

IMMIGRANT ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Alessandro Arrighetti*, Andrea Lasagni*

*Università di Parma, Italy, alessandro.arrighetti@unipr.it, andrea.lasagni@unipr.it

In recent years, the ethnic entrepreneurship has assumed a role of major importance in Italy. Firms managed by immigrants are a significant part of Italian business world, but they are also an opportunity for exchange between populations of different origin, an opportunity for social mobility, the search for autonomy (individual and group) and, in some circumstances, a factor strengthening social cohesion. Not a few, finally, are the experiences that provide for their involvement in transnational initiatives and projects in co-development.

This panel session has explored the issue and provided an update on the state of the art research with several contributions by scholars working in the Italian universities, according to different disciplinary approaches.

The paper presented by Arrighetti, Bolzani and Lasagni has provided new empirical evidence to understand the evolutionary paths of ethnic businesses in Italy. Besides a sharp decline in the birth rate of enterprises founded by Italians, the number of new businesses run by immigrants in Italy is growing steadily. Today ethnic businesses are able to offer new types of services and to extend the variety of products available, including on markets to which access the natives. This study confirms that the enhancement of the physical resources, knowledge and financial requirements of the communities of origin retains an important role in the entrepreneurial motivations of immigrants. At the same time, it has also showed the presence of significant relationships with mainstream markets. Looking at a considerable portion of the firms analysed, it is possible to find support for the traditional models that associate strongly to the enterprise social network of the ethnic communities of origin entrepreneur who founded it. However, for a relatively large segment of firms, they observe phenomena such as strengthening formal inter-ethnic relations and founding teams and firms where members of the majority groups operate as partners or employees. In short, there is evidence of multicultural hybrid organizational models and increasing 'diversity' in organizations in the evolution of ethnic firms in Italy.

Fullin's paper focused on self-employment among immigrants, a theme that has been the subject of several studies in Italy. However, there are few contributions that compare self-employment of immigrants with self-employment of natives. On the other hand, the studies on self-employment often tend to overlook at all or only marginally consider the differences between natives and immigrants. This paper used Eurostat data to assess the characteristics of self-employed immigrants and natives in five European countries. In addition, it seeks to shed new light on whether and to what extent self-employment might be a refuge choice both for the natives and immigrants having low education skills.

De Luca's paper is aimed at assessing the development of the entrepreneurial career and the transnational ways of living of 28 immigrant women. The role of the family and the different use of the ethnic resources bring to different career paths. These differences are also evident in the transnational activity, which is mainly of an economic nature and linked to the company. The company also benefits from the different cultural background of the owner. Some companies, in fact, arise from the desire to take advantage of their different cultural background, turning their passions and skills in economic activity, while other follow a more traditional path, which not necessarily include the use of ethnic resources. In addition, attention to the country of origin is also visible in the social engagement, which also moves parallel on two fronts: that of the host society and the one of society of origin. While, on the one hand, there is a desire to help other immigrants to deal with the daily problems that arise in the Italian context, on the other hand some women develop afterwards the wish to do something for those who remained in the country of origin. In this case, visibility, contacts and skills acquired in the course of the business are of particular importance and facilitate the success of transnational projects.

The contribution by Coviello takes into account a particular case of immigrant entrepreneurship institutional body: a consortium of craftsman, conceived and founded in 2006 by a Romanian entrepreneur with a fellow and an Italian company. The consortium includes several companies with Romanian owner, most individual firms but there are cases of some relevance also with Italian employees. The consortium is not only an innovative solution in terms of coordination and efficiency but also acts as a channel of social mobility by promoting the transition to self-employment of immigrant workers previously placed in a position of dependency. The case of CerTo allows to highlight mechanisms of integration and social advancement which, although based on membership in networks of compatriots and pre-existing fiduciary bonds, lead to better conditions for socio-economic inclusion in the context of inclusion.

PERCORSI EVOLUTIVI E VARIETÀ DELLE IMPRESE ETNICHE IN ITALIAAlessandro Arrighetti*, Daniela Bolzani^o, Andrea Lasagni**Università di Parma, Italy, alessandro.arrighetti@unipr.it, andrea.lasagni@unipr.it^oUniversità di Bologna, Italy, daniela.bolzani2@unibo.it**ABSTRACT**

A fronte di un netto calo del tasso di natalità delle imprese fondate da italiani, il numero di nuove imprese gestite da immigrati in Italia è in costante crescita. Oggi le imprese etniche sono in grado di fornire nuove tipologie di servizi e di estendere la varietà dei prodotti disponibili, anche sui mercati a cui accedono gli autoctoni. Il presente lavoro propone nuove evidenze empiriche per comprendere i percorsi evolutivi delle imprese etniche in Italia. L'indagine conferma che la valorizzazione delle risorse fisiche, conoscitive e finanziarie specifiche della comunità di origine conserva un ruolo rilevante per le motivazioni imprenditoriali degli immigrati. Allo stesso tempo, viene segnalata anche la presenza di rapporti significativi e, talvolta, prevalenti con i mercati *mainstream*. Si osserva inoltre che una porzione delle imprese analizzate appare coerente con i modelli tradizionali che legano fortemente l'impresa etnica al *network* sociale della comunità di origine dell'imprenditore che l'ha fondata. Un segmento relativamente ampio di imprese, invece, sembra allontanarsi significativamente da questa rappresentazione fino a comprendere soluzioni che prevedono l'inclusione di individui (soci o addetti) nativi o provenienti da comunità diverse da quelle di origine dell'imprenditore. L'ipotesi di una crescente varietà delle forme organizzative dell'impresa gestita da immigrati riceve ampia conferma empirica.

Parole chiave: Immigrazione; Imprenditoria immigrata; Impresa etnica; Italia**INTRODUZIONE**

A fronte di un netto calo del tasso di natalità delle imprese fondate da italiani, il numero di nuove imprese gestite da immigrati in Italia è in costante crescita. Oggi le imprese cosiddette "etiche" sono in grado di fornire nuove tipologie di servizi e di estendere la varietà dei prodotti disponibili, anche sui mercati a cui accedono gli autoctoni.

A questo si aggiunge che negli anni più recenti l'imprenditoria immigrata ha assunto in Italia un ruolo sempre più rilevante, come fattore di consolidamento dei processi di integrazione socio-economica degli stranieri nel nostro paese. I risultati ottenuti in questo lavoro offrono un quadro parzialmente inedito. Infatti, l'impresa etnica può essere considerata un fattore importante per rafforzare la coesione sociale, perché diviene un vero e proprio luogo di scambio e di interazione sociale e non solo economica.

LA LETTERATURA DI RIFERIMENTO

Lo sguardo sull'imprenditoria immigrata oggi è cambiato rispetto al passato. Le imprese etniche sono, infatti, più diversificate ed eterogenee di quanto la loro rappresentazione stereotipata mostri. Tradizionalmente, infatti, venivano messe in evidenza le differenze tra imprenditori "nativi" e imprenditori immigrati (diverse motivazioni, differenti risorse disponibili, distanza nelle esperienze e nella cultura, ecc.). Le imprese etniche sono state descritte come intrinsecamente "fragili", per la discriminazione della società ospitante o perché esse operano in mercati protetti basati su stretti rapporti co-etnici (Ambrosini e Erminio, 2011).

Attualmente, dal dibattito emerge una maggiore complessità del fenomeno. I nuovi modelli tendono a sottolineare l'eterogeneità (cioè la notevole varietà) delle soluzioni organizzative e produttive adottate dalle imprese etniche. Ne risulta un profilo dell'impresa gestita da immigrati rinnovato: all'immagine semplificata dell'impresa gestita da immigrati che ottiene un supporto essenziale dalle risorse fisiche, conoscitive e finanziarie specifiche della propria comunità di origine, si va sostituendo una visione in cui sono presenti numerosi modelli organizzativi e molteplici strategie di *business*.

La letteratura tradizionale sulle tipologie di imprenditori e di imprese fondate/gestite da immigrati distingue tre diversi tipi: *middleman minorities* (minoranze di intermediazione), *enclave entrepreneurs* (imprenditori di *enclave*) (Zhou, 2004) e *imprenditori transnazionali* (Portes *et al.*, 2002).

