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Migrant Entrepreneurship and Social Integration: A Case-Study Analysis among Bangladeshi Vendors in Rome

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Abstract: Migration and migrants' integration are prominent aspects of globalized contemporary society. In this respect, a key question appears of how to foster the full participation of migrants in the host society. This article investigates the role of migrant entrepreneurship as a vector of integration. Based on case-study research conducted among Bangladeshi vendors in Nuovo Mercato Esquilino in Rome, the article highlights the potentialities in terms of social and market innovation of such activity. However, it points out that this way forward cannot be considered a generalized solution, relying on strong social and cultural capital that not all migrants, in particular asylum seekers, may have. Thus, it proposes a normative adjustment to empowering migrants and facilitating their endeavors.

Keywords: migration; entrepreneurship; social integration; Italy



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1. Introduction

According to the European Union [1], social innovation encompasses ideas and initiatives aimed at meeting social needs, creating social relationships, and forming new collaborations. While it is commonly referred to as specific projects developed to cope with emerging issues by private and public institutions, it also encompasses grass-roots dynamics and processes that mitigate risks and weaknesses, and open new opportunities for people in fragile sectors of the society [2]. In this respect, as James Phills, Kriss Deiglmeir, and Dale Miller [3] posed, “innovations need not necessarily be original [but] they must be new to the user, context, or applied in a new way. [. . . Moreover] to be considered an innovation, a process or outcome must be either more effective or more efficient than pre-existing alternatives.” [3] Social innovation, thus, regards different aspects of the everyday life of an individual or a community, such as labor and entrepreneurship [4].

Entrepreneurship is a form of mobilization of all the individual's resources in terms of cultural, social, and economic capital, aimed at the improvement of one's living conditions [5]. It is a relational process through which people participate with the surrounding society and expresses their agency—defining and legitimizing their individuality [6]. In this regard, the role of entrepreneurship in a context of increased mobility of people, goods, and ideas brought by the recent globalization [7] can be considered as a way forwards toward social integration, specifically in migrant communities.

Social integration is the process through which migrants incorporate into the host society, embodying its social norms and practices, and functionally being part of its local socio, economic, and political structures [8]. This concept has become key in the debate concerning multiculturalism [9], triggered by the development of international migration that annually sees millions of people leaving their native communities to settle down in a new space, trying to make a home in a new environment [10]. Since the School of Chicago, in the 1930s, the social sciences interrogate the process through which migrant communities interact with the new space, embedding their life in this milieu [11]. Integration, in this respect, is about mingling, and functionally interacting with the host society and improving

the possibility of accessing, drawing from, and increasing the social, economic, and cultural resources of the social space where the migrant lives. In this respect, participation in the local economy and job market is crucial [12], and entrepreneurship appears particularly effective in fostering integration [13]. While migration entails a cultural and social distance between the migrant and the host community, migrant entrepreneurship, which is the form of entrepreneurial activity undertaken by members of a migrant community, is a form of cultural, social, and economic engagement that passes through the market that can provide the opportunity to bridge the gap, fostering better understanding both of the social praxis of the new place as well as of its institutions [14]. Thus, while migrant entrepreneurship fosters social integration and civil growth, cultural diversity turns into a crucial asset both for the growth of the business and of the communities [13,15,16].

Despite this positive perspective, several key questions are still unanswered. These concern for example, the factors that support the migrant entrepreneurial initiative, and the economic space that migrant entrepreneurship can open, whether it should be an innovative and transformative force in the market, in Schumpeterian terms (which is an innovation that causes the destruction of previous forms of businesses and their substitution with the new ones [17]), or a mere form of intensification of competition [18]. This article aims at providing an answer to these questions based on case-study research [19] conducted in Rome among Bangladeshi entrepreneurs at Nuovo Mercato Esquilino (New Market Esquilino, in English) marketplace between autumn 2020 and spring 2021. The ethnographic research investigated the characteristics of migrant entrepreneurship, its history, and perspectives. The Bangladeshi community was chosen because it is often referred to as one of the most successful in terms of entrepreneurial activity, e.g., [20–24], which in Italy is expressed mostly with small-scale retail business [25].

