



**HOW DO POLITICAL CHANGES IN THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN AFFECT
TRANSNATIONAL BEHAVIORS OF MIGRANTS?
The case of Egyptians in Turin during and after the Arab Spring**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper aims to explore the transnational behaviours of first and second generations of Egyptians, with special attention to the relationship among the diaspora, strengthened as a result of the increasing use of new technologies, and the current delicate and decisive political phase the country of origin is undergoing following the events of January 2011¹.

The analysis in this paper is based on a knowledge of the current situation of Egyptians in Turin, and will focus on two hypotheses. On one hand, immigrants of Egyptian origin, as one of the largest and oldest groups settled in the city, show a clear tendency towards stabilization. On the other hand, the recent political developments in the countries of origin may represent important variables in the redefinition of present and future projects among parents' and children's generations. We have tried to understand the tension among local rooting, transnational political participation and return projects, comparing the perspectives of the first and second generation.

Egyptian immigrants who first came to Turin in the 1970s, were members of urban and middle class groups with high levels of education. Over more recent years the immigrants' composition has been changing due to the arrival of younger, less educated individuals coming from rural areas. Moreover the presence of second-generation has introduced elements of diversification because values and meanings systems of persons born in Italy are quite often different from those of their parents. The community in Turin is not cohesive, even if there are some meeting places where first- and second -generation can interact: the most important are the Arabic culture and language school Il Nilo and few worship places.

The ties that immigrants establish and maintain with their homeland are different for first- and second-generation: transnational bonds are more pronounced among first-generation, although they tend to become weaker over time and with social and occupational integration in Turin. Attempts to return to Egypt have been made with transnational business projects, but only few have success. Despite there has been some independent attempt to return made by second generation, ties with Egypt among second-generation young people are weaker. But in such a scenario revolts of January 2011 and the new media (social networks) have played an important role to promote forms of transnational participation, especially among second generation migrants that until recently were not interested in their parents' homeland. This is the case for example of the Facebook internet group "Egyptians in Turin". The youngsters living in Turin followed through the social network what their peers were doing during the revolts in Egypt and have become more and more involved and supportive thanks to the web. Since then in some cases their involvement has been changing from just online action to engagement in specific projects, as it was the case of the dissemination of information and support in organizing the polling procedures for the recent Egyptian political elections.

At this stage it is still early evaluating the impact of the changes in Egypt on diaspora because the political situation is evolving day by day. It is true that recent changes in political life in Egypt have awakened among both first- and second-generation immigrants a sense of belonging that had been worn away over time.

The way in which this situation will evolve will depend on both the diaspora commitment and the institutional initiatives promoted by the Egyptian government to involve and enhance Egyptians abroad (first and second generation).

KEYWORDS: *diaspora, transnationalism, media, social network, first generation, second generation.*

¹ We are aware that the situation is changing very rapidly day by day in front of us.

1. INTRODUCTION

Immigrants from North Africa are among the first and largest groups in Italy. Among them, Egyptians were and still are clearly predominant, and, although less numerous than Moroccans and Tunisians, they have registered a higher growth rate over the last few years. Furthermore Italy is one of the major destinations for Egyptians in Europe, with 82,064 residents as of 1 January 2010. The Egyptian community in Turin, with 3,672 people, is the third largest by number after those in Milan and Rome. Egyptians are also one of the oldest groups settled in the city: their arrival dates back to the late 1980s–early 1990s. It is therefore a group which is now well established, with a high percentage of family units due to a process of gradual consolidation of the community, which has led to the birth of a second generation².

This paper aims to explore the transnational behaviours of first and second generations of Egyptians, with special attention to the relationship among the diaspora, strengthened as a result of the increasing use of new technologies, and the current delicate and decisive political phase the country of origin is undergoing following the events of January 2011.

The importance of social media in the recent popular protests that occurred in many North African countries, especially Egypt, has clearly pointed out the novelty of web technologies, which have burst onto the social and political scene. More generally, information and communication technologies (ICT) are deeply transforming the attitudes and transnational relationships of migrant communities and of communities arising from migration. The use of ICT by diasporas for the creation and maintenance of transnational ties and as a mean of political participation in the origin and destination countries is therefore an expanding field of study, although still little developed.

The analysis in this paper is based on a knowledge of the current situation of Egyptians in Turin, and will focus on two hypotheses. On one hand, immigrants of Egyptian origin, as one of the largest and oldest groups settled in the city, show a clear tendency towards stabilization. On the other hand, the recent political developments in the countries of origin may represent important variables in the redefinition of present and future projects among parents' and children's generations. We will then try to understand the tension between local rooting, transnational political participation and return projects, comparing the perspectives of the first and second generation.

In the first part we will provide a picture of the Egyptian population in Italy and in Turin, presenting, in particular, socio-demographic features and characteristics of the socio-economic integration of this group on the territory. Afterwards, we will reflect on the main features of the Egyptian community, and on the way the feeling of belonging is being developed between first and second generations of migrants.

We will then analyse the role of new technologies in building ties with the country of origin and the use of social network for political participation, with special attention to second generations. The we will try to understand how political changes in Egypt were perceived and how they impacted the Egyptian community

² In this paper, with the term “second generation” we consider the children of Egyptian immigrants, born in Italy or abroad but who have come to Italy before they were 13 years old (Ambrosini 2008).

in Turin. In the conclusions, we will provide some policy recommendations for the strengthening of social and cultural ties also suggesting some strategies for a worthwhile use of the media.

Besides the interviews specifically carried out for this project, this paper benefits from some of the initial results of a broader project called “Transmediterraneans. North African Communities in Piedmont, between continuity and change” that FIERI is carrying out with the support of the Compagnia di San Paolo foundation. The Transmediterraneans project, which started in September 2011, is centered on a systematic comparison of social and economic behaviours of the first and second generations of two North African groups settled in Turin since the 1980s: Egyptians and Moroccans.

