The Transnational Engagement of Second Generations: Young People of Egyptian Background in Italy and the Arab Uprisings [1]

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Abstract

The popular mobilisations of 2010-11, known as the 'Arab Spring', have had a global resonance well beyond the Arab world, affecting the lives of migrants with Arab-Mediterranean background living in Europe. Drawing on qualitative analysis, this article explores the impact of the Arab Spring on second generation's young people of Egyptian origin living in Italy. This study shows that research participants have a diverse assessment of the outcomes of the uprisings, that they have participated in them in different ways, and that they have contributed to the construction of common or contested narratives around them, both in the public and private discourse. Moreover, the research discusses the impact of these key historical events on young people's identity and sense of belonging, as well as on their transnational ties and practices. The transnational political engagement of research participants is examined to investigate how second generations experience a transnational life and build transnational identities. This study contributes to the debate on the relationship between transnationalism and second/third generations.

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1. Introduction

The Arab uprisings have had a spill over effect well beyond the Arab world. They reached out to the cultural and political imagination of the youth in the EU, transforming anti-austerity protest movements' repertories of action, and creating shared political geographies and solidarities across the Mediterranean (Fregonese 2013; Aday *et al*. 2013). The role of migrant communities in fostering such connections is still to be fully appreciated, although existing research already suggested that the uprisings deeply affected the lives and political imagination of migrants and people from Arab-Mediterranean countries[5] living around the world (Anderson 2013; Brand 2014; El Baradei, Wafa, and Ghoneim 2012), affecting second and third generations in particular.[6] Studies by Müller-Funk (2014) and Saey and Skey (2015) pioneered this research. Müller-Funk has highlighted the importance of cyberactivism in migrant women and young people's transnational participation, while Saey and Skey have discussed how the representation of the Egyptian revolution as led by the youth made it easier for second and third generations to identify with it. This identification, however, was reversed by later, grimmer events.

This article contributes to this discussion, examining the impact of the uprisings on young people born to foreign parents but raised, or even born, in Italy. When it comes to the intersection between the Arab uprisings and migration, the Italian case is barely discussed as most literature focuses on Italy's reception of migrants and asylum-seekers and the post-2011 impact of EU migration policies. Exceptions are Ricucci (2015) and Ricucci and Cingolani (2014), who compare Moroccan and Egyptian first and second generation's involvement in uprisings. They demonstrate that the uprisings inspired members of the second generation based in Italy to reflect on their identity, their ethnic and religious belonging, their ties with their parents' country and, also, on their role as young people in the Italian public sphere. They suggest that the uprisings constituted a watershed moment in the lives of these young people. Many among them in fact, especially those with high cultural capital and strong educational credentials, got involved in the uprisings and the revolutionary movement in a variety of ways.

Building on the insights from the existing literature and drawing on narrative interviews and online sources, this article examines how the uprisings, a key-event in world history,

[5] We use the term 'Arab uprisings' as this expression has entered the public and scholarly language, although we are aware that non-Arab individuals and groups also participated in the mobilisations. On the other hand, for the sake of brevity we use the expression 'Arab-Mediterranean countries' to refer to Arab-majority societies of Northern Africa, although we recognise that they are diverse and composed of Arab and non-Arab individuals.

[6] In this group we include the sons and daughters of foreign parents, who were born in Italy or arrived in Italy before adulthood following their parents' project of family migration (generations 2, 1.75, 1.5 1 1.25 of Rumbaut's typology [2004]).

shaped the biographies and identities of second generation's boys and girls of Egyptian origin residing in Milan by focusing on their transnational ties and practices. Different forms and degrees of engagement in the uprisings, as well as the representation and the construction of common or contested narratives of them—both in the public and private discourse—are at the core of this examination. The goal is to first analyse the relationship with the parents' homeland and with the country of residence, and secondly to examine how second generations activate, reactivate or jeopardise their multiple sense of belonging.

We understand the experience of these young men and women, and their practices of participation in the uprisings, to be indicators of the transnational orientation of their lives (Levitt and Waters 2002). Our case study has thus relevant theoretical implications for the current debate on transnationalism and generational divide (Levitt and Waters 2002; Portes and Rumbaut 2005), providing empirical insights for discussing the transnational character of the practices and identities of second generations in relation to a geographical context—Italy—where research on this topic is incipient.