Middleman minorities

Storicamente le *middleman minorities* sono costituite da imprenditori immigrati che svolgono la loro attività imprenditoriale in forma di commercio e di scambio tra le elite di una specifica società e il resto della popolazione (Zhou, 2004), per lo più concentrandosi in alcune occupazioni a basso-medio valore aggiunto. Il loro ingresso in attività di intermediazione è stato tradizionalmente spiegato da due argomenti: a) la reazione culturale ostile della società circostante ad uno specifico gruppo etnico e b) la mancanza di uno status sociale riconosciuto nel Paese in cui si sono stabiliti. Bonacich (1973) ha sottolineato che questa scelta è legata a una c.d. “mentalità di soggiorno” che caratterizza certi gruppi di immigrati, i quali sognano un ritorno a casa e pianificano la loro esperienza migratoria solo come un modo per accumulare denaro rapidamente, per poterlo investire nel Paese di origine e rendere possibile il ritorno. Questo tipo di mentalità fa sì che le attività dei *middleman* sia caratterizzata da lunghi orari di lavoro, frugalità, concentrazione in attività facilmente accessibili e liquidabili e elevati livelli di solidarietà interna. Tali imprenditori hanno pochi legami con le strutture e le relazioni sociali della comunità locale nella quale svolgono le loro attività imprenditoriali. Le imprese sono tendenzialmente localizzate nei quartieri urbani poveri e popolati da minoranze etniche, spesso andando ad occupare attività di commercio al minuto o del terziario abbandonate dagli imprenditori locali. Tuttavia studi più recenti hanno anche messo in luce casi di imprese *middleman* attive non solo nel commercio e nel settore terziario, ma anche in ambito manifatturiero o primario, localizzate nelle periferie o nei quartieri urbani più benestanti e popolati dalla classe media locale.

Enclave entrepreneurs

Gli imprenditori di *enclave* sono caratterizzati da stretti legami di tipo etnico e di co-nazionalità, che pervadono le strutture sociali e influenzano la localizzazione di queste imprese (vedi Portes, 1981; Portes e Shafer, 2006). Le imprese di *enclave* tendono a concentrarsi in una stessa localizzazione urbana, caratterizzata dalla presenza di una forte identificazione etnica e un minimo livello di organizzazione istituzionale. Inoltre tali imprese svolgono attività in settori diversificati (es. servizi professionali; produzione; commercio al dettaglio), non solo occupando nicchie di mercato lasciate vuote dagli imprenditori locali. Infine, le relazioni tra proprietari e lavoratori e tra imprenditori e clienti (anche se in misura minore) sono caratterizzate da rapporti di co-etnicità.

Tali caratteristiche di localizzazione e concentrazione in zone popolate da connazionali sono spiegate dalle modalità in cui si sviluppano queste attività. Soprattutto nelle prime fasi di sviluppo, queste imprese hanno bisogno di essere prossime alla clientela co-etnica cui si rivolgono e alle fonti di risorse di cui abbisognano, tra cui credito, informazioni, lavoro e altre forme di sostegno (Portes e Manning, 1986). Light (1972) avanza l'ipotesi di un “mercato protetto” in cui le condizioni di nicchia all'interno di una comunità etnica promuovono il successo dell'impresa etnica. Dal momento che le comunità etniche sviluppano spesso esigenze particolari in termini di prodotti/servizi (es. orientamento all'acquisto di prodotti etnici; preferenza per negozi gestiti da qualcuno della stessa provenienza culturale), gli imprenditori loro connazionali hanno un notevole vantaggio competitivo rispetto agli imprenditori locali nel rispondere a queste esigenze (Aldrich *et al.*, 1985; Masurel *et al.*, 2002). Studi più recenti hanno, però, evidenziato che l'evoluzione di molte aree urbane in quartieri multietnici sta favorendo lo sviluppo di imprese di *enclave* che contemporaneamente svolgono il ruolo di *middleman* con altre nazionalità e gli abitanti nativi (Zhou, 2004).

Nella letteratura sono stati identificati diversi fattori che spingono gli immigrati ad aprire imprese del tipo di *enclave*. Tra questi, sono stati particolarmente rilevanti la dimensione del mercato (ampiezza della comunità straniera appartenente allo stesso gruppo culturale, in particolare con bassa competenza linguistica), l'esistenza di gruppi di lavoratori isolati (Evans, 1989), il capitale umano e la dotazione di capitale sociale (Brenner *et al.*, 2010). Gli aspetti culturali sono molto importanti per le economie di *enclave*. Le attività economiche sono regolate dalla solidarietà interna (*bounded solidarity*) e di fiducia regolamentata dalle norme sociali (*enforceable trust*), meccanismi di sostegno e controllo necessari per la vita economica della comunità e per il rispetto delle norme, dei valori e per il sanzionamento di comportamenti socialmente devianti (Portes e Zhou, 1992). I rapporti di tipo co-etnico tra imprenditori e lavoratori, così come con i clienti, in genere trascendono i legami di tipo economico e contrattuale e si basano su norme di reciprocità comunemente accettate (Zhou, 2004).

Imprenditori transnazionali

Gli imprenditori transnazionali gestiscono attività che coinvolgono contemporaneamente i loro Paesi di origine ed i Paesi ospitanti. Portes *et al.* (2002) per l'identificazione di questa categoria di imprese, impiegano variabili quali lo svolgimento di frequenti viaggi all'estero per motivi di lavoro e l'esistenza di una relazione positiva tra il successo dell'impresa e i contatti con il Paese d'origine o con Paesi terzi.

Gli studi sul fenomeno dell'imprenditoria transnazionale sono stati effettuati soprattutto negli Stati Uniti, in cui i comportamenti transnazionali caratterizzano la vita di molti immigrati, specialmente quelli originari dal Sud America. Lo studio di Portes *et al.* (2002) ha dimostrato che gli imprenditori transnazionali rappresentano una quota considerevole degli imprenditori immigrati, anche se non costituiscono la maggioranza degli immigrati. Gli autori hanno dimostrato che gli imprenditori transnazionali presentano caratteristiche diverse rispetto a quelli che svolgono

attività domestiche e rispetto agli immigrati occupati come lavoratori dipendenti, soprattutto in termini di dimensioni e portata delle reti sociali.

Anche all'interno della categoria degli imprenditori transnazionali sono state proposte alcune tipologie specifiche. Una delle più citate è quella proposta da Landolt *et al.* (1999) sui migranti Salvadoreni negli USA, empiricamente convalidata da Sequeira *et al.* (2009). Tale tipologia presenta cinque diverse classi di imprese a seconda del loro grado di coinvolgimento a livello transnazionale sul piano finanziario, del personale occupato, delle risorse destinate alla crescita e del mercato di riferimento:

- Imprese “circuito”: sostengono il flusso di risorse materiali e immateriali tra il Paese di origine e il Paese ospitante;
- Imprese “culturali”: distribuiscono prodotti provenienti dal Paese di origine nel Paese ospitante;
- Imprese “etiche”: vendono a una clientela multi-etnica i prodotti provenienti dal Paese di origine dell'imprenditore o di altri prodotti occidentali;
- Imprese “di ritorno”: fondate dagli immigrati che rientrano nel Paese di origine;
- Imprese “transnazionali di espansione”: imprese costituite nel Paese di origine ma che considerano gli immigrati all'estero come parte del loro mercato.

Un modello simile è stato proposto da Itzingsohn *et al.* (1999) nel suo studio delle comunità dominicane di immigrati nella zona di Washington Heights di New York City. Sequeira *et al.* (2009) hanno analizzato ulteriormente i fattori che influenzano la scelta del tipo di impresa transnazionale da sviluppare, in particolare esaminando il ruolo delle percezioni degli immigrati verso il Paese ospitante e l'intensità del legame con il Paese di origine. Generalmente si può affermare che l'esperienza degli immigrati e il loro atteggiamento verso il Paese ospitante è strettamente correlato alla positiva percezione di opportunità imprenditoriali. Migranti che subiscono discriminazioni sul mercato del lavoro del Paese ospitante potrebbero essere maggiormente spinti verso forme reattive di imprenditorialità transnazionale, in quanto questa esperienza negativa potrebbe influenzare sfavorevolmente le loro percezioni verso il Paese in cui sono ospitati. Ancora in Sequeira *et al.* (2009) viene dimostrato che i migranti con una percezione più positiva delle opportunità disponibili sono generalmente attivi in imprese del tipo “circuito” o “culturale” piuttosto che imprese “etiche”. Gli immigrati con più intense relazioni con il Paese di origine hanno invece più probabilità di essere coinvolti in attività transnazionali, quindi con una minore presenza nelle imprese “etiche”. Un ulteriore aspetto interessante che emerge da questo studio è che gli imprenditori di imprese “circuito” o “culturali” hanno una maggiore probabilità di attribuire il successo della loro impresa alle caratteristiche personali dell'imprenditore (es. capacità ed efficacia personale) o al sostegno sociale, mentre gli imprenditori “etnici” percepiscono come più importante la qualità dei prodotti/servizi offerti.

