The Arab Spring and the Return Intention of Egyptians Living in Italy

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THE WIDESPREAD ENTHUSIASM triggered by the Arab Spring affected both first- and second-generation Egyptians in Italy and led to different forms of action and socio-political participation. However, to what extent will this new enthusiasm transform into a real consideration of returning to Egypt is a largely unexplored topic. Relying on the main migration theories, we address the following research questions: which traditional theoretical arguments apply to the intention to return of first- and second-generation Egyptians in Italy? Do the changes in Egypt after the Arab Spring strengthen their intention to return? Presented data comes from qualitative interviews conducted between 2011–2013 with Egyptians in Turin and Rome. The results show that transnational ties strengthened by the Arab Spring support the idea of returning, although a definitive return will probably not occur for the first or for the second generation, but rather they will adopt a transnational way of living.

Key Words: return intention; transnationalism; Italy; Egypt; Arab Spring

Migration flows from Egypt to Italy have registered a high growth rate over the last few years, ranking Italy as one of the major destinations of Egyptians in Europe, with 90,365 residents as of 1st January 2011. In Italy, there is a well-established community with a high percentage

of families and an increasing presence of second generation Egyptians (United Nations 2010; Caritas di Roma, Provincia di Roma e Camera di Commercio di Roma 2011).

Egypt, along with other North African countries, was involved in a revolutionary experience in 2011, known as the Arab Spring. More than two years after the outbreak of the Arab Spring, the political and economic situation in the country is still uncertain. In parallel, since 2008 the European countries have been facing a historic economic turmoil. In such a context of important changes in their origin country and of economic concern in their destination countries that may particularly affect migrants' situation, the following question arises: how do migrants handle the return or settlement decision? The empirical literature on the topic of return migration is flourishing but results are quite ambivalent without drawing any general pattern. In a recent article on Turks' return intentions, Şenyürekli and Menjívar (2012, 3) highlighted that 'in times of economic turmoil and socio-cultural crises in receiving countries, special attention should be placed on immigrants' desires and plans to return to their homelands.' We believe that the same applies for the sending countries as well, since they are facing major political, social, and economic crises or changes that may strongly affect migrants' intentions to return.

With the aim of shedding light on the multiple factors influencing the intention of migrants to return, this study will focus on the Egyptians living in two Italian cities: Turin and Rome. Among the factors influencing migrants' return intentions we consider not only the individual and social factors in which migrants' lives are embedded, but also contextual factors both in the receiving and sending countries.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Return migration has recently captured the attention of researchers and policy makers as an instrument to guarantee temporary migration and avoid the permanent settlement of migrants (Olesen 2002; Cassarino 2004; Barber, Black, and Tenaglia 2005; Castles 2006; Ruhs 2006).[1] The phenomenon is not new; it calls to mind the guest workers schemes of the 1970s and the temporary labour migration schemes of the Arab Gulf countries. However, top-down schemes do not often

succeed and individual decisions are usually much more complicated than policy designs.

Different theories have been conceptualized to explain migrants' position in relation to migration and thus return processes. The *neoclassical theory of migration* (Harris and Todaro 1970) has been conceptualized at both micro and macro level. At the micro level, migration is assumed to be an individual decision for income maximization. Through a cost-benefit calculation, potential migrants decide to move if they can get a positive return – most often money – from their emigration. In this model, a pre-condition for migration is the stock of human capital (e. g. education, work experience, training and language skills) as well as individual socio-demographic characteristics (e. g. age and health). In line with the classical assimilation theory of the Chicago School (Warner and Scrole 1945; Gordon 1964), the neoclassical theory of migration considers migrants' integration as a 'time dependent' phenomenon. The longer the duration of stay at the destination, the higher the chance of integration. 'So, within this perspective, return migration is mainly interpreted as a result of structural (educational and economic) integration failure. In different words, while "winners" settle, "losers" return' (de Haas and Fokkema 2011, 757).

By contrast, the *new economics of labor migration* (NELM) interprets migration as a co-insurance agreement between family members in order to spread the income risks and overcome the local market constraints at the origin (Stark and Bloom 1985). According to NELM, only the best-suited individuals among the family members are sent abroad in order to earn money, necessary to insure income and market risks in the sending countries (Stark 1991; Taylor 1999; Taylor, Rozelle, and Brauw 2003). According to this theory, return is considered as a successful outcome of a migrant's achievements in terms of financial and human capital accumulation, which is useful for investment in the home country. However, capital accumulation is a time-dependent phenomenon, strictly related to integration in the host countries. Therefore, return has to be considered as part of the migration process that will only occur once the migrant has achieved his/her migratory objectives.