The present paper is based on 16 qualitative face-to-face interviews addressed to Egyptian migrants living in the city of Turin. Sampling was done according to gender, age, birth place and year of arrival in Italy. Accordingly the interviews were grouped as follows: “old pioneers” (men who arrived more than 20 years ago), first-generation women who arrived for marriages or to rejoin husbands, “new pioneers” (men who recently arrived alone) and second-generation youths (over 18 years old, born in Italy from Egyptian parents or who arrived in Italy as infants). A more detailed description of the sample is provided in the Annex.

The following aggregation centers for Egyptian immigrants were referred to for meeting the interviewed persons: Il Nilo, an Arabic culture and language school; Giovani Musulmani d'Italia (Young Muslims of Italy association); and ASAI (Associazione Animazione Interculturale) an association for intercultural activities. A few people were reached through other local networks in order to diversify the sample.

Interviews were done in Italian and lasted an average of 60 minutes. Interviews were conducted under a semi-structured outline that included various aspects of life: arrival, sense of community, intergenerational relationships, transnational ties with Egypt, new media use. Interviews were undertaken by Viviana Premazzi, Pietro Cingolani and Matteo Scali. We want to thank Roberta Ricucci for her scientific contribution in the conception of the paper, and in all the phases of the research. We are grateful also to Ferruccio Pastore as scientific coordinator of “Transmediterranean” project, Claudia Villosio and Carlotta Maffeo for their help in finding the data.

2. EGYPTIAN MIGRATION TO ITALY

Over the last decades, two main destination areas have emerged for Egyptian migrants: Arab Gulf countries (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Libya, Jordan and more recently Lebanon) and, since the early 1960s, the industrialized countries of the West (Australia, Canada, the United States, and Western European countries, among which mainly Italy, France and the United Kingdom) (Zohry, 2010).

According to the CAPMAS (Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, Egypt) data in 2001, 78.6% of Egyptians residing in non-Arab countries are concentrated within five industrialized countries: US (318,000 - 38.6%), Canada (110,000 - 13.3%), Italy (90,000 - 10.9%), Australia (70,000 - 8.5%) and Greece (60,000 - 7.3%). The remaining of the Egyptian migrants are mainly in Western European countries including UK, Holland, France, Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Spain.

Italy became a destination for Egyptians beginning in the 1970s. The first migrants from Egypt, those that we call “pioneers”, were mainly male, highly educated, middle-class individuals, originating in urban areas (Cairo and Alexandria), who left Egypt as a consequence of the high unemployment rate in the origin country. They left looking for new job or study opportunities and new cultural experiences. While migrants for study reasons headed especially to Rome, many of them did not conclude their studies and joined the labour market. Often Italy was not the first destination, but a step in a longer and more complex migration paths.

Over time the composition of the population coming from Egypt to Italy has changed. From the mid-1980s the economic crisis in Egypt has put a strain on Egyptian families, pushing new groups of men from rural areas with low levels of education, looking for work abroad. They come to Italy in fact not only from big cities but also from the countryside. The migrant population to Italy from these rural villages is increasing and youth there compete to find a way to migrate, legally or illegally. The choice of destination country in Europe is not a free choice; it is closely related to the migration networks and linkages between origin and destination. Regarding migrants from rural areas migration to Europe is concentrated in a set of Egyptian villages in specific governrates; each village has its own destination; the two major destinations are Italy and France. Migration to these two destinations are operated as Zohry (2006, p.19) states “in a *close market* where new entrants come from the same village or group of adjacent villages”.

Egyptian migration consolidated during the 1990s, thanks to a system of networks of family members and acquaintances that attract new compatriots and act as a base in the settlement phase and in the search for a first job at the destination. Migrants of this first phase did not have economic obligations towards their families. Initially they were interested in accumulating savings in order to return home after few years. But during their stay, they changed their migratory project as a result of the improvement of their economic and social conditions in Italy and they opted for a long-term stay (CeSPI 2005a). Therefore the migratory project changed from temporary to permanent.

Although the Egyptian group is not among the most numerous in the country, representing just over 3% of immigration in Italy and the ninth group in terms of total number of immigrants in Italy, the evolution of this group has been steady, with a rapid acceleration in the last decade.

Table 1: First ten groups of non-EU citizens in Italy - 2011

	COUNTRIES	TOTAL	% of total non-EU citizens
1	Morocco	501,610	14.2
2	Albania	483,219	13.7
3	China	274,417	7.8
4	Ukraine	218,099	6.2
5	Moldova	142,583	4.0
6	India	142,565	4.0
7	Philippines	136,597	3.9
8	Tunisia	116,651	3.3
9	Egypt	110,171	3.1
10	Bangladesh	103,285	2.9
	TOT	3,536,062	100%

Source: www.demo.istat.it

As the data show, the number of Egyptians in Italy has grown from 33,000 individuals at the beginning of the 2000s to over 110,000 at the beginning of 2011, with a growth rate of 226,9% over the last nine years.

Table 2: Egyptian residents in Italy in 2002, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011

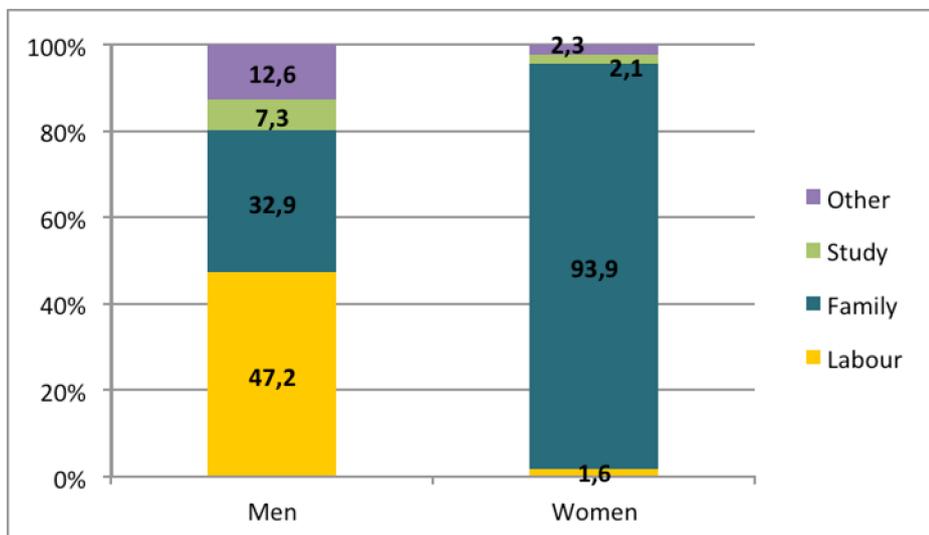
2002	2006	2008	2009	2010	2011	Var. % 2002–2011
33,701	65,667	71,117	82,843	90,365	110,171	226.9%

Source: *www.demo.istat.it*

Over the years, the number of women has also increased, largely due to family reunification (in 94% of cases, as shown in next graph) and the creation of families, resulting in increasing births of children in Europe.

