Transnational Identities. A Preliminary Exploratory Study on the Transnational Socialisation of Second-generation Egyptian Adolescents in Italy

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Abstract. The present work is a preliminary and explorative study and is part of a wider research project on Egyptian, Pakistani and Moroccan families living in Northern Italy. In particular, it analyses qualitatively the experiences of a few first-generation Egyptian migrants (No.4) and second-generation adolescents of Egyptian origin (No.14) who have been living in Italy for at least two years following family reunion practices. By outlining the respondents' practices and values and comparing them, the paper proposes to show how the immigrant second-generationers live transnationally, build their identities, acquire social skills, shape cultural repertoires and selectively deploy them in response to the opportunities and challenges they face.

Keywords: Migration, Second-generations, Adolescence Transnational Socialisation.

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Introduction

The study of second-generation immigrants is part of an emerging trend in sociology, which focuses on the family in migration (Boyd, 1989; Faist, 1997; Fawcett, 1989; Gozzoli and Regalia, 2006; Gurak and Caces, 1992; Scabini and Rossi, 2008). This is a specific approach that takes into account the fact that a) individuals rarely migrate alone -and even when they do so, in most cases have a family left behind in their home country or reconstitute a family setup in the country of destination (Giuliani, 2002; Marazzi, 2005); b) most of the decisions regarding human mobility are taken within a family context and c) mobility itself has repercussions on family relations.

Looking at migration from the perspective of family relations introduces a temporal aspect that shows the changes brought about by migration over time. In fact, it is basically after the first generation that migration turns into permanent settlement (Massey *et al.,* 1994; Massey and Garcia España, 1987; Tognetti Bordogna, 2007) and integration in the hosting society can be assessed. With the advent of second-generationers the relationships and exchanges with the host society are multiplied (Zhou, 1997) and this creates a progressive «citizenisation» of the immigrant subject (Codini, 2002; Codini and D'Odorico, 2004), i.e. a "process leading to him being a member and subject of the city in the widest sense" (Bastenier and Dassetto, 1990, p. 17); it also urges the host society to become aware of a radical transformation in its human and social landscapeThus the study of the children of the first-generation migrants, the so-called second-generationers, can cast light on the integration processes of a certain family or ethnic community, and the changes brought about by migration on the people in both the source and destination country. This is also in line with Donati's relational theory (2001) and its application to migration studies, where great attention is devoted to pre-, during, and post-migration bonds (Scidà, 2005).

Outlining and comparing the second-generationers' practices and values with those of the a) first-generationers, b) non-migrants in the source country, c) native community in the destination country is a strategy to observe transformation over time and assess the relational well-being of the persons affected by the migratory transition (Ambrosini, 2008; Portes and

Rumbaut, 2001; Portes *et al.,* 2003; Bosisio *et al.,* 2005). In order to implement such a comparison, as suggested by Levitt (2009), it would be necessary to make long-term ethnographic research in the countries of origin and destination, collecting the viewpoints of the different social actors involved in the migration process (first-generationers, second-generationers, non-migrants in the source country, natives in the receiving country).

The present work is a preliminary and explorative study and is part of a wider research project on Egyptian, Pakistani and Moroccan families living in Northern Italy. In particular, it analyses qualitatively the experiences of a limited number of first-generation Egyptian migrants (No.4) and second-generation adolescents of Egyptian origin (No.14) who have been living in Italy for at least two years following family reunion practices. ISTAT (2012) estimates the presence of Egyptians officially living in Italy in 2012 as 117,145 people, most of whom (69.1%) are resident in Lombardy, Italy's richest and most populated region and one of the most developed areas in Europe. The official number of underage residents of Egyptian origin is over 35,000 (32,000 in 2011), that is, 30.4% of the total number of Egyptians in Italy.

By outlining the respondents' practices and values and comparing them, the paper proposes to show how the immigrant second-generationers live transnationally, build their identities, acquire social skills, shape cultural repertoires and selectively deploy them in response to the opportunities and challenges they face.

These three aspects -construction of identity, acquisition of social skills and shaping of cultural repertoires- are part of and mainly occur within socialisation, i.e. the process by which social and cultural continuity are attained as socialisation provides an individual with the skills and habits necessary for participating within his or her own society. In this sense, socialization is essential both for society and its continuity over time, and the individuals who need symbolic reference points and cultural patterns to orientate their actions.

The advent of post-modernity has certainly produced a discontinuity in the traditional way of understanding and making socialization. Human mobility, cultural diversity, the multiplication of viewpoints and allegiances have made the process of socialization more complex and sharpened the

challenges especially for those who live transnationally, like the second generation of migrants. Analysing the complexity and challenges of post-modern transnational socialisation thus becomes a crucial topic for research, as well as the process of identity building of the second-generation immigrants.

