

Lights and Shadows of an Empowerment Process of Migrant Women in Italy¹

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Abstract

This essay analyzes the role of migrant women in Rome with regard to *public* and *private* spheres aiming to stress many aspects of the integration process. With a focus on gender migrations, it has taken into account how women have been ignored by theories on this phenomenon. The analysis points out how the assimilation has not been completely successful in different fields such as work, citizenship, race and many more. Interviews with ten women from different countries have provided an opportunity to reconsider how they perceive their experiences: there are many contradictions in the so-called integration process that are exacerbated by their role as mothers. In spite of this, it is worth noting how autonomy and empowerment drive these new citizens to integrate into the receiving country.

Key words: *women – gender migrations – migrant families – integrations – empowerment*

Introduction

This essay focuses on *gender migrations*. Its aim is to analyze and investigate the role of migrant women in our society, in particular in the city of Rome. The essay presents the results of in-depth interviews of a sample of ten migrant women from different countries of origin who have been living in Rome for several years. The research begins with a reflection on one of the main issues linked with migration and integration today: the job market and its effects on these phenomena. The analysis combines gender migration theories with entrepreneurial assimilation, i.e. the improvement of their ethnic group through entrepreneurship, but not the assimilation into

¹ This paper is the result of a collaborative project. The introduction and the conclusions were written by both authors. Roberta Sorrentino wrote the following: "Female migration processes", "Self-employment and "immigrant" entrepreneurship" and "Case studies: the migrants entrepreneurs women in Italy". Pina Sodano wrote: "The Ethnic Immigrant Families Studies" and "Migrant family as a starting point"

indigenous entrepreneurs. Despite their long-term residence in Italy, the interviewed women have a strong bond with their origins: their family and friend networks tend to be ‘ethnic’. Meeting these women has been an opportunity to underline great contradictions in the so called assimilation process: e.g. the concept of ethnicity is to be found only in the way they run their activities, not in their products or in their services. The indigenous way is just a vague model to follow in order to find full recognition as workers. During the interviews, many issues emerged strongly showing how deeply they are linked to each other. It seems impossible to speak about jobs without dwelling upon these topics. The job market analysis offers a framework for this study.

Female migration processes

For a long time migration theories have neglected the female component considering it simply as one of many variables to be observed, denying its central role and its importance to understanding migration as a whole. Migrants have often been studied and presented as a homogenous block where women were passive and vulnerable, without any plans on their behalf. The flattening tendency of the female component can be considered a symptom of the difficulty to include migration of women in consolidated interpretive frames. Only the gender perspective, as an innovative category of analysis, allowed, not without trouble, the ‘rediscovery’ of the role and features of women in the processes of migration and integration into the receiving society. Despite great complexity, it is possible to isolate a few phases² in which growing awareness has made gender a real key to understanding the matter.

The first step, from the seventies to the early eighties, is that of ‘women of migration’. In those years, studies and reports were strongly committed to fight prejudices about women and their passivity: among others, we must take into account the well-known article by Morokvasic³ who draws attention to the presence of women in the context of a changing economy where small

² P. Hondagneu-Sotelo, “Gender and Immigration, A Retrospective and Introduction”, *Gender and US immigration: Contemporary Trends*, (2003), Los Angeles University of California

³ M. Morokvasic, “Birds of Passage Are also Women”, *International migration review* vol. 18 n. 4, (1984), Special Issue: Women in Migration pp. 886-907.

businesses and the service sector offer a new space to the female workforce and, in a particular way, to the immigrant, giving birth to the unresolved tension between exploitation and empowerment⁴. The second step includes the eighties and early nineties and sees a progressive awareness of the *gendering* of migration patterns⁵. Studies on the issue are enriched with new points of view: gender is framed in connection with race and class, questioning the role of women in the migration process and their relationships with the *labor market*⁶. In this way, the gender perspective starts to configure not only the migration process as a whole, but also *the balance between migrants and their positions* in receiving societies⁷. Lastly, in the third stage, which began during the mid-nineties and is still in progress today, we see the definitive acquisition of gender as a constituent element of migration, shaping relations and identities as well as migration institutions⁸. In these years a meso-dimension of analysis arose with an integrative approach that takes into account several factors such as family and networks of relationships. It leads to a reflection on power relations between men and women alongside forces acting on the ability of migration processes to change hierarchical models in the family sphere and in that of labour.

Over the years, a good part of the literature has focused on topics such as the relationship between gender, ethnicity and class, and the inclusion/exclusion of job market dynamics. Regarding the first point, it is important to bear in mind the historical debate on the issue of double, and possibly triple, submission that women in minority groups have to face in Western contexts.⁹

⁴ M. Omizzolo, "Nuovi bisogni di assistenza familiare: le attività di cure dei migranti in Italia", *La Rivista delle Politiche sociali*, (2015), n 2-3, Roma, Ediesse editore

⁵ M. Tognetti Bordogna, *Donne e percorsi migratori: per una sociologia delle migrazioni*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2012 p. 44

⁶ Many questions are yet to be taken into account in reference to the Italian panorama of immigration and the integration of women into the labor market.

⁷ The formula "race, gender, class" is particularly useful in the international context where "the sexual division of work determines the demand of work and migration, where women of the entire world emigrate towards the societies of the rich world to be nurses, domestic servants and « *entertainers* », a euphemism for sex workers or prostitutes." G. Campani, *Gender and Migration Italy: State of the Art*, Working paper n. 6 – WP4, Firenze, University of Florence, 2007

⁸ The term *migrant institution* means agencies and organizations working in the field of migration and, in particular, playing a leading role in the feminization of the labor market. M. Tognetti Bordogna, *Donne e percorsi migratori. Per una sociologia delle migrazioni*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2012

⁹ Just think of the dynamism of the feminist associations of African-American members of the so-called "Black Feminism" which, since the early eighties, inevitably ended to question all the relations between sexism and racism, between the media and patriarchal system. By the wave of criticism were not spared the white activists regarded as representatives of an elite feminism that could not take charge of the claims of all women.