The *historical structural approach* shifted the attention from the micro level process that shapes individual migration to the macro level process that is behind population movements. In particular, the world systems theory (Wallerstein 1974) describes migration in the context of the global economy: it pays particular attention to the relations between the 'core' (receiving countries) part of the world and the 'periphery' (sending countries). The penetration of the capitalist economic system from the core to the peripheral countries increases development gaps between countries rather than increasing development and containing migration flows. Therefore, the *structural approach to returns* considers social and structural factors, such as local power relations, traditions, and values in the home country as important factors in hindering or fostering return migration.

The contextual factors, i.e. the economic and social situation in the origin country, and the expectations of the returnees contribute to the creation of different 'returnee' profiles, as described by Cerase (1974) in his study on Italian returnees from the us. The author defines four different profiles of returnees: 'return of failure,' including those who failed to integrate in the receiving country – as assumed by the neoclassical theory of migration; 'return of conservatisms,' referring to those who returned and bought land with the money earned abroad (consistent with nelm) and who were not interested at all in changing the situation in the home country; 'return of retirement,' for those who returned once retired; and 'return of innovation,' concerning those who returned in order to change the situation (in economic, political or social terms) in the home country thanks to the new skills acquired abroad. Unfortunately, according to Cerase (1974), the 'innovators' are going to fail, because of the unstable socio-economic situation of the migrants' home country. Several studies (Moran-Taylor and Menjívar 2005; Boccagni 2011; Şenyürekli and Menjívar 2012) show the importance of the homeland's social, political and economic situation for the return experience of migrants.

A further step forward in the analysis of migrants' bond with their home countries was taken by a group of anthropologists (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992) who introduced the term *transnationalism* to define the migrants' process of linking countries

of origin and settlement. This perspective was further developed by Portes (1996; 1999) and colleagues (Portes, Guarnizzo, and Landolt 1999) and applied to second generations as well (Portes and Zhou 1999; Fokkema 2011; Fokkema, Lessard-Phillips, and Bachmeier 2012; Fokkema, Cela, and Ambrosetti 2013; Schneider, Fokkema, and Matias 2012). The new literature generated by this new perspective considers the return migration as a stage of the migration process (Guarnizo 1997; Pessar 1997); according to this school of thought, emotional and ethnic attachment to the country of origin never disappears. Cross-border movements become circular thanks to the facility to commute and communicate between origin and destination countries. Thus, integration and transnational ties may be complementary instead of substituting each other. As a consequence, even if well integrated in the host country, migrants who hold transnational multiple ties are more likely to return to their home country than other kinds of migrants.

According to the *social network theory,* return is sustained by cross-border networks. Returnees and potential returnees are part of the cross-border social and economic networks that 'are responsive to the economic, social, and political context in receiving and sending countries' (Cassarino 2004, 266). Likewise, from the transnational perspective, return may only be a stage in the migratory project and potential returnees maintain strong bonds with their home country. Within this context, remittances and investments in the origin country contribute to the realization of the return project: the skills and resources acquired abroad enhance the advantage of returning, though returnees remain social actors involved in cross-border networks. As for the transnational migrants, those embedded in cross-border social and economic networks are more likely to return to their home country than other kinds of migrants. According to Cassarino (2004), thanks to transnationalism and social network theories, 'return is no longer viewed as the end of the migration cycle but as a stage in the migration process' (p. 268). Contrary to structuralism that considers the situation in the origin country as a constraint on a successful return, in both the latter theories, the constant links that migrants maintain between home and host countries support their project of return.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As the decision to migrate can often be explained by different factors, likewise, return intentions are likely to be affected by a combination of the above-mentioned factors. Moreover, empirical evidence from several ethnographic and quantitative studies (Moran-Taylor and Menjivar 2005; de Haas and Fokkema 2010; King and Christou 2010a; Boccagni 2011; Şenyürekli and Menjívar 2012) on the topic of return intentions shows that when describing migrants' experience and their intention to return, it is difficult to differentiate between the postulates of migration theories on return. It is clear that return intentions are strongly embedded in the personal experience of each migrant, his/her social network and transnational ties, as well as in the socio-economic situation in both the origin and the destination country.