The article opens by presenting the research and case study. Then, it outlines the characteristics of the Bangladeshi entrepreneurial experience, and explores the resources leveraged and the opportunities seized—the basis of the vendors' entrepreneurship. The discussion of the data that emerged from the field thus highlights the interplay between harsh contextual conditions and individual socio-cultural and economic resources in the entrepreneurial process, suggesting that despite the positive premises, entrepreneurship per se cannot provide a generalized answer for social integration. However, the specificities of migrant entrepreneurship should be regarded as an interesting area of the market and social innovation in terms of retail services provided in the context of a growing multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. The Target Group: The Bangladeshi Community in Rome

Over the past forty years, Italy has reversed its historical vocation and has become a country of immigration [26]. Specifically, the country has been the destination of migration flow from diverse regions, primarily from Eastern Europe, Northern Africa, and Central and South Asia [27]. A substantial migration from Bangladesh began in the late 1990s. Still, in the 2000s, Italy was considered a transition phase that preceded migration to the UK. It was only in the second half of the 2000s that the country turned into a final destination where Bangladeshi migrants looked for economic opportunity [28].

In 2021, accordingly to the Italian National Institute of Statistics, Bangladeshi represented the seventh largest migrant community in the country, with 158,000 people [29]. Bangladeshi migrants are prevalently male, single, and traveling alone. About 29% of Bangladeshi migrants live in Rome (39,078 people in 2021, which is the largest Bangladeshi community in the European Union) [30]. They are particularly active in the job market, as the unemployment rate of Bangladeshi males (15 years and over) shows: 7.1%, which is below the average unemployment rate of Italians (8.8%) and the EU population (12.1%).

In terms of professional development and occupation history, Bangladeshis usually participate in the Italian economy in three ways: as employees, street-hawkers, and entrepreneurs [28]. The first immigrants from Bangladesh were street vendors. The street-

hawkers who have become such a prominent feature on Roman streets sell a variety of wares such as lighters, tissues, car fresheners, flowers, toys, or jewelry. However, over time, many began to make money and hire employees from their own country. Usually, once the employees managed to put together a bit of money, they, in turn, would ask the community for a loan, in order to set up their own business (often mini-marts, corner shops, or market stands), exploiting the labor of recently arrived fellow nationals [31].

Through their entrepreneurial spirit, Bangladeshi migrants have achieved what few other migrant communities could in Italy: they have managed to take over a niche in Italy's economy, attracting Bangladeshi and Italian customers alike to their mini-marts, providing long opening hours, all year round [31]. The overall relevance and prominence of the community are testified by the flow of remittances generated by Bangladeshis in Italy. They have remitted nearly 1 billion dollars from Italy between 2000 and 2010, according to Bangladesh's central bank [28,32]. More recently, figures released by the Bangladesh government and disseminated by the press indicate \$721.43 million remitted only in 2020.

The community is particularly numerous and active in Rome, where they have a key role in the retail sector, in particular in the marketplaces. Specifically, in the early periods of migration, the Bangladeshi population was concentrated in the Esquilino district, close to Termini Station, where young Bangladeshi men lived in bachelors' houses. While in the past years, with family reunifications becoming more frequent, families began to move eastwards, to the Tor Pignattara district, however the Esquilino district is still a key place for the community.

2.2. The Site: Equilino District and its Nuovo Mercato

Esquilino is the 15th rione (district, in English) of Rome, identified by the initials R. XV, and is located within Municipio I. It is named after Esquiline Hill (Figure 1). The district is renowned for its multi-cultural milieu that is manifested by the presence of numerous ethnic shops, as well as cheap hotel facilities aimed at providing first hospitality for migrants.