So migrant women are discriminated against both "as women and as immigrants"¹⁰. In this context, the class position would seem to be a direct consequence of ethnicity and gender, leading to, as will be seen, a strong de-qualification of the education and professional qualifications obtained in their countries¹¹. Therefore, there is a close link with the theme of job market: is not possible to ignore the bond between migration processes, integration and work. Finding a job, a good job, is a key concept, something that drives migration and resources. Women seem to have a greater ability to use and to lean on the financial and social services available in the receiving country and thus to develop and use their social skills¹². Examining migrant women underscores a wide range of factors: economic goals are combined with a deep desire of empowerment. Self-determination has a greater importance in the case of females than in male migration. The decision to migrate is experienced and perceived as a possibility to escape from major inequalities with their male counterparts, within and outside the family. Thus, the stage prior to migration is of particular interest in defining the reasons behind this decision. The systemic and individual factors are intertwined with poverty and to specific gender role relationships. All these elements are constantly in interaction with the receiving societies and the inevitable transformations that this inevitable clash determines.

¹⁰ M. Ambrosini, *Sociologia delle migrazioni*, Bologna, Il Mulino, pp. 135 e ss., 2005

¹¹ "The term class is often understood in a broad sense, the inclusion in occupations which involve a marked social subordination, as the domestic one, characterized in terms of isolation and lack of recognition in society: an atypical work, the dependence of households that is hard to be recognized in its social and economic value, despite its importance in daily life of the receiving societies". Ibidem

¹² P. Pessar, "Engendering Migration Studies. The Case of New Immigrants in the United States", *American behavioral scientist* (1999), vol 42 n. 4 pp 577-600.

Self-employment and "immigrant" entrepreneurship

"Having a job is necessary to be present (legally speaking), to earn a living, but at the same time it becomes an opportunity to establish relationships in a community, with other communities, with local people, to give full meaning to immigration project that implicitly or explicitly each one has built"¹³. Work is presented as a privileged area in which one can observe and evaluate the processes of inclusion of immigrants in the host society: the path taken becomes a fundamental element in the definition of aspects related to quality of life, expectations and projects of the individual. The connection between immigration, work and integration becomes the core of analysis based on the theme of economic integration of immigrants. Although this perspective does not always allow one to *hit the target*¹⁴, it urges reflection both on mechanisms from incorporation in the productive systems of the host countries and the fulfilment of any strategies implemented by the immigrant population. Parallel to the accentuated division between the immigrant and the native labour force, entrepreneurship is seen as evidence of the immigrant's ability to not remain caged in by the marginal tasks that are usually enforced. Indigenous self-employment appears to be a fundamental promotion and upward mobility channel.

However, in the case of the immigrant entrepreneur, complex dimensions arise with several contradictions. Scientific analysis on the subject provides an important framework – a tool that helps to interpret the phenomenon, its causes and its possible interpretations. Although from the different point of view of “exit strategies”, with respect to marginality and immobility of employment, evidence presenting entrepreneurial adventure as a "forced choice" can also be argued. It is, however, not possible to rule out the existence of specific plans and the impact of many external factors.

These analyses cannot give an ultimate solution to the matter: “the immigrant entrepreneur is in fact a highly controversial figure of the ongoing global processes: on one hand he [*sic.*]

¹³G. Gosetti, Lavoro: immigrati e lavoro al tempo della “ricomposizione del lavoro, *Vivere sotto le due torri. Analisi della condizione lavorativa, sociale e di salute della popolazione immigrata nella provincia di Bologna* L. Lelleri, C. Patuelli ,(a cura di), Bologna, Clueb, 2009

¹⁴E. Pugliese, *La presenza straniera in Italia. Il caso della Campania*, Franco, Angeli Milano, 1990

represents a successful immigrant, and as such he [*sic.*] stands out as a model among the other immigrants; on the other hand he [*sic.*] hides the contradictions of today's too easy equation (i.e. the one between immigrant entrepreneur and success, to be precise) that exemplifies the real difficulties of social integration"¹⁵. However, a deep evaluation of the phenomenon cannot stand apart from a few observations: setting apart what should be qualified as "enterprise" from various types of self-employment is not easy, given the need to establish a classification of immigrant businesses, a label that includes the so-called ethnic business and the "open business" model that offers mixed products and services. All these factors are to be considered in the peculiar path of female entrepreneurship together with the aim of individual freedom. As a matter of fact, the chance of leaving so called "bad jobs" is perceived and experienced as a moment of self-determination. However, the fulfilment of this project shows that "immigrants are like water; they can fit wherever there are open spaces. Their concentration in specific occupational niches is the paradoxical result of the social networks from some immigrant groups which first help them to find work more quickly, but then are likely to trap them in these niches"¹⁶.

Italian case studies have produced a significant literature on the basis of investigations and surveys referring to local contexts, but when looking at migrant women, the framework is considerably confined. It is worthwhile noting how in a similar way even the focus on female native entrepreneurship emerged not only with a degree of suspicion, but also with the tendency to underline discrimination and difficulties¹⁷. The international literature has shown a more sensitive attitude to this dimension of analysis¹⁸, even if it has suffered for a long time from lack of attention to the presence of women in migration flows. Therefore, entrepreneurship and self-employment are

¹⁵ A. Valzania, "Successo o rifugio? Luci ed ombre del lavoro indipendente straniero", in M. Ambrosini, F. Buccarelli, *Ai confini della cittadinanza. Processi migratori e percorsi d'integrazione in Toscana*, Franco Angeli, Milano, (2009)

¹⁶ E. Reyneri, *Sociologia del mercato del lavoro. Vol. 2: le forme dell'occupazione*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2005, p. 236

¹⁷ M. Franchi, *Donne imprenditrici: le regole del gioco*, Milano, Angeli, 1992

¹⁸ R. Aliaga-Isla, A. Rialp, "Systematic review of immigrant Entrepreneurship literature: previous findings and ways forward", *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development: An International Journal*, 25:9-10, pp 819-844, (2013) Starting from the publications of some journals, the authors propose an analysis of the international literature produced on the subject of immigrant entrepreneurship. Operating a number of distinctions based on specific criteria, a gender perspective is limited to a few items at a regional and local level and often in relation to specific case studies.

framed in the wider strategy of incorporation of women in the host society and in the specific nature of their migratory path.