Nuovi indirizzi di riflessione

In tempi più recenti, oltre alle distinzioni tipologiche sopra viste, l'osservazione della realtà imprenditoriale etnica ha spinto alcuni autori a una maggiore sofisticazione dei modelli teorici ed empirici adottati, cominciando a spostare l'attenzione verso l'aspetto proattivo e manageriale delle scelte strategiche e gestionali sviluppate dagli imprenditori immigrati. In alcune ricerche si è, quindi, iniziato a distinguere analiticamente le tipologie di strategie attuate dalle imprese controllate da immigrati. La distinzione più comune si basa sul grado di etnicità del prodotto/servizio offerto e sul grado di co-etnicità tra l'imprenditore e i clienti finali / mercato. In sostanza, questi studi si ispirano alla letteratura tradizionale che differenzia tra imprenditori *middleman* vs. *enclave* (Zhou, 2004).

Seguendo questa distinzione dicotomica, alcuni autori hanno identificato diversi tipi di strategie – e di imprese fondate da immigrati – sulla base delle possibili combinazioni tra prodotto etnico vs. non etnico (lato offerta) e di clientela etnica vs. non-etnica (lato domanda). Rusinovic (2007) ha proposto una classificazione dei mercati disponibili all'imprenditoria degli immigrati sulla base della clientela e del prodotto, come mostrato nella Fig. 1.

Fig. 1 – Tipologia di imprese secondo la matrice clientela/prodotto di Rusinovic (2007).

		Clientela (domanda)	
		Co-etnica	Mainstream
Prodotto (offerta)	Etnico	Mercato etnico	Mercato <i>middleman</i>
	Non-Etnico	Mercato di nicchia	Mercato <i>mainstream</i>

Questi quattro mercati sono definiti come segue:

- Mercato etnico: popolato da imprenditori che vendono un prodotto etnico a una clientela principalmente delle stesse origini nazionali e culturali dell'imprenditore. Tali clienti, che definiamo “co-etnici” presentano una serie di esigenze e preferenze speciali, che sono soddisfatte al meglio da chi condivide questi bisogni e li conosce intimamente (Waldinger, 2000). Pertanto gli imprenditori immigrati che scelgono di collocarsi in questo mercato sfruttano un “mercato protetto” in cui non sperimentano virtualmente alcuna competizione da

parte di imprenditori locali esterni alla loro comunità (cfr. Ward, 1987). Questa situazione può dunque essere descritta come un monopolio di fornitori etnici, o una “no-go area” per concorrenti esterni (Ward, 1987), il che costituisce certamente un vantaggio per questi imprenditori.

- Mercato *middleman*: in questa situazione i prodotti etnici sono venduti ad un pubblico generale (Engelen, 2001). Se il termine “*middleman minorities*” era stato originariamente coniato per descrivere le relazioni tra minoranze etniche e maggioranza della popolazione nelle società pre-capitalistiche, nel suo attuale uso caratterizza anche imprenditori immigrati che servono una clientela non necessariamente co-etnica (Kim, 1999). Come affermato da Jones *et al.* (2000), questi imprenditori hanno un vantaggio in quanto essi promuovono un prodotto che deriva dal proprio patrimonio culturale, è unico per loro e non appropriabile altri. A differenza degli imprenditori attivi nel mercato etnico, però, essi godono di un monopolio relativo ai prodotti etnici, e quindi di un mercato protetto, ma senza i limiti demografici e finanziari collegati all’orientamento verso una clientela strettamente co-etnica.
- Mercato di nicchia: mercato in cui gli imprenditori non forniscono prodotti etnici, ma generali, come ad esempio assicurazioni, servizi finanziari, assistenza legale, scuole-guida, intermediazione immobiliare verso clienti co-etnici.
- Mercato *mainstream*: gli immigrati operanti in questo mercato offrono prodotti generali, non di tipo etnico, a clientela locale, nativa del Paese ospitante. Essi entrano dunque direttamente in competizione con gli imprenditori locali e sono in sintonia con le esigenze di un mercato più ampio. Le transazioni su questo mercato sono spesso trascurate negli studi attinenti all’imprenditorialità degli immigrati, con le recenti eccezioni di Leung (2001) sulle imprese ICT cinesi in Germania o di Saxenian (2002) sulle imprese indiane e cinesi nella Silicon Valley.

Naturalmente è da intendersi che, sia a livello teorico che nella realtà, i confini tra i diversi mercati non sono così netti e distinti come possono sembrare a un primo esame. Potrebbero, inoltre, esistere differenze tra imprenditori immigrati nella scelta di quali mercati servire. Ad esempio, Rusinovic (2007) ha dimostrato che gli imprenditori immigrati di prima e seconda generazione differiscono in tali scelte in quanto gli immigrati di prima generazione tendono ad essere più attivi nei mercati etnici e a servire clienti co-etnici, mentre quelli di seconda generazione tendono a scegliere mercati di tipo *mainstream*. I risultati differiscono altresì tra diversi gruppi etnici, riportandoci alla necessità di considerare sia fattori culturali che strutturali quando si affrontano indagini di questo tipo.

Una proposta ulteriore è quella di Ndofo e Priem (2011) che hanno individuato due strategie opposte in termini di combinazioni di prodotto/mercato etnico o *mainstream*. Essi definiscono una “strategia di *enclave*” quando l’impresa gestita da immigrati serve pienamente una comunità etnica, con un prodotto etnico, realizzato da lavoratori co-etnici e con materiali forniti da fornitori co-etnici. In sostanza essi identificano la partecipazione ad una intera catena del valore di tipo co-etnico. All’opposto, una “strategia dominante” viene messa in essere quando l’impresa serve il mercato locale con un prodotto di massa che viene prodotto attraverso manodopera non necessariamente co-etnica e con materiali forniti da fornitori *mainstream*.

Nello specifico ambito del fenomeno imprenditoriale dei migranti nel contesto italiano, una tipologia che ricalca le precedenti è quella offerta da Ambrosini (2011). Egli differenzia tra cinque tipi di imprese:

- Impresa etnica, che offre prodotti etnici a clienti immigrati;
- Impresa allargata (o impresa esotica), che fornisce prodotti etnici a clienti misti (nativi e immigrati);
- Società di intermediazione, che offre prodotti non etnici (generali) a clienti immigrati;
- Impresa di prossimità, che commercializza prodotti non etnici a clienti misti (nativi e immigrati);
- Impresa aperta, che offre prodotti non etnici (generali) a clienti di origine locale.

Infine, è necessario fare un cenno ad una classificazione basata sull’intersezione tra le tipologie di proprietà delle imprese degli immigrati e il settore di riferimento, proposta da Li (1993) in uno studio riferito alle imprese cinesi in Canada. Egli distingue i seguenti quattro tipi di imprese:

- l’impresa di tipo tradizionale, a gestione individuale o familiare, attiva principalmente nei settori di servizio alla persona (es. servizi di ristorazione) e del commercio al dettaglio;
- lo studio professionale di proprietà e gestito da professionisti nei campi medico, legale, contabilità, che sono proliferati negli ultimi decenni;
- imprese controllate attraverso investimenti diretti da società con sede in Asia e, talvolta, aventi filiali anche in Canada;
- investimenti ad alta intensità di capitali eseguite da immigrati in risposta ai programmi di immigrazione del Governo Canadese.

Il contributo di Li (1993) mette in luce alcune interessanti considerazioni di tipo storico e temporale. Il primo tipo di imprese, più tradizionale, è quella stabilita dagli immigrati all’inizio dei loro percorsi migratori, quando l’ipotesi della mobilità bloccata può spiegare perché molti stranieri tentano di aprire un’impresa come un mezzo per sfuggire a un mercato del lavoro per loro svantaggioso. Con l’incremento del numero dei migranti e del loro insediamento, la

domanda di servizi, di beni etnici e generali aumenta e questo può essere un'ulteriore stimolo per le imprese tradizionali e per la nascita degli studi professionali. L'autore sottolinea che gli ultimi due tipi di impresa sono, invece, spiegate da fattori politici, relativi ai cambiamenti nelle politiche migratorie e da variabili economico-finanziarie.