Adopting a processual approach to transnationalism (Wessendorf 2013), we examine the relationship between practical political engagement and the abstract identity-making process among members of the second generation. As the processual approach suggests, we adopt a diachronic perspective, thus paying attention to how young people's transnational ties may have changed over time in relation to both biographical events such as transition to adulthood, and historical events, such as the uprisings.

2. Theoretical Framework: Transnationalism and the Second Generation

Transnationalism—a key-perspective in sociology and migration studies focusing on cross-border exchanges between people and institutions, and the construction of transnational networks by migrants (Boccagni 2012; Glick-Shiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 1992)—has increasingly enlarged its scope to include research on how the generational divide matters in transnational practices. It follows that the political activism of the second and third generations of migrants, too, has become crucial to the research on transnationalism.

The scholarly debate on second and third generations has gained prominence in the United States since early 2000s, only recently reaching Europe and Italy (Caponio and Schmoll 2011). Interest in the 'transnational life' of second and third generations emerged from the critique of the assimilation theory and from the elaboration of the 'segmented assimilation' theory (Portes and Rumbaut 2005). The recognition of the existence of hyphenated and multiple identities among migrant (and non-migrant) youth, and the re-framing of integration as a multidimensional and non-linear process involving different spheres (social, economic, cultural, political), contributed to this shift. These advancements challenged the dominant hypothesis that transnational ties among second and third generations were irrelevant and confined to first generations, leading to more complex analyses of how descendants of migrant parents 'live transnational lives' (Levitt 2009; Smith 2005).

According to Susanne Wessendorf (2013), empirical analyses of transnationalism may take two approaches: the practice and the process-oriented approach. The first assesses the extent of engagement in transnational activities among second and third generations

and compares it with similar trends among first generation members. Analyses adopting this approach tend to signal a decline in transnational practices, with the exception of minorities and notwithstanding some continuities such as the knowledge of the parents' mother tongue, travelling to the parents' country of origin and, in some cases, economic ties such as remittances (Kasinitz *et al*. 2002; Rumbaut 2002). The second, processual approach, is 'less interested in the extent of regular transnational activities and more in how the transnational lives of their parents and co-ethnics shape the second generation's upbringing and their sense of belonging, as well as how members of the second generation go through different stages of transnational involvement in the course of their lives' (Wessendorf 2013, p. 2). It proposes a richer menu of what it means to be socialised and live transnationally, including peer-to-peer and family relationships, media and cultural consumption, visits to the parents' country, shared political and cultural references, family memories, emotional attachment to the parents' culture of origin, as well as the everyday experience of managing multiple cultural codes, languages, values and identities. It follows that examining the transnational dimension of the lives of migrants' descendants means acknowledging the dynamic relationship between the symbolic and concrete activities that research participants may carry out during their childhood and youth, or at specific points in their life.

In fact, growing up in a setting 'that reference[s] the homeland ideologically, materially and affectively each day' (Levitt 2009, p. 1231) provides a social and cultural capital that may be activated *ad hoc*. This may happen for self-definition and identity construction-related purposes, in everyday encounters and interactions, at specific biographical turning points (such as the pursuing of secondary education or parenthood, as well as the retirement, illness or death of the parents or relatives living in the parents' country), or when reacting to crucial events involving both the country of residence and the parents' homelan (such as financial crisis fostering return projects, changes in the political regime) (Baldassar *et al*. 2007; Fokkema, Cela, and Ambrosetti, 2013; Levitt and Waters 2002; Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004; Reynolds and Zontini 2013; Sommerville 2007; Smith 2002; Zontini 2007). It is important to remember that such social and cultural capital may be mobilised in different ways, and in different contexts, over the life course of second/third generation members. Scholars taking up the processual perspective, therefore, adopt a diachronic analytical approach, looking at processes of identity formation rather than its (temporary) outcomes (Levitt 2009). This means examining how 'identity is done transnationally' rather than how second and third generations identify with punctual identity markers such as ethnicity, nationality and religion (Reynolds and Zontini 2015; Somerville 2008; Viruell-Fuentes 2006; Wessendorf 2010).