Second-Generationers and Ethnic Identity

The presence of a second generation of migrants poses questions on identity processes, differences in terms of educational and socialisation models, academic achievement, access to the labour market. The first generation lives a transnational experience because they typically maintain ties with their homeland and at the same time they become integrated into the countries that receive them. The same apply to the children of immigrants even though they are not likely to engage in their ancestral homes with the same intensity and frequency as their parents. The second-generationers in fact are more likely to acquire social skills and contacts that are derived and useful in both the context of origin and the country they live in. This happens because they mostly grow up in households and participate in organisations where people, ideas, goods, and practices from the homeland circulate but at the same time they are socialised into the rules and institutions of the country where they live.

On the whole, second-generation immigrants are apparently faced with more complex developmental tasks than their Italian counterparts, as they must construct a new identity for themselves in a situation of transnationalism and learn how to negotiate boundaries and cultural repertoires. What behavioural models and values systems will they adopt? To what extent will they be similar to their Italian peers? Where will the distance from their ancestral culture be most evident? According to some authors, girls' greater freedom from their culture of origin makes them more inclined to pioneer change (Dalla Zuanna *et al.*, 2010, p. 99), so will there be a wide gender gap? These are just a few sub-questions that the paper will seek to tackle.

When dealing with identity building process, a special attention must be devoted to both the social and the individual component, which are in

reciprocal relation. The individuals, in fact, form their identities by differentiating themselves from the others and maintaining continuity with respect to themselves. At the same time, they need to be recognised by the others. Identity is thus formed through a constant dialectic between equality and diversity, as well as personal agency and external constraints.

There is another aspect that is crucial in the identity formation of the immigrant adolescents: ethnicity (Erickson, 1963; 1968; Root, 1998; Umaña-Taylor and Fine, 2004). Ethnic identity is defined as a fundamental aspect of oneself, connected to the sens of belonging and commitment toward an ethnic group and toward feelings, thoughts, behaviours associated with one's being part of that particular ethnic group (Phinney, 1996b; Rotheram and Phinney, 1987). This concept has received much attention in the social sciences, both at the empirical and theoretical level, because of its far-reaching implications in intergroup relations (Hofman, 1988; Verkuyten, 2005), linguistic dimension (Jaspal and Coyle, 2009, 2010), and psychological well-being (Phinney *et al.*, 2001; Taylor and Brown, 1988).

According to Valtolina and Marrazzi (2006), the *discovery* of one's ethnic identity is a typical experience for all those who have lived for a significant period of time in an environment culturally different from the ancestral. Ethnic identity is thus conceived as a resource to which the individuals refer to when challenged or when they feel the discomfort of having to deal with identities and values different from those assimilated in the early stages of their lives. In other words, the individuals discover their own *identity* when they are part of a minority.

Like any other dimension of the self, ethnic identity is understood as a multidimensional social product (Phinney, 1996a), dynamic (Breakwell, 1986) and influenced by socio-cultural and socio-historical factors. The concept of ethnic identity includes a (subjective) commitment to an ethnic group and its culture along with socialization processes through which the individuals integrate into primary ethnic groups and formally organized ethnic networks (Isajiw, 1974; 1997). The rationale behind this approach is that analyzing the self in isolation from the social processes in which it is rooted has little importance in the study of identity. These analytical differences are particularly important in the study of ethnic identity of the second-generation immigrant adolescents.

A number of studies show that, even if the members of the second generation have been socialized into primary networks and institutions of the host society and feel more in tune with this cultural universe rather than their parents' cultural background, a strong identification with their country of origin remains (Alba, 1990; Breton *et al.*, 1990; Waters, 1990; Gans, 1994; Nagel, 1994; Eid, 2007). This has led authors to speak of *symbolic ethnicity*, which means the concept of permanent ethnic self that develops outside of the cultural and social environments that would have supposedly supported and reinforced it.

Thus ethnic identity becomes thus more symbolic, as its objective bases are replaced by subjective components. The symbolic identity theory also implies that, once estranged from their ethnic community of origin, the individuals are mostly left on their own to recreate and maintain their ethnic identity, which is accomplished primarily through imagination. This phenomenon is reminiscent of the concept of *invented tradition* elaborated by social historian Eric Hosbawn (1983) in which nations and social groups create invented traditions when they need to adapt their rituals and collective identities to the rapid changes occurring to the society in which they live. Similarly, given that the children of immigrants try to maintain an ethnic identity uprooted from their socio-cultural environment of origin, they are sometimes forced to reinvent traditions and customs to give meaning to this new ethnicity. In this process, ethnicity becomes symbolic as the elements of the culture of origin that are displayed in the context of immigration often consist of rituals, practices and stereotypical attitudes, far away from those actually enacted in their countries of origin (Waters, 1990).

Eid (2007) suggests that, although the second-generation youths can widely practice their ethnic identity – for example, by speaking the language of origin, participating in traditional festivals, or through music, movies and stories – the repertoire they can draw from decreases as they become culturally and structurally integrated into the host society.