In the interpretative framework provided by the study of the female gender migrations, economic initiative would seem to have precise meanings. Theories and explanations about the immigrant entrepreneurial phenomenon can be applied to women's experience. It is easy to trace a turnover in the low-skill activities taken-up by the native population, where, at the same time, a strong commitment is required (shops, restaurants, packaging centres). However, the observation of the female component has gone further, coming to argue that in this case, the requirement is not the need to struggle against unemployment, as in the male case, but a definite desire to get out of occupational segregation¹⁹. Indeed, the possible weakness of available material resources is highly compensated for by the strong motivation, willingness to sacrifice, and, though not always, the support provided by the same ethnic groups and, when possible, by the same families²⁰.

A part of the literature has focused on the so-called *skilled female migrations*²¹ in an attempt to scale the tendency to focus exclusively on sectors such as domestic work or the sex industry to show that migrant women are also in sectors socially recognized and valued. From the point of view of the motivations behind these career paths, the close link between migration projects that welcome the desire for economic emancipation, and traditional social roles is to be noted. Women are driven by the need to improve their living conditions from education to personal development, from economic independence to a precise strategy of accumulation of capital for their own business. Italian studies, not particularly numerous, showed an interesting fact: in the case of women, self-employment is often undertaken with the specific intention of abandoning the heaviest work in favour of creative occupations or otherwise valorising individual capacities²². This fact is

¹⁹ E. Kofman, "Female 'Birds of Passage' a Decade Later: Gender and Immigration in the European Union", *The international migration review*, vol 33 (1999) n. 2, pp. 269-299, Academic Research Library trad. it. in M. Ambrosini, E. Abbatecola, *Migrazioni e Società: una rassegna di studi internazionali*, Milano, Franco Angeli, pp. 219-249, 2009

²⁰ U. Apitzsch, G. Kontos, , "Self-employment, gender and migration", *International review of sociology* vol 13, (2003) pp .67-234

²¹ Kofman *et al.*, *Gender and International Migration in Europe. Employment, welfare and politics*, London, Routledge, 2000; P. Raghuram, "The difference that skills make: gender, family migration strategies and regulated labour markets", *Journal of ethnic and migration studies*, Vol 30, (2004), fasc. 2, pp. 303-321

²² C. Lunghi, *Culture creole. Imprenditrici straniere a Milano*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2003

underlined in this essay as well. Women want to stand alone, far from the control of their husbands²³. In short, it could be said that their will is the most important resource for these women²⁴.

Looking at the volume of the entrepreneurial migrant phenomenon is necessary to inform the Italian national context. We have data supplied by different subjects²⁵ and this causes distortions in the method of providing information. There is a complexity in defining with certainty the number of foreign entrepreneurs as well²⁶. It is also necessary to state clearly what is meant by foreign entrepreneur. For example, the CNA Observatory detects the performance of individual companies that have no Italian holders, Unioncamere looks at foreign entrepreneurship in Italy with a portfolio consisting of holders born abroad, partnerships in which more than 50% of members are made up of people born in a foreign country, or from capital companies in which more than 50% of members and administrators have been born in a foreign country. Lastly, as pointed out by a recent report conducted by EURES on this issue, we must not forget that Italian citizens born abroad are included in this field. The surveys can then be further distorted by the share of foreign citizens who have assumed Italian citizenship.

Keeping in mind these necessary clarifications, we report briefly some data on immigrant entrepreneurship at the national level. Unioncamere - Infocamere shows that in 2014 there has been an increase in immigrant guided enterprises including the areas most affected by the financial crisis such as construction, manufacturing and agriculture. These have increased significantly to 524,674 units. The most common form is that of the individual company; small businesses that make up 86.3% of companies started by immigrants in 2014. While immigrant entrepreneurship emerges as

²³ F. Anhtias, N. Metha, "The Intersection between Gender, the Family and Self-employment: the Family as a Resource", *International review of sociology - Revue internationale de sociologie*, vol 13, (2003), n. 10 pp. 5-116.

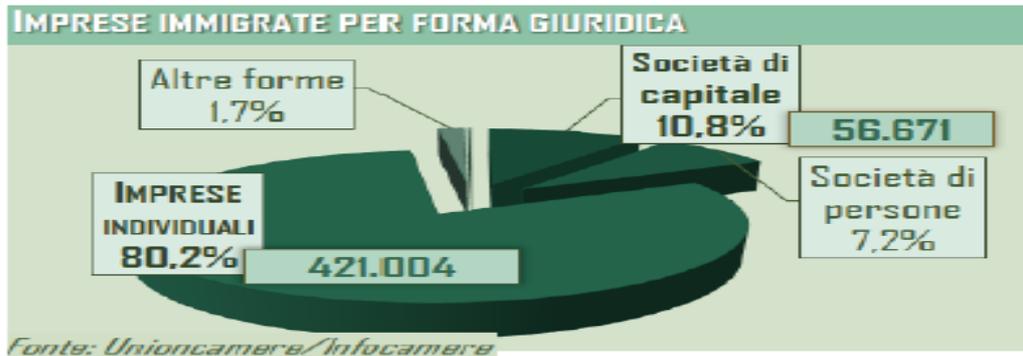
²⁴ M. Kontos, "Considering the concept of entrepreneurial resources in ethnic business: motivation as a biographical resource?" *International review of sociology*, vol 13, (2003), n 1 pp 183-204

²⁵ Istat, Camera di commercio, Movimpresa, Observatory on the evolution of women entrepreneurs in the service sector, INPS are some of the main subjects to conduct this type of survey.