The processual approach provides the conceptual framework of our analysis, allowing to shed light on how the transnational experience of migrants' descendants may change over time, either at critical junctures of the transition to adulthood (end of education, starting of professional life, marriage and parenthood) or in correspondence to other events that mark the individualised and fragmented transition to adulthood which is typical of contemporary youth (Camozzi 2013, 2016; Leccardi 2005). Among such turning points, the participation in political and social events, such as the Arab uprisings, in the parents' country of origin may represent a factor of further fragmentation. The processual approach also helps us shed light on how the forms and level of transnational involvement

may vary in relation to changes in the individual life and in the collective history, and in correspondence to meaningful turning points at the intersection of such two timeframes.

3. Methodology and Research Design

Qualitative analysis is used to examine forms of transnational engagement by young people with Egyptian background living in Milan, Italy. Narrative interviews and the analysis of online documentation were carried out in 2015 and 2016, and constitute the empirical data informing this article. This research was divided into two phases.

First, we conducted an explorative analysis of online documents, focusing on blog posts and websites to see if a public discourse on the uprisings and their aftermath was articulated by the members of second generations of Arab origin living in Italy.[7] We examined how opinion-leaders discussed the uprisings, looking for a narrative or multiple, contested narratives. By opinion-leaders, we mean publicly known young men and women of the second generation: activists, bloggers and journalists with a platform from which they voice opinions and views, such as personal or collective blogs, websites and online magazines. We analysed 15 posts published between 2011 and 2013 on 'Yalla Italia' (a well-known online magazine run by members of second generation—no longer available) and 'La Città Nuova' (an online magazine published by the national newspaper 'Il Corriere della Sera', run by members of second generation).

In the second phase, we carried out in-depth narrative interviews with young men and women aged 18-26, born or raised in Italy and living in Milan and province, with at least one parent originally from Egypt.[8] In this part of the research, we focused on the voices of 'ordinary' young people (Roy 2010), purposely excluding from our sample those who were recognised as leaders or spokespersons of social movements and political groups. During the interviews, most of the interviewees shared some experience of civil and political activism, ranging from volunteering in faith-based transnational charitable

[7] Selected contributions focused equally on Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco, namely Arab-majority countries that underwent revolutions and/or sustained mobilisations. During this first phase, we enlarge the criteria of geographical origin to include the voices of second-generations from Arab countries other than Egypt and their narratives on Arab uprisings (including but not limited to Egyptian events). This methodological choice was aimed at ensuring a richer pool of evidence (by collecting a higher number of documents) and followed our first assessment of the documentation available online. In fact, the Egyptian revolution was commented by several second-generation people, not only by Egyptian youth. In addition, most of commentators refers to the Arab uprisings or "Arab spring" instead of the events taking place in single countries, thus establishing a meaningful connection between the Egyptian events and the events occurred/occurring in other Arab countries.

[8] Nine interviews were conducted between September 2015 and January 2016. As such, they mirror the young men's and women's views on that historical moment and exclude other important events in the country of origin and in the diplomatic relation between Italy and Egypt, such as the killing of young Italian researcher Giulio Regeni, whose assassins remain unpunished at the time of writing.

organisations, local associations supporting incoming refugees, cultural/art festivals, to being involved in a national association demanding access to citizenship rights for second generation members in Italy or in movements supporting the Palestinian cause. In few cases, research participants came from a politically active family. However, this aspect was only partially reconstructed during the interviews. Rather, attention was given to a) the parents' motivation for migrating, and no participants reported political reasons, and to b) the extent to which the participants discussed events in Egypt with their parents and family members.

All participants maintain friendship and, in some case, love affairs with peers of Italian, Egyptian and other national origin alike. Since childhood, they have equally maintained transnational ties with friends and cousins both in Egypt and other European cities, where Italian and Egyptian friends and cousins moved. Their parents—who settled permanently in Italy when the participants were born—are either of working- or middle-class background. Most of parents have compulsory education or high school degrees, except in two cases in which at least one parent holds a Master's degree.

The specific focus on Egypt was motivated by three reason. First, the Egyptian community is the Arab Mediterranean largest and most diverse community present in Milan, and counts a large number of Coptic.[9] Secondly, the Egyptian community started to settle in Italy and Milan in the mid-Seventies, when Italy started to become a country of immigration. This means that it represents one of the foreign communities with the most consistent number of second generation born in Italy. Thirdly, in our view, the Egypt case is particularly relevant because it underwent a revolution and a counter-revolution, which developed into authoritarian reversal.