In our sample the majority of the interviewees or the interviewees' fathers returned to Egypt to get married, subsequently they brought their wife to Italy. The first generation's cultural space, in fact, continues to be that of the homeland and their individual lives continue to be dictated by family ties and reproduction cycles, especially with regard to marriage choices (CeSPI 2005a).

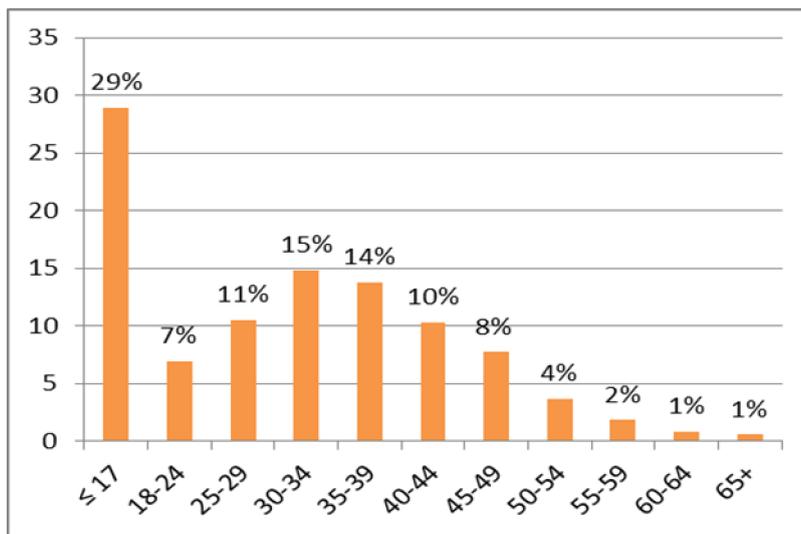
Figure 1: Egyptians who entered Italy with a residence permit in 2006, still in force as of 1/1/2007, by gender and reason (%)



Source: *www.demo.istat.it*

With the establishment of families, we find a consolidation of a second generation of young people who were born (or who arrived in their early years), raised and socialized in Italy. The population structure by age groups shows a substantial proportion of children (29%). According to data from MIUR – Ministry Education University and Research (Dossier Caritas, 2011), Egyptians enrolled in the school system during the academic year 2008–2009 included 2,732 in kindergarten, 3,915 in primary schools, 1,696 in secondary schools, 1,037 in high schools.

Figure 2: Distribution of the Egyptian population in Italy by age-group - 2011

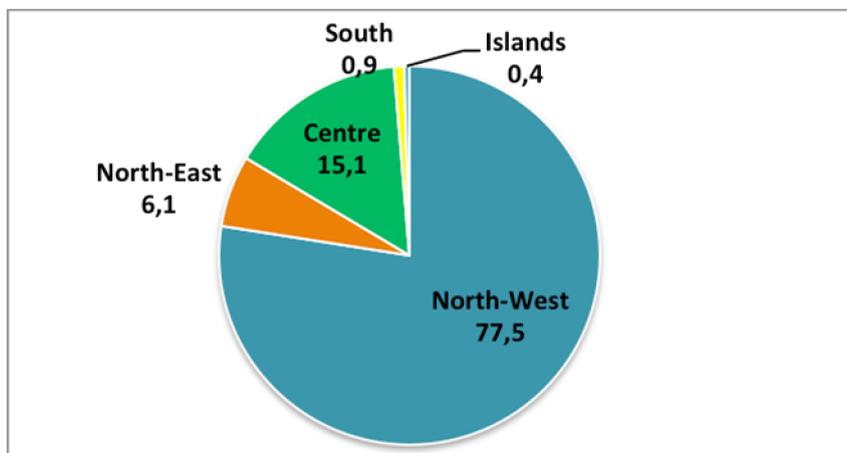


Source: www.demo.istat.it

The largest share of population is that in the working age, between 25 and 45 years old (50%).

According to ISTAT (2011) Egyptians are concentrated in the northwest (77.5%) and in the centre of the country (15.1%).

Figure 3: Distribution of Egyptian residents in Italy by area of the country - 2011



Source: www.demo.istat.it

Table 3: First ten provinces of residence of Egyptians in Italy (%) - 2011

	City	Total	% women	% of total Egyptian residents in Italy
1	Milan	51,023	26.8	46.3
2	Rome	12,636	28.4	11.5
3	Brescia	7,833	23.5	7.1
4	Turin	5,051	34.6	4.6
5	Pavia	4,273	31.3	3.9
6	Bergamo	3,668	25.2	3.3
7	Lodi	3,342	29.9	3.0
8	Cremona	2,913	36.0	2.6
9	Florence	2,287	29.3	2.1
10	Reggio Emilia	1,942	24.8	1.8

Source: www.demo.istat.it

We note in particular a high concentration in the Lombardy region, primarily in the province of Milan (46.3%), and in the provinces of Brescia (7.1%), Pavia (3.9%), Bergamo (3.3%), Lodi (3.0%) and Cremona (2.6%). Egyptians are also highly concentrated in Rome (11.5%), the province with the second highest concentration of this group. In fourth position we find Turin, where 4.6% of Egyptians in Italy reside.

Regarding economic integration, the Egyptians have integrated since their first arrival in Italy in the construction and the food service industry.