Nagel (1994) and Okamura (1981) developed a *situational* approach to ethnic identity. These authors acknowledge the unstable, changeable and flexible nature of ethnic identity that can be modified according to the context in which the actors interact. Nagel (1994) for example claims that as the individual or groups move in their daily lives, so ethnicity may

change depending on the situations and interlocutors. This idea of a situational identity applies well to the study of young migrants identity. Several studies demonstrate that these youths learn very quickly how and when to change appropriately their cultural codes according to the different contexts in which they are (Wilpert, 1989; Vertovec, 1998). For instance in the family they may be more likely to speak their ancestral language or watch television programs of the country of origin, while with friends they may share interests and passions typical of the destination context. In this regard we must consider that although the second-generationers can broadly negotiate their identity choices, by deciding when to minimize or make salient their ethnic differences, their ethnic self is to be considered as an aspect of the relationship between two or more groups. In this sense the way in which members of an ethnic group are considered within the host society does matter.

According to Phukon (2002), the term *ethnic* can be understood as an organizing principle used by a group of people to differentiate themselves from other groups in terms of race, kinship, language, habits, way of life, culture, religion, and so on. Claiming one's ethnic identity enables the aspirant member of the group to gain a sense of closeness and acceptance by other persons (Baumeister and Leary, 1995), it may also have a protective function with respect to perceived rejection by other social groups, such as members of the dominant majority (Jacobson, 1997; Vadher and Barrett, 2009; Roberts *et al.*, 1999). In this regard, Eid (2007) believes that the ethnic self has inner and outer boundaries. The internal boundaries are delineated along a shared history and memory that provide the ethnic group with the symbolic material they need for the formation of a collective historically located self ("We"). The external boundaries are formed through a virtual dialogue with the majority group. Specifically, they are formed in relation to the categories through which the majority group builds and organizes the cultural otherness of the ethnic group.

For example, in Western societies, the majority often refer to groups and individuals of Arab origin as "Arabs", without any consideration of national and sub-national differences. As a result, individuals and groups labeled as such are often forced to identify themselves simply as Arabs to be recognized by the host society. In this sense, this attitude to labelling forces the members of the minority group in an irreducible alterity, over-

simplifying the multiple and complex dimensions of their social self. A process as such is likely to foster discrimination and prejudice (Guillamin, 1972; Jenkins, 1997).

In reaction to what they see as a Western distortion of their ethnicity, the second-generation migrants may feel compelled to anchor to their ethnic and religious identities. Then, when the prejudice is combined with socio-economic exclusion, such a situation can develop into protest (cf. the riots in the suburbs of Paris in 2005). These young people, who see themselves denied access to high-quality education and decent employment, are also significantly over-represented among those who commit acts of violence randomly and are involved in petty crime (Begag, 1990; Roy, 1994; Gross *et al.*, 1997; Duprez, 1997; Viprey, 2002). In other words, young "Arab" and "Muslim" from deprived suburbs that live an objective situation of social exclusion, define themselves as such because they are labeled as such by French society, and because ethnic and religious identification makes them feel like they are a group in opposition to a society that excludes them. Ethnicity and religious diversity can thus become the catalyst for a situation of exclusion and a reaction to marginalisation. The self-identification with Islam can then take the traits of a reaction to a hostile environemnt (Cesari, 2005), but can also be seen as the place of formation of new identities and social practices, which contribute to perpetuate discrimination, shape a socially recognizable identity and recover a positive self-image (Hervieu-Léger, 2003).

Second-generationers: Identity Strategies and Transnational Socialisation

During adolescence, as pointed out by Mannheim (2000), the individual feels like a stranger who gets in touch for the first time with an unknown cultural repertoire and is torn between the desire to be similar and different. This ambivalence is amplified for migrant adolescents: in fact they participate in the lifestyles of their indigenous peers and often have aspirations and consumption patterns typical of the destination context. At the same time, the family socialise them into a culture that refers to their ancestral homeland. The peculiarity of the second generation of immigrants

therefore lies in the plurality of identity references available and their being adolescent at the same time. According to Valtolina and Marrazzi (2006) adolescent migrants are called to cope with a series of *developmental challenges*, the outcome of which would lead to a more or less adequate integration. According to Cesari Lusso (1997), the main challenge for a minor immigrant is the unity of the self in different situations that is to maintan integrity in the perception of one's identity. The adolescent immigrant is in fact to present different aspects of the self according to varying contexts and interlocutors. If this is a condition common to all human beings (Archer, 2003; De Singly, 2003), it is even more significant in the case of subjects with multiple cultural and social references.

According to Schimmenti (2001; 2002) rewriting and restructuring the ego at the level of social and ethnic identity is inherently problematic, and may lead to anxiety and frustration, as the effort of adaptation is confronted with values and roles diverse, which tends to counteract an image of the self built on the values and roles of the country of origin. The author argues that only confidence in one's origins can give the strength to assert one's identity and at the same time the courage to detach from it, promoting a synthesis between the ancestral and the host culture. So, the challenge for a teenager will not only be to preserve a sense of integrity, but also to be able to consider compatible the different possibilities of expression of the self, operating translations and comparisons between different potentially conflicting cultural codes (Bastianoni, 2001). The positive solution to this challenge, according to Valtolina and Marrazzi (2006), depends very much on both the conditions of the different contexts of interaction, such as the presence or absence of a positive relational climate, and subjective characteristics, such as age or gender.