²⁶ Cfr. "The labor market integration of immigrants in the Province of Rome in the context of the economic crisis", *Rapporto Migranti 2011*. In a recent study on immigrant employment ISTAT states that "the articulation of self employment positions of foreigners differs from that of Italian in account of their manual labor and their less strictly entrepreneurs "(ISTAT, 2008). In particular, the self-employed - to which INPS combines the quasi-employees, as not bound by a relationship of dependency with the employers - are concentrated in the crafts, commercial activities and in the construction industry.

an increasingly important component of the Italian production system, the choice of this particular path is still primarily dictated by the search for emancipation and autonomy which, however, in the absence of opportunity, ends up to be an obvious choice.

Figure 1: Immigrant Entrepreneurship by Type



The Unioncamere-Infocamere report then provides information about distribution across regions of the country, as follows:

"[I]n the north where there is more than the [*sic.*] half of immigrant businesses (30.1% in the North West and 21.0% in the North East), with an incidence of one-tenth of all companies registered in the territory (10.0% and 9.4%), above all in the construction sector; however in Centre and in the South of the country the commerce sector accentuate [*sic.*] its leadership, despite a strong differentiation in products. The Centre collects just over a quarter of the companies considered here (26.7%), with an impact of 10.7 % of all local companies, and the entire southern Italy area just over a fifth (22.3%), 5.8% of local businesses. Lombardy, with nearly 100 thousand companies (19.0% of the total), and Lazio with over 67 thousand (12.8%), are the main areas of activity, as well as Rome (57 thousand, 10.9%) and Milan (45 thousand, 8.6%) are

the main provinces and collect, by themselves, nearly a fifth of all immigrant businesses registered in Italy”²⁷.

In particular as regards the Roman area, the immigrant businesses are viewed as an element that increasingly defines and characterizes the economic system of the capital. Where the city is transformed and fragmented, the multiethnic space grows and, with it, the potential of immigrant economic initiative, with trade and construction the main sectors, but surely not the only activities. A particularly interesting aspect concerns the activities managed by immigrants who tend to place themselves in the "open enterprise" model, according to the classification from Ambrosini, making problematic the casual use of the term ethnic business²⁸.

The *Ethnic Immigrant Families Studies*

Anthropological and sociological approaches in the study of immigrant families mention cultural interpretations that can be found on ethnicity and/or the culture of the family and this can be seen as a dominant trait in defining and characterizing different individual and family experiences. In the analysis of immigrant families in host contexts, identity and cultural diversity are key elements. Culture is the central element, a marker of identity which presupposes the adaptive option, and which is the process of integration or assimilation to the new culture of the individual and/or within a family (eg. parents and children). According to this view, the ethno-cultural factor, along with adaptive action, leads to a reduced family relationship of "transmissive machinery" of values, myths, beliefs, and country of origin. In "*Studies on Immigrant Families*," this approach is inspired by the ecological-evolutionary and clinical family, focusing on two aspects: a) How did the family migrate?, and; b) What was the role played by the family to support and protect core members through the challenges they faced, and compared to post transitional stress?

²⁷ Idos, *Rapporto-Immigrazione e Imprenditoria 2015*, 2014

²⁸ CCIAA, Caritas di Roma, *Gli immigrati nell'economia romana: lavoro, imprenditoria, risparmio, rimesse*, 2003
International Journal of Public and Private Management, Volume 03, No. 1, 1 August – 31 December, 2016

As Donati argued²⁹ (1998), every culture has its own and specific representation of the family, from which extends its patrimony of values, both symbolically and socially. The family would be, according to an Italian sociologist, the vital core of its culture of reference, to which it is linked in an essential way. The primordial family plays a fundamental role in human relationships and is also "a social place that promotes a particular movement of goods based on interpersonal gifts and makes explicit prohibitions to cancel this paradigm, worth the loss of the same company"³⁰. This means that the destruction, for any reason, of the family's definitive form by the culture of origin, would be to destroy even this last bastion of identity. Within each culture, there are sub-family cultures that can evolve new forms of family which are able to co-exist and to make strategic responses to the changed social conditions in which they operate, in order to be able to redefine themselves to overcome crises and changes. Donati continued, stating that "the family is essentially a social relation, ie a network of relationships: that is a distinct way in which mutual actions are configured that involve inter-subjectivity and structural connections between subjects"³¹. This is a useful definition and consistent with the object of the search, in which the family plays a role centred in transnational networks linking the different communities from immigrants living in Italy and these with their homelands.

The family is defined as space and place if we think of the house, as the cradle of society, life pattern and/or institution. Donati defines it as a "specific living system, culturally organized, which presides over the organic parts of the internal network and is established in a typical way the rule of symbolic exchange"³². The object of the sociology of the family study, according to an Italian sociologist, would be the definition of the various forms or family types produced in specific historical environments. So it is possible to analyze why this "living" system, (the family), uses multiple conceptual frameworks and mutual morphogenesis in both natural (biological - time) and in social morphogenesis (environmental conditioning - anthropological - historians). With the

²⁹ P. Donati, *Manuale di sociologia della famiglia*, Bari, Laterza, 1998

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1998

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7

³² P. Donati, *La famiglia nella società relazionale. Nuove reti e nuove regole*, Milano, Franco Angeli, p. 9, 1994

functionalist approach, family studies assume two roles; starting from the global study, namely the interactions reciprocated between the sub-family system and other societal subsystems (cultural integration - economics and politics) and the local point of view, such as the analysis of structures and processes for "the inculturation", that is, the typical primary socialization process that develops in children taking, through their family, linguistic codes, genetic heritage, attitudes and social roles that then go on to affect the child's development and personality. According to this view of the family as a social phenomenon, it would develop an individual character. Mauss (1924) specifically calls it a "total social phenomenon"³³, which includes every aspect of daily life, from economic, political, legal, religious, and so on.