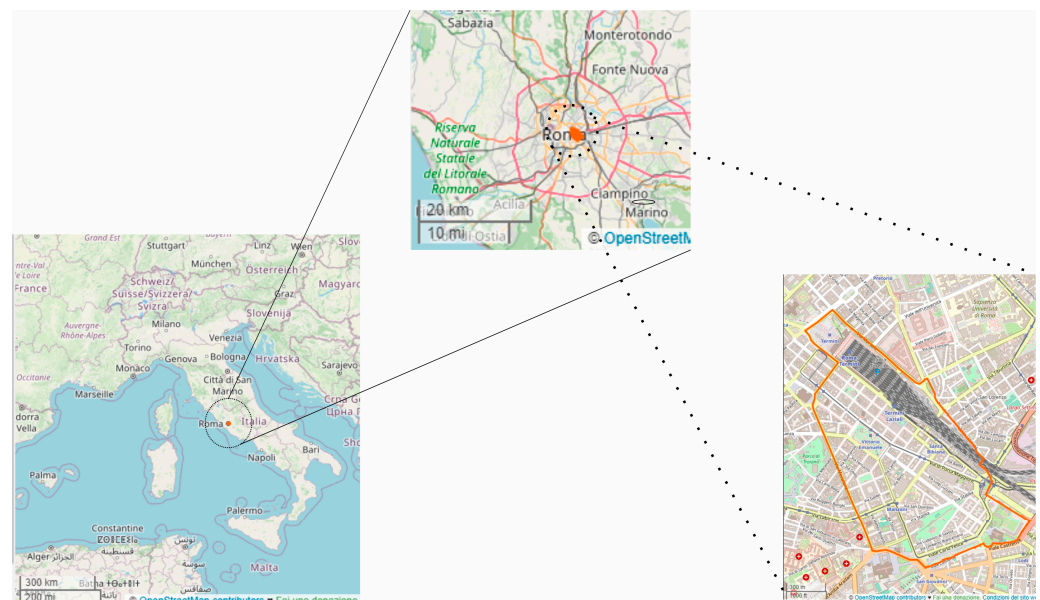


Figure 1. Location and Boundaries of Esquilino. Source: OpenStreetMap.

A key place in the district is its market, the Nuovo Mercato Esquilino (Figure 2), which is one of the most important marketplaces in the city, established at the end of the 1990s in an attempt at expanding and improving the old marketplace of the district built in Piazza Vittorio at the beginning of the twentieth century [33]. The presence of foreign customers, specifically in the past few decades, favored on the one hand maintaining a certain level

of the cheapness of products and, on the other hand, has determined the expansion of the variety of foods offered, with the inclusion of specific ingredients of the African, Asian, and Mediterranean diets [34]. All this meant that the new marketplace not only served the neighborhood, but also a large part of the migrant population located all over the city. This made Nuovo Mercato Esquilino a flourishing place of migrant entrepreneurship, and in 2021, a large part of the stands was run by migrant entrepreneurs, of which Bangladeshi entrepreneurs are the largest group.



Figure 2. Nuovo Mercato Esquilino from the outside. Photo by S. Mendonce.

2.3. The Ethnographic Market Analysis

Since the seminal contribution of Geertz [35], marketplaces are commonly regarded as crucial ethnographic windows to investigate a society, and specifically the complex socio-political and economic dynamics that underpin the entrepreneurship that is expressed there [36]. A marketplace is complex in nature: it is “both a literal place and a symbolic threshold, a ‘socially constructed space’ and ‘a culturally inscribed limit’ that nonetheless [involves] is inextricably bound up with the local community.” [37]. Thus, a marketplace is a place where social and cultural connections are established among vendors as well as with the clientele through daily interaction and conviviality [38]. While such a relationship may reinforce cultural bias and distances [39], they are mostly reported as an opportunity for socialization and integration [38]. Moreover, the quotidian encounter with a diversity of products and people turns the place into an informal educational platform fostering the integration of migrants into the receiving countries [40]. Considering this premise, this research focused on a specific marketplace and its migrant entrepreneurs.

The research was conducted between November 2020 and May 2021 in Nuovo Mercato Esquilino, in Rome. The market is spread between two blocks: one for food stalls and the other for non-food stalls. There was a total of 132 food stalls, which can be classified under the following categories: fruit and vegetable, poultry and meat, fish, and dry ingredients (spices, dry fruits, packaged foods, etc.) (Figure 3). During the research period, 109 of the food stalls were fully functional; of these, 76 were operated by Bangladeshis, 20 by Italians, and 13 by vendors of other nationalities (such as Chinese and Moroccan).



Figure 3. Moments of commercial activity in the market (13 September 2022). © Sharon Mendonce.

The research involved an ethnographic marketplace analysis [41] that includes participant observation of the market activities, mapping of its places and actors, food scouting [42], and short interviews with the vendors and clients to create the first base of knowledge concerning the dynamics of the markets, and the common challenges and opportunities for the vendors, as well as a campaign of in-depth interviews with Bangladeshi vendors.