L'INDAGINE SUL CAMPO: UN PROFILO DELLA IMPRENDITORIA IMMIGRATA IN EMILIA ROMAGNA

Il nostro lavoro si propone di offrire un ulteriore contributo alla comprensione dell'imprenditoria immigrata in Italia e all'analisi della varietà dei modelli e delle tipologie che caratterizzano tali imprese. L'indagine, che è stata realizzata attraverso 130 interviste a imprese etniche localizzate nelle province di Parma e di Bologna, fornisce evidenze descrittive sostanzialmente coerenti con risultati da tempo consolidati nella letteratura di riferimento (Tab.1).

In primo luogo, la distribuzione della numerosità delle imprese etniche per provenienza geografica può delineare un quadro non dissimile dalla struttura della popolazione immigrata in Italia. Inoltre, il grado di scolarizzazione degli imprenditori alla guida delle imprese etniche considerate risulta molto alto: quasi il 50% degli intervistati ha conseguito un titolo di studio di scuola secondaria superiore con un curriculum di cinque anni e più di un terzo è in possesso di una laurea. Infine, occorre sottolineare un aspetto importante: per fare impresa al di fuori della propria comunità di origine è fondamentale la conoscenza della lingua locale e la possibilità di comunicare senza barriere significative con i potenziali clienti. In altre parole, è importante capire se le imprese etniche siano sostenute da una effettiva conoscenza della lingua italiana. I risultati ottenuti (di nuovo in Tab. 1) mostrano che oltre metà degli imprenditori immigrati intervistati parla italiano in modo più che soddisfacente.

Tab. 1 - Statistiche descrittive relative agli imprenditori immigrati intervistati.

	% su tot. imprese	Nr. Imprese
Genere intervistato/a		
Maschio	67,7	88
Femmina	32,3	42
Area geografica di origine		
Est Europa	29,2	38
Asia e Medio Oriente	26,2	35
Africa	35,4	46
America Latina	8,5	11
Titolo di studio		
Nessuno o scuola primaria	1,5	2
Scuola m. superiore (profess. - 3 anni)	13,1	17
Scuola m. superiore (liceo/college)	20,8	27
Scuola m. superiore (istituto tecnico - 5 anni)	28,5	37
Laurea	36,2	47
Competenza linguistica		
Non parla bene Italiano (1)	1,5	2
(2)	16,2	21
(3)	40,0	52
Parla Italiano in modo fluente (4)	42,3	55

Fonte: elaborazioni su risposte interviste ad imprenditori immigrati – Univ. Parma – anno 2012.

Per comprendere ulteriori elementi legati alle esperienze degli imprenditori immigrati intervistati, è utile fare riferimento ad un ulteriore insieme di caratteristiche descrittive riportate nella Tab. 2. Innanzitutto, è degno di nota il fatto che i dati raccolti fanno riferimento ad un campione di imprese composto in larga misura da ditte individuali (quasi il 60% del totale), ma sono stati intervistati anche i titolari di società. Per questi ultimi si tratta, quindi, di una forma organizzativa di maggiore complessità e di notevole interesse nella prospettiva di cambiamento.

Secondariamente, si può osservare che in almeno un terzo dei casi l'impresa è stata fondata o acquisita da un gruppo di soci e non da un singolo individuo. Ciò conferma che l'impresa etnica sta articolando e differenziando i propri percorsi evolutivi assumendo modelli organizzativi più complessi sul piano imprenditoriale-manageriale di quelli tipici delle soluzioni di *self-employment*.

Tab. 2 - Statistiche descrittive relative alle imprese etniche.

	% su tot. imprese	Nr. Imprese
Forma societaria		
Ditta individuale	59,2	77
Società	40,8	53

Fondazione dell'impresa		
Fondata da solo o acquistata da solo	63,1	82
Fondata con altri soci	23,8	31
Acquistata con altri soci	11,5	15
Ereditata	1,5	2
Età dell'impresa		
Minore o uguale a 5 anni	54,6	71
Da 5 a 10 anni	20	26
Da 10 a 20 anni	18,5	24
Oltre 20 anni	6,9	9
Nazionalità dei clienti (valori % medi)		
Stessa nazionalità imprenditore	12,8	-
Italiana	72,6	-
Altre nazionalità	15,4	-
Nazionalità fornitori (valori % medi)		
Stessa nazionalità imprenditore	7,8	-
Italiana	78,3	-
Altre nazionalità	13,8	-

Fonte: elaborazioni su risposte interviste ad imprenditori immigrati – Univ. Parma – anno 2012.

In molti casi, l'avvio dell'impresa per gli immigrati non risulta essere un fatto contingente o la reazione ad una situazione temporanea, ma l'esito conclusivo di una lunga fase di inserimento nel territorio e nel paese di destinazione. Dalle interviste raccolte in questa indagine, emerge come la maggioranza delle imprese (il 54%) segnali un'età di costituzione molto bassa, inferiore o uguale ai cinque anni. Solo una su quattro risulta attiva da oltre dieci anni.

L'integrazione con la realtà locale è evidente se vengono analizzati alcuni aspetti delle politiche commerciali adottate dalle imprese intervistate. Lo stereotipo dell'impresa etnica che si rivolge prevalentemente, se non esclusivamente, ai propri connazionali o si orienta a soddisfare essenzialmente la domanda proveniente dalla popolazione immigrata, non trova riscontro nei dati raccolti. Si osserva una propensione marcata verso la domanda *mainstream* e si osserva che i prodotti e i servizi sono destinati prevalentemente alla clientela italiana (ancora in Tab. 2). Ed è significativo anche che per le imprese etniche considerate quasi l'80% dei fornitori sia rappresentato da italiani. E' vero che in termini di valore gli acquisti realizzati presso fornitori connazionali risultano di entità non trascurabile (quasi l'8% del totale), ma questo dato non sembra sufficiente a suggerire una particolare focalizzazione degli scambi a favore dei mercati di origine. In sintesi, si può ipotizzare che le filiere in cui si collocano le imprese etniche analizzate nel presente lavoro presentano una propensione allo sviluppo di scambi con mercati esteri non elevata, mentre sono in grado di operare in modo integrato con la struttura commerciale delle imprese italiane.

Le principali motivazioni per l'avvio dell'impresa sono: la ricerca di autonomia, indipendenza e soddisfazione per il lavoro e la voglia di valorizzare le proprie competenze. I principali punti di forza che gli imprenditori immigrati considerano rilevanti per la loro attività sono la migliore qualità dei prodotti e servizi offerti rispetto ai concorrenti, i migliori servizi offerti (es. assistenza post-vendita) e, infine, le buone relazioni con i clienti italiani. I principali punti di debolezza che essi hanno indicato sono i costi di gestione, le insufficienti risorse finanziarie e le difficoltà nelle pratiche burocratiche e fiscali.

Anche se lo studio non aveva come obiettivo la valutazione degli effetti della grave crisi economica, è stato proposto il seguente interrogativo agli imprenditori immigrati: "Secondo Lei, quale è la probabilità (da 0% al 100%) che questa Sua impresa sia ancora attiva tra 3 anni?". Secondo le risposte fornite, quasi il 60% degli intervistati si dichiara fiducioso e prevede che la probabilità di superare la crisi sia molto elevata per la propria impresa.

QUALI STRATEGIE, COMPETENZE E COMPORTAMENTI PER LE IMPRESE ETNICHE?

Nel complesso, dal nostro lavoro emerge una rappresentazione dell'imprenditorialità immigrata più composita di quanto non appaia negli studi precedenti. Innanzitutto, l'impresa etnica, non utilizza in modo esclusivo risorse della comunità di origine, ma appare in grado di accedere alle opportunità fornite dai mercati *principali* (cioè i mercati in cui sono presenti sia consumatori immigrati che italiani) e dalla comunità autoctona.

Come accade per gli imprenditori italiani, la spinta alla costituzione dell'impresa è collegata al desiderio di autonomia e di indipendenza personale ed è sostenuta dal desiderio di autorealizzazione professionale e di valorizzazione delle proprie competenze e attitudini. Inoltre, le motivazioni che vedono la scelta imprenditoriale come ripiego (rispetto ad un lavoro dipendente) o come reazione alla condizione svantaggiata di immigrato sono presenti, ma non prevalenti. Poi, le scelte imprenditoriali sembrano meno condizionate dai legami con la comunità di origine rispetto a quanto previsto nella letteratura.

In sintesi, una parte delle imprese analizzate appare coerente con i modelli tradizionali che legano fortemente l'impresa etnica al *network* sociale di appartenenza dell'imprenditore che l'ha fondata, mentre una quota relativamente ampia di imprese etniche, invece, trova corrispondenze solo parziale in questo quadro concettuale.