According to the communicative approach, the family is the choice of partners³⁴. It is an approach which presents some critical ability in at least ways:

- I. the family is not pure communication, and total social relationship. Luhmann argues that family social system consist of communications, not people, and not even relationships. It is designed as a relevant place for "the complete" person;
- II. the general process of social differentiation leads to the result that no one company's functional system can take account of the family for its action or to its internal differentiation. According to this reading, the family is an interactive system closed on itself;
- III. family socialization is not communication, but a context and system of actions both aimed and intentional. The socialization of the contemporary family, both the couple and children, is bound to lose relevance and become increasingly dissimilar in its expressions³⁵.

The family is not simply the set of individuals who live together, sharing features, but a way in which individuals are together and/or are expected to be together. The analysis of the concept of

³³ This is the approach of the French sociologist Marcel Mauss (1872-1950), disciple and grandson of Emile Durkheim. Mauss in his book *The Gift* (1924) illustrates how the forms of exchange in archaic and primitive societies, which took place in ceremonies and parties, producing a kind of system of reciprocity with the moral obligation to give, receive and reciprocate the gifts. This practice of the ritual of the gift means that you create a social bond, moral and economic, between the community creating, in the words of Mauss, a total performance that is able to structure and understand the different areas and levels of the organization of social life.

³⁴ M. Magatti, *Azione economica come azione sociale: nuovi approcci in sociologia economica*, Milano, Franco angeli, 1999

³⁵ P. Donati, *Op cit.*, pp. 109-113, 1994

the evolution of the family examined from various angles (from history, anthropology and sociology) helps to conceptualize the family, starting with definitions that are useful for the purpose of definition. This essay proposes to focus inside the family, especially for the emergence of a "new vision" for the roles within the family and especially the families of immigrants living in Italy. In the words of Cesareo (1997) "the family is a living system that changes and adapts to the environment, able to regenerate itself and to implement processes of morphogenesis to reinvent creatively the couple's relationship (married life), and the relationship filiation (generativity)"³⁶.

The migrant family as a starting point

Migration, experienced as family strategy, can make use of the cultural dimension but not only it alone. According to these considerations, what secures family members, young people in particular, from the risk of migration? The role of family cohesion is important, with parental support and control, as well as the sharing of values, such as solidarity between generations and the presence of ethnic networks in the group. There are two dimensions which serve as indicators of this process: 1) the link with the origins through cultural heritage care which serves to promote and keep alive their origins, and; 2) the encounter with the cultural other, through the feeling of hospitality, which can be considered as either a success or as a negative element. The hosted family, with society, can create generative or degenerative relationship problems. Going beyond the paradigm of migrant families, what will happen to those children who are born in the place where their parents have chosen to live? How does one raise a family? What is the relationship between mothers and children?

In the words of mothers, their children will experience a strongly different upbringing from theirs: the path of integration is seen to be largely free of obstacles because "they are well-placed," while at the same time they do not ignore the problems that living in another context can cause in

³⁶ V. Cesareo., *Sociologia Concetti e tematiche*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, p. 89, 1997
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terms of mobility expectations, where the same host societies manifest an "assimilation anxiety"³⁷. In this case, we think is right and necessary that children who arrived in Italy at a young age, or who were born in Italy, are given access to citizenship because here in fact they grow up, building friendships and receiving an education. Some among the interviewed expressed some worries in general on youth and the fragility that double-belonging can cause, along with confusion and uncertainty. On the other hand, on at least two occasions it was possible to discern some discomfort about the particular attachment to Italy expressed by the children. The testimony of *Aisha*³⁸, a young woman of Tunisian origin, which shows her concern for her six years son born in Italy and who feels Italian, is particularly interesting. As a woman and mother Aisha feels the need, and the responsibility, to remind him constantly of what his origins are: "*luckily he does not go to an Italian school*" and then adds:

"I face this problem with my son; I tell him 'You are Tunisian' and he refuses. 'I was born in Italy and I am Italian' he says. He is six years old and I struggle with him to explain the rules. I have a child of six years and I have to talk to him about immigration and citizenship ... it is difficult. Luckily he does not go to an Italian school because the Italian degree is not recognized in Tunisia, and our (Tunisian) degree is not recognized in Italy, so he goes to a French school. However, I make many sacrifices so that he can go to Tunisia or France, and has a future where we go ... he has as future".

Regarding this point, it is interesting to note how migrant women assume the role of guardians of the culture of origin, and are considered essential as mediating figures between the two worlds. The distance from their family of origin, from the informal network of knowledge, from

³⁷ M. Ambrosini, "Quando i minori sono "altri" " A. De Bernardis., (a cura di), *Educare altrove: l'opportunità educativa dei doposcuola*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2005

the neighbourhood, helps to undermine the family, and especially women, in their educational function. The new context involves the creation of "educational processes often steeped in ambivalence between attachment to the traditional cultural codes and desire for integration and social mobility in the context of the host society, including the will of the choices and behaviours of children and control compared with a culture that emphasizes the values of personal autonomy, emancipation and, not least, equality between men and women"³⁹.

In the case of Aisha, we can assume some concern regarding the possibility that the child is exposed to those processes which, in fact, are faced by the second generation: a strong sense of discontinuity with the experience of their parents from the point of view of behaviour and expectations, and a crisis with respect to the ability to live in balance between the two worlds. Other difficulties include those that come from the "world of here" and discomfort manifested in being able to handle the "problem of second generations"⁴⁰. The possibility that the children end up feeling imbalanced and rejected by both worlds is a very strong concern in the thoughts of these women. This point, however, reveals some contradictions since, at the same time, Aisha and the other women interviewed, in their capacity as mothers, feel that their children are, and will find, in a different situation from theirs, more opportunities of socio-cultural integration. In the case of Aisha, we can probably talk about an aspiration of integration that is essentially selective and as such encourages "the creative process whereby the capabilities and skills required to integrate successfully in the new environment do not come into conflict with maintaining strong family and community ties and identity reference also related to their origins"⁴¹.