Table 4: Egyptian dependent workers in Italy by economic sector at census 2001

ECONOMIC SECTORS	DEPENDENT WORKERS	
	Absolute values	% on total
Agriculture and fisheries	550	4.2
Industry	4,951	38.2
<i>among which:</i>		
<i>Manufacturing</i>	2,556	19.7
<i>Construction</i>	2,318	17.9
Commercial	4,467	34.4
<i>among which:</i>		
<i>Hotels and restaurants</i>	3,024	23.3
Other sectors	3,003	23.2
<i>among which:</i>		
<i>Transportation and warehousing</i>	508	3.9
<i>Domestic work in private households</i>	588	4.5
Total	12,971	100

Source: Istat (in Cortese, 2010)

For some workers, characterized by a high level of education (according to ISTAT - 2008 - almost 30% of Egyptians in Italy have graduated), the switch to self-employment represents an alternative route to a blocked socio-professional mobility in the dependent labor market. Many have acquired through their employment the human resources (acquisition of skills and expertise) and social capital (building of networks and functional relationships) necessary for opening autonomous activities in particular in the

construction, food service industry and commerce sectors. A number of Egyptians, furthermore, already have either direct business experience, or previous experience within their families in the country of origin, and thus can count on a base of skills as well as economic resources from Egypt, beneficial for starting up a new business in Italy.

Regarding economic transnationalism, the experience of bankruptcy of many small and medium investors due to poor infrastructure, poor or lack of proper market research identifying the current Egyptian market needs/demands and trends, lack of information on investment opportunities and overall weak transparency and accountability in the Egyptian structure (Zohry 2010) seems to have created a strong distrust with respect to investment opportunities offered by Egypt. These conditions have slowed, until now, any kind of investment and financial and economic planning by our interviewees. However among them there were some attempts to return in order to create entrepreneurial projects. Two of them have been successful (and are considered exceptions by the respondents), while others (most of them) failed, forcing the migrants to come back to Italy (Ricucci 2010):

Here there are just a few people who came back to Egypt, very few. Those who did something there, it is because they have a lot of money, like Amin who has a transport company in Egypt. But that is an exception. (Saleh)

3. EGYPTIAN TRANSNATIONALISM

3.1 RETURN PROJECTS BETWEEN MYTH AND REALITY

Generally, the first generation migrants' links with the extended family in Egypt remain strong. While they are economically and socially integrated, they continue to be strongly linked to the country of origin in cultural and social terms. With regard to the idea of returning, temporarily or permanently, however, according to the first generations' interviews there is a general ambivalence: many of them seem to cultivate a myth of return, perhaps when retired, once the children have reached a certain economic stability (Ricucci 2010); while for others children's birth is the factor that makes any idea of returning disappear. But family issues are not the only ones that influence the decision. There are also associated considerations and decisions related to the constraints and opportunities that could arise in the two contexts of origin and destination. Viewed through the transnational lens, return migration is part and parcel of a system of ties and forms of mobility, it can be seen as an ongoing circuit rather than a definitive act of resettlement (Cassarino 2004). The dichotomy permanent-temporary in fact is beginning to be questioned by some scholars: Ronald Skeldon (2008) said for example that "you never know if a migrant is permanent, not even when he's dead, as many migrants want to get buried in their origin country!".

My family lives there and, who knows, when I retire.... That is my country, my roots, even though I have Italian citizenship. (Saleh)

My parents are in touch with their families. They are very 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.... But contacts with their relatives an increasing more and more because they feel the need to go back to their country. (Amro)

In our own field interviews we found also cases where the respondents' moved back and forth for a year or a few years.

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 closed it. (Dalia)

The interviews have shown another interesting phenomenon that should be investigated more thoroughly: some attempts to return are made by second-generation migrants, often supported by their parents, few, who, having started business activities in Egypt, have an opportunity to give their children a future on both sides of the Mediterranean, e.g., Bahaa, whose successful example was previously mentioned: *My elder son was born on August 1989, now he is 22. He is currently in Egypt, studying, and he will come back here at the end of January. After high school, in Turin, he attended an IT training course funded by the Piedmont Region, but he couldn't enrol at the university. So he came back to Cairo where he is now attending his third year at the faculty of Information Technology. He comes here to Turin every summer to help me.*

When he finishes the university there he will come back here and have his degree recognised. I have another son and a daughter, the youngest.... They will decide what to do, if they want they have a future here. They have a future at Cairo as well, because I have a business partner there with an import-export transportation company. They have a chance both here and in Egypt, it is up to them to decide what they want to do.

As Russel King and Anastasia Christou (2008) state "they are not 'return migrants' in the strict sense, but first-time emigrants to their parents' country of origin" and for newer diasporas (those which are the result of labour migrations or refugee flows over the past half-century or so), as the Egyptian, the more specific phenomenon of second-generation 'return' does seem to be gaining in significance.

3.2 SECOND GENERATION AS TRANSNATIONALISM TEST

Notwithstanding the foregoing, second-generation migrants' ties with Egypt are in most of the cases extremely different from those of their parents and almost none of the people interviewed intend to return to live permanently in their country of origin. According to a common argument, in fact, the ethnic ties and the intensity of border-crossing should be reduced in the shift between generations. Nevertheless, recently Ambrosini (2008) invited consideration of the second generation as a "transnationalism test". Studies from as far apart as Boston, Massachusetts and Senegal (Leichtman 2005; Levitt 2001; 2002), have found in fact that immigrant transnationalism is not a phenomenon confined to the first generation, but one that can extend to the second and subsequent generations. Moreover, a rapid and successful integration/assimilation does not preclude the second generation from engaging in a range of transnational/diasporic activities linking them

back to their ‘home’ country (Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo 2005). According to Queirolo Palmas (2010), in fact, the second generation can live “transnational lives” (Smith 2005) and discover new identities and forms of belonging, and also launch independent attempts to return, like Amro:

I attended junior high school in Chieri and high school for one year.... Then I wanted to come back to Egypt again, because high school there lasts three years and university is one year less. I wanted to try and I lived there for one year. But I couldn't adapt to it and I came back to Italy. (Amro)

Hopes and good intentions, however, are often disappointed on one side because these returnees are plunged into a school system with which in many cases they are unfamiliar, which is unprepared for them, and in which their educational progress may be seriously held back (King 1977; King & Christou 2008), on the other side by the inability of the same migrants to adapt when they return to the community of origin, failing to re-adhere to the values of identity and community of the country of origin (Ricucci 2010). This situation may also end up by reinforcing notions of how ‘Italian’ the second generation are, and convince them that their parents’ home country can never become *their* home (Kasinitz *et al.* 2002; Kibria 2002).