The research included 10 entrepreneurs, 2 from each category of food stalls and 2 vendors from non-food stalls (i.e., 2 own fish stalls, 2 own fruit and vegetable stalls, 2 own dry food stalls, 1 owns a meat stall, 1 owns a predominantly kitchen supplies stall, 1 owns a clothes stall, and 1 owns a shoes stall). The sample size was selected to be as representative of the Bangladeshi vendors as possible, despite the brief research period (the market was sporadically shut for a few weeks at a time for reasons such as poor hygiene standards, rising COVID-19 transmission concerns, and the holiday season) and limited number of vendors agreeing to be participants in the study (most had challenging schedules as their work day could begin as early as 4 am and end as late as 5 pm, with only a single day off in the week).

Interviews were conducted in either Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, or English and lasted an average of one hour each. The questions from the unstructured interviews revolved around themes of migration, food choices, and entrepreneurship (a summary of the key questions is presented in Table 1). The interviews were conducted in person. Before each interview, informed consent was obtained, as recommended by the code of ethics of the American Anthropological Association. Interviewees were informed in advance about the rationale, aims, methods, and expected outputs of the project. Data were anonymized during the analysis.

Table 1. The table presents the key questions used to complete the semi-structured interviews with Bangladeshi entrepreneurs. The interviews were divided into three main sections concerning entrepreneurship, management of the stall, and their private life and experience with migration. The questions and their orders, then, were adapted accordingly with the methodology of the semi-structured interview [43].

	Question
Block 1: Entrepreneurial Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How long have you had a stall at the market for? - What is a regular day at the market like? - How did you get a stall at the market? - Was it easy to get ownership? - What is your educational background? - Have you had previous job experience? Specifically, in selling at markets? - What difficulties did you face? - How did you overcome these? - What advice would you give someone who would like to start a stall? - Who are your customers?

Table 1. Cont.

	Question
Block 2: Stall Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What food/product do you stock? - How do you select your stock? - How are your goods procured? - Has COVID-19 impacted your procurement and/or sales?
Block 3: Migration Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When did you arrive in Italy? - Why did you come to Italy? - How did you come to Italy? - Do you have a family? - Do you have any friends here? - Do you feel 'at home'? - Where do you see yourself in the future? - What kind of food do you eat on a daily basis?

3. Results

Nine out of ten interviewees are male, first-generation migrants, and first-generation entrepreneurs. They have a low–middle class background, and a high level of education: 5 out of 10 have a university-level education, and all the others had completed their secondary education. They arrived in Italy in the mid-2000s, looking for economic opportunity and a better life. However, despite the expectations, they met difficulties in finding a job. Four of them mentioned the “lack of work.” This condition pushed them into taking up whatever work they were able to find. One food stall vendor noted that he did: “lots of odd jobs. Too many to count!” (Hasib, 23 November 2020). Another said he had to work “illegally” (Najmul, 14 January 2021), which is without a proper visa. Another mentioned he took on jobs such as a barista and a waiter despite not having any experience in either (Hossein, 8 April 2021). Thus, the job market for Bangladeshi migrants is often tinted by precariousness [44]. In this landscape, the first objective for them is to find stable employment. Entrepreneurship is undertaken only if they have the confidence, and they have the solid skills to set up and run a business. Using the categories proposed by Chrysostome [45], the vendors expressed a form of entrepreneurship pushed by opportunity rather than mere necessity.

In the creation of this opportunity, for half of the interviewees, it was crucial to have previous work experience in a stall at the market. All these vendors highlighted the significance of their time spent working in a stall which provided them the opportunity to reach a deep understanding of the profession, and better knowledge about the products sold, the customers’ needs and preferences, and the management of the flow of money. In this respect, the comment of Ahmed (10 February 2021), a fishmonger, is exemplary: “This stall has so many Italian clients. I am proud of it. It means that what I learned in the market, before starting my stall, was meaningful and right. There is really no substitute for that experience.”

Moreover, the previous experience at the market is vital to improve their linguistic skills of Italian, otherwise limited to basic compulsory language courses completed to gain access to the trade license. As Mohammed (7 April 2021), a poultry and meat seller, put it: “I may have a university degree from Bangladesh, but I learned Italian by working in the market.”