³⁹ M. L. Maniscalco, *Islam europeo. Sociologia di un incontro*, Milano, Franco Angeli, p. 140, 2012

⁴⁰ "In this scenario, concern about the second generation becomes a privileged place to discuss the future of our societies, the new face that are hiring, the new forms of social cohesion they need, as well as the production of new cultural identity, fluid, composite, traded on a daily basis, in a relentless ancient and recent bricolage, traditional and modern, ascribed and acquired, transmitted elements familiar from education and evidence obtained in the extra-family socialization." M. Ambrosini., (2004), "Il futuro in mezzo a noi. Le seconde generazioni scaturite dall'immigrazione nella società italiana dei prossimi anni", M. Ambrosini, S. Molina, (2004), (a cura di), *Seconde generazioni. Un'introduzione al futuro dell'immigrazione in Italia*, Torino, Edizioni Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli

⁴¹ M. L. Maniscalco, op. cit., p. 142, 2012

In this context, again on the importance of family, it is interesting to note the interview with *Madeleine*⁴², a young Colombian woman, who says: *"I am here since 2001. I had a real project because in fact I came to get my husband who had come here to Italy to work, and I decided to reach him to gather the family because this family was destroyed, and I care so much of the family"*. Therefore, the importance of the family drives the woman to sacrifice her relationships at home to reach her husband, along with her offspring. For *Madeleine*, one must respect the host country and the native population by demonstrating good conduct of all the family:

"Indeed I am very, very careful to have a certain behaviour, to make a good impression ... because I am a foreigner, I come from a country that you connect immediately to cocaine and then I try to be 100% accurate but I do my best... although not to bother, not to disturb the Italian in the Italian state. The behaviour is very important because a lot depends on that. I do not understand those who arrive and want everything, so you can not... I always say well to him (her son) you have to behave in a certain way, you have to commit".

While reflecting on the second generation should be considered an autonomous subject, these solicitations reveal the experience of these women living an inclusion that is not defined in a comprehensive manner and double-belonging tends to blur into a situation of "suspension" which is interrupted, but not resolved, by daily contact with Italians.

⁴² Not her real name. The Colombian woman was interviewed in February, 2014.
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Case studies: the migrant entrepreneurs women in Italy

As underlined by the literature, the feminization of migrant flows has been a fundamental aspect of the migration phenomenon: migrating women have gradually received more attention and visibility, have had their roles in the migration process recognized, fighting the idea that they were one and a homogeneous block to be label as "women following their husbands". This process, not without ambiguity, has been accompanied and "strengthened" by the emergence of a gender perspective pointing out the needs of immigrant women in the labour market and in everyday life, together with brand new relations between men and women in migration contexts.

Looking to the so-called Mediterranean model⁴³ reflection on the labour issue has also highlighted the extensive analysis on the concentration of immigrants in the domestic and care sector. This aspect is particularly evident for the Italian situation where, for example, next to the figure of the household, the phenomenon of the caregiver has expanded through the years. These trends have reinforced the image of the immigrant woman into a limited range of possible professions contributing to the continuation of stereotypes.

This was one of the most interesting issues to discuss in this study. In Italian literature, male entrepreneurship has been receiving attention for several years, while the female one has only recently attracted greater interest. The immigrant entrepreneur profile is often made in the context of reports and articles handled by different agencies and institutions. Still, with specific reference to Italy, the diversity of experiences, motivations, the possible consequences in terms of empowerment and possible construction of a specific image has been poorly investigated, especially if contrasted with a "traditional" immigrant stereotype. From this theoretical framework, the interviews are an attempt to explore a portion of a reality yet to be discovered and understood in all its potential. The study of immigrant entrepreneurs appeared to be of interest in the weaving of several factors relating to the multiplicity of experiences that "profoundly transformed the usual scenarios of our daily life" in which there are "immigrants, foreigners, and individual citizens,

⁴³ E. Pugliese, *L'Italia tra migrazioni internazionali e migrazioni interne*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2002
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whose social integration introduces ways and customs, relationships and unfamiliar values to us, both as a source of curiosity and attraction, and also apprehension and discomfort. Like a journey without any movement or distance, but with social and cultural distances, it sometimes seems to be absolute and overwhelming and sometimes turns out to be quite recognizable when we see the familiar landmarks of our social spaces gradually changing"⁴⁴.

This study involved ten women chosen not by statistical sample but for their significant experiences, allowing us to reveal similarities and differences in the definition of their subjectivity of immigrants from different geographical and cultural areas⁴⁵. The collection of data was conducted according to a qualitative approach based on ten life stories followed by intense interpretation. In the stories of those interviewed, is possible to outline topics of particular interest. The analysis of the material has led to the isolation of some dimensions not only closely related to, but also "troubled" by issues such as citizenship, the second generation, the differences between their experience and the experience of the new migrants. Remarks on racism, on the complicated Italian bureaucracy, and on their birth families have appeared. A dimension of particular interest is that of the relations established with the Italians as an encounter of sociability, communication and understanding. Once again various panoramas open in front of the observer's eyes: contradictions arise together with the need to connect their job position to their positive and successful integration. In their words, the desire to show a different, new image of immigration is so strong that their storytelling is strictly oriented to draw all the attention to their value as workers as well as human beings.

It is not possible to deny a certain degree of inclusion even if this is an on-going process that must be cultivated constantly. The core of their stories is focused on people and relationships: "good work" is matched with "successful integration" which, in some way, is simply defined by the approval of the natives. Italians are seen as tolerant toward foreigners, though not always

⁴⁴ Ibidem

⁴⁵ The geo-cultural expression is offered by Tognetti Bordogna

welcoming, especially when it comes to the role of institutions. Ylenia,⁴⁶ for example, arrived in Italy in 1991 from Cuba, and speaks about her childhood, her training, and the reasons that drove her to Italy:

"I had a different education and then see if I am chocolate, If I am black, for me is not a problem, I'm me, so therefore, sometimes all these problems also depend too much on the character and also on what you want. I am very ambitious and outspoken, and I have noticed that since I do not have the problem of racism I think I have not even a colour. I like the elegance of colours for clothes. To me these issues are not interesting. We are what we are, so many things I do not like, however, all countries have bad things then I met people stupid or ignorant but not often. So many things I did not want to see them or I have not even accepted... Of course I do not deny that I have experienced uncomfortable situations, however, comments are normal things and I've always dealt with them with great pride and tranquillity. And again "... certain things toda ... then you know I have an education that when I have to go to an office it allows me to go alone, however, still I often go together with a friend because of the ignorance of many people. There are offices for foreigners and everything is more organized but still, it's bad to say, someone ranks people by what he sees. For example, I've been Italian since '98... when I took the shop at the time when I went to the circumscription, they had put me in the box of extra-community citizens so when I went to ask to renew my health card, they were amazed. Then I wanted to say to them,

⁴⁶ Ylenia, name invented, she was interviewed in January 2014.