Recently I feel a bit more Italian and I am growing away from my relatives. I hope this isn't so strong (the detachment), because they are still my parents anyway. (Amro)

I came to Italy to stay here forever; I will go to Egypt on holiday at the most. What do I care about the Egyptian government? My dream is to stay in Italy.... I would just like to have a regular work contract in Italy. And buy a house here, stay here. (Abdelrahman)

In Italy many second-generation immigrants, however, are often caught between two fires: on one hand the young people who have grown up here know very little of their parents' country of origin, which is, in many cases, just the country where they go on holiday:

First, I'll go to Cairo to see everybody. I have a small house there overlooking the sea and we go there on holiday. My son's friends came with us once. It was a group of Italians and Egyptians on holiday. (Sherin)

When I went there I visited the Pyramids; I went to Sharm El Sheik; I had a wonderful time with my friends! (Abdelrahman)

On the other hand they are sometimes forced to return to their roots when they fall victim to an “exotic curiosity”, as could happen in school, for example by being asked to “describe a traditional story of their homeland”.

My children follow what happens in Egypt because their teachers always ask them about what happens there. (Sherin)

Moreover, for the second-generation immigrants that we have interviewed, the discriminations of which they are often victims, the solicitations of classmates and above all in the last year the curiosity and attention towards their country of origin are all factors that have stimulated new reflections on their personal identity and have brought them to involve themselves in the construction of online and offline social and political spaces where they can play their hyphenated senses of belonging (Andall 2002).

4. THE EGYPTIAN COMMUNITY IN TURIN

4.1. DIVISION BETWEEN GROUPS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY – SO-CALLED “NON-COMMUNITY”

From the evidence gathered, the Egyptian community in Turin seems quite fragmented within itself, confirming results of previous research (Ambrosini & Abbatecola 2002) which defined it a “non-community” because of the little cohesion among migrants. After September 11, 2001, and as a reaction of the perceived Islamophobia, many Egyptians in the Western countries also started to sacrifice their Egyptian identity for broader and supranational identities such as being an Arab and a Muslim (Zohry 2010). The solidarity linkages coming out from our respondents often depend by the place of origin: rural or urban, as Saleh states:

In Turin there is no solidarity among us, because there are only about 20 of us who come from Cairo, others come from Suez, but the majority comes from the countryside, not from the city. From Afghor, a village near the city of Kalubia, or from Saleh, near Mitom. I can easily recognise those who come from the countryside by their face. [...] Those who come from little towns are close to each other, they see each other frequently.

The Egyptian migrants themselves say they are individualistic, family-bound, and not prone to engage in community activities. In the early stages of migration in Italy this has happened for other immigrant communities as well (CNEL 2000), but for the Egyptian (community) this condition continues into the settlement phase. The same interviewees highlight the existence of this condition, that favours forms of social relations based on family allegiance (both in Italy and in Egypt).

In Turin there are no important labor/ trade unions, hometown associations nor any other organization networks to strengthen links with the villages and cities of origin. The existing associations are weak, with little representation, disconnected at the national level, and depend on the character of the association’s president. Egyptian associations are interested principally in sustaining the local integration of migrants and the preservation of Arabic culture and language as demonstrated in Turin by the engagement of the Egyptian school, Il Nilo, which is considered one of the few important meeting places of the Egyptian community. Iman also confirms the importance of the school in her experience, as a source of social cohesion on a family basis:

The community depends on the family; this is the case for mine, as we have attended the Egyptian school and have many family friends there. They have also created an association which is called “Egyptian families”. (Iman)

The school has in fact become a meeting place and a bridge between the first and second generations: first generation migrants are involved as teachers whereas the second generation learn their parents’ language and culture and maintain important ties with their community.

In addition to Arabic language and culture schools, another meeting place is represented by the worship centers. With regard to the religious sphere, Allasino and Ricucci (2004) showed how religion occupies a prominent place in the lives of Muslims living in Turin, who identify themselves with the faith in which they

were educated, considering it a point of reference for their lifestyle. Nevertheless, for our respondents the sample is more articulated, and they present different styles of living the faith: some are believers and practitioners, while others are believers, but in a discontinued manner and others live religion in a more intimate way or they are indifferent.

For some of them the worship center is a place to meet the whole Muslim community, a place of appropriation of identity, for themselves and their children, especially on occasions such as the traditional religious festivals like Ramadan and the ceremony for its conclusion, or the ceremony for the Sacrifice of the Ram. These are important occasions where young people, together with their families, meet with relatives who live in Italy and the entire Muslim community. There they feel a sense of belonging to a common faith and a common culture. The worship center is not only a place for praying, but also an important center for information, as in the circulation of instructions on the polling procedures for the recent Egyptian elections:

My father is one of the people responsible for the mosque and he has managed to arrange some events in order to explain to people how to vote. (Asab)

Whereas Christian Egyptians in Turin have their meeting point in the Coptic Church based in the Orthodox Coptic Parish of Holy Mary. Many of them visit the church every Sunday for attending the mass and there they communicate with other Egyptians, speak Arabic, eat Egyptian food, etc. During the week also catechism lessons for the young and other activities are organized.

4.2. ONLINE SPACES FOR THE COMMUNITY – IMPACT OF INTERNET ON COMMUNITY

There are more and more in the world virtual Egyptian organizations which sometimes tend to be more active than the physical ones. Accessibility of internet technology in fact has made it possible for Egyptians to communicate and create virtual organizations regardless of their current residence. The virtual groups utilize the internet and other communication technologies to keep in touch with its members. Many Egyptian diasporas established groups with Yahoo, MSN and Facebook. As the *Study on the Dynamics of the Egyptian Diaspora: Strengthening Development Linkages* (Zohry 2010) shows there are more than 200 Facebook groups created by Egyptians abroad. The number of members in each of these groups varies according to the location. The members of such virtual organizations are usually young (between 18 and 39 years old) and computer literate. During the interview with Rania, creator and administrator of the Facebook group “Egyptians in Turin”, she tells us how this idea came to her:

The thing that encouraged me to become the leader of a group was an Egyptian TV programme called Wesal which acted as a link between Egypt and all the Egyptians abroad.