Likewise, this work creates useful contacts in finding a stall at the market and provides support with the process of renting or buying it out. Thus, in light of all of this, it was common knowledge, also among those informants who did not have this work experience before, that a period of work in the marketplace is valuable.

Bangladeshi entrepreneurship seizes another key opportunity. Italian vendors abandon the marketplaces, because of insufficient returns and strenuous working conditions that the work in a stall encompasses. This is the case of Abdul (18 November 2020), who took over the stall from an Italian owner, and explained, “I was really worried when I

bought it. I took over it from an Italian seller. I was afraid this would affect my business ... you know ... a new face, a stranger would have had made clients run off. Instead, no! They liked how I work, what I have learned and was putting in use. They remained loyal to the stall and now they are the backbone of my business." In the market, these empty spaces are filled with Bangladeshi vendors at Nuovo Mercato Esquilino who take over the licenses, generally by renting them from the Italian holder. Rent overcomes the economic and administrative high entry barriers required for getting a new license. Despite the willingness of the Italian holder of selling the license, however, rent often does not turn into a purchase. Reza (7 May 2021), one of the non-food vendors, explained, "We don't usually buy stalls because they're very expensive and the money is better spent elsewhere!" He exclaimed, "50,000 in euros is 50 lakh Bangladeshi taka ... You can be rich at home! Why would you invest it here?" Such a decision is not just linked with nostalgia. It is the result of the difficulty in creating relationships with banks, and especially in their ability to obtain credit and loans. Banks tend to grant credit based on the duration of the permit to stay of an immigrant, and the maximum time for loan repayment may not go beyond its expiry date. Thus, immigrants, specifically those who need to periodically renew their permit, are practically cut out of the formal credit process, and it is very unlikely for them to obtain a consistent loan that allows them to potentially start a business.

The difficult access to credit entails the difficulty of obtaining a long-term business visa. Although all the informants were able to obtain a permanent residency permit or Italian citizenship (only one seller), they all pointed out the length of the process, which took at least three years. This situation is the result of the rigid legislation concerning immigration, based on a strict quota system enforced in Italy [27,46]. Facing the complex and uncertain legal context, migrants have to come to terms with a limited possibility of acquiring and running a business. Such precariousness undermines their legitimization as social and economic actors and, as mentioned explicitly by the informants, ends up precluding the possibility of envisioning a long stay in Italy—a perspective that is needed to plan investments and develop a business [47].

Social capital is a key tool for entrepreneurs to overcome many of these limitations. Half of the informants arrived in Italy already having some relative in the country ($n = 5$), and the others also had acquaintances and friends in the country. These people are the primary elements of the network of relationships owned by each entrepreneur. They use this network for procuring initial jobs, credit, accommodation, and, at times, the working force for the business as well as information, contacts, and expertise for dealing with the complex bureaucratic and bank systems. Then, weak social ties—which are bonds that derive from interpersonal relationships rather than formal obligations [48]—link the vendors to the other vendors in the marketplace, as well as with some of the customers, Italian and international. These weak ties have a central role in the conduction of the stall because they provide the channel through which vendors acquire information concerning changes in preferences, emerging needs of consumers, market policy changes, etc. Moreover, through daily interaction with colleagues and clients, entrepreneurs become accustomed to the language and the culture of the city, furthering the entrepreneurs' actual and potential social integration.

For the vendors, the opening and management of their businesses have a deep and multifaceted meaning that refers to tangible and intangible aspects of their life. First, it is recognized as a concrete opportunity to reach a safe possibility of earning that reflects on the possibility of accessing stable housing. Precarious work conditions are coupled with precarious accommodations. Rooms are commonly shared with other migrants, and often secured through informal contracts that provide no defense against sudden eviction or other forms of abuse. Financial stability and stable income provide the means to access the formal housing market, renting accommodation for the entrepreneurs and their relatives, as in the case of the informants who all live in Rome and share them with their relatives.

Moreover, the overcoming of economic insecurity is a key element in terms of creating a base for the support and reunification of the family. Precarious workers tend to keep their

families in Bangladesh, sending the little savings as remittances to support them. Stable occupation allows the migrants to reunify their families in Italy, proving necessary for the spouse, the children, and potentially the migrant's parents once arrived in Italy.

