

To stay or to return. The main determinants of return migration intentions among first-generation Moroccans living in Italy and Spain

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Aim and rationale of the study

Return migration is not a new strand of studies. In the past, among others, Cerase (1974) and Gmelch (1980) conceptualized this phenomenon, offering helpful categorizations of return migrations and returnees. Such studies remain relevant due to the recent resurgence of interest of researchers and policy makers alike. In particular, some scholars, such as Olesen (2002) and Ruhs (2006) believe that return migration should be considered a “brain gain” for the migrants’ sending countries, which along with monetary remittances, contribute to the development of such countries. On the other side, receiving countries are recently re-considering migrants as temporary labor force, developing immigration schemes more aligned to temporary stay rather than long term settlement (Cassarino, 2004; Barber, Black and Tenaglia, 2005; Castles, 2006). Furthermore, recent empirical studies tested the phenomenon of return migrations, which have been largely accelerated by the economic crisis in Europe (Domingo and Sabater, 2013).

Despite of the growing scientific and political interest in return migration, return is still considered as a marginal area of studies. The lack of adequate data and the strong emphasis put on the migratory process itself have contributed to such marginalization. Our study attempts to fill this gap by exploring the main determinants of return migration intentions among first-generation Moroccans living in Italy and Spain, using two different datasets, separately. In particular, we are going to examine empirically the effect of the duration of residence, the integration process and the transnational participation on the Moroccans’ return migration intentions. Therefore, this study focuses on return migration intentions, not on actual migration behaviours. In this respect, we believe that the knowledge of migrants’ plans and desires concerning return can facilitate researchers to better understand the migration experience, specifically its triggers and effects. At the same time, migration return intentions can inspire receiving countries in implementing new migration schemes and appropriate integration policies, and facilitate sending countries in introducing institutional reforms in order to make return a source of economic growth and social development (de Haas, 2012). As highlighted by Şenyürekli and Menjivar (2012: 3) in their recent work on Turks’ return intentions, in a period of socio-economic instability in receiving countries special attention should be given to immigrant’s

intentions to return to their home countries. This consideration may be extended to origin countries. Migrants' return intentions should be taken into account by national governments and politicians in order to implement long-term strategies aimed at preparing migrants' reintegration at home and fostering their monetary and non-monetary investments.

Regarding our population of interest, Moroccans form the first non-European foreign group in both Italy (501,610 individuals, according to Istat) and Spain (788,563 individuals, according to INE). As North-African immigrants, Moroccans' migration experience in Italy and Spain dates back further than most immigrant groups. The first arrivals of Moroccans in Italy and Spain started in the mid-1970s, (Fadlouallah, 2007; Khaldi, 2007), which coincides with the transition of Italy and Spain from turning into immigration countries from emigration countries, occurred in the mid-1970s and in the mid-1980s, respectively. The oil crisis in 1973 led to a change in the measures of border control in historically immigration countries. The above combined with the segmentation of the Italian and Spanish labor markets on the top of ill-defined immigration laws served as push factors for Moroccans into Italy and Spain. However, Moroccan migration flows to Italy remained modest until the 1990s (Devitt, 2011) and between 2003 and 2004 they were surpassed by the Albanians and the Romanians. For Spain, the bulk of Moroccan migration dates back to the beginning of the 2000s, which corresponds to the period of highest employment rate for Spain (Domingo et al., 2010). Nevertheless, in 2008 the number of Moroccans in Spain was exceeded by the Romanians (Colectivo Ioé, 2012). This was due primarily to the inclusion of Romania in the European Union in 2007 and, secondarily, to the eruption of the international economic crisis, which in particular affected Spain severely. Nonetheless, the general trend of Moroccan stocks in both Italy and Spain is linearly increasing among the last two decades. As a result of their ancient migration history in Italy and Spain, Moroccans are one of the first immigrant groups to experience the aging of some of its first-generation members and the growing of the second-generations, which are typical features of a well-stabilized and integrated population of immigrants in the host country (Cesareo and Blangiardo, 2009), albeit with a male predominance (around 60% of the total population are men in both Italy and Spain. Nevertheless, despite of their established presence, Moroccans in Italy and Spain remain to be marginalized due to negative perceptions of their geographic and ethnic origin, especially after 9/11 events. The favorable treatment of the Eastern European and Latin American immigrants (Izquierdo et al., 2002) further highlighted the disadvantageous position of the Moroccans in comparison.