ORGANIZZAZIONE E IMPRESA ETNICA: L'IPOTESI DI "IBRIDISMO CULTURALE"

Le evidenze raccolte mostrano che, all'aumento della complessità organizzativa e alla varietà delle strategie adottate, cresce anche l'apertura dell'impresa a soggetti (clienti, fornitori, soci, dipendenti) provenienti da comunità diverse da quelle di origine dell'imprenditore. Si è scelto di utilizzare il concetto di 'ibridismo culturale' per descrivere le imprese gestite da soci di diverse nazionalità o in cui lavorano dipendenti non-coetnici. Il risultato è che le imprese connotate da ibridismo culturale non sembrano mostrare strategie e comportamenti riconducibili alla fragilità e alla marginalità.

Le imprese con connotazioni "ibride" risultano caratterizzate da un orientamento molto marcato verso il consumatore italiano e da una offerta di prodotti e servizi non-etnici ad una popolazione di clienti in prevalenza non co-etnica. Tali imprese, inoltre, dopo la fase di *start up*, hanno ricevuto un supporto esplicito da amici e conoscenti italiani e da consulenti e professionisti. Figure, queste, esterne alla comunità di origine e derivanti da legami sociali e contatti sviluppati in Italia nel corso del tempo. Infine, le interviste presso le imprese "ibride" hanno permesso di evidenziare una migliore conoscenza della lingua italiana rispetto alle altre imprese gestite da immigrati.

Le imprese 'ibride' nel campione analizzato risultano essere più del 30% del totale (Tab. 3). Si nota che tali imprese 'ibride' hanno una età media (circa 10 anni) superiore al valore medio delle imprese intervistate (circa 7 anni). Inoltre le imprese "ibride" risultano maggiormente orientate verso una offerta di prodotti e servizi non-etnici per una popolazione di consumatori in prevalenza non co-etnica. Infine, una quota molto elevata (quasi 80%) delle imprese 'ibride' ha dichiarato di aderire a qualche forma volontaria di associazionismo.

Tab. 3 - Classificazione delle imprese etniche: l'ipotesi di ibridismo culturale.

Tipologie di imprese	Nr.	% su totale
Ibridismo culturale nullo	80	61,5
Ibridismo culturale limitato	26	20,0
Ibridismo culturale elevato	24	18,5
Totale	130	100,0

Fonte: elaborazioni su risposte interviste ad imprenditori immigrati – Univ. Parma – anno 2012.

In conclusione, possiamo affermare che l'impresa etnica sta diventando, non soltanto una importante realtà economica, ma anche un nuovo fulcro di scambio e di integrazione tra individui appartenenti a diverse comunità e depositari di relazioni e conoscenze molteplici e stratificate. In questo senso, l'impresa etnica deve essere considerata un fattore importante per la coesione sociale nel nostro paese.

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IMMIGRANT WOMEN AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP: STRATEGIES OF DEVELOPMENT AND FORMS OF TRANSNATIONALISM

Deborah De Luca*

*University Statale of Milano, Italy, deborah.deluca@unimi.it

ABSTRACT

The goal of this work is to explore the development of the entrepreneurial career and the transnational ways of living of 28 immigrant women. The role of the family and the different use of the ethnic resources bring to different career paths. These differences are also evident in the transnational activity, which is mainly of an economic nature and linked to the company. The company also benefits from the different cultural background of the owner. Some companies, in fact, arise from the desire to take advantage of their different cultural background, turning their passions and skills in economic activity, while other follow a more traditional path, which not necessarily include the use of ethnic resources. In addition, attention to the country of origin is also visible in the social engagement, which also moves parallel on two fronts: that of the host society and the one of society of origin. While, on the one hand, there is a desire to help other immigrants to deal with the daily problems that arise in the Italian context, on the other hand some women develop afterwards the wish to do something for those who remained in the country of origin. In this case, visibility, contacts and skills acquired in the course of the business are of particular importance and facilitate the success of transnational projects.

FEMALE IMMIGRANT ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The attention towards female migration is quite recent [1]. This delay was motivated primarily in two ways. In general, even when the female migration is independent, it is mainly due to economic reasons [2], as in the case of men, and therefore it is believed that the differences between men and women are not such as to require a specific theory. In fact, family reunification or departure to form a new family in the context of immigration are for women frequent reasons for emigration [3]. In addition, other authors have emphasized the role played by the search for greater freedom and by the desire to escape from an overly patriarchal society [4] as well as by the fact that, in the context of immigration, women are able to improve their status [5].

If several authors have noted the marked asymmetry in the attention paid to migrant men compared to women's migration, it is not surprising that this asymmetry is even greater when we narrow the field to the study of entrepreneurship. The interest towards (male) immigrant entrepreneurship has produced over the last decades many works (see, among others, [6] [7] [8] [9] [10]) about the motivations encouraging migrants to choose self-employment, the different rates of entrepreneurship in different ethnic groups, the role of human and social capital (family and ethnic ties).

Given the wideness of the studies on the subject, we will here focus our attention on those aspects that also affect women's entrepreneurship, in order to be able later to highlight their peculiarities.

For example, the vacancy chain theory [11] suggests the existence of a substitution mechanism such that the most disadvantaged in the labour market tend to fill positions vacated by those who have the opportunity to choose the most profitable and prestigious occupations. In this case, immigrants penetrate and occupy progressively (both dependent and independent) heavier, less paid and precarious jobs (as defined also by [12]). In self-employment, immigrants often occupy market niches related to activities that require low skills and long working hours, such as small shops, bars/restaurants, or small firms of packaging in textile sector, or become small carriers or self-employed in construction.

Even the blocked mobility theory (for example, [13]) suggests that self-employment for immigrants represent a valid alternative to the underemployment of dependent workers or even a response to unemployment.

Other elements to be considered in the study of immigrant entrepreneurship are the role of ethnic and family ties and human capital. While the theory of Aldrich and Waldinger [6] emphasizes the role of the ethnic community, other authors [7] emphasize the importance of human capital and distinguish between community ties and ethnic and familiar ones [14]. The first, in fact, although potentially useful to start the activity, may later become an obstacle to the growth and the company's expansion beyond the ethnic context of reference. The latter, however, are useful in any case, helping to provide the initial capital and labour at low cost. This second aspect is less relevant when referring to tasks that require specific skills and qualifications. Overall, though, the difference in the level of family intervention in the enterprise is an aspect that helps to differentiate between immigrants, both male and female.

Finally, some authors have criticized the structuralist explanations, emphasizing instead the role of free will and conscious decision of immigrant entrepreneurs who "take control over their own lives and do not only appeal to ethnic and class resources [...], but also to experiential and motivational resources" [10, p. 394].

In this brief literature review, we cannot forget the few studies concerning female immigrant entrepreneurship. In some research, with a structuralist approach, the gender variable is just one of many used to detect any inter-group differences in the profile of immigrants [14] [7] [8]. Overall, the most important results that emerge from this body of research is that, with rare exceptions, the propensity to entrepreneurship is higher among unmarried women. Other studies use a qualitative approach, which highlight the important role played by immigrant women in the ethnic economy [15], their decision to pursue self-employment to find a better balance between work and family, as well as to earn more money [16]. Self-employment also provides a greater gain compared to being an employee, generally of low-level [17]. Finally, according to Lunghi [18], female enterprise is typically the implementation of a specific project aimed to give up unskilled work to create a more creative activity, which ensures greater personal satisfaction.

FORMS AND PERSPECTIVES OF TRANSNATIONALISM

The search for a higher gain and/or greater personal satisfaction are also important motivations to undertake a transnational activity, in the economic, political and/or socio-cultural field.

Strictly speaking, the concept of transnationalism has been used in recent years to indicate "occupations and activities that require regular and sustained social contacts over time across national borders for their implementation" [19]. In reality, that of Portes *et al.* is just one of the many definitions of this concept, which emphasizes the presence of regular and sustained, then "empirically verifiable", activities [20]. This definition severely limits the scope of the concept of transnationalism, since, as also admits Ambrosini [21], the majority of migrants are settled and transnational activities are usually occasional. However, it is a clear definition, which helps to perceive transnationalism as something new thanks to the intensity and frequency of these exchanges. In fact, a criticism to the concept of transnationalism is that it does not actually describe a new phenomenon, as transnational ties have always been part of international migration [22].