These elements reinforce an overall sense of individual legitimacy within the migrant community and within the Roman community that the vendors link to the running of their business. As reported by Hasib (23 November 2020), a fruit and vegetable seller: "Having this stall means that I am someone for my customers . . . I'm not just a migrant in the street they throw alms to. I'm a person with a certain, maybe small, importance in their lives." Being an entrepreneur is, therefore, the achievement of an effective integration in the Italian community and the achievement of a position in which individuals can fully express their agency, which manifests in entrepreneurial choice and daily trade.

The stalls express a particular model of business that cannot be simply included under the rubric of a stereotypical ethnic shop run by migrants for migrants. Rather they represent a juncture between different clienteles that emerges from the juxtapositions of goods commonly used by Italian consumers with others used by consumers from Latin America or South Asian countries (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. Examples of the goods sold by Bangladeshi food stands. (2 August 2022). © Sharon Mendonce.

The selection of goods is generally first made based on the taste and knowledge of the entrepreneur. In this respect, often, it refers to needs shared within the Bangladeshi, or more in general the migrant, community in Rome. Comments such as "I know what they [South Asian customers] want . . . I'm one of them at the end of the day . . ." (Mohammed, 7 April 2021) or "I have the products I would buy for my meal . . . and it is what most Bangladeshi people want and buy" (Yusuf, 18 November 2021), express this understanding. In doing so, Bangladeshi vendors carve out a niche market, serving their co-nationals and the larger migrant community of the Esquilino district, answering to the nostalgia for specific food from their home country [49], and the desire for the same items that they consumed before migration.

Although the niche represents a fundamental reference market for the vendors, and security for their businesses, Bangladeshi entrepreneurs often move beyond the niche boundaries. As explained by Ahmed (10 February 2021), one of the vendors: "We [Bangladeshi people] are many in Rome, but in [Nuovo Mercato] Esquilino there are customers from Italy, too. I want them also to be my customers." To intercept this clientele, vendors enrich

their offer by including goods that are also of use for Italians. They select these items out of their experience or by copying from other successful stands and observing the choices of the clients of the marketplace. It is a movement toward the open market that expresses a form of specific innovation in the ability to maintain a traditional migrant clientele and expand it to new customers. In this hybridization, it is possible to identify a materialization of a socio-cultural process of integration that makes the Bangladeshi entrepreneurs able to interpret the host society and develop a unique trajectory of business development. "I know the stand looks different from what it was before [when it was run by an Italian entrepreneur], and there are different things, more things. But I am happy that most of the old customers [Italians] continue to come to visit the stand and new ones [migrants] are coming as well," concluded Fahad (11 March 2021), a dry ingredients seller.

4. Discussion

This research points out the complex process that defines Bangladeshi migrant entrepreneurship. Specifically, it is the combined result of a response to the legal and cultural impediment the migrants have to face once in Italy, and the mobilization of economic and socio-cultural capital in order to secure and improve their status. In fact, all the Bangladeshi entrepreneurs appear as socio-economic actors endowed with strong social capital and embedded into the economic and institutional milieu of the city. As suggested by Aldrich and Waldinger [13], their entrepreneurial activity is the creative result of:

- (1) The characteristics that immigrants bring with them, and which predispose them to do well in business (e.g., high level of education, strong links with other people of the migrant community).
- (2) The local structural conditions that favor the migrant's endeavor (e.g., the availability of rentable stalls, a multi-ethnic clientele).
- (3) The interplay between resources and opportunities that immigrants encounter.

While Aldrich and Waldinger focus primarily on the positive contextual elements, the scholarly debate also indicates the impact of other concurring elements that limit migrant entrepreneurship, e.g., [50–53]. Among them, access to credit, as well as possible barriers imposed by the local legal system that impede access to the formal economy to migrants, are among the most cogent faced by the Bangladeshi entrepreneurs.

The specificity of the current Italian legislation limits the possibility of migrants to a full residence permit. As S.M. Aminur Rahman (7 May 2021), chairman of the Bangladesh Foreign Exchange Dealers' Association and the Janata Exchange Company srl. in Italy, pointed out during an interview: "The Italian government has a condition that whenever an individual remits money, he will have to show his identity card (which hints at his visa status) and sources of income from his official job." This is the first crucial impediment because the availability of a proper business visa is a fundamental requirement to register and start a firm. Moreover, it is also required to gain full access to credit through the Italian bank system. The informants have tried to respond to these structural limitations through their families, raising funds, and finding help. Moreover, the lack of access to credit affects not just the start, but also the development of the businesses. Relying on limited credit, savings, and earnings, the entrepreneurs face limited possibilities of expanding their activity, forcing it to a small size despite the skills and desires of the entrepreneurs.