The anchorwoman, Abir Said Abo Taleb, is very good because she travels around countries and interviews Egyptian people to know how long they have been living there, then she interviews the second generation... and then this programme decided to arrange winter or summer tours for Egyptian guys from 15 to 30 who live abroad, to allow them to discover Egypt because the majority of them do not know its history, historical and religious monuments.... And when I watched this programme showing guys who were all happy and

enthusiastic, I was a bit jealous and I said “lucky them, lucky them!”

For Rania, in fact, Egypt is a country that she has seen above all through her parents' stories:

I have information about Egypt only from my father and my mother. We go there on holiday every 2–3 years but from ages 5 to 11 years we were never there. And when I went there, at 11, it was a surprise.

Thus, following the example of other young people of Egyptian origins living outside the Egypt and given the opportunities provided by the social networks (as mentioned before (Zohry 2010)), she decided to set up on Facebook the group “Egyptians in Turin”. Facebook for her is, in fact, an important tool for creating a sense of belonging for Egyptians living in Turin, but also to maintain contacts with people, relatives or friends, staying in Egypt:

I think Facebook is very important because it is a communication network which is essential not much for friends who see each other frequently, but especially for my cousins who live in Egypt, I just want to thank Mark who invented Facebook because it is easier to communicate with relatives in Egypt. You feel closer making comments on Facebook statuses, and thanks to the pages on Egypt, on its news, politics, sports, films, Egyptian society, or thanks to other news in general... you understand what is happening between you and the world... everything and then some.

The interactive and participatory web 2.0 makes aggregation and definition of new identities easier, and leads to the emergence of new social and political actors. Furthermore such online communities can be effectively translated into forms of off-line political mobilization. Meeting offline, organize trips for the group members, invite group members to convene in public places and organize Egyptian dinner parties, lectures, etc. was in fact Rania's idea since she created the group.

Then there were guys who, during the Wesal programme, said, “We have a group on Facebook”, and “we know each other, we meet up...” and then I said, “What about creating a group?!”. So, first I started searching on Facebook; I said, “maybe it exists and I don’t know it”. Then I found two or three “Egyptians in Italy” groups, with few participants, then pages of Egyptians in Milan and Rome, but in Turin there was nothing, so I created the group “Egyptians in Turin” and tried to get the majority of Egyptians in Turin to join it... The group was formed one and a half years ago; in the beginning we were few, then many friends joined, etc. and since I created the group I have wanted us to meet up one day to get to know each other better.

The group allows members to communicate about Egyptian news, rumors, commercials, jokes, to organize activities to promote Egyptian culture and national solidarity, to share experiences and emotions, to exchange advice and opinions, and to present proposals and claims lobbying for the current political issues and debates in Egypt. New forms of civic participation via the social network appear to meet the needs of contemporary individuals to connect individualism and collectivism, to affirm their own subjective identity, and to pursue their personal interests, but at the same time, the need to share feelings and a sense of solidarity with a group, thus entering into a community dimension.

Not all the people from the group live in Turin, but we all share the same love for Egypt. There are also people who live in Egypt who want and provide news live from Egypt, but most of these people are from

Turin and I am very happy when I meet people who share this homesickness for our country with me.

5. HOW THE MEDIA HAS LINKED EGYPTIAN COMMUNITY IN TURIN TO EVENTS AND PARTICIPATION IN EGYPT

In this particular historical moment, the role of mass media (conceived as technologies as well as content), is becoming more and more instrumental in defining the formative experiences of a generation, not only because they are so deeply embedded in everyday practices as to become a “natural” element of its social landscape and its common sense, but also because historical events, as well as cultural values and their symbolic forms, are often mediated by them. This is what has happened, for example, with the revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests which occurred in Egypt and became known as the “Arab Spring”³.

In the Egyptian case, in particular, we can identify four types of media used by the Egyptian community in Italy to keep themselves in contact with their country of origin. These media flow across and between local, national and international boundaries: Egyptian online newspapers; Egyptian TV channels, broadcasted by satellite or internet; and online social networks. The Egyptian protests have brought to the fore the inextricable connection between networked media (such as Facebook and Twitter) and mass and interpersonal media (such as radio, newspapers and mobile phones) (Chatora 2012). But here we will focus only the use of the social network Facebook.

By now it is well-known that social media tools have become a staple in the everyday lives of many people, included migrants, merging their online and offline experiences, and becoming one of the main methods of social connection and interaction around the world, whether between individuals, or with businesses and governments. The skills of using the internet are now a part and parcel of individuals' social capital. Moreover internet facilitates contacts with diaspora groups that often “act as bridges or as mediators between their home and host societies” (Shain & Barth 2003).

The first time I surfed the internet was to know about life in Egypt, to watch the Egyptian news. (...). Now I use it to get informed, to know, to talk and get in touch both with Italian and Egyptian people. (Sherin)

The contacts between Egypt and diaspora groups allow them to share values like pluralism and democracy, called “social remittances” by Levitt (1998): ideas, behaviours and social capital that flow from receiving to sending country communities. The transfer of social remittances is made easier by the development of new technologies, as also Rania states:

Egyptians and Tunisians who live abroad have been educated for democracy, they know they can talk and you can talk about freedom, justice, ... and through social networks they share ideas and experiences with their peers who live in Egypt.

³ “Arab Spring” refers to the democratic uprisings that arose in Tunisia in December 2010 and spread across the Arab world (Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain...) in 2011.

Given the widespread diffusion in the use of Facebook among young migrants and the second generation, today they are more and more, like their native counterparts, “prosumers” (Tapscott & Williams 2006)—active producers/consumers of digital contents—and “netizens” (Brettel 2008)—digital citizens, who find in the web a public space, a citizenship place (Mazzoli 2009). In particular, on the debate over the importance of online services for the spread of mobilization during the Arab Spring, it is actually interesting to focus on their use. During the revolution what and with whom did Egyptian bloggers, and Facebook and Twitter users communicate? And what happened after that?