While carrying out a qualitative study on how to define the self of young adult Muslims living in America, Sirin *et al.* (2008) have identified three typical identity solutions: 1) integrated identity (smooth and coherent, without conflicts), 2) parallel identity (where both cultural references are present but clearly separated) and 3) conflicting identity. The majority of subjects fell within the first two groups, while only a minority expressed a deep and unresolved conflict between "being Muslim" and "being American". The study has also shown gender differences: teenage females are more likely to have an integrated identity, while males a parallel

identity. The two cultural references – one linked to the source country and the other to the destination country – are apparently equally important in defining female identity: on the one hand the girls reject the stereotypical representation of oppressed women, on the other hand are attracted by the freedom and opportunities that Western societies offer to them.

In this regard, with respect to the gender representations of Arab migrants, a number of studies show that women are considered guardians of the family and responsible for the maintenance and reproduction of the Arab culture in the host country. Their participation in the public sphere is deprecated in favor of a greater commitment to domestic responsibilities (Ajrouch, 1999). Another study about Moroccan adolescents living in Italy (Lorenzoni, 2005) show how girls are confident and proud of their dual membership: they consider the different expressive possibilities available a great opportunity for enrichment, and apparently are more willing than their parents to "contaminate" their identity and experience plural cultural forms by interacting with the environment around them.

For most second-generation Egyptian immigrants, ethnic identity is closely linked to religious practices and beliefs. In a study about Turkish and Moroccan adolescent immigrants living in the Netherlands (Beveridge, 2008), the findings have indicated that more than 80% of Moroccan interviewees have expressed high levels of identification with Islam and Islam is not merely a religion, but corresponds to a whole way of life. At the same time, being Muslim does not necessarily imply a weak or no attachment to the nation in which they live. In fact, adolescents of Moroccan origin have expressed high levels of identification ("being Dutch") with the nation and in particular the city and the neighborhood in which they live. In this sense, these findings seemingly suggest that the Moroccan second-generationers are equally highly attached to the Dutch and their ancestral culture.

A number of qualitative studies were conducted in Italian secondary schools to assess how pre-teens and teens of foreing origin manage multiple cultural affiliations and reconcile, in everyday life, cultural diversity (Bosisio *et al.*, 2005; Secchiaroli and Mancini, 2002). Many are the strategies at play. The first strategy is mimetic, whereby immigrant children assimilate to the host culture and hide their ethnic origin. In these cases, they are likely to neglect everything that is concerned with their

ancestral background such as food, language, values and customs, which are considered indaquate to their new context. This process is highly risky as denial of their origins may turn into a loss of psychic stability. A second strategy is adopted by migrant children living on the edge: they do not belong to any of the two cultures and feel placed in between them passively, unable to choose between family obligations and the charm of emancipation. Often these children have parents who live in a state of great uncertainty about the future, unable to decide whether to live in the country of immigration or return permanently to their source country. In a third type of cases, the children of the immigrants seek for a strong ethnic identification, minimize contacts with the host society, and keep up strongly traditional family roles and behaviors. Finally, the fourth strategy is *dual ethnicity* and is the outcome of a continous process of selection and adjustment and does not entail definitive resolutions. This happens mostly when the adolescent's family is able to successfully integrate into their new social context and foster their children's development in a direction that does not deny aspects of their ancestral culture. As many scholars have pointed out, also the host society plays an importan role in facilitating this dual identification. Overall, the study of Bosisio *et al.* (2005) reveals the impossibility of identifying a unique prevailing pattern of identification. However, some aspects are crucial in this process and should be carefully considered, such as the age of the children at their arrival in the destination country, the cultural capital of the parents and the adolescents' perception that there is room for their freedom to experience and participate. In general, however, the diverse strategies adopted by the children of the immigrants and their capabilities to manage multiple cultural references seem to depend more on practices and actions rather than reflexivity and pondered evaluations.

In the process of identity formation, the second-generationers seek for symbols and meanings to help them making sense of their experience in the world. Often these symbolic references are sought in different cultures and social contexts, and this is typical of transnationalism.

In a study on young Filipinos, Wolf (2002) speaks of emotional transnationalism. This concept is useful to figure out another way in which the second-generationers build their identity: they manage between the various references and perspectives some of which are real and some just

imagined. Wolf's study shows a difference in the way different generation of migrants make sense of their exprerience: the parents are in general more active in keeping up the relations with the country of origin, while their children maintain these ties especially on an emotional and symbolic level.

Based on these considerations and taking up the suggestion of Andolfi (2011), the path toward the construction of the adolescent identity, children of immigrant parents, can be defined as a journey through losses and discoveries: it originates and prospers by the ability to recognize oneself as part of a group, build a social identity that shares aspects of the ancestral culture with the new. In this process, key figures can facilitate the construction of identity, such as parents, relatives and acquaintances from the source country and teachers, educators and peers in the host country. When these conditions are met, a multiple, hybrid yet integrated identity is more likely to be formed.