The research participants were selected through the snowball technique including gender and age variations as well as different religious backgrounds (Coptic and Muslim families) [10]. All participants except one[11] are university students. The research focused on a sample composed of second generation's members with high social and cultural capital, as the literature often suggests a more positive attitude to transnational practices and activism among such profiles[12]. Also, given the relevance of class, education and cultural resources in differentiating the second-generation's transnational orientation and behaviour (Haller and Landolt 2005), this choice allowed us to contain our sample,

[9] The Egyptian community is the second largest foreign community in Milan after the Filipino community.

[10] The research participants are 5 girls and 4 boys: 5 come from a Coptic family and 4 from a Muslim one. 6 are Italian citizens while 3 are entitled to and waiting for it.

[11] One participant (male) is attending the last year of secondary school.

[12] In her qualitative research on Egyptian and Moroccan young people's attitudes towards the Arab uprisings, Ricucci (2015) argues that those who felt involved and active in the uprisings were mostly university students or former students who already graduated from university, whose parents possess a solid cultural capital. By contrast, the group of those participants "indifferent" to the Northern African events tended to have lower cultural and family capitals and lower educational qualifications.

considered the exploratory nature of the research. Most of participants experienced the Arab uprisings from inside Italy, yet they were all involved in the events to a varying degree.

Narrative interviews—whose aim is to shed light on the interviewees' biography in order to explore their *Weltanschauung* in depth—focused first on interviewees' experience of the Arab and Egyptian revolution (we investigated how they have participated); second, on the impact of the Arab uprisings on their sense of belonging and transnational ties. Interviews—recorded and transcribed—were conducted in Italian and lasted around one and a half hour /two hours. We analysed all the interviews with the aim of outlining a set of common themes with a particular focus on biographical turning points. We then developed a coding system to organise the contents into analytical categories.

4. The Representation of the Uprisings in 'Second Generation' Blogs

It is possible to single out two main elements to the online narration of the uprisings. First is the enthusiasm for the revolts of 2011, particularly in relation to early mobilisations, with implications for the emotional positionality of the blogs' authors *vis-à-vis* their parents' country. Commentators looked at the beginning of the revolution with great hope, highlighting the key-role played by the 'heroic youth' who rebelled and took action for change. National pride and a re-ignited sense of national belonging are detectable in the narratives, especially when focusing on Egypt, coupled with insistence on the contribution that young Italians or members of the second generations could make to the revolution. At the same time, online narratives also voiced regret for the inability to make that contribution due to geographical distance (Madkour 2012). This narrative, which expresses a sense of moral obligation and the willingness to contribute to the ongoing transformation in Egypt, echoes the 'development assignment' that Anastasia Christou (2011, p. 103) also found in the case of Greek-Americans returning to Greece. The authors often compare the events in North Africa to the situation lived by the members of second generation in Italy, who are represented in opposite terms, namely as static and passive. Young people in Italy are in fact represented as lacking the necessary revolutionary spirit to 'change things (Hassen 2013).

The second key element in the narratives is the feeling of belonging to a revolutionary generation which is elsewhere, physically. The generation the authors described is constructed as homogeneously revolutionary, young and disadvantaged, and they mirror themselves in it (Gamyla 2012). The same approach is deployed when it comes to the uprisings more generally, which are often described as a homogeneous phenomenon with homogeneous demands and goals centred around democracy and social justice. The construction of a generational belonging is often possible thanks to shared cultural consumption, which is turned into a politically salient element. As Asef Bayat (2010) explained, seemingly a-political *loci* or phenomena, such as the notorious TV show 'Arab Idol'—criticised in one blog as subservient to the Moroccan King in its disregard for all brave young Moroccans who mobilised and asked for reform (Gamyla 2012)—can become sites of political action and demands, eventually strengthening the sense of belonging to a newly-emerging generation of brave revolutionaries that rebel against injustice.