Another way to respond to this criticism is to consider transnationalism not a new phenomenon, but a new perspective. Guarnizo [23] speaks of 'transnational living', i.e. cross-border relations of social, cultural, political and economic nature that emerge from the migrants determination to maintain and reproduce in the host country their social environment of origin. The transnational experience is very close to the concept of 'bifocality' used by Vertovec [24], which defines the two points of view in which migrants live and define their own identity, but that does not necessarily translate into verifiable activities [21].

This step is crucial to connect with the other line of studies on transnationalism, the anthropological one [25] [26] [27]. In this perspective, focus is on the roots of the migrant in different social and territorial contexts, its belonging to transnational 'social fields', or to a set of social relationships multiple, interdependent, through which ideas, practices and resources are exchanged. Levitt [27] makes it clear that to be part of these fields, individuals do not need to move physically between borders, but it is sufficient communication, the transfer of ideas, the comparison between different ways of belonging. It is no coincidence that Levitt and Glick Schiller [25] suggest the distinction between ways of being and ways of belonging. Only the first refer to concrete and empirically verifiable activities, while the latter refers to the conscious definition of their own identity and belonging.

The emphasis on belonging and identity are useful to clarify the relationship between transnationalism and assimilation. In the traditional assimilation view, in fact, the links with the country of origin were treated with distrust by the hosting one, who suspected the migrant of 'double loyalty' [21]. On the contrary, the protagonists of social and political transnationalism are in fact mainly stable and integrated immigrants [28] [5]. This aspect was important in our decision to investigate the transnationalism of immigrant entrepreneurs, as those who have taken the path of self-employment are resident for some years in the host country and rarely plan to go back home [29] [30]. The acquisition of economic stability and, in many cases, a good level of integration in the host country, could enhance the interest in establishing economic ties with the country of origin not only through business activities, but also through investment projects and development of local communities, which contribute to the visibility and symbolic power to immigrants [31].

These investment projects in the country of origin are one of the possible forms of transnational activity. They are usually developed by groups of immigrants (the so-called HomeTown Associations, HTA), which are also responsible for advocating the rights of minorities and to give visibility to local problems [32] [21]. Apart from this form of political transnationalism, others are less relevant in our research, like the actions taken by International NGOs, which nevertheless in some cases seem less effective than informal initiatives [33].

The political activity of this type of association intertwines with the economic one, i.e. investments in terms of infrastructure and public goods designed to improve the quality of life of the communities of origin. Although this form of economic transnationalism is undoubtedly interesting, these initiatives, at least in the Italian context, are still sporadic. Another type of economic transnationalism, for us the most important, is that of entrepreneurial activities. The growth of immigrant communities promotes the formation of ethnic businesses that provide goods and services to their community, importing or anyway maintaining ongoing and regular ties with the country of origin [34] [23]. From the

business point of view, many activities undertaken by immigrant businesses are 'open' [12] but there are some areas of the economy where more properly 'ethnic' businesses are growing and in which, as we show in this paper, national or 'ethnic' belonging is fundamental to the entrepreneurial activity. In general, cultural transnationalism is promoted at various levels: through participation in voluntary associations and cultural activities [35] and through the maintenance of certain traditions and customs of the culture of origin, encouraging the construction of a multi-faceted identity sometimes difficult to detect empirically [28] [37]. Fully connected to cultural transnationalism is symbolic transnationalism, "that does not import goods, or it does so only on a side basis, in order to reconstruct atmospheres, environments and meanings" [36, p.20]. However, in the present work, we find few example of this type of economic-cultural activity. From this point of view, more important are activities that the interviewed women entrepreneurs undertake in their spare time, through more specifically socio-cultural initiatives.

DATA AND METHODS

This work on immigrant entrepreneurs is part of a more general research on the national profile of immigrant entrepreneurs, which used as a method of data collection a semi-structured questionnaire. Among the topics addressed in the questionnaire, there are family background, pull and push factors in migration, job career, economic situation of the company, social and associational networks, economic transnationalism.

Often, the selected sectors and nationalities have made the presence of women entrepreneurs unlikely. For this reason, in order to obtain a sufficient number of cases to focus on women, 7 more questionnaires were administered to women immigrant entrepreneurs operating in the province of Milan, without any selection concerning nationality or sector, because of the difficulty in finding them. To these 7 entrepreneurs, as well as to the 3 successful women entrepreneurs, always operating in the province of Milan (see note 2), in addition to the semi-structured questionnaire, we asked some open-ended questions, mainly aimed at understanding the difficulties faced by respondents as a woman and as an entrepreneur. The questions covered the following topics: reasons for the decision to start their own business, benefits of entrepreneurial activity for balancing work and family, or discrimination faced difficulties as a woman and / or as a foreigner, and any other activities - associations, cultural - carried out in their spare time.

The theme of transnationalism, therefore, only concerned their business. However, during the interviews, there were numerous references to other forms of transnationalism, both 'political' and cultural. The bifocality and belonging to transnational social fields by migrants emerge in various forms in our research, which will be analysed in the next paragraphs.

Instead, we start now to present briefly some of the characteristics of the women interviewed. As you can see by looking at the summary table in the appendix, apart from the Chinese - with one exception – that all work in the textile and leather, in the other cases we have a great variety of activities carried out, although most relate to trade and services. In addition, there are many nationalities represented. Despite this diversity, there are many elements that these women have in common in their experience of life and business management.

A first interesting fact is that the interviewed women are in Italy since several years, almost 16 on average. It is therefore a group of people that has already passed the early stages of migration and has already reached a certain stability, not only economic, but presumably also from the point of view of integration in the social context. This is especially true for the women interviewed in the province of Milan, which show good knowledge of the language and, in 6 out of 10 cases, they also have Italian citizenship, while all the other interviewees are foreign citizenship. Moreover, half of the respondents have a diploma or a degree. It is generally among these people, as shown in the literature, that transnational activities should emerge more frequently [23] [21].

FAMILY, CAREER AND REASONS FOR BEING AN ENTREPRENEUR

In this section, we focus initially on the role of the family in business development, as well as on the constraints and opportunities offered by the family in business management. In fact, as frequently shown in literature, the presence or absence of the family in Italy often contributes in shaping the relational and economic context in which female (and male) immigrant entrepreneurs move. First, 24 out of 28 interviewees have one or more children, 21 are married or cohabiting. No wonder, then, that more than two thirds of the respondents have asked for help and advice to their families in the daily management of the company and in the recruitment of workers and funds necessary to start and run the business. Less frequently, on the other hand, the people who women have asked for help and advice are Italian (about half of the respondents citing them in their contacts), while only a third of the women entrepreneurs have in their contacts of non-relatives compatriots. The contacts with Italian rather than with family members in the social networks of respondents varies greatly depending on nationality. In fact, while only 2 out of 11 Chinese do not have family members in their network, a third of other entrepreneurs (6 of 17) do not have family members among their useful contacts for business management. Similar differences also concern to their compatriots. Conversely, while only 3 out of 11 Chinese have useful contacts with Italians, more than half of the other entrepreneurs (9 out of 17) have significant contacts with Italians. Some of the women interviewed in Milan have highlighted the dynamic role that Italian friends have played at the beginning of the business: *"And is there anyone in particular who has supported this process of*

gaining a good reputation? Yes, there are. Italian friends. That pushed me. In fact, I could say that they were very important because in the beginning I had not this confidence that I would be successful. They encouraged me a lot" (M9). Another one: "Who gave you the most support? There was a dear friend of mine [...]. He already knew I was doing odd jobs and was looking around when I was not working for the cleaning company, to earn more [...] Then he saw that I was doing all of this work without an invoice, and said: "A., Look, it's the moment. If you want I will speak with an administrator and so you begin" So, with a lot of fear - but he gave me so much strength - I started my business" (M7). Instead, this is the point of view of a Chinese on the relationship with the family and compatriots: "It is normal I feel better with Chinese, there are fewer problems with the language and then also privacy is important so I prefer to work only with relatives" (C10).

The family at various levels has some importance also in the reasons that have led women to start their business. In three cases, other relatives had already started the entrepreneurial activity and, therefore, the interviewee only participates to a wider entrepreneurial project. In another case, the activity started on the advice of the partner. Among the secondary reasons for beginning the activity, respondents mentioned the desire to follow the family traditions, the need to be closer to the family and get a job for family members. The influence of the family, although not negligible, is secondary to the desire to earn more money (mentioned by 9 respondents as main reason and by 5 as secondary) and the desire to enhance their skills and competences acquired (referred to as main reason by 6 women and as secondary by 11). However, it could also be linked to the need to have a more regular work (referred to as main reason by 7 respondents and, secondly, by 2). The desire for a more regular work can also be interpreted as an expression of the wish to get out of underemployment, as well as - after all - the desire to see enhanced their skills and expertise. In two cases, moreover, women mention the aspiration to less strenuous work and, in one case, as a secondary reason, it is recognized that business activity represented an alternative to unemployment. The theory of blocked mobility seems to get an acknowledgement from our interviews.