Method

The materials presented here form part of a wider project intending to understand the lives of the families coming from the Egyptian, Moroccan and Pakistani communities in Italy, with a specific focus on the exploration of the socialisation and identity processes, belonging and relationships of adolescents. The method is qualitative and based on: a) a collection of individual, biographical, face-to-face interviews with second-generation adolescents, key informants and first-generation adult migrants (mothers and fathers) of Egyptian, Moroccan and Pakistani origin, and b) a number of focus group sessions with adolescents and adults migrants. The results of the interviews are integrated with information collected through the *Family Life Space* (Gozzoli and Tamanza, 1998), a graphic instrument for exploring family relationships and their projection in time.

However, the present paper focuses only on the Egyptian component. The interviewees were with 4 immigrant Egyptian adult mothers, plus 5 male and 9 female adolescent, all Muslims, aged between 14 and 18, who had been resident in Lombardy (Northern Italy) for at least two years (this was judged as the proper amount of time for foreigners to master the language and get beyond the early critical stages of migration). According to a

relational perspective that relates the viewpoints, these interviews were compared with individual biographical interviews with 4 immigrant Egyptian adult mothers.

Findings: "If You Understand Yourself, Others Will Understand You"

The young people's descriptions of their family and social environments and their relationships to their significant others bring out the processes of socialisation and identity construction, as well as the relationship between social identity and personal identity during migration and throughout their life in the host country. Comparing these with the previous generation's narratives provides a sharper definition of the picture, since migration, and the subsequent settlement and integration, are strictly connected with the family in terms of decision-making and the transmission and mediation of culture and values.

The adolescents interviewed had been living in Italy for over ten years, which suggests a long-term family migration plan. Another significant fact is the presence of siblings: the interviewees' families are rich in horizontal relationships, which generally brings a sense of relational wellbeing. The interviewees talk about good relationships of support, solidarity and complicity. Among those left behind, the interviewees mention other uncles and aunts, cousins (of their own age) and especially grandparents, whose absence evokes feelings of pain and nostalgia.

> "I brought a pic... it's my Granma […] because to me my grandma is... I am her favourite… and she's my favourite" (male, adol5)
> "Being close to my family, I miss all this. For instance, I always hear my friends say «I go visit my grandma» and I wish I could [do the same] or visiting my cousins… This is very important to me, a value, and then feeling like I am from my own country, this is very important to me… feeling that the people around me are like me, same religion, same language" (female, adol9)

The link with these significant others is kept alive through the Internet and social networks, as well as the more traditional telephone (landline and mobile). Their more general connection with Egypt is through television

programmes in Arabic; they also try to keep abreast of political and social events affecting the country.

> "[I] Always [talk about Egypt] especially politics because these days… everything is happening… then [I talk] about relatives, about my holidays. [I keep in touch with my relatives in Egypt] through Facebook, Skype, all these things… we are always in touch and connected. […] On the TV at home everything is Egyptian […] but when I get back home everything becomes Italian!" (male, adol5)

This contact has prevented interviewees feeling uprooted. Besides, many of them expressed their being Egyptian by bringing to the interviews Egyptian flags or the lyrics of Arabic songs they particularly like and feel represented by. Other young people brought their smartphones, the virtual and instrumental appendages connecting them to relatives and friends back home. One particular boy said he had prepared a special project on Egypt for his lower-secondary school final test, thus showing he had given a constructive and mediatory form (by presenting his work to classmates and teachers) to his own desire to know and make contact with his country of origin.

These young interviewees have similar migratory paths: in all cases, the first family member to reach Italy was the father; then, as a result of family reunion, the mother and the elder siblings.

The father and his migratory experience stand at the centre of the male adolescent's narrative, often being compared with his personal migration story. Seen through the eyes of a young person, the father's migration account takes on a mythological aura, becoming a family narrative about commitment, hard work, success of the migration plan, opportunities for the younger generations.

> "My father left [Egypt] when he was 17 […] He went to Iraq, Iran, then he was in Libya… Everywhere! Then in 1996 he came here in Italy. […] It was difficult, he says that he did not know anyone when he first came […] and those days he had to sleep in the streets or at the railway station. Then he managed to get the phone number of a friend of his who was in Italy and went to his place. He stayed there for a while. Then he managed to find a job and he was okay. […] In the beginning, when he came, he did not have a job. Then he worked in a tarmac industry, they used to pave the roads… then started to work in a restaurant as a guard and until now he still works there" (male, adol5)

The story of this hero who crosses continents and braves the sea, suffering discrimination and hardship in the hope of improving his family's lot becomes an important part of a family history where migration is but another transition (like children's births, parents' deaths, etc.), involving more than one generation and responding to a more or less explicit mandate for those migrating. This ethically and affectively loaded mandate re-emerges in the following generations, including those individuals only indirectly affected by migration, such as the children born in the host country.