These two elements, however, need to be analysed with a diachronic approach. They become salient when contextualised in specific temporal and political environments. The initial, harmonic representations and narratives of the uprisings contrast with the ones elaborated at later stages. This is especially so in the case of Egypt during the Morsi presidency, following the end of the political unity that characterised the occupation of Tahrir Square, the growth of social polarisation and political violence. The heterogeneity of political and ideological orientations that one finds in Egypt was then mirrored in the community of Egyptians residing in Italy, and consequently, the narrative about the aftermath of the uprisings became contested. Diverse opinions are expressed, in particular, on the role of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and its ascendancy to power, and critiques are mirrored in the language mobilised to narrate the event. One blogger, for instance, made a distinction between 'the people'—a central element to all descriptions of mobilisations, usually described with epic tones—and the MB. In fact, those who support the MB are described as 'confused' and seem to fall outside of 'the people', not being part of them and not being supportive of their will (Ibrahim 2013). This very linguistic tactic of 'Othering' is used by another blogger in the case of Tunisia, too. Here, the blogger referred to the political power gained by the moderate Islamist party Ennahda to put forth a critique of the events in Tunisia. A contraposition is constructed between the revolution and Ennhada's electoral victory in 2011, and arguments about the supposedly anti-modern and anti-democratic nature of Ennahda are presented (Gamyla 2011).

In conclusion, the online public discourse about the uprisings, as constructed by opinion-leaders from within the second generation, is characterised by a shifting positionality which goes from a non-critical embracing of the uprisings and re-ignited national pride, to a more critical stance once the events on the ground started to reveal political divisions. It follows that three main elements seem relevant in order to make sense of the contribution that the blogs and their authors have made to the narration of the uprisings. First is the shifting positionality of the authors *vis-à-vis* the parents' country of origin. Second is the sense of belonging to a revolutionary generation which is one the bloggers were not bred and raised into. On the contrary, the revolutionary generation is geographically distant and located in the parents' country of origin. Third is the unveiling of the contested nature of the events and the consequent selective memory-building and narrative-building the bloggers put in place.

5. Subjective Experiences and Narratives of the Uprisings

These contested imaginations and narratives around the uprisings suggest a high degree of involvement, both emotionally and politically, of the members of the second generation in such events. The interviews confirm this, although most of the participants were physically in Italy during the revolution and subsequent events in Egypt. They experienced the events, on the one hand, through the Internet and the television, and on the other hand, through friends and relatives' opinions, with whom they were in contact through Facebook, WhatsApp and Viber. Research participants utilise all these different options without showing a preference for either new or traditional media, or for social networks. They selectively choose the channels and seem to exercise a sort of active triangulation between the different sources of information. In general, Arab television

channels (in particular Al Jazeera, Al Arabya, Al Kahera) were preferred to Italian television because the events were analysed in the detail on a daily basis. Facebook posts by friends and relatives in the countries of origin, along with posts in Facebook groups hosting discussions on the uprisings, were also particularly relevant for keeping up to date with the events on the ground.

Only two out of nine interviewees participated directly in the protests as they were in Egypt for education and family reasons. Nabil (22 years old, male, Muslim)[13] joined some young men from his relatives' neighbourhood and spent time in Tahrir square in January and February 2011. He did not know these men previously, but their enthusiasm convinced him to follow them to Tahrir. He spent several days in the square, experiencing both a sense of unity and solidarity and also the tragic events following police attacks, which caused deaths among the protesters. While in Egypt during the summer of 2013, Aida (22 years old, female, Muslim) spent time at the sit-in protests supporting Morsi in Rabaa al-Adawiya square. She witnessed the repression of pro-Morsi and pro-MB forces by the military. Like Nabil, Aida was curious about the protesters' motivations and willing to be part of a revolution with no mediation. Overall, for all participants, the uprisings represented an occasion to reflect on the reasons why their parents emigrated, with reported contentious family discussions around Egypt's economic crisis, high levels of unemployment, limitations to political freedom, corruption, the poor quality of the education system, military power and dramatic class inequality.

The reactions of the research participants to the uprisings can be regrouped into two categories, describing their emotional involvement and identity implications. The first category includes those who demonstrated immediate, strong enthusiasm for the revolution—an enthusiasm, however, terminated by the 2012-2013 crisis, which generated great disillusion and cynicism. The initial enthusiasm is associated with revived national pride, a renewed sense of belonging to Egypt, and an intense hope for change, which later increased the participants' disappointment. Aida and Baha, for example, lost hope for change, a feeling that Baha (26 years old, male, Muslim) articulates saying '*that was all a soap opera, a sham*'. They feel they were naive and stupid to believe in the possibility of change. Aida, who volunteers in an association demanding citizenship rights for second generation members in Italy, offers an interesting explanation for the strong enthusiasm and great disappointment for events in Egypt among Italo-Egyptian second-generation members, shedding light on the political apathy of youth in Italy.