“Poor things” – for them it was a normal thing but I'm a normal person. So there they put me in the non-EU group because it was easier and that is a basic problem – a lack of respect. If it happened now I would have called the manager. There I smiled and left. Why you must be accompanied even today? Because you know you have to talk and there is as a matter of authority and credibility, unfortunately, these things still happen and you have to be sure to avoid misunderstandings with them, so I go with my Italian friend. Many times, even when one has to do simple things I have noticed that when I am with an Italian things are better. I think I'm very clear but it is a basic problem of the other person: there is a difficulty of dialogue”.

*Irene*⁴⁷, a Croat, has lived in Italy since the sixties and has chosen Italy, first and foremost, to continue studying. During her stay, she has changed jobs many times. About her relationship with natives she says:

“I do not know... what you want to know... (pauses) ... I do not say that you can generalize on both the Italian and on foreigners but here one can enter only if you are humble and good, respect must be earned with commitment. You must be firm and humble. It serves to get the favour of the people. For me it worked. Though (she raises her voice) definitely maybe now is a special time... that one must also try to understand the reactions, but you... Italians do not show much willingness towards foreigners. I do not know how to explain but the will is there where the foreign citizen behaves well – otherwise not.”

⁴⁷ Irene, not her real name, was interviewed in June, 2014.

An interesting aspect we may also notice is the constant tendency to show off good relations with the natives against the existence of still unclear limits in everyday life, especially with bureaucracy – a machine that does not inspire much trust. *Betty*⁴⁸ is from Romania. She has lived in Rome for many years and her work has been a bet with herself and her family. When she talks about her experiences, from the human point of view about the relationships between foreign and native she says:

"...often they think we are stupid... that we are idiots... They think they can take us in... Italians do not understand that we can adapt to everything and that even if we come here without knowing anything, after a year we already speak the language and I do not want to offend anyone... but we come from a different way of seeing things. I personally came here knowing that I had to adapt here... if I'm in the house of one, I have to adapt... but if I've got an idea that makes you feel... it's hard to make them understand that we, too, we reason. It's hard to understand... because they are sure that only they are right."

When she talks about her relationship with the institutions and on the issue of citizenship, she is very critical:

"There is a difference... that is with the institutions, especially in recent years I have seen changes only for the worse... What can you say?... See... it is not that who knows what the institutions do... sometimes it seems that they are doing anything... for example I do not need citizenship and do not even want it, so I am European... that's all I need. I did it all without citizenship. I could if I had a son. But that to me if I am Romanian French

⁴⁸ Betty, name invented, she was interviewed in January 2014.

Italian citizen... I'm not ashamed... Yes ... it was necessary but it is not, I care about the person, not about what you write on paper."

Lily⁴⁹ moved to Italy in 2001 and comes from Madagascar. After studying chemical engineering in Cuba, she lived in France with her sister, then she left the country to return home. She decided to move to Italy because she already knew other compatriots who lived in Rome and who were helped her. She speaks about the difficulty experienced by foreigners contacting the Italian bureaucracy:

"Bureaucracy, all the things of the documents... it is complicated and if you have someone who helps you better... for example at the beginning I only did the caregivers thing and had difficulty to make the reunification of my children (Her sons have been in Italy since 2006) because I had no one to help me and I did not know the bureaucratic structure... then maybe you turn to some for immigrants centre... but it is not easy. Only with the work then becomes a bit easier... ."

Aisha says about her experience with the natives:

"I'm fine here, however, there are many things that should change, this now has nothing to do with friends, I say, however, that Italy is like divided in two and the percentage of people who reject the immigrants is higher than that they accept it, then it is difficult to help the integration. Because we are in 2014 and still talk about racism. Racism against people who are born here in Italy, who are never considered as Italians." At the same time Aisha talks about her son: *"My son has not only Italian friends but mixed and many black friends that it is hard to see here all mixed... many religions, languages everyone has his own religion, but there is*

⁴⁹ Lily, name invented, she was interviewed in January 2014.

no... indeed problem for me is so much wealth... like the rainbow... so many beautiful colours and makes us pleasure... this racism that there is so much dependent on the family which is the basis of everything. Because if the father and mother speak of racism it becomes a language. We cannot throw everything we care about to the institutions before society starts with the small family... if the little family is healthy then also society and institutions are healthy. It 's all to erase and remake... if we want to talk about a future of Italy, of a healthy future we start with these small generations... with young people. Clean up the brain... we must give importance to the differences in all fields... if that is different from us does not mean it is not good or does not complete us... we cannot all be the same. My son is in love with Rome and Italy... and thus also for the question of citizenship because it is a guarantee for him so growing up he can vote. What interests me is so much the vote... because I see my future and the future of my son. Italy needs a change. Even foreigners have difficulty staying here because not even the dignity of a piece of paper can have and sooner or later when they make the money they have the dream to return to their country, not their dream of growing old here.”

Antonia⁵⁰ and her husband are from Romania. Despite a very complicated stay, she now has an excellent business that gives her satisfaction in many ways. When she speaks about her experience she says loudly:

"The truth is that even after a life here you're always a foreigner. That's for sure. I noticed that no-one doubts that, hearing you

⁵⁰ Not her real name. She was interviewed in June, 2014.