The above considerations outlined the rationale behind our study, which is to provide insight on Moroccans' intentions to return to their homeland. This phenomenon is especially overlooked in

Italy and Spain where little attention is given to the topic. Furthermore, especially in Italy monographic studies concerning immigrants from Morocco have been overlooked in favor of comparative cross-ethnic socio-economic integration studies (Zincone, 2000; Golini et al., 2004; Cesareo and Blangiardo, 2009; CNEL, 2012). Despite of the merit of these studies, they do not allow a contemporary analysis of socio-cultural and demographic details of the Moroccan community, which are much needed in order to grasp the similarities and differences between natives and foreigners. In this study, as already explained, we intend to shed light on the Moroccans' stay or return dilemma, including the assessment of the relationship between the duration of residence, the integration process, the transnational participation and the Moroccans' migration return intentions. In the process, we also seek to uncover the socio-demographic characteristics of Moroccan immigrants in Italy and Spain.

Data

Our study draws on two surveys. For Italy, data stem from the *Reddito e condizioni di vita delle famiglie con stranieri* survey (Income and living conditions of families with migrants), carried out by Istat in 2009 and financed by the Italian Minister of Labour and Social Policy. It follows, for both contents and methodology, EU-SILC, the European Statistics on Income and Living Conditions, which started in 2004 with the European Union Regulation n. 1177/2003. This survey collected information on a total sample of 15,036 individuals aged 0-80, among 135 different countries of birth, with different migration histories, in terms of period of arrival in Italy, socio-economic integration, links with the origin country and future plans. For the purpose of our analysis, the dataset is reduced to N=1,009 (Moroccan immigrants aged 16-80).

For Spain, data come from the National Immigrant Survey, conducted by INE between November 2006 and February 2007, with the Population and Society Study Group of the Complutense University of Madrid. The survey contains a total sample of 15,465 individuals aged 16-98, among 144 different countries of birth. This survey allowed the collection of pre and postmigration data, allowing information on the migration experience itself, settlement, integration and transnational participation. The dataset is reduced to N=1,828 individuals (Moroccan immigrants aged 16-80). The criterion we used to identify our immigrant group is the country of birth (= Morocco). Our analysis is restricted to the first-generation Moroccans and, thus, according to R. G. Rumbaut's definition (2004: 1165), to those who have born in Morocco, although they have acquired the Italian or the Spanish citizenship. The limited sample size of the second-generation Moroccans in the Italian dataset does not allow us to extend our analysis to the second-generation. Moreover, both of the surveys were carried out before the onset of

the main consequences of the economic crisis in Italy and Spain. Therefore, they do not allow assessment of the effect of the economic downturn on the Moroccans' return intentions.

Measures

Dependent variable

Return intentions. In the Italian survey, respondents were asked the following question: Eventually, do you intend to leave Italy to return to live in your home country or to another foreign country? The options were: 1= YES, to return to live in your home country; 2= YES, to go/return to another country; 3= NO; 4= do not know. While a sizeable proportion of the respondents intended to return to Morocco (for more details, see below), only 1.48% of the respondents expressed the intention to go/to return to another country. Therefore, our analysis is limited to: the potential stayers, the potential returnees and those who are not sure about staying in the host country or returning to their home country.

In the Spanish survey, the question concerning migrants' return intentions was addressed in the following way: What are your plans for the next five years? The possible options were: 1= To return to your country of birth; 2= To remain in Spain; 3= To move to another country; 0= Do not know. Because of the limited time horizon ("next five years"), a very little proportion of the respondents expressed the intention to return to Morocco (for more details, see below) and only 0.88% of them intended to move to another country. Therefore, also for the Spanish data our analysis is restricted to: the potential stayers, the potential returnees and those who are not sure about staying in the host country or returning to their home country.

Key independent variables

Duration of residence. Duration of residence refers to the length of time (in years) one lives in Italy and Spain. It is measured by the difference between the year of the survey and the year of arrival.