As far as economic migration theories are concerned (neoclassical and NELM), those theories lead to opposite expectations – the likelihood of return is higher among the least and the most integrated migrants, respectively. Accordingly, our first research question is: (1) Which traditional theoretical arguments from the migration theories apply to the return intention of first- and second-generation Egyptian migrants in Italy? The structural approach as well as the transnational and social network theories trigger our second research question in relation to the role of the revolution of the Arab Spring 2011 on the transnational ties and, hence return intention: (2) Do the changes in Egypt due to the Arab Spring strengthen their intention to return?

DATA AND METHODS

This study uses data from the project 'Transmediterraneans; North African Communities in Piedmont, between Continuity and Change' that FIERI, together with Sapienza University – MEMOTEF Department, carried out from September 2011 to January 2013. Respectively, 32 and 23 qualitative face-to-face interviews were conducted with first- and second-generation[2] Egyptian migrants living in the cities of Turin and Rome. Interviews were conducted from September 2011 to July 2012 in Turin and from October 2012 to January 2013 in Rome. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling, utilizing key informants like immigrant associations and NGOs. The sampling was

stratified according to gender, birth place, and year of arrival in Italy. However, given the explorative nature of our study and its qualitative design, the sample is not representative of the Egyptian migrant population in Italy. Accordingly, the findings cannot be generalized beyond the study sample.

The interviews were carried out in the place of migrants' recruitment and occasionally in their private houses and workplaces. They were primarily conducted in Italian, sometimes English or Arabic was used as well in order to allow the respondents to better express themselves. A semi-structured approach (using an in-depth interview guide) was followed, which included several aspects of life and migration experience. In particular, participants were asked about the following topics: arrival to Italy, sense of community belonging and social participation, intergenerational relationships, transnational ties with Egypt (in political, economic, family, and symbolic terms) and new media use, opinions about the current situation in Egypt, future plans and return intentions. The interviews on average lasted approximately 60 minutes and were audio-taped, transcribed, and coded using the qualitative software *Atlas.ti* (www.atlasti.com). As interviewees were guaranteed confidentiality, fictitious names have been used throughout the article.

The average age of the sample is 34.6 years. Educational attainment is homogeneous and rather high: many of the interviewed migrants have completed secondary education or higher. As far as occupation is concerned, the first generation works mainly in the catering and cleaning sectors and in the retail trade, while the second generation is mainly represented by students. Finally, more than half of the sample has Italian citizenship.

Empirical findings of our analysis are presented in the following sections as follows: in accordance with the first research question, first of all, we examine to what extent the 'myth of return' applies to first- and second-generation Egyptians in Italy and which differences exist between generations. Secondly, we analyze the impact of two specific factors on the first and second generation's return intention: family obligations and economic considerations. Thirdly, we focus on the pendular migration, a form of mobility that is often replacing a

definite return. Lastly, in accordance with the second research question, we consider the impact of the Arab Spring on migrant's return intention.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Return between Desire, Possibility and Opportunity

Myth of Return

> When we go there we are fine, when we are here we are fine, there is not much difference. Our generation has always had the intention of returning, even if years have gone by and we are still here. Most of us live life like a transit, a stopover. They come here and always think of returning. We have to live here like we are here forever, then when we decide to go back to Egypt there will be no problems, but if you don't have this mentality you can't build anything here. [Kebir, 48, Turin, 1st generation]

The words of Kebir, an Egyptian man who arrived in Turin in 1990, sum up the sense of uncertainty that many first-generation Egyptians experience, suspended between their desire to settle in Italy and their strong attachment and intention to return to Egypt. This uncertainty affects their daily life, plans, and objectives over time, producing a continuous pendulum in migration plans that results in living 'neither here nor there.' Boccagni (2011, 471), in relation to migration from Ecuador to Italy, suggests considering the beneficial effects of the mythical form of return too, as 'It provides Ecuadorian migrants with a valuable construct with which to make sense of their life experience and endure it better.' Nevertheless, Ecuadorian migrants' willingness to return is limited to a wish, which is rather postponed and sometimes never realized. The underlying reasons are multiple and often linked to the difficult situation in the homeland and to the unaccomplished migratory project in Italy.