Moreover, similarly to what was indicated by Basu [54], the capacity to launch a business and its success rely on the acquisition of professional and cultural competencies (among which is a robust knowledge of the local language). Despite the professional education that many Bangladeshi migrants completed before arriving in Italy [30], they have substantial language deficiencies and cultural gaps. While the access to formal education aimed at the acquisition of language and professional skills may be restricted, e.g., [55], direct involvement in business activities appears a privileged way of acquiring this knowledge, as well as a means of economic survival.

As a response to necessity and the restriction of the context, migrant entrepreneurship develops thanks to individual social and cultural capital mobilizing resources within the

entrepreneurs' social network. However, this solution has a substantial shortcoming. It reiterates class, caste, religious, and gender bias and divides within the migrant community, precluding possibilities of broader inclusion of sectors. In this respect, it is relevant to notice the absence of women among the vendors, a datum that mirrors the marginalization of women also in the Bangladeshi economy [56].

In face of these substantial aspects of conservatism, the development of the vendors' entrepreneurship outlines a specific trajectory that can be read in terms of social integration and innovation. It develops along a path of peripheral legitimation, as the one modeled by Lave and Wenger [57], through which migrants first as workers, then as entrepreneurs, meet and understand the host community, hybridize their knowledge, and learn its needs. Specifically, this path proceeds through the acquisition of language skills and trade competences. Once mastered in the course of months or years of work in the market, the migrants define and specify their professional identity as the one of a market seller, moving away from a past of multiple and diverse forms of occupation. At the same time, they acquire the needed financial resources to rent or buy a commercial license and a stall, and run a business, to fulfil themselves.

A distinguishing trait of migrant entrepreneurship is the ability of developing forms of businesses that bridges the needs of the local (Italian) clientele and the one of their native communities. In developing the firm, they expand their approach, creating an offer that can answer the needs of their community as well as the ones of the locals. This offer, hence, is a material and commercial manifestation of social integration in so much as it can keep together different needs and cultural instances. Thus, instead of copycatting and replacing local entrepreneurial format, migrant entrepreneurship trots along an innovative direction that, however, struggles to be scaled up considering the contextual restrictions.

Overall, then, the case of the Nuovo Mercato Esquilino and its Bangladeshi vendors confirms that entrepreneurship offers a concrete opportunity for social integration. It is a grass-roots process that blossoms out of necessity and opportunity and creates jobs, possibilities of intercultural interaction, and cultural development through new business ventures that contribute to wealth creation, as well as the recognition of immigrants. This path, however, is not open to all, and specifically not to those who have no access to the economic and socio-cultural capital the informants were able to mobilize.

5. Conclusions

This article aimed at exploring the trajectories of migrant entrepreneurship, its foundations, and its extensions. The ethnographic analysis pointed out the elements that favor success but also the limiting factors that impede a broader entrepreneurial development. In doing so, the paper contributes to highlighting the reason for the success of the case of migrant entrepreneurship embodied by the market vendors and indicates the possible solutions to support the expansion of this form of social innovation.

The case study of the Bangladeshi vendors of Nuovo Mercato Esquilino suggested the important aspects concerning social integration that are encompassed by this entrepreneurship. In so doing, however, it shows that this path may not be a generalized solution. Contextual limitations, linked first to migration policies, make entrepreneurship a trajectory that draws heavily from the individual's specificities rather than systemic elements. To open entrepreneurship up to a broader public, substantial policy reforms should be advocated, allowing the broader public to enter the job and the credit market. In this respect, while one of the key fears that echo in the public debate is the one of unfair competition, the case study suggested that migrant entrepreneurship develops along new trajectories, opening up new markets, thus expanding the local economy rather than merely competing with already established realities. Thus, if migrant entrepreneurship is the expression of the globalization and multiculturalization of the local space, it is also the proof of its social innovation—a change that moves toward deeper integration of the newcomers in a host society.

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