As second generation, we live in a country where young people aren't interested in politics and are disenchanted with regard to civil and politic engagement, [so] we felt immediately involved in those facts, awakening a sense of belonging and engendering enthusiasm for the opportunity to change things. (...). When the [Mubarak, NdA] government fell down, it was like a party. We were united. Then, the rush to elections brought about political divisions and conflicts again. (...). The problem in Egypt and in all Arab countries is that we did not target deeply-rooted national problems but stopped at the tip of the pyramid. We didn't consider the role of military forces and the daily brain-washing and propaganda that operate in Egypt, we naively celebrated the Revolution too early. What a bitterness. (Aida, 22 years old, girl, Muslim)

[13] All names are fictitious

The revolution, as Nabil also underlines, was like '*the waves of the sea... they come and go. They [politicians and military forces, NdA] loosen the grip to let us breathe and steam off and then someone pulls the rope again. After, I didn't follow any news. (…) We hoped that things could change but things worsened.* '

Aida and Nabil voice their disillusion in these excerpts. It is important to notice that both Aida and Nabil were in Egypt during the uprising and, probably, experienced the events more intensely.

As anticipated, two categories emerge from the narratives. Aida's and Nabil's reflections contrast with the second category including participants that developed only limited curiosity and moderate enthusiasm toward the revolution, and who unlike Nabil, Aida and Baha, were less disappointed by the events that followed. The latter group approached the uprising progressively, without strong initial enthusiasm, through TV news, Facebook and family discussions. For example, Asma reports conflicting feelings: she never got involved in politics but the Egyptian events had made her slowly more conscious that she was witnessing an historical event, which reinforced her sense of belonging to the point that she decided to move to Egypt in the future, for education and professional reasons.

Before the events in Egypt, I wasn't involved in politics at all. I started following the events just because we still have relatives there, who live close to the place of the events. (…). Today, [if I think back to those times] I have contrasting feelings. On the one hand, I think they [Egyptians] have been courageous because it wasn't sure that the revolution succeeded. On the other hand, the situation hasn't really changed. So I'm sad. Damn, you made a revolution, you expelled two presidents and you still have to deal with so many practical problems: flooded streets, electricity cuts… They aren't able to solve these issues even if they did a revolution. They are disillusioned. When I tell to some Egyptian friends that I would like to go back and live there, they tell me that I'm crazy. I still have hope. I am convinced that one day Egypt will shine. (Asma, 21 years old, female, Copt)

Unlike Nabil, who declared that he is not following the news any more, Asma still has interest, emotional involvement and curiosity for current affairs in Egypt. In both online and narrative interviews, time is fundamental to understand the positionality of research participants *vis-à-vis* the events and, as a consequence, their parents' country. Participants included in the first groups of interviewees did not only surrender to pessimism after strong initial enthusiasm but, crucially, also seemed to lose interest in Egypt, conflating their interest for the revolution with the country as a whole. On the contrary, Asma developed interests for politics and Egypt more slowly but resiliently. But what were the consequences of this involvement, both emotionally and politically, on the second generations' life projects and sense of belonging?

6. The Revolution and the Question of Belonging

The uprisings, the revolution and the crisis in Egypt, culminated in a military coup, brought more political awareness to the research participants, revealing aspects of their

parents' homeland previously overlooked. Magda (23 years old, female, Copt) and Asma, for instance, have declare that they feel more mature and aware thanks to the events in Egypt. Events '*opened my eyes*', declares Asma, and allowed Magda '*to have a personal [informed] opinion on facts*'. Aida echoes this assessment, particularly in reference to the link between migration, war and political instability. This awareness also translated into a sense of belonging to and pride for the Egyptian population, who had the courage to topple Mubarak after so many years, as Nabil and Aida declare. Not only this. Asma's reference to the fact that the events '*opened my eyes*' and Magda's self-confidence '*to have a personal [informed] opinion*' also suggest they are now able to look at their parents' homeland beyond an iconic and static image, resulting from holidays spent with their parents' families, in sheltered and protected spaces. The revolution brought about a different picture of Egypt, which includes aspects of the everyday life they had never encountered before, such as the lack of drinkable water or electricity supply. Magda says:

I got interested in the events gradually. My previous relationship to Egypt was spending summers at my aunt's, who took care of me, I was like the Queen of England, really spoiled by her, I didn't see the necessity to change anything in the way [in which] the country worked, because I didn't know the real country. At first, I experienced events through my relatives' eyes […]. I followed the news above all to know if my relatives were alive. Nevertheless, I slowly formed my own opinion, especially after I visited Egypt alone for the first time last September. This opened my eyes to many things that (I didn't think were possible but which) I then saw with my own eyes and realised that 'They [Egyptians] did the right thing to try to change the country!