Two significant elements emerged from the adolescents' interviews affect identity building, socialisation and intergenerational transmission: the imaginary comparison between father and child, and the family mandate. The father is the reference figure the young people must reckon with. The hardships endured by him during his migration and the social ransom sought *for* his children and *through* them (as measured against their academic success) are something the adolescents need to confront as they construct their identity. Fathers are phantasmatically important figures representing norms and rules; through their example and life experience they transmit values (commitment, responsibility, self-denial) and models of behaviour.

By migrating, fathers work towards improving the life condition of their family members who remain in Egypt (typically grandparents, to whom they often send money, or their unmarried/divorced sisters) as well as those (wives and children) who then join them in Italy. To keep fulfilling the family mandate their children try to obtain good marks at school, pass exams and develop a sense of responsibility. Comparing themselves with the previous generation is crucial: they say that at their age their fathers missed school because they had to work to contribute to the family's income, or that they had to work and study at the same time. Academic success thus becomes the sounding board of social emancipation. The adolescents' narratives focus on the importance of good school results, though males tend to admit to their dislike of, or poor aptitude to, learning, and their difficulties with some school subjects. Girls, on the contrary, like studying, get high marks and find school easier than their male counterparts. This gender difference suggests a more introspective female

world, where reflexive activities carried out at home are preferred to physical and public ones.

Despite its ambivalence, the school issue (academic success, opportunities from which parents were excluded) is part of the values adolescents feel they have received from their parents. Beside education as an inter-generational investment, all the adolescents' narratives refer to some common values perceived as having been transmitted to them by their parents, i.e., respect, politeness, and the importance of religion. These values are strongly interconnected: to be respectful and polite means to be able to occupy one's place in the inter-generational chain by showing deference towards one's seniors, avoiding excess or display, complying with prohibitions, obeying one's parents and listening to their advice, whilst avoiding too friendly a relationship with them as this could lead to confusing roles and expectations.

If the religious dimension is inevitable for these adolescents, it is also a topic they are unable to discuss. They accept religious precepts (to wear the veil, to abstain from certain foods, etc.) as inseparable from their identity but refuse to talk about religion during interviews or to compare Islam with Christianity or the secularised attitudes of their Italian counterparts.

> "[What represents me is] the mosque. […] It represents our religion, and I like it because here in Italy there are no like this one. And then this is the most important and it is in Cairo. And then every Friday people go praying and when Ramadan comes we always go praying here… and we have celebrations. And that's it. [I also brought this image] It says Allah, our God, [in Egyptian]. [It represents] the name of our God. And then when you wear such a necklace, it protects you from the evils, all this nasty things, and you do not go to the loo with such things on you. And that's all. [These things say] That I'm a Muslim. That I believe in God. And that's all." (male, adol7)

For the girls, religion focuses on the veil issue and traditional gender expectations, making ethnicity and gender inseparable. Besides, religious identity often becomes a label implying discontinuity with the Other, and inviting contempt or racist behaviour.

The crucial node, however, remains the school. The fact that the school experience of the adolescents interviewed has led to comparisons with their fathers' migration stories and to the inter-generational transmission of values introduces the issue of the generation gap, which partly derives from migration and exposure to a profoundly different host culture. This is

important in light of the secondary socialisation process (through school, peer group and the media) already taking place among these young Egyptians and posing challenges unknown to the previous generation or to those who never left Egypt.

The school is also the main environment for learning the Italian language, which is the first (though not the only) integration indicator. All the young people interviewed, who have lived in Italy for a long time, speak fluent Italian; but those among them who left Egypt when were old enough to know they were landing in a country whose language was unknown to them associate their journey with this kind of anxiety. In their narratives, being unable to understand Italian emerges as the greatest fear they can remember about the idea of moving to Italy, and this can be explained as the impossibility to make new friendships and integrate in the new context unless the local language is spoken. Mastering the language is considered by the interviewees an integration factor as well as a disintegrating one (many of these young people still act as linguistic mediators for their parents); it also represents a powerful aggregator of identity traits and a psychic organiser of personal and social identity. At home, with their parents or in their presence the interviewees speak mostly or entirely in Arabic (in some cases, parents who do not have a good grasp of the Italian language insist on Arabic to be spoken at home); with siblings they speak either language, according to the situation. They may use Arabic while in Italy, when they want to be secretive, and vice-versa, speak Italian in Egypt as a code for including or excluding others more or less deliberately. To speak Italian in Egypt, or even to occasionally, or even unintentionally, use Italian words attracts comments from their peers, and the accusation of "having become like the Italians".

> "[When I go back to Egypt, they tell me that I became like Italians] in speaking Italian. I'm with them and they do not understand what I say, they'd like to understand… also to my brothers […] some words come more easily in Italian (male, adol1)

Their flexible, creative use of the language denotes the presence of fluid adaptation and identity strategies, as these adolescents skip from one sphere of belonging to the other in a competent and sometimes instrumental way.

Also the young immigrants' Italian-style clothes create discontinuity in their representation by their peer group in Egypt, which prompts one of the interviewees to comment that he feels a foreigner in both countries.