The reference to the enhancement of their capabilities and skills and the desire to work more regularly prompts us to wonder what career paths the women interviewed followed before starting their entrepreneurial activity.

First, only 16 women out of 28 had worked in their country of origin, therefore almost half of the women have only the working path in the host country. Since the working career, as well as the business activities, are too different to be examined in detail in a synthetic way, we built a typology that summarizes the most significant features, while also taking into account what has already appeared in the literature (contribution of family, degree of 'ethnicization').

The first group, the biggest one (10 women, all of them Chinese), includes women who in Italy have worked almost exclusively by relatives or fellow citizens. Their jobs were somehow connected to the future company (for example, in the textile industry) or occupations in contact with customers who favoured language learning (ex. waitress) and who later opened a business in the apparel or leather sector, often with the help of a spouse or other family members. Thus, the career path ends with an ethnic family business in sectors with high foreign presence (*vacancy chain family path*).

The second group (3 Moroccan women) differs from the first only by the fact that women have previously worked for Italian and have little or no previous experience in the sector of their entrepreneurial activity. The random career path ends with a company in sectors with high foreign presence (*vacancy chain random path*).

The third group (3 Senegalese women and one Ecuadorean) had a career path in foreign-dominated sectors (such as peddler or anyway self-employed) and also run an entrepreneurial activity aimed at co-ethnic or other foreigners. So this is the path most closely ethnic (*ethnic business*).

The fourth group (5 women, different nationalities) is instead composed of women who have managed to maintain or return to the profession they performed at home or turn a hobby that they had for many years in a business. These entrepreneurs most valued the skills and competences they acquired (*creative enterprise*).

The fifth group (4 women, different nationalities) is made up of women who, after several experiences, have invested in a business in the open market, generally alone or - in one case - with the Italian partner and, consequently, their identity nationality is neither shown nor valued, and could even be a disadvantage (*unidentified company*).

Finally, the last two women, with higher education and that in Italy were able to get clerical jobs, decided to exploit, in the context of their own business, their being a foreigner. In fact, working together with other foreigners, they offer services to Italian public organization or private subjects to improve their knowledge of cultures other than their own (*bridge or intermediary business*).

Regarding the companies in the first, second, and, in part, the fifth group, we find a path of ecological succession, while the third and last group benefited from new business opportunities offered by the growing presence of foreign immigrants.

If these two groups can be considered to be those that best exemplify the situation of bifocality and transnational ways of belonging, in reality transnational ways of being of the interviewed women are multiple and do not only concern the economic field, even if we will start right from the latter.

ECONOMIC TRANSNATIONALISM

From the economic point of view, our research has shown a reasonable level of transnational relations, especially with the country of origin, but also with other countries. Most important are economic ties with the motherland. In fact, about one-third of the respondents (8 of 28) said they entertain business relations with the country of origin. Seven

women buy products in the country of origin and resale them in Italy. Among these, we find an owner of a deli that also sells kebab, a Chinese pastry and a hairdresser. In these cases, the goods are purchased at the country of origin to ensure the authenticity of the product, both when the customers are mainly Italian, and, as in the case of the hairdresser and the Chinese pastry, when the customers are both Italian and foreigners. The authenticity of the product allows attributing a specific cultural identity even if, at least in the case of kebab, this identity has become increasingly globalized and artificial, and has lost much of its original connotation [39]. Adapting the typology proposed by Ambrosini [21] [36], we could define this category as symbolic transnationalism based on authentic products. The strategy of these companies is the originality, regardless of the quality of the product or service. This originality appeals to the Italians, but also to compatriots and foreigners in general, just because the authenticity of the product can satisfy the one and the other.

In other cases, entrepreneurs purchase the products in the country of origin, or commission semi-finished products, as in the case of clothing and leather goods intended to be sold in the shops of Chinese import-export. In fact, even if some of the Chinese entrepreneurs purchase in Italy from Chinese wholesalers, most entrepreneurs prefer to maintain direct relationships with their country, in order to reduce transaction costs. Two entrepreneurs follow the production and commission in details the types of goods to be produced. In this way, they can gain a competitive advantage compared to the Chinese who simply buy their goods from wholesalers, tending to sell products very similar to each other. Instead, these women seek to maintain their own specificity and originality, always trying to take into account the demands of the market. This is a competitive merchant transnationalism (even if the products are not 'ethnic'). Since the products marketed are often similar and primarily aimed at low-end market segments, competitive advantage is given by the speed and flexibility in the identification of specific customer preferences.

Finally, another example of economic transnationalism is that of M., an Ecuadorian entrepreneur, and owner, together with another woman compatriot, of a travel agency, which is also money transfer and which recently has started as real estate agent. This business has developed following the requests of compatriots, who increasingly want to invest their earnings in the purchase of real estate in the country of origin. However, customers are not only compatriot, but also immigrants from other South American countries. In the interview, M. stressed the importance of her very good reputation among customers, consolidated thanks not only to her efficiency, but also to her ability to listen to customers, their stories and their everyday problems. She said, jokingly: *"We always say that we should buy more uncomfortable chairs, because people are here for hours and do not go anymore. This gave me a good reputation. Once I have also received a call from Spain to see if I could provide a cheaper ticket, and I did. They call me and trust me only by word of mouth, even though they have never seen me"*(M5). The good reputation allows her to operate on a transnational level not only with her country of origin, but also with clients (compatriots) residing in other European countries. It is here an example of connective transnationalism, which, however, has found its own peculiarity in the real estate business.

The economic activities outlined above are transnational ways of being, and are also regular and long-lasting activities, as well as empirically documented, which can be included in the narrowest definition of transnationalism.

It is not always the case, however, for the transnational activities that we will discuss in the next section.

CULTURAL TRANSNATIONALISM AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Some of the activities undertaken by the interviewed women have a strong cultural connotation, so we can speak of cultural transnationalism even if there are no concrete business ties with the country of origin. For example, some food services, unlike the kebab restaurant mentioned above, do not buy outside Italy the raw materials they need.

First, in our sample there are three food services run by Senegalese women. These activities are 'informal', designed primarily for compatriots. It is important to note that Senegalese immigration in Italy is predominantly male, although the female presence is growing [34]. There are still many Senegalese leaving their wife and children at the country of origin, where they spend several months a year anyway. When they are in Italy, these food services represent important gathering places, where they spend their free time with friends and family finding familiar flavours and atmosphere, typical of their country. The fact that the food services are 'informal' and are addressed primarily to their compatriots (even if one of the Senegalese women said she has also Italian and Bangladeshi customers), allows for greater flexibility with respect to compliance with the rules of hygiene and formal requirements required by Italian bureaucracy. This helps to keep costs down, but also gives a sense of insecurity and uncertainty (they would be forced to close or to pay fines if the authorities would inspect them) and limits their ability to attract a larger and varied customer base, as they do not advertise their activities, but rely only on word of mouth. In any case, the current activity, as well as representing a connection with their culture of origin, has made it possible for these women to terminate their previous work as street vendors. In addition, this type of activity does not require special training, since the women interviewed draw only on their culinary skills.

A similar case is that of H., a Moroccan woman who runs a deli in Turin directed both to Italians and to compatriots. The business strategy here is to offer local products to Italians and Moroccan products to compatriots, so that both can find their own traditional foods. This choice, therefore, is opposite to that of the owner of the deli kebab viewed in the previous paragraph, since while the latter turned to Italian customers betting on the product exoticism, H. instead has chosen the path of tradition and familiarity.

A mix of familiarity and exoticism provides the Senegalese hairdresser, who addresses to foreign women (co-nationals or not) and Italian ones, suggesting her country's traditional hairstyles (braids, etc.). The possibility to appeal to a Italian clientele is also an effect of the increased visibility and regulation of its activity, which currently run a real store, while before the activity was run in her house. Instead, G. has mainly focused on the exotic charm of customs and traditions others than their own, as she owns a school of belly dance with an Italian clientele.

