
UNDERGROUND WORK, IMMIGRANTS AND NETWORKS: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS FROM ITALY

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Abstract

This article exposes and tries to explain some preliminary findings from a research project, still in progress, on immigrant insertion into the underground economy in the agricultural, building and family care service sectors in Tuscany. Employing a network analysis approach it seeks to explain how immigrants, both documented and undocumented, get their jobs for Italian employers and the role that ethnic and non-ethnic networks play in providing information on vacancies, guarantees to employers and activating mechanisms of social control and sanctions against a worker. The finding is that although networks play an important role in providing information on vacancies, such networks play a less important role in providing guarantees for employers and as mechanisms for social control. This is explained in terms of both the characteristics of immigrant groups and their networks and the Italian underground economy more generally.

Introduction

In the international literature there are many different terms used to denote the underground economy and informal employment (Portes and Sassen-Kobb, 1987; Portes, Castells and Benton, 1991; Portes, 1994; Williams and Windebank, 1998; Mateman and Renoy, 2001; OECD, 2004). So a preliminary definition

is necessary in order to understand exactly the use I will make of various terms.

In this paper, the terms *underground* or *black* or *irregular economy* will be used as synonymous terms and denote “the paid production and sale of good and services that are unregistered by, or hidden from, the state for tax, social security and/or labour law purposes but which are legal in other respect” (Williams and Windebank, 1998: p.1). *Informal employment*, or *black work*, or *unregistered* or *undeclared* or *irregular work*, meanwhile, will be used as synonymous terms to denote a “relationship where one’s labour is recompensed by a wage or fee, in other words, paid” (Williams and Windebank, 1998: p.3), but when the whole relationship is not regular, for example when there is not any labor contract. Finally, I use the term *gray work* or *gray employment* to denote a situation where only a part of the relationship is not regular according to laws; for example when extra payment for overtime is made without registration or when there is use of atypical labor contracts contrary to laws.

In this paper, moreover, I take care to distinguish between migration and about immigrants’ status in work and in host countries. Here, ‘irregular’ refers to immigrants regularly in the national territory but with an irregular job or a gray job; ‘undocumented’ (not authorized) refers to those regularly entered in the national territory but with an expired permit to stay; and ‘clandestine’ refers to those who have entered into the national territory completely without any authorization.

The research reported here is focused on irregulars employed by Italian employers in the region of Tuscany. It is based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with a range of respondents and employs a network analysis approach in order to understand the relationships between immigrants, networks and the underground economy.

The underground economy in Italy and Tuscany

The underground economy is a largely extensive and deeply rooted phenomenon in the Italian productive context. By means of a review of the international research that considers the size of the underground economy, it is possible to identify three groups of countries in Europe: those with a low rate on GNP of submerged activity (such as Austria, Ireland, Great Britain, Scandinavian countries), those with a middle rate (such as Germany, Belgium, France) and those with a very high rate (over 15% as in many Southern European countries). Among this latter group, Italy is the country, after Greece, with the largest underground economy.

Informal employment in Italy increased during the late 1990s and for the first years of the new century (Roma, 2001), even if the incidence of workers without any labor contract seemed to be lower and the incidence of people having a double job (the first one regular the second on irregular) higher. The incidence of foreign workers in the underground economy, meanwhile, seems to have increased. The sectors presenting higher rates of black work are agriculture, the service sector, especially family care services, restoration in manual jobs, cleaning services and the construction sector. On the contrary the industrial sector is where gray work prevails. It must be pointed out that along Italian peninsula very different situations exist however. Irregular jobs are more than 20% in the South (with areas reaching 40%), about 15% in the Center and about 10% in the North (Meldolesi, 1998; Lucifora, 2003).

Tuscany, a region of central Italy, has a situation like other neighboring areas and gray work

prevails (Regione Toscana, 2001). According to the Social Security Institute (INPS) inspections' data, in 2002, the rate of irregular enterprises among the inspected ones was 62% and among these ones "only" 25% were completely black (Unioncamere Toscana, 2003). Irregularity, meanwhile, is concentrated in the above mentioned sectors, where also at national level, informal employment is more widespread. The worker typology of those involved in these jobs are that they have a regular formal job and an irregular second occupation or weaker categories with more problems of inclusion in the labor market such as youth, women, and immigrants.

Immigration in Italy and Tuscany

For many years a country of migrants, Italy has had an increasing number of immigrants inside its borders since the 1970s, during the conversion of the industrial economy into a post-industrial or post-Fordist economy and the concomitant increasing relevance of informal employment and underground economy.

At the beginning the places of origin were North African countries and the Catholic Latin American countries or Philippines (especially women recruited by religious associations or Catholic church to care for elderly or children in families), but since the 1990s, the presence of people coming from Eastern Europe and continental Asia has increased and now is the largest part.

At the start of 2004 the number of foreigners in Italy was about 2,194,000 (Caritas, 2004), about 3.8% of the overall population. The biggest communities are Rumanian (10.9% of all foreigners), Albanian (10.6%) and Moroccan (10.4%) immigrants. Less represented but nevertheless numerous are people from the Ukraine,

China, Philippines and Poland (5.1%; 4.6%; 3.4%; 3% respectively). Most of the resident foreigners have a permit to stay for work reasons (about 2 out of 3); also family reunion permits (25%) have increased very much during the few last years, displaying the degree to which immigration has increased in Italy during recent years (Pugliese, 2002).