Integration. Reddito e condizioni di vita delle famiglie con stranieri survey and the National Immigrant Survey contain a series of questions to capture respondents' integration into the Italian and Spanish societies. Our study differentiates between structural and socio-cultural integration. In particular, for the Italian dataset, we selected: for the structural integration, (1) education, i.e. the highest level of education an individual has completed, distinguishing between "primary school or lower", "lower secondary school", "upper secondary school" and "higher education" and (2) current work status at survey, distinguishing between "employed", "unemployed or seeking for the first job" and "other status" (included "retired"). For the socio-cultural integration, we selected: (3) the legal status, distinguishing between "Italian citizenship",

“resident card”, “residence permit” and “other document” (included “visa”) and (4) home ownership. For the Spanish dataset, we selected: for the structural integration, (1) education, distinguishing between “primary school or lower”, “secondary school” and “tertiary school or higher” and (2) current work status at survey, distinguishing between “employed” and “unemployed or seeking for a job”. For the socio-cultural integration, we selected: (3) the legal status, distinguishing between “Spanish citizenship”, “an authorization for permanent residence”, “an authorization for temporary residence” and “other document” (included “visa” and “community residence”) and (4) home ownership.

Transnationalism. Reddito e condizioni di vita delle famiglie con stranieri survey provide us with the following questions to detect Moroccans’ transnational participation: (1) the variables “partner still in the home country”, “children still in the home country”, “parents still in the home country”, “siblings still in the home country” and (2) remittances. The National Immigrant Survey provides a larger series of questions aimed at capturing Moroccans’ transnational participation. Nevertheless, for reasons of homogeneity with the Italian survey, we selected: (1) remittances and (2) home ownership in the country of origin.

Control variables

Finally, we included the following control variables in the analysis: (1) respondent’s age (measured in years); (2) gender, represented by the dummy variable male and female and (3) marital status, distinguishing between “single”, “married” and “other status” (included “separated”, “divorced” and “widowed”).

Method

We will start by presenting the descriptive statistics of the dependent and independent variables. This will allow us to elucidate the background characteristics of our immigrant group and, thus, to know more deeply the socio-demographic characteristics of Moroccans, as mentioned before. Next, multinomial logistic regression analysis is performed to simultaneously test the effects of duration of residence, integration in the receiving countries and transnational ties with the origin country on Moroccans’ return intentions. In particular, multinomial logistic regression enables us to answer to the following research questions: (1) in what extent the length of residence affect the first-generation Moroccans’ return intentions in Italy and Spain? (2) Does the degree of integration achieved in Italy and Spain by Moroccans weaken their intentions to return? (3) Do the transnational participation and the existence of social networks among first-generation Moroccan immigrants strengthen their return intentions?

Preliminary results

Descriptive statistics on the variables show that while 17% of Moroccans living in Italy intend to return, 50% intend to stay and 31% are not sure. The average age of Moroccans residing in Italy is 37.4 years old. Males represent 58.5% of the total sample, while females are 41.5%. While the most part of Moroccans are married (54%), 31% are single and 15% are separated, divorced or widowed. Their length of stay in Italy is around 10 years. Educational attainment is not very high: many of the respondents have completed primary education or lower (42%). As far as occupation is concerned, the first-generation Moroccans are mainly employed (57%). Few of them have Italian citizenship (3%), whereas 48% have the resident card (for long-term residents) and 40% have the resident permit. Lastly, 14% have a home ownership in Italy. When links with the home country are considered, 16% of respondents have a partner still in the home country, 15% have children still in the home country, 70% have parents still in the home country and 74% have siblings still in the home country. Furthermore, 43% send remittances to the home country.

While 2.2% of Moroccans living in Spain wish to return to the home country, 88% wish to remain and 9% are not sure. The average age of respondents is around 39 years old. Males represent 53% of the total sample, females 47%. While most of Moroccans residing in Spain are married (66%), 24% are single and 10% are separated, divorced or widowed. Their length of stay in Spain is around 16 years. Concerning what we have defined as structural integration, Moroccans are mainly employed (50%) and their educational attainment is distributed as follows: 41% of respondents have primary or lower education, 48% secondary education and 11% tertiary or higher education. As far as social integration is concerned, around 34% have Spanish citizenship, while 28% have an authorization for permanent residence, 12% have an authorization for temporary residence and 26% have other documents. Furthermore, 24% of respondents have a home ownership in Spain. Regarding the links with the home country, around 37% of Moroccans living in Spain send remittances to the home country and 15% have still a house there.

These results lead us to partially conclude that for the Moroccans living in Italy a clear pattern of return migration intentions can be sketched. The Moroccans living in Spain seem rather involved in a transnational settlement, albeit with echoes of the home country and tendencies to return.

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