of her background on her activism. 'When you are constantly living in the second generation, being Italian, not being Italian, it depends on what, it depends on how, it depends on who says it... so you try in some way to re-propose the theme, but in a different context'.

Even though all these associative practices seem to share a common claim for a broader conception of citizenship, they differ in their intergenerational dimension. In fact, in those experiences marked by an explicit bond with Tunisia, such as Safiya's in *Consulta* or Hicham's in Ennahdha, parental influence comes out: 'My father has always been interested in this party [...] then, I started having my own ideas too' (Hicham, 27). However, even in these cases, migrants' descendants' activism does not seem to share their parents' diasporic outlook (Mezzetti, Ricucci, 2019: 417) aimed at 'the preservation of a distinctive identity vis-à-vis a host society' (Brubaker, 2005: 6). On the contrary, youth initiatives, both those pointing at the recognition of a Muslim-Italian citizen or of a Tunisian-Italian one as well as standard associative initiatives, seem to be intimately linked to the will of these youth people to be *a bridge* between the transnational references issued from their migratory background (Freyer, 2019: 255).

## Acts of citizenship? The example of an activist citizen

Alongside these daily experiences and associative practices, we can also find some *acts of citizenship* that transform forms and modes of being political 'by bringing into being new actors as activist citizens (claimants of rights and responsibilities) through creating new sites and scales of struggle' (Isin, 2008: 39). Whilst in the narratives of the research participants it is not straightforward to distinguish between citizenship practices and acts of citizenship, some episodes seem endowed with the power of transforming subjects into citizens (*ibidem*: 18).

<sup>13</sup> Despite the different outlooks of GMI and Ennahdha (Acocella, 2018: 57-67), at the local level we must recognise a strong continuity between the two experiences based on the shared claim for acknowledging the existence of multiple belongings, on the common conception of Islam as a strong source of identity and on the involvement of more or less the same participants.

<sup>14</sup> Council for the integration of foreign citizens





One of these episodes is the initiative of the *sardines*, a spontaneous group of people, who in November 2019 started to demonstrate in Emilia-Romagna against the xenophobic rhetoric of the Northern League party (*Lega Nord*), which seemed about to win the regional elections. Sania (23) actively participated in the movement in Modena, emphasising the localistic nature of her engagement: ‘For me it was always “Modena”, that is. I do it for Modena, because Modena is my city [...] I also feel the need to *represent* it’. Also, she seems conscious of the exceptionality of the mobilisation and of her acts: despite lacking Italian citizenship, she contributed to a political change, redeeming herself, as she put it, for not having participated in the Tunisian revolution. ‘It was a bit of a redemption, because I said to myself “here I am rewriting history” and in some way I feel I have written it’<sup>15</sup>.

Therefore, Sania’s activism shows that the dispossession of formal citizenship is not an obstacle to the development of a sense of local rootedness able to trigger activism. Rather, her situatedness, acquired through schooling and civic participation, inspires her attempts to make her place in Modena as she would have done in Tunisia during the revolution. In this way, Sania confirms the possibility also for denizens to influence local politics, playing an active role, when endowed with material and moral resources, in ‘civic expansion’ (Lockwood, 1996: 542). In its singularity, the story of Sania also provides an example of activist citizenship (Isin, 2008: 38): her claims against ethnic and exclusionary views of membership are not so different from those previously described, but her feeling of national and local belonging intertwined with a sense of political responsibility (Khan, 2021: 138) that triggered a radical call for a change of the status quo.

### **Conclusion: A promising intersection of gazes**

In studying the lived citizenship experience of a group of young people with Tunisian parentage in Italy, I followed Kallio and Mitchell’s invitation to respatialise this study on a transnational enlarged geography, looking ‘at where and how people lead their lives as political subjects’ (2016: 264). I argue that for the research participants the performed dimension of citizenship (Kallio et al., 2020) is built around the quest for recognition and inclusion that spans from everyday relations to acts of citizenship. This drive for more inclusive and plural conceptions of citizenship seems closely related to the existential condition of migrants’ descendants (Colombo et al., 2011: 344), who experience relations and belongings within an enlarged transnational geography, while facing a twofold exclusion from full entrance into citizenry.

Therefore, for most of them the ordinary of daily life (Staeheli et al., 2012) is characterised by continuous and individualised efforts to gain the *deserved* recognition as Italians and/or Tunisians, especially within the most frequented social networks. In a similar vein, these young people display in their associative practices an explicit ‘entitlement to critique and change’ (Khan, 2021: 136) citizenship’s boundaries, thus promoting their permeability. Hence, the ephemeral, or absent, engagement in traditional politics does not seem to entail an indifference towards social and political issues, which are expressed in non-conventional political participation (Riniolo & Ortensi, 2021) or in daily interactions.

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<sup>15</sup>The *sardines* played a crucial role during the electoral campaign and finally contributed to the victory of the left-wing coalition in the regional elections held in January 2020.

The lived experience of citizenship of this group of people appears much more understandable when framed within their complex ‘geographies of daily life and of attachment’ (Staeheli et al., 2012: 641), composed of local bonds, national ‘landscapes’ (Desforges et al., 2005: 441), transnational relations, and supranational horizons, such as the Islamic *Umma* (Grillo, 2004: 867). In these ‘intertwined and co-constitutive’ (Kallio & Mitchell, 2016: 261) geographies, Tunisia is a significant centre of gravity, representing a symbolic and identity reference that shapes, in many ways, the whole experience of lived citizenship, being also a social landscape in which these young people periodically reintegrate and seek recognition as citizens. In this framework, the role of nation-state remains pivotal both for managing formal access to citizenship and for building memberships (Brubaker, 2010: 65). However, the two processes do not always go hand in hand as demonstrated by denizen respondents, who engage in everyday tactics (Abed), associative participation (Insaf, Malek) and acts of citizenship (Sania).

Consequently, we can assert that citizenship is experienced by our respondents in a transnational dimension of emotional geographies and situated practices, where ‘spaces of “locatedness” spanning multiple sites of material life both within and across borders’ (Smith, 2011: 188) interact with national and supranational frameworks in a multiscalar complex of references. The study has also provided fresh insights into the long-lasting question of migrants’ descendants’ transnational engagement, arguing that, also in this case, a focus on institutionalised activities would hide the ample and significant experience of transnationality influencing their lived experiences.

In conclusion, by moving within ‘the fraught ties between transnationalism and citizenship’ (Kallio & Mitchell, 2016: 262), we gained a deep comprehension of ‘the where of citizenship [...] and how of citizenship’ (Wood, 2013: 52). The merging of transnational and lived citizenship approaches appears beneficial for the advancement of both domains of study and particularly suitable for enquiring migrants’ descendants, whose multiplicity of belongings complexifies their experience of citizenship.

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