The activities discussed above are linked to symbolic transnationalism in a broad sense and, in these, economic elements and marketing strategies intersect with cultural values and identity. Among them, we find a typical ethnic business (Senegalese food service), next to an expanded ethnic business (the hairdresser), open business (gastronomy) and an exotic one (belly dance), according to the typology proposed by Ambrosini [12]. However, this is a symbolic transnationalism closely connected with the entrepreneurial activity, a transnationalism then mostly weak, because it is rarely connected to a regular and constant exchange with the country of origin. However, in many cases, this transnationalism allows the interviewed women to enhance their identity and their ethnicity. Apart from this option, there are few entrepreneurs who engage in social, political or cultural activities that can be transnational, even in the broadest sense of the term, that is to re-define identity and belonging in a bifocal perspective that takes into account the dual context, the country of origin and of immigration. Among our respondents, five promote cultural or socio-political trans-national activities.

Owner of a beauty salon, S. in her spare time organizes events with the support of the belly dancing school where her daughter works, that is owned by Italians. These events, a mix of competitions and performances by famous artists in North Africa, represent to S. not only an additional income, but also the possibility to introduce an important aspect of their culture that has always been a great passion for her. Among her future projects there is a greater investment in these cultural initiatives, in the hope of being able to transform it into a real work, shifting from a job that has no cultural connotation linked to her country of origin to one rather strongly marked in this sense.

D., in Italy since 1993, is the chairperson of a cultural mediation cooperative company, which employs both foreigners and Italians. Through this activity she has managed to tighten ties with local associations and institutions in the area. These ties have been useful for a project that she has pursued alongside her business. It is a program of education and development for women resident in her country of origin, aimed at encouraging a process of empowerment of women and awareness of their rights in a society still deeply patriarchal [40]. The first goal is to build a house of culture, health and labour for women with the help of the Italian institutions and some NGOs. D. has followed this project as part of her associative activity. She is the president of a cultural association of compatriots. Thanks to the visibility and the social capital built while running her business, D. was able to help her fellow citizens in the dual context where she moves, that of the host country and that of the country of origin. Her intervention in the country of origin, however, is the result of a social commitment beside her job, even if it is in the working environment that the necessary conditions to carry it forward have developed.

A similar pattern can also be observed in the activity of L., a member of a cooperative cleaning company that is also responsible for a multi-ethnic catering service (further example of an enterprise of exotic and symbolic transnationalism) and president of an association that assists women who want to obtain recognition of their qualifications in Italy. In addition to social commitment with the immigrants in our country, also L., which has been in Italy since 1975, in more recent years has turned her attention to the country of origin. In this regard, she founded, along with other fellow compatriots and some Italian, a twinning committee with her city of origin that promotes exchanges between teachers and social workers of the two countries to help them better manage students at risk of social exclusion, developing specific and targeted approaches [40].

A., a Filipino woman married with an Italian man that runs a café, in her free time is member of an Italian association that gives legal assistance to immigrants. Moreover, she is member of the Women Federation for World Peace, which works for the empowerment of women all over the world.

Finally, M., the Ecuadorian entrepreneur who, with her travel agency and real estate represents a case of economic transnationalism, is also active from the cultural point of view. Her commitment aims to raise awareness of the conditions of discrimination and inequality that Ecuadorean women experience both in the country of origin and in the host country. For the moment, this commitment addresses especially to seek improvement in the condition of the Ecuadorians in Italy, in marital relationships and with their children, while there are no measures to help women residing in the country of origin. M. dedicates to this activity as member of a cultural association of compatriots. The lack of involvement of M. in properly transnational actions from a social perspective in support of women in her country of origin, beside the economic one already seen, may be due to different reasons: her relatively recent arrival in Italy (in 2000), her being the single mother of a small daughter (while D. and L. do not have children, and S. and A. have adult ones) with therefore less free time and, more importantly, the still temporary prospect of her migration project, which is still aimed to return to her country of origin.

FINAL REMARKS

In most cases, the business path of immigrant women does not deviate - in its main features - significantly from that of men. Most entrepreneurs seized - often as part of a shared family project - the opportunities offered by the vacancy chain or by niche sectors more closely ethnic. Nonetheless, reasons related to the family appear to be

particularly relevant. In addition, some women have been able to use in an original and successful way their creative skills that sometimes, in the country of origin, were not more than hobbies. In other cases, finally, the entrepreneurs have taken advantage in their own business of the opportunities resulting from their bifocality, participating in a sort of cultural transnationalism.

Overall, the area where there is greater transnationalism is the economic one. This may seem obvious considering the fact that we interviewed women entrepreneurs, in many cases Chinese, but thanks to this research, we have better defined the different exchanges of transnational goods, services and information. In addition, many of the activities do not have real ties with the motherland, but merely to import atmospheres and cultural traditions.

Finally, of particular interest seemed to us the social commitment of some of the interviewed women, both in the Italian context and in the country of origin. In both places, this effort is dedicated primarily to women and it is this aspect that is most influenced by the gender identity of our respondents, together with the almost total absence of a strictly political connotation in their transnational action. The transnational social commitment is more recent than that to immigrant women (compatriots or not) in Italy and it is conceivable therefore, that in the coming years we will see a growth of this phenomenon, as is already the case in several countries, where immigration is less recent.

Finally, it is likely that the different levels of transnational activity depend on the different institutional and social contexts of the countries of origin and the different levels of interest and ability of the different countries to attract and encourage this type of initiatives, which also move to a local, not national, level. We hope to explore this aspect in future research.

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APPENDIX – The interviewed immigrant women entrepreneurs

Int.	Prov.	Nationality	Activity	Age	Citizenship	Marital status	Chld	Arr. in IT	Education	Cohabit.
M1	MI	Egyptian	Café	49	Also Italian	Married with Egyptian	2	1984	Univ. degree	3
M2	MI	Egyptian	Belly dance school	48	Also Italian	Widow		1984	Diploma	2
M3	MI	Moroccan	Beauty centre	50	Also Italian	Married with Egyptian	2	1984	Univ. degree	3
M4	MI	Ecuadorean	Tailor's shop	43	Ecuador	Divorced	2	2000	Diploma	2
M5	MI	Ecuadorean	Travel and real estate agency	33	Ecuador	Single	1	2000	Short degree	1
M6	MI	Chilean	Cleaning/catering service	64	Also Italian	Divorced, living with Italian	no	1975	Univ. degree	1
M7	MI	Colombian	Cleaning company	45	Also Italian	Divorced	2	1991	Univ. degree	0
M8	MI	Romanian	Shoes and accessory design	32	Romania	Single	no	1998	Short degree	0
M9	MI	Albanian	Cultural mediation	50	Albania	Single	no	1993	Master	1
M10	BG	Filipino	Café	55	Also Italian	Married	1	1977	Diploma	2

						with Italian				
T1	TO	Moroccan	Grocery stall	46	Morocco	Married with Egyptian	2	1994	Diploma	3
T2	TO	Moroccan	Deli	35	Morocco	Single	no	1992	8 yrs school	3
T3	TO	Moroccan	Deli and kebab shop	45	Morocco	Separated (hsb ir Morocco)	no	2000	Univ. degree	2
P1	PO	Chinese	Pastry shop	38	China	Married with Chinese	2	1992	8 yrs school	5
P2	PO	Chinese	Garment import export shop	33	China	Married with Chinese	3	1989	8 yrs school	10
C1	CT	Senegalese	Food service	34	Senegal	Married with Senegalese	1	2002	8 yrs school	4
C2	CT	Senegalese	Food service	35	Senegal	Married with Senegalese	3	1994	8 yrs school	4
C3	CT	Senegalese	Food service	26	Senegal	Married with Senegalese	1	2006	Short degree	2
C4	CT	Senegalese	Ethnic crafts/hairdresser	38	Senegal	Married with Senegalese	2	1991	Diploma	3
C5	CT	Chinese	Shoes wholesaler	32	China	Married with Chinese	1	1996	8 yrs school	4
C6	CT	Chinese	Garment wholesaler	34	China	Married with Chinese	2	1999	Diploma	2
C7	CT	Chinese	Shoes wholesaler	36	China	Married with Chinese	2	2004	Diploma	2
C8	CT	Chinese	Leather retail and wholesaler	26	China	Married with Chinese	2	2000	8 yrs school	6
C9	CT	Chinese	Leather wholesaler	29	China	Married with Chinese	3	1998	Diploma	5
C10	CT	Chinese	Leather wholesaler	44	China	Married with Chinese	3	1999	8 yrs school	8
C11	CT	Chinese	Garment retail shop	30	China	Married with Chinese	2	2000	8 yrs school	3
C12	CT	Chinese	Garment retail shop	38	China	Married with Chinese	3	1995	8 yrs school	4
C13	CT	Chinese	Garment retail shop	38	China	Married with Chinese	1	1998	8 yrs school	2