In the days of the revolutions communication was two-pronged: the web was used for the practical organization of the protests and for keeping in constant touch with the diaspora, connected by the internet to the rest of the world (without suffering censorship imposed by regimes). Between Egyptians living in Egypt and the diaspora new forms of collaboration as well as sharing of new political ideas, values and norms were realized, allowing diaspora communities to get involved in social- political processes back home (Chatora 2012).

Our respondents were very active in their use of Facebook during the revolts, and over the following months they stayed in touch with those who were in Egypt, sharing information and making comments about political news with relatives and friends, but also updating the pages of the official Egyptian and Italian groups with news, videos and posts.

My friends took to the streets and now, on Facebook, on my account, I'm kicking up a fuss: “guys, you have to go out!” – I write – Lately we always speak about politics, even for two hours because people say “Egypt will not be the same any longer!” and then I ask my friends and they say “take it easy, we are there!” (Mosek)

We talk about politics, I write something on Facebook. There is a page called Egyptians in Turin and I always write there what's happening in Egypt, in order to report here what is happening there. (Alima)

I use the internet; there is a group on Facebook called “President, we beg your pardon”. These are bad people who play dirty, in order to support the old people. Then there is the “Group for freedom”, the “April 6” or the “January 25” movement. I follow them, they are well-educated, doctors, graduates, lawyers. (Saleh)

I use Facebook, Twitter and the press as sources of information and to keep in touch with the guys who live there and tell me about politics. (Sanah)

This huge global data and information exchange can influence the moulding of public opinion: people from one side of the Mediterranean to the other demonstrated during the revolts and still demonstrate today that the internet can be more and more a place of citizenship, where people can put up their own identity, their own profile and interact with other people as if they were in a “modern agorà” (Mazzoli 2009).

6. POLITICAL CHANGES IN EGYPT: HOW IT IS PERCEIVED AND HOW IT HAS IMPACTED THE EGYPTIAN COMMUNITY IN TURIN

6.1. FIRST GENERATION

The first-generation migrants have perceived some differences between them and the second generation in relationships and empathy with respect to the revolts that happened in Egypt in January 2011, as Bahaa notes:

Not all the young born here are interested in what has happened in Egypt. My generation has followed the events more closely because we suffered when we were young. Those born here didn't feel the lack of democracy and freedom. They don't care. It isn't the same as for young people who stay there, that have experienced the dictatorship. Those born here, they go to Egypt only for holiday, for having fun, for going on the beach, for visiting relatives. Those more involved were young people in Egypt and we, migrants of my generation, abroad. We want to see, to participate in this change. I have always followed politics.

What happened during the revolts was the sharing of a mix of enthusiasm and frustration, pride and guilt, among first-generation immigrants. Migrants are often likely to feel a “genuine sympathy” for their relatives who remain in conflict-ridden areas (Pirkkalainen & Abdile 2009). Migrants may also feel guilty at the thought of being safe while their relatives are suffering (Byman et al. 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 Bahaa:

All of us went from Turin to Egypt, my family, then there in that square we met other Egyptians from Turin. (...) Egyptians in Turin followed the events a lot. It was really important. We had to help, give a hand, feel side to side. In the last 10 years things got worse and from here we see them better. It is like your son. If you are side by side daily you can't see he is growing, but if you see him once a year you realize immediately that he has grown.

First-generation migrants' commitment was not limited to physical or emotional participation during the revolts. They also foresaw concrete opportunities for action for their country, and some of them also plan to engage in specific projects as it was the case of the dissemination of information and support in organizing the polling procedures:

In Egypt in January everything changed. We have to be more linked with our country because now it needs us. Before we didn't have freedom and we weren't able to do much. Now we can do more for helping the elections, following the polling procedures... (Bahaa)

6.2. SECOND GENERATION

Despite the opinion of first generation, according to second generation, Egyptian revolution has also caused the rediscovery of their pride in being Egyptian and made them reconsider the migratory networks and ties

with their parents' country of origin as a resource. The parents have often sacrificed familiar ties to a more generalised emotional link to the 'homeland'. But on special circumstances as they were the revolts new ties were created (or old rediscovered and reactivated) by first and second generation also thanks to the use of the new technologies, giving them the opportunity to be always on, always connected with what was happening there, here and there at the same time.

What has happened is tragic and beautiful, even for we who are here. We wrote on our wall or on the movements' walls "Go on!" But sometimes those who directly participated in the protests, those who really took to the streets, discouraged us saying "Well, thank you very much, but you're not here." But it was my way of showing support and adherence to the cause. So during those weeks I felt even more frustrated because it was they who took to the streets and I could only follow things from a distance and write my support. I wanted to be there, they were momentous changes, and even now I want to be there because during these days Al Tahrir Square is a laboratory of ideas. (Rania Ibrahim, journalist for the Magazine Yalla Italia)

Similarly, on the wall of the Facebook group Egyptians in Turin, Rania explains that:

The group was really useful during the revolution, because we posted everything there: patriotic songs, songs for the country, songs for the young men and women who died in the square, songs that make us cry, make us dream to be in Egypt, we posted news and everybody did it.

The combined dynamic of the rediscovery of their roots, the birth of a new pride in being Egyptian and being masters of their destiny able to overcome dictators and to create real democracies, is upsetting space/time links and could transform the parents' country of origin from not only the past, but also a new future in which they can be involved not only as an audience but as participant actors:

I thank my mother who gave me this love for the country. And this love has increased after the revolution, because before I didn't know anything about Egypt, nothing about politics: I only knew the name of the President, but I didn't know how was the country, how they lived there. When my dad watched the news on the TV I ran in my room. Now I watch the news everyday to see what is happening there. I follow pages that I never imaged, I know all the parties, the parliament, the ministries; even my mum is surprised and says "you look really interested". It is strange for me to be so interested in Egypt. With what is happening I might be there; during the revolution I cried when I saw the people in Tahrir Square and I could have been one of them but I was and I still am here. (Rania)

After the revolution I would like to see the new Egypt. Perhaps you are more proud to be Egyptian than before because around you people are more proud. You are more curious and more proud, yes. (Asab)

It would be interesting also to understand how many of these processes and these ideas are born and die online, activating only an affective/emotional dimension and how many have effects in the offline realities of the countries of origin and in Italy.