In the very segmented Italian labor market, immigrants are complementary and not substitutive or competitive with local workers (Gavosto, Ventuini and Villosio, 1999; Venturini, 1999; Reyneri, 2002). They fill “dirty, dangerous and damaging” jobs (Abella, Park and Bohing, 1995) where labor power shortage is evident. So, it is easy to find a foreign worker in the worst parts of the agricultural sector, in the building construction industry working as laborers, in the family care services when living together is necessary or in the manufacturing industries working as unskilled workers. The smallest enterprises (up to 10 employees or slightly more) are the ones more often hiring immigrant workers (Caritas, 2004).

So, the contexts where foreigners move and work, regularly or irregularly, are the same as where irregular employment is widespread among Italians. Again according to Social Security Institute data of inspections, for the year 2003, foreign workers with a total irregular job have been about 14,250 with a proportion three times bigger than the incidence of foreign workers on the total labor forces (*ibidem*).

For several years Italian Governments had not enacted any policies or any special law about migration and obviously this lack of rules has influenced and contributed to widespread immigrant’s involvement in irregular employments. Most of them had been living a long period of their migratory experience in conditions of irregularity or clandestinity (Pugliese, 2002). This does not mean that the presence of undocumented

immigrants is the main reason for the diffusion of the underground economy; on the contrary studies on relationships between immigration and black economy, stress that the many immigrants choose Italy just because it is a country where it is easy to live and to earn even without documents, preferring it to more affluent nations for this reason (Reyneri, 2001a; 2003). The underground economy has to be considered the cause and not the effect of unauthorized immigration (*ibidem*; Sciortino, 1997). Many people can attain their aims entering Italy with a regular tourist permit and staying beyond the deadline of the permit (overstayer) earning their living by holding only black jobs. Instead of being a borders control problem this is a clear indicator of the serious lack of inspections on labor market workplaces. About this it will be sufficient to remember that the ratio of work inspectors/workers is 1/7 in comparison with the European average (Reyneri, 2002). A great many of the overstayers began to work irregularly then, thanks to the frequent regularization measures (*sanatoria*), they regularized both their work and their presence in Italy (Reyneri, 1998; Carfagna, 2002; Barbagli, Colombo and Sciortino, 2004; Pugliese, 2002).

The pattern of immigration policy today presents some analogy with the German one in particular because the non-communitarian foreigner needs a labor contract to get the permit to stay and in any case, a very important fact in order to understand the behavior of an immigrant in the submerged labor market, he has to renew it every two years at least. A partial exception is given to the ones who have been residing for six years and can obtain a permit to stay (*carta di soggiorno*) which does not need continuous renewal. Family reunion permits are possible for sons and daughters under eighteen years and for the husband or the wife. With new rules, to hire an undocumented worker is a penal crime.

About Tuscany, the essential and fundamental data on immigration are similar to the ones regarding the national situation just mentioned with some difference. There is a higher rate of foreigners in the total population (4.9% of population; about 175,000), Albanians are the biggest community, followed by the Chinese - a very close community gathered together in some areas of the old industrial districts like Prato - the Rumanians and the Moroccans (IRPET, 2004). A quite high use of regularizations by immigrants and employers (especially families) has been signaled during the last sanatoria and this demonstrates a persistence of immigrant presence in the local underground economy. In a Region presenting a prevalence of gray economy compared to the completely irregular economy, immigrants are the ones filling the second type spaces (Unioncamere Toscana, 2003).

Theory and methodology

The empirical research I am currently conducting is focused on the North-East of Tuscany, in the so-called metropolitan area Firenze-Pistoia-Prato, areas with an elevated presence of care services (the urban area of Firenze), agriculture (the countryside of Firenze e Pistoia) and a typical industrial district (Prato).

The qualitative enquiry is based on partially structured in-depth interviews with immigrants (N=30), experts who follow foreigners and can observe their insertion in society and in the labor market day by day (trade unionists, members of pro-immigrants associations, members of ethnic associations; N=11) and employers (N=4). To interview immigrants on such a problematic theme, good human relationships with them are fundamental, so some information has been collected through more informal conversations. The

sample gathers cases of people with a long presence in Italy and well inserted in the social context and people with a shorter presence and sometimes undocumented still looking for a definitive occupation and settlement. Their three main sectors of insertion are building construction, agriculture and, for women, family care services. Someone has or had experiences in industrial and cleaning sector business. Most of them come from Albania and Rumania and Morocco but some come from Ukraine, Philippines and Somalia. These features make the sample quite representative of the overall foreign population in Tuscany and its insertion sectors.

Therefore we are speaking of short-range immigration, a characteristic that affects how a network is organized and it operates; how communities are organized and how individuals act both in the job market and in society. Literature has pointed out that groups of immigrants from farther away are more able to create solid support within a group and provide easier settling compared with immigrants from geographically closer countries that are more likely end up following individual and lonelier paths (Ambrosini 2000; 2001; Reyneri 2001b).

The interviews have been used to recompose the networks that these immigrants are part of and through which they have found irregular employment. Particular attention has been paid to the dynamics of the networks through observation of the development of relationships among the nodes of the network and the job relationship in time.

Literature on migrations, for some time now, has pointed out the importance of the dimension of networks in this phenomenon