It is important to mention that re-thinking Egypt is an open-ended process for Magda. Although she feels disappointed by the outcome of the revolution, she has hope for a future political and social change in the country. The outcome of the revolution affected her intimate life too. The events impacted on Magda's biographical transition to adulthood which, as an effect of the activation of transnational networks and practices, can be seen as examples of 'root migrations' (Levitt 2009; Wessendorf 2013) and 'return' projects (Conway and Potter 2009; Christou 2011). In fact, following her aforementioned first solo visit to Egypt, motivated by the desire to discover what family visits had until then concealed from her, at the time of the interview she was inclined to move back for two years to study classic and commercial Arabic. Like Magda, other participants refer to similar return projects linked to both education and professional development, and call for a distinction between '*Egyptians of second generation [that are] completely integrated here [in Italy], (…) and other[s] who [are] [comparatively] more strongly linked to Egypt, [the latter] decide to study there [in Egypt] even if [they] live here; or they do exams at the Egyptian Consulate in Italy*[14]. (Baha)

These excerpts are in line with the scholarship arguing that emerging identity configurations are multiple, complex, ambivalent (Colombo, Leonini and Rebughini,

[14] The participant refers to second-generation young people who live in Italy and are enrolled in Egyptian universities.

2009; Louie 2006; Raffaetà, Baldassar and Harris 2016) and processual. For members of second generation, identity is often a mosaic composed of multiple belongings (Reynolds and Zontini 2015; Somerville 2008; Wessendorf 2010) which, crucially, are activated and re-activated by events and circumstances. The interview excerpts, in fact, emphasise the importance of the Egyptian revolution, an event 'unhinging' their tranquil everyday life. Baha, Asma, Nabil and Carol (22 years old, female, Copt) articulate this complexity.

Egypt is my parents' country, as Italy is my country. I never lived my life there [Egypt]. I spent there every summer, (…) but I stayed in my [family's] nice home, where everybody took care of me. I didn't need to go to public offices or similar [places], therefore I didn't live there really. Recently, I went there to fix some bureaucratic issues dealing with the military service and my identity card [it] was surprising, it's another world! It's my country after Italy but I was born here [in Italy]. Being born and raised here, I feel Italian. I learnt Italian before Arabic but I will never forget my roots. (Baha)

[The Egyptian events] didn't affect my relationship with the country. I have always loved the country. It's my country, I have always thought it. Italy too is my country of course. It's a difficult situation: it's difficult decide which one is my country, or which I feel more attached to. (Asma)

Nabil's relationship with Egypt does not seem to be relevant to him. The failure of the revolution indeed terminated the renewed interest for the country he felt at the beginning of the uprising. This disillusion is the consequences of his participation in the revolutionary movement in Egypt. This was his first political experience because he had never got involved in political events or he had never had interest in politics. The rollercoaster of Nabil's feelings (affection, delusion) reflects the emotional richness of his relationship with Egypt. He explains that:

Before 2011, I didn't feel for my country of origin. I felt without roots. (…). In 2011-2012 I said, 'Considering that things are changing in Egypt, I wish it could become my country, it were more important for me'. I started to feel something, to feel affection. Then I came back to Italy, after the revolution, [and I was] aware that things had not changed. Now, I don't feel anything for Egypt. (Nabil)

Nabil's reflections suggest that he is aware that the ambivalent and troubled relationship he has with Egypt has changed with time, although he seems quite sure that a revival of interest is not possible, at least for the moment. In her interview, Carol elaborates on the processual nature of identity-construction, and how her roots and origin are present in her everyday life.