> "I am a foreigner here and am a foreigner in Egypt. [I feel this way] when other people tell me, especially when I am in Egypt, because well here I know I am a foreigner but … I think I no longer am a foreigner… I am here since a was small child! [...] I feel Egyptian [...] but then I have all the Italian customs, so if I go to Egypt I change habits, if I come here then I change habits again" (male, adol5)

Clothes also become an issue with the Italian peers. Girls equate this to the question of the veil and freedom in behaviour. To cope with the displacement caused by migration, and faced with a world where gender roles are so different (Italian girls are free and uninhibited, and excessively exposed to sexualised behaviours), Egyptian girls wear the veil as a form of protection and a way to *qualify* themselves as valuable: to hide the body from public view reflects the ideal of a woman abiding by moral values. The veil also links identity with religiosity and the practice of religion. It is a sign of belonging to the Muslim community, as well as marking discontinuity with Italian society, which creates a continual tension between acceptance and discrimination. The veil is a talking point for Italian peers and adults alike, often arousing conflict rather than curiosity or openness towards difference: it is the focus of (Italian) preconceptions and (Egyptian) identitarian intransigence.

> "At the beginning of high school I'll wear the veil [...] because I had tried to wear it for a few days this year and there were some that just did not talked to me anymore ... But thank goodness they're not my friends, they are just classmates and ... they stopped talking to me. And when I took it off they said "finally you're back," that is, I wander how do they reason? [...] My dad never talked to me about the veil, my mum yes because I had to wear it by 10 years. [...] My mom [...] told me in the sixth grade ... so ... in sixth grade I wore it ... I put it on all year round, then the following year I wore it and this year I took it off, then I will wear it again in ninth grade and I think I will not remove it. [...] I will not be bother if someone stops talking to me because I wear the veil" (female, adol1)
> "Because one has to wear the veil when she is grown up, a woman, I was still small, but I wore it because I liked it, it was something that represented me, but not everyone accepted this thing ... There racist people around, [...] I have come to crying in the street for all the things I had to bear, because for example, someone threatened me in the street, one teased me for my religion, not only for the veil, so things like that make me feel bad" (female, adol8)

In fact, the interviews convey a picture where Italians interpret the use of the veil very differently from the view that Egyptian girls and women have of it.

The relationship of Egyptian adolescents with their peers in Italy is reported as being generally good, especially at school, whether these peers can be Italian, Egyptian or of any other origin; however, there are repeated discriminatory incidents and a generalised perception of racist attitudes. The boys draw a rich and articulated picture of their peer relationships, as they have more opportunities to socialise outside the school; the girls, instead, appear to be more isolated, due to greater parental control as well as the fact that they dedicate more time to their homework. Their attitude to their Italian counterparts is ambivalent, given the profound differences as to dress, staying out late, and relationships with the opposite sex. The Egyptian girls' relational life is pivoted on the home, their siblings (especially the younger ones, whom they look after), and their mother. In fact, a similar picture emerges from the interviews with adult Egyptian females: a relational world focused on the home, poor in outside contacts (this also depends on absence from the work sphere) and critical as to the freedom experienced by Italian women. The female identity, with its representations and expectations, appears as a series of structured, well-defined codes applying to both adult and adolescent females. A woman's identity is based on the roles of wife and mother and is defined by belonging (daughter, mother, wife of…).

Inter-generational relationships seem to be relatively conflict-free, as values, traditions and identities remain solid; only occasionally are gender roles perceived as conflicting. Some issues emerging from the interviews are the loneliness experienced by adult women, problems in reuniting the family, a general sense of being insufficiently integrated on part of first-generation mothers. Social discrimination and being the targets of racist prejudice are feelings shared by both immigrant generations, although parents and children (male and female, see below) develop different coping strategies. The loneliness and lack of integration are enhanced by the surprising weakness of ethnic networks.

> "I mean, for example, yesterday, I repeated this for maybe five times, "I want to go away, I want to leave" because well ... for example this year I'm not doing anything so

> I wanted to stay there [in Egypt] for a little while, but as I explained to you, it is difficult to remain there without parents, etc., it is not easy at all ... but in the end I lost my childhood friends, I lost everything over there, my grandparents… while I was here [tears come to her eyes]" (female, adol8)

Parents, besides, are concerned about their children's occupational future and the risks deriving from exposure to a materialistic and individualistic society. The adolescents, on the other hand, express their difficulties in meeting family expectations and relating to the opposite sex – this is especially evident among the girls.

The strategies of coping with racist prejudice differ according to gender: males tend to physically confront provocation, while girls are less reactive, tending to internalise aggression. Adult females too often display greater passivity in these situations. There is also a family response to racism and discrimination, where adults, usually fathers, invite to be calm and non-reactive by shifting the issue to a question of politeness and respect, which denotes maturity and a reflection on inter-ethnic relationships.