... speak Italian because it already has branded you... at times... but it's something that makes you think, my children sometimes tell me that they feel like Romanians. Maybe the place of birth is what remains somehow... is very important the way you see people because you throw the first stone. But when you meet, you do not know if it's ignorance... maybe they answer "yeah we do so" there is this urge to want to distinguish at all costs... Look, I was reflecting recently on this very thing one can have citizenship... can have a significant role, but... always remain... maybe other societies have already made this step even though I cannot say for sure why I not had experiences in other countries. We live here pretty quiet, so normal... when you know your identity you are strong and you face the world... when it starts to get confused... I do not know".

*Edmunda*⁵¹ arrived recently in Italy. In 2011 she was in Germany because she had won a scholarship for restoration. She is very busy and in a hurry while we speak.

"The desire to promote integration there is and there is a sense of welcome even if the institutions do not have it, and in any case they are forced to have a will because they need us, we are the only ones who continue to struggle. Is an attitude that Italians do not have. I honestly think that makes a difference (having citizenship), I see it with some friends who have it that people when they know that they have it, the attitude changes. Even if I say that you need it and it would be fair for me to have it do not say that I will become Italian. I do not think I ever will be, you know, if you

⁵¹ Not her real name. She was interviewed in May, 2014.

forget where you were born... never losing the identity. Many lose it completely, maybe they do it because they think they fit better, but not to put yourself you have to share.”

We see that this statement confirms that citizenship is most likely to ensure stability from a legal perspective, but not necessarily from a cultural one. Only in this case did the interviewee believe that being an Italian citizens can make a difference not only in the bureaucratic sense, but also in everyday relations. She admits, however, the inability to bridge the gap between her identity and that of the country that welcomed her, a distance that maybe it is good to keep in order to preserve her roots.

On the other hand, the link with the culture of origin and identity expresses a tension that occurs to some extent in the entrepreneurial dimension – they celebrate the success of their business, as such, while facing a public which might not necessarily be ethnic. They also show a deep sense of identification with their own business, an involvement that is not merely economic but mostly emotional.

Ethnicity fades away in the desire to show themselves as entrepreneurs, professionals, and then as foreigners. In the case of Betty, she insists on the Italian spirit of her activity: *"A bit 'with everyone... but especially with Italians, the working relations, that some are even friends, only exclusively Italian"*. The importance of the entrepreneurship dimension emerges from expressions such as *"set aside a mini capital"*, *"seek my own space"*, *"want my autonomy"* and be responsible for their own choices. This determination is very strong, even if the project was in fact defined only over a long time. The interviewees have developed only to the second step of having a small business and to turn a hobby in their main activities, which was a way to place importance on their passions and inclinations. It would seem to be confirmed by the idea of self-employment as a space in which creativity and personal satisfaction are the highest achievement. *Ylenia* remembers having always had *"this interest (drawing and sewing) ... already as a child ... and then to school even if I studied for the diploma to become a surveyor. I also studied art and drawing and sewed at home*

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already" and also Maddalena: *"as a baby I wanted to be a doctor and now instead I take care of the clothes and it is my passion, I'm in love with this work"*. A similar enthusiasm is seen in the words of Greta⁵², who arrived in Italy from Moldova, and shows that she has very clear ideas about what it means to be autonomous and build a future: *"I always knew what I wanted to do, in my country I graduated and took my degree, I worked but earned little. Here I never stop. I do everything there is to be done... I go around talking with people of all colors and all races to bring them to the office. I try to be very positive and face everything with a smile, the important thing is that you know what you want"*.

Conclusions

In this essay, we have tried to explore different dimensions of the experience of foreign women employed in Italy as entrepreneurs. Despite the diversity of the original contexts and experiences, the subject of job has occupied a large part of their reflection, providing a balance and a direction for their path. The individual trajectory was strong enough to enclose a number of meanings ranging from a sense of personal growth to the demonstration of their skills. The achievement of these goals also tended to be delivered with strength and pride both to family and friends back at home, as well as to Italians. This is confirmed by the certainty of living their lives in Italy despite the crisis and the many difficulties encountered in their businesses and social paths. In tandem with this aspect is the feeling that they have a duty to give a positive image, as if their visibility is necessary to promote a certain idea of authority and seriousness and commitment of the foreign worker.

Focusing on issues not directly related to their business, however, we can see many contradictions. For example, it is considered significant that there is a continuous transition between "here" and "there" expressed by frequent use of "we" and "you" and the more or less explicit statement of feeling foreign. With the idea of labour as the heart of the integration process,

⁵² Not her real name. She was interviewed in May, 2014.

the testimonies collected lead to several considerations. For these women, a mobility path was fulfilled in that they could abandon domestic and care work. The desire for autonomy and a strong identification with their work are primary in the construction of their experience. The career has certainly represented a real redemption in their perception. In this sense, there is the question of the perception of the host society of these realities which are still small but growing, and can to show another side of immigration. Other information seems to remain suspended and yet to be defined. One can see a continuous negotiation and conciliation, questioning what is meant by integration. Integration in the job market is not necessarily full inclusion in the social life of the host country. Opening a small individual business leads, in some cases, to reinforcement of the idea of replacing the native in work areas that have lost prestige and attractiveness. Thus, it opens a dynamic dimension: the good will of the individual is not sufficient but must increasingly bind to a path of mutual sharing and dialogue. Integration, in the sense of living together in the social and cultural reality of the country, does not depend on the constraints of defined projects, but is realized according to the places and the actors involved. The story of Magdalene, for example, is an interesting case. She has decided to take over a small tailoring business thanks to the skills she picked up as a child when, at home, she had a small sewing business with her mother being a dressmaker. The idea of running a small business that somehow reminded her of her childhood helped her feel more at home and also made it possible to demonstrate skills that would otherwise be lost, returning a kind of know-how that in her imagination is a form of commitment to the host country. The path drawn has not always been easy. yet we can observe an ongoing process of emancipation, achievement and inclusion in a society that has welcomed them.

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