The Egyptian first-generation migrants tacitly construct return as a moral obligation and an expression of loyalty to their Egyptian identity, which is also connected to their desire to be buried in their homeland.

> You have to think that we also have a place at the cemetery, most of the people who die are brought to Egypt. [Kebir, 48, Turin, 1st generation]

Studies from Boston, Massachusetts, and Senegal (Levitt 2001; Levitt and Waters 2002; Leichtman 2005) have found that migrants' transnationalism is not a phenomenon confined to the first generation, but can extend to the second and subsequent generations. Moreover, a rapid and successful integration does not preclude the second generation from engaging in a range of transnational activities linking them back to their 'home' country (Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo 2005; Fokkema, Lessard-Phillips, and Bachmeier 2012). According to Queirolo Palmas (2010), the second generation can live 'transnational lives' (Smith 2005) and discover new identities and forms of belonging and also launch independent attempts to return. Levitt (2009), while agreeing that the children of migrants will not participate in their ancestral homes in the same ways and with the same regularity as their parents, also argues that 'we should not dismiss outright the strong potential effect of being raised in a transnational social field' (p. 1226).

Hence, it is not surprising that the interviewed second-generation Egyptians often cherish the wish to return as they feel strong emotional bonds with their ancestral country.

> I hope to graduate in time and then return to Egypt to [...] even if sincerely I know that there are no job opportunities! [Sara, 20, Rome, 2nd generation]

However, compared to their parents, they have more awareness about the difficulties they may face in their ethnic homeland.

> I also have to say that my father, when I used to go to Egypt, always showed the good part: we went there in summer, it was all fun, and I did everything I wanted. So I don't know how it would really be to live in Egypt, I don't know daily life in Egypt. To return to Egypt is just an idea. [Shuruq, 20, Turin, 2nd generation]

Family Obligations and Economic Considerations. Several factors, such as family concerns and obligations, economic insecurity, legal status, and career goals may shape the decision to return (Şenyürekli and Menjívar 2012). Regarding family matters, Şenyürekli and Menjívar highlight for

[118]   the first-generation Turkish migrants in the us that 'on the one hand, they were attracted to Turkey because of worries that something would happen to their aging parents. On the other hand, they were attracted to the us because of their us-born children' (2012, 9). Likewise, de Haas and Fokkema (2010), in their article about return and pendulum migration among Moroccans, found that migrants who decided to return permanently are typically the ones who left their family behind. The outcomes of our interviews are in line with those studies.

> I want to return to Egypt because I have a difficult situation there: six sisters, and my aging parents. 7 women and my aged father, I can't let them sacrifice in Egypt alone and stay here. [Kebir, 26, Turin, 1st generation]

Compared to their offspring, however, first-generation migrants live in a double situation of concern as they have their children and grandchildren settled in Italy, while their aging parents are often living in Egypt; therefore, the presence of close family members in Italy may transform their desire into the myth of return.

> My parents are in touch with their families. They are much attached, indeed even more so recently. They always think about going back, but it gets difficult since they are here and have a family here. [Amro, 21, Turin, 2nd generation]

The second-generation intention to return seems to be economically driven, reflected in one's reconfiguration of study and work plans.[3]

> Despite having lived sixteen years out of nineteen in Italy, I feel more Egyptian! My dream is that my country, when I finish school, will get better economically and that I will be able to return to work and live in Egypt. [Menes, 18, Rome, 2nd generation]

Nevertheless, the second generation is also aware of the lifestyle they have in Italy and the different life they would have in Egypt. Hence, the strategy is to choose a professional path that allows them a successful return to Egypt with a certain status (such as being a doctor or engineer) or with a salary that can allow them to maintain the same Italian lifestyle.

Indefinite Return: Pendular Life between 'Here' and 'There.' Another path that appears feasible and beneficial is pendulum migration (de Haas and Fokkema 2010). This strategy has already been adopted by many migrant communities (Sinatti 2010), because it allows people to undertake less permanent decisions and obtain the benefits of living between different countries.

Our study confirms this trend as well; pendulum migration is likely to become the main living arrangement for the first generation after retirement.