Because of its dense inter-gender, inter-generational relationship network, the school is a crucial life environment for second-generation children: it enables them to learn and fulfil the family mandate but also to establish significant relationships with the Other, whether adult or contemporary. The same applies to the mothers. In this sense, the school is not just a secondary socialisation agency but also a terrain for encountering/clashing with Italian culture and society, a box whose contents are transmitted and elaborated, appropriated or rejected through constantly dialoguing with the Other.

Conclusion. "Here I Know I am a Foreigner but … I Think I No Longer Am a Foreigner"

As it has already emerged in the literature, identity is formed through relationships and belonging (or the lack of it); in fact, identity could be defined as a belonging relationship. Thus, to acknowledge and label those who are similar and part of one's in-group, or strange and outside the group, are dynamics which act on the young people interviewed in this study and influence their identity building. Methodologically speaking,

exogenous identity attribution, or out-group labelling (that is, the way others' assessment of a person affects that person's identity building) should be investigated by collecting opinions and interpretations (meaning making) from outside the category of Egyptian adolescents in Italy, and relating these data to the ones already acquired, for a deeper insight into the relationality and complexity of the identitarian process.

Analysing contents has allowed researchers to focus on some relational aspects affecting the family and community socialisation processes among Egyptian adolescents living in Northern Italy. These identity-building aspects may appear as challenges and criticalities but also as resources and opportunities. The socialisation process of adolescents of Egyptian origin takes place within a network of concentric relationships (primary to secondary, to friendly, etc.) that are transnational (family in Italy and Egypt, friends in Italy and Egypt) and contribute to the transmission of cultural and ethical contents as well as the building of personal and social identity. Primary socialisation takes place within a family living in a context that is different from their original one whilst keeping a solid and particular sense of identity without becoming rigid or isolated. Secondary relationships (peer group, teachers, etc.) add to the young immigrants' significant experiences and urge them to confront the world outside, while equipping them for this job. The adolescents' main problem lies in the possible negative connotations of relational experiences characterised by discrimination and racism (on part of both peers and adults). Another problem, mostly affecting girls, lies in their limited opportunities to establish positive relationships outside the family. Girls, in fact, are also the ones who feel a more acute sense of discontinuity with their cultural and life context: the freedom experienced by their Italian counterparts, their more relaxed attitude to gender relationships, dress code, staying out late, etc., mark a profound difference between the two cultures.

The interviewees, boys and girls, have solid identities, neither withdrawn nor reactive: they are aware of their Egyptian origin and heritage but they also feel Italian. Girls are bound to traditional gender roles, while boys can more easily cross boundaries and play with identities and belonging. They seem to consider the identity issue unproblematic, though still in the course of developing. The picture emerging from an analysis of the interviews is in harmony with Archer's theory of ultimate concerns (2003), whereby

"who we are is what we care about": accordingly, in fact, the adolescents interviewed take care of their own origin (by keeping in contact with those left behind through modern technology, the study of their cultural heritage and the practice of religion) but they also care about their life in Italy (through commitment to school and learning, friendships, trusting Italian adults). This attitude characterises their identities as dialogical and relational.

What emerges from this (preliminary) research is a discourse on ethnic identity as articulated as: a) self-identification (feeling more Egyptian/Italian), and b) socio-cultural practices (typical or ritualised interactions, eating certain foods, religious practices, etc.). Religion, for example, has great importance in the definition of ethnic identity (versus the progressive secularisation of Western societies), although adolescents struggle with the complexity of the religious question and feel unable to draw a comparison with the Italians' religious practices. They have temporarily delegated the question to the adults and postponed complexity to an indeterminate future (when they are older than 18). To them, the religious question is resolved by adhering to certain practices acquired through socialisation within the family and community; these practices, particularly those concerning food and the veil, contribute to structuring their identities. In general, they see religion as a stronghold to save them from the corruption and loss of values typical of Western societies, seen as threatening their community's ethno-cultural heritage.

It would be interesting to study in depth the creative transformations operated by second-generation Egyptians in the process of building a religious identity. In this case, two questions need to be considered: 1) the way socially-inherited ethno-religious identities can be transposed to a migratory context, and 2) the way they can be adapted to the second generation in order to enter the largely secularised cultural and identity models prevailing in Western societies (Eid, 2007).

The veil issue, which reoccurs in the interviews of boys and girls alike, suggests a link between gender and ethnic-religious identity: what is the place of practices and gender beliefs in the discourse on ethnic-religious identity? According to Eid (2007), gender has become the battleground for the definition of identities and practices, and gender values constitute a powerful (hermetic) boundary between immigrants and natives. On the

female body (covered or uncovered, veiled or unveiled, shown or hidden) converge a number of values and ideologies. The veil issue, in fact, finds little understanding or acceptance among Italians, as their ideas of the body, individual freedom and identity are very different from those of the subjects interviewed. The interviews also show that socialisation and the construction of identity can be based on discrimination or racism.

Beside extending the research to other ethnic groups (Pakistani and Moroccans) already contemplated in the project, it would be interesting to interview the same young people some years later or include in the sample some second-generation young adults, to observe the way they have experienced the migratory transition and the processes of acculturation and socialisation.

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