I have a complicated relationship with my origins because my parents used to tell me 'Don't do that because you are Egyptian, remember it!' They have constantly remembered my origins to me. That's part of my everyday life. (…). When you receive constant cultural reminders since childhood that 'Do that because you are Egyptian, Don't do that because you are Egyptian', you are loaded with cultural meanings but you are not necessarily able to understand them, because you live in Italy and you were born

here. (…). Now I feel more comfortable with this [diverse cultural heritage]. (…). I accept now that what seems licit to my parents, may be absurd for me. (Carol)

7. Conclusion

This paper explored the experiences of young men and women of Egyptian background living in Italy and their views on the Arab uprisings and their aftermath. It analysed the transnational engagement of these young people and the implications for their sense of belonging. Methodologically, this analysis took into account both the discourse advanced by activists and opinion leaders among the second generations' members on blogs and websites, as well as the narratives of young people with Egyptian background collected through interviews.

Building on the debate on the transnational lives and identities of young descendants of immigrant parents (Levitt and Waters 2002; Portes and Rumbaut 2005), the paper has demonstrated that second generation youth also experiences transnationalism, contrary to the dominant view that transnational practices and identities are prevalent within the first generation migrants but marginalised amongst the members of the second generation.

More specifically, the paper sheds a light on the relevance of the uprisings as a turning point in the lives of research participants, who, indeed, have changed their transnational behaviors and symbolic identity-making after the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia, and popular mobilisations in North Africa in general.

The uprisings mobilised the participants' transnational ties and networks as well as their transcultural competences. These events have strengthened the connection between the participants and their parents' homeland, either through increased social interactions, communication and exchange of information, or through emotional attachment and a re-ignited sense of belonging and curiosity towards the country. The uprisings have propelled the participants to re-consider their identity, as for many the uprisings represented a turning point in their biographies. Their direct and indirect participation in the events was made possible thanks to a pre-existing social and cultural capital, rooted in their socialisation into transnational families and fields—a socialisation which, in turn, was reactivated and transformed by these experiences.

Findings from this research also show that the participants' involvement in events in North Africa and Egypt has changed over time. Some participants experienced sudden and strong enthusiasm since the very beginning of the revolutionary movement, which after 2013 transformed into deep disillusion and retreat from politics, while other participants' involvement was more gradual and resulted into a resilient interest from Egypt and politics. However, such a changing attitude towards the events in Egypt did not seem to stop the process of identity re-configuration that the uprisings put in motion, as well as the re-covering/discovering of the relation with the parents' country. Following the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary events, many of the participants started to look at the parents' country under a new light. They gradually or traumatically (depending on the cases) substituted the familiar image they had built during childhood—rooted in personal memories—with a better-informed and more conscious image of the country, built at a later stage in their life and rooted in an emerging collective memory of public events. This shift shows the relevance of the uprisings and their aftermaths as biographical

turning point at the intersection between the private experience of the young people involved in the research and the collective history in which they are merged.

Such results are in line with what we called—following Susan Wessendorf (2013)—a 'processual' approach to second generations' transnationalism. This is also in line with the literature suggesting that the transformation of transnational orientations and practices should be understood in the frame of young people's life cycles and biography (Fokkema, Cela, and Ambrosetti, 2013; Levitt and Waters 2002; Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004; Reynolds and Zontini 2013; Sommerville 2007). This paper indeed emphasises the relevance of applying a longitudinal approach to the study of the transnational practices and ties of the members of the second generations. This is an emerging research field that, in our view, could complement intergenerational analysis, that is those analysis that focus on how transnational practices and ties change across generations, e.g. moving from first-generation migrants' to their descendants' experience. This paper argues that such changes do not only take place between generations, but also in relation to events that happen outside of migrant communities but have a specific impact on them.

While research participants and blogger opinion-leaders constantly refer to a diverse set of identities and cultural codes they move in-between according to their needs in given circumstances, transnationalism hardly features in public discussions around migration and second/third generations, especially in the context of Italy, which is loaded with concerns around the migration-security nexus. In the Italian context, second generations are often perceived as a potential threat, and implicit suspicions of their nationalist loyalty are ever-present. Multiple belongings still tend to be perceived as problematic and dangerous, while cultural and national identities are framed as exclusive and mutually incompatible. For all these reasons, we consider relevant to highlight the dynamism of the practices, imaginaries and relationships that the young people of migrant background may construct and maintain transcending national and European borders, across the two shores of the Mediterranean.

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