> I don't say that I would return to live there forever. I say that I would die there and be there maybe a year or two in Egypt but then return to Italy [...] In my opinion, it will be this way, so there won't be people who will stay here until death or there until death, they will be in the two countries because both are their countries. [Edjo, 52, Turin, 1st generation]

Pendulum migration is also a common idea among the second generation, which aspires to create transnational business and, therefore, does not lose the benefits of being 'here' and 'there.' Going back and forth is the strategy, either for the future or for the present; this allows them to have the best opportunities of both countries.

> But I would do something different if I had the economic and professional chance: I would like to work in both countries, Egypt and Italy. It would be the best choice, but it's difficult. So I think that the best choice would be to work in-between the two countries, while it would be more unfeasible to work in Egypt. [Jahi, 21, Turin, 2nd generation]

The Impact of the Arab Spring on Return Migration

With regard to the effects of the Arab Spring on the stay-return dilemma, our findings show that the revolts in Egypt have really represented a turning point in the relationships, interests, and participation in the country of origin for both the first and the second generation. The widespread enthusiasm about changes and future opportunities in Egypt has resulted in different forms of action and socio-political participation: in Italy, at the beginning of the Arab Spring in 2011, many demonstrations were organized in support of the Egyptian revolts. In order to explain to the Italian society that the support given to demonstrations was a support for democracy regardless of religious belonging, debates were organized in different Italian cities by both the first and the second generations (Premazzi and Scali 2011).

First-generation migrants' commitment was not limited to emotional participation during the revolts. They also foresaw concrete opportunities for action in their home country and many of them also actually engaged in specific projects, as in the case of the dissemination of information and support in organizing the polling procedures for the presidential and parliamentary elections. This is hardly surprising, as migrants are often likely to feel a 'genuine sympathy' for their relatives who remain in conflict-ridden areas (Pirkkalainen and Abdile 2009). Migrants may also feel guilty at the thought of being safe, while their relatives are suffering (Byman, Chalk, and Hoffman 2001). Such feelings may motivate diaspora members of the first generation to engage in 'virtual conflicts' or even participate in or mobilize forces for the 'real conflict' (Demmers 2002), as happened to Babu:

> In January everything changed in Egypt. We have to be more linked with our country, because now Egypt needs us. Before we didn't have freedom and we weren't able to do much. Now we can do more, like helping the elections, following the polling procedures. [Babu, 47, Turin, 1st generation]

Among the second-generation Egyptians, the Egyptian revolution has triggered a rediscovery of their pride of being Egyptian and made them reconsider the migratory networks and ties with their ancestral

home. Analogous to Kibria's study (2002) on Chinese and Korean immigrant offspring, which shows that exposure to the economic dynamism of their parental home countries bolstered a sense of national pride (Kibria 2002), thus demonstrating the potential value of 'ethnic identity capital' (p. 201), the Arab Spring has led to a new consideration of their national affiliation. With regard to the second-generation respondents, born mostly in the 1990s, the past refusal of 'being Egyptian' was not a reaction directly related to the perceived trend of increasing Islamophobia since 9/11 as it was for the first generation who started to sacrifice their Egyptian identity for broader and supranational identities, such as being an Arab and a Muslim (Zohry 2010). Rather, for the second-generation Egyptians, it was the result of, on the one hand, the hostile attitude of Italian society that prompted them to describe themselves as fully integrated, and on the other hand, the perceived lack of interest of Egypt towards their parents, who had even been forced to leave the country without any attempt made by the Egyptian institutions to retain them. This situation has prompted the second generation to describe themselves as 'more Italian than Egyptian' and then, once again, to sacrifice their Egyptian identity to an alternative one.

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> If you had asked me this question before the Arab Spring I would have answered that I was 90% Italian and 10% Egyptian, or better 99% and 1%, because Egypt has never done anything for me and for my parents, it has never given anything. [Narmer, 20 years, Turin, 2nd generation]

> After the revolution I would like to see the new Egypt. Perhaps you are prouder to be Egyptian than before, because around you people are prouder. You are more curious and prouder, yes. [Abir, 22, Turin, 2nd generation]

The combined dynamic of the rediscovery of their roots, the birth of a new Egyptian pride and being masters of their destiny able to overcome dictators and attempt to establish a real democracy, has transformed the parents' country of origin to a benchmark for a new future, at least on an emotional level, in which they can be actors:

> Initially I was not interested [in Egyptian politics] because in my
> opinion it was dead [...] But in the last two years, I started to get
> more interested, to really understand what was happening. Today
> I believe I am one of the most important activists here in Italy!
> [Rabia, 20, Rome, 2nd generation]

For some of the young second generation, the rediscovery of their
Egyptian identity due to the Arab Spring makes them feel a moral
obligation toward Egypt, pushing them to a new reconfiguration of
their present and future life, study, and work plans. It becomes a sort
of mission: 'do something for my country.'