7. CONCLUSION

In this paper, the main characteristics of Egyptian immigrant community in Turin are described. The paper illustrates also the impact on their lives of the the recent political changes in their country of origin and describes old and new transnational practices, activated by first and second generation and facilitated by the use of new media.

Egyptian immigrants who first came to Turin in the 1970s, were members of urban and middle class groups with high levels of education. Over more recent years the immigrants' composition has been changing due to the arrival of younger, less educated individuals coming from rural areas. Moreover the presence of second-generation has introduced elements of diversification because values and meanings systems of persons born in Italy are quite often different from those of their parents. The community in Turin is not cohesive, but of a plurality of individuals and of small groups mainly interlinked by family relationships, even if there are some meeting places where first- and second -generation can interact: the most important are the Arabic culture and language school Il Nilo and few worship places.

The ties that immigrants establish and maintain with their homeland are different for first- and second-generation: transnational bonds are more pronounced among first-generation, although they tend to become weaker over time and with social and occupational integration in Turin. Attempts to return to Egypt have been made with transnational business projects, but only few have success. Despite there has been some independent attempt to return made by second generation, ties with Egypt among second-generation young people are weaker. But in such a scenario revolts of January 2011 and the new media (social networks) have played an important role to promote forms of transnational participation, especially among second generation migrants that until recently were not interested in their parents' homeland. This is the case for example of the Facebook internet group "Egyptians in Turin" that is described in the paper. The youngster living in Turin followed what their peers where doing during the Revolution in Egypt and became more and more involved and supportive thanks to the web. Since then in some cases their involvement has been changing from just online action to engagement in specific projects, as it was the case of the dissemination of information and support in organizing the polling procedures for the recent Egyptian political elections.

At this stage it is still early evaluating the impact of the changes in Egypt on diaspora because the political situation is evolving day by day. It is true that recent changes in political life in Egypt have awakened among both first- and second-generation immigrants a sense of belonging that had been worn away over time. Among first and second generation of immigrants there were support and mobilizing activities, for example, organizing voting procedures. A few people have returned to Egypt to participate in the protest movements and to be closer to their family members but most of the migrants remain sceptical on the possibilities to going back to Egypt and to develop business activities. Several second-generation young people have shown an emotional participation and interest in the Egyptian events and rediscovered their pride in being Egyptian. The way in which this situation will evolve will depend on both the diaspora commitment and the

institutional initiatives promoted by the Egyptian government to involve and enhance Egyptians abroad (first and second generation).

8. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

These research findings allow for some tentative policy recommendations that may be useful to the strengthening of transnational bonds and to the promotion of the Egyptian diaspora's contribution to homeland political and social processes.

1) Sustain remittances through co-financing measures

First-generation immigrants have knowledge and professional experiences and economic resources that can be invested in their homeland. Some migrants are interested in directing individual and collective remittances towards social development initiatives (education, healthcare, sanitation, small irrigation systems) for the villages and cities of their origin. One incentive for the gathering of individual and collective remittances may be through co-financing measures with Italian cooperation and/or Egyptian local and state authorities. The organization of these pilot projects may be promoted and supported by local NGOs in the villages of origin and by Italian NGOs linked to migrants.

2) Promote educational and cultural activities at local level

A second important policy recommendation refers to educational and cultural exchanges. In Italy selected schools could organize study and discussion activities on what has been happening in the Arab countries, in this case Egypt, by mobilizing the Arabic culture and language teachers now working in the cultural centre Il Nilo. In Egypt selected schools could promote information meetings on migrants' conditions and their potential social and cultural contributions to their homeland. These meetings may involve the participation of first-generation migrants and the use of new technologies, for example for the undertaking of videoconferences and screening of video-documentaries shot in Italy.

3) Promote exchanges among second-generation young

A third innovative kind of pilot action could be to organize exchanges among second-generation young people and their peers living in Egypt, similar to the activity coordinated by the journalist Abir Said Abo Taleb or made by other association of Egyptians abroad. Such exchanges would be promoted in Italy as well as in Egypt. Groups and bonds established on the web could be strengthened by direct contacts and personal exchanges.

4) Create a web portal for circulation of human resources

A fourth activity could be the creation of a web portal where human resources, cultural resources and professional skills can be interlinked between the two sides of the Mediterranean. Until now there is a lack of

tools dedicated to this geographical area. The only attempt in this direction was the creation of the website of the IMIS project, financed by the Italian government and implemented by the Emigration Sector of the Ministry of Manpower and Emigration and the IOM. The website aimed to connect job seekers to employers abroad through a data-bank and an info-portal for Egyptian migrants abroad. At the end of 170,000 applications only 178 persons were selected to work in Italy. This system could be implemented, following the model of LinkedIn, the well-known business-oriented social networking site. The purpose of this site is to allow registered users to keep a list of contact details of those with whom they have some level of relationship, or to find other people potentially interested in their skills. On this web portal, migrants (first and second generation) who live in Italy, for example, could offer their job expertise to companies based in Egypt or skilled people in Egypt could offer their jobs for companies based in Italy.

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ANNEX

	Name	Sex	Age	In Italy since
Pioneers				
1	Saleh	M	46	1988
2	Bahaa	M	45	1986
First-generation women				
3	Aziza	F	39	1991
4	Sanah	F	42	1991
5	Sherin	F	38	1999
New pioneers/unaccompanied minors				
6	Asab	M	20	2007
7	Abdelrahman	M	18	2008
8	Mohamed	M	18	2008
9	Mosek	M	20	2007
10	Osman	M	32	2002
Second generation				
11	Rania Ibrahim	F	32	1981
12	Alima	F	19	Born in Italy
13	Dalia	F	19	Born in Italy
14	Iman	F	19	1993
15	Rania	F	19	Born in Italy
16	Amro	M	21	1997