> I want to return, because I really want to help! Then, from there, I
> can help other countries like Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia and Palestine.
> From there it's easier because we are closer! [Rabia, 20, Rome, 2nd
> generation]

The Arab Spring has resulted in a stronger orientation to Egypt,
with the exception of one population group, which is the Christian
Copt Egyptians, for whom the Arab Spring has triggered the opposite
feelings. For Christian Copt Egyptians, the political change seems to
block their present and future entrepreneurial initiatives in Egypt.

> I don't think about a definite return to Egypt, because the situation
> is getting worse. [...] Egypt is our country, it's our land, and we
> can't forget it all but we can't live like this. [Amina, 45, Turin, 1st
> generation]

The Egyptian Muslims, on the other hand, hope for a positive
economic change in Egypt due to the removal of obstacles for eco-
nomic growth, such as the long tradition of corruption during the
Mubarak government and the lack of attention to the Egyptian dias-
pora abroad. As it has happened for the first-generation Moroccans
(de Haas and Fokkema 2010), the experience of bankruptcy for many
small and medium investors seems to have created a strong distrust
with respect to the investment opportunities in the home country.

Among our interviewees there were, before the Arab Spring, attempts to return in order to create entrepreneurial projects. Some of them, a minority, have been successful, while others have failed, forcing the migrants to come back to Italy:

> I was born in Turin, then when I was 4 we came back to Egypt and we meant to remain there, but after four years, when I was 8, we came back [...] In the four years we stayed there my father was a civil engineer and founded a construction company, but we didn't make it and it closed down. [Dalia, 21, Turin, 2nd generation]

Although the strong enthusiasm for the changes occurred, according to the Egyptian participants, after the presidential elections, the institutional changes regarding investment projects have not improved up to the present time.

> The fundamental problem of Egypt for investments and so on [...] today is still instability, we need to have guarantees. [Babu, 47 years old, 1st generation]

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Which traditional theoretical arguments from the migration theories apply to the return intention of the first- and second-generation Egyptians in Italy? Do the changes in Egypt due to the Arab Spring strengthen their intention to return? We answered these research questions by examining, with a comparative approach and through qualitative data, the main factors underlying the intention to stay or return among the first- and second-generation Egyptians residing in two Italian cities: Turin and Rome.

As far as our first research question is concerned, different theories on the determinants of migration have tackled the topic of migrants' return and have been developed exclusively for the first-generation migrants. We have built on the review of the theoretical and empirical debate, analyzed by Cassarino (2004), who suggested several reasons behind the return decision, such as integration failure as assumed by the neoclassical theory and the opposite outcome by the NELM, con-
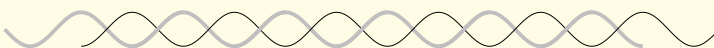
textual factors related to the socio-economic situation at the origin, as well as transnational and social network ties. According to our empirical evidence, the following types of motivations seem to dominate the return intention of the Egyptian migrants: myth of return, family concerns and obligations, economic possibilities, pendular life between 'here' and 'there,' and the (expected) effect of the Arab Spring.

The study shows, first of all, that the return intention remains something that will probably occur in the future for many Egyptians. This holds true especially for the first generation, for which the 'myth of return' is closely related to their identity and homeland attachments and loyalty. The difference between the first and second generation is the latter's greater awareness in relation to the real chance of returning back home, although some of them would like to return after obtaining their university degree. It is difficult to talk about return in case of the second generation: they were born and have grown up in Italy. Although Egypt for them represents their parents' homeland, their return is not strictly speaking a return, but rather a migration, which could represent an ontological sense of return to a point of origin, their ethnic homeland (King and Christou 2010a), and could be physical or emotional (Wessendorf 2007; Levitt 2009).

As a second finding of our analysis, the return intention is, to some extent, shaped by family concerns and obligations at both the origin and the destination. The presence of family members on both sides may either foster or hinder the desire to return. This holds true especially for the first-generation migrants who are more likely to have family members in Egypt and it seems to be even stronger for male migrants having aged parents and only sisters at home. By contrast, the presence of family members in Italy transforms the hope of returning to some extent into a dream.

For the second generation, the situation is quite different. They are more likely to have their family in Italy, so their desire to return is more closely related to their capital accumulation and education achievements, as well as economic possibilities, if any, in Egypt, although they seem to be aware that achievements in Italy are not always valued in Egypt. Moreover, while acknowledging the desire to go back 'home,' the second generation mentions the problematic aspects of liv-

ing in Egypt more than the positive ones. For sure, the decreasing wage differentials between Italy and Egypt will increase the feasibility of the choice of returning to Egypt. For the second-generation Egyptian migrants the 'return' is likely to be more feasible than their parents' return, as they often have higher possibilities of adapting to a changed society, thanks to their young age, high education levels, bilingualism, and especially their living back and forth as underlined by King and Christou (2010b) for the second-generation 'returnees' to Greece.

Third, the open-endedness of the return plan transforms for many Egyptians into a pendular strategy of living back and forth, as shown for other migrants' communities (de Haas and Fokkema 2010). For those first-generation migrants whose physical condition will allow it, this becomes a popular strategy, especially to cope with retirement, a new phase of their lives, no longer having the responsibility of earning income and child care and with many opportunities for self-realization, creating new social roles, and leisure. This pendular lifestyle could imply a way of living transnationally, as they have already done throughout their life, but on a more regular and intensive basis after retirement. The second generation grows up in families and co-ethnic communities where life and social networks are shaped by a continuous exchange of ideas, people, norms, practices, and goods from the ancestral home and the country of settlement (Levitt 2001). And even if the ties with ancestral home do not show, they are latent. Such a transnational context of cross-border ties generates both obligations towards the family and community and opportunities of upward mobility, thanks to the mutual support within transnational communities. In relation to the latter, investing in the parents' homeland could be attractive and represents social and economic mobility, especially for the highly skilled second generation (Foner 2002), as is the case of our interviewees. Constraints, such as professional barriers in Italy and opportunities, generated by multiple cross-border bonds and recent socio-economic improvements in Egypt, could become the incentive to undertake such a strategy of transnational life. Living back and forth also becomes an opportunity for the first-generation Egyptians who want to invest both 'here' and 'there' as a result of successful integration in Italy and the emergence

of safe investment opportunities in Egypt. The transnational entrepreneurs, regardless of which generation, can become a new Egyptian class who really could take advantage of a positive socio-economic situation on both sides, transforming themselves into co-development agents, affecting Italy and Egypt, thanks to their skills, financial resources, and initiatives.

As far as the second research question is concerned, we found that the new enthusiasm arising from the Arab Spring has had the role of unifying generations in their sense of belonging and their belief about changes and future opportunities in Egypt, although this does not regard all Egyptians: the economic and social situation in the origin country has become worse for Christian Copt Egyptians, for whom the return has become even more unfeasible. The Egyptian revolution has triggered the hope of the renovation of the socio-economic situation among the first generation and the revival of identity, interest, and moral obligations toward Egypt among the second generation together with the reconsideration of their future life between 'here' and 'there.' Future research on return migration should therefore address in more depth the importance of political, economic, and cultural changes in both home and host countries. Moreover, our study clearly displayed that transnational ties at economic, political, social, and cultural levels support the idea of returning, although a definitive return will probably not occur, neither for the first nor for the second generation; however, these cross-border ties will encourage a transnational way of living, especially for those who can take advantage of their skills and social and financial resources. Thus, it is important for countries of origin to consider this kind of transnational mobility rather than a definitive return as a way to foster development at home through brain and resources circulation.

As we stressed earlier in this article, the qualitative design of our research does not allow the generalization of our findings beyond the study sample. In addition, our research findings represent the conditions at the time of the interviews; recent changes in the political and economic situation in Egypt may have had an impact on respondents' intention to travel or return to their country of origin. A follow-up study, preferably using a larger sample, is needed to quantify this impact.

NOTES

1 For an excellent overview of the theoretical debate on return migration we refer to Cassarino (2004).

2 Following Rumbaut's (2004) definition of the second-generation immigrants, 2.0 and 1.75 generations have been recruited.

3 This is certainly the case for our respondents as the majority was in their last year of high school in the academic years 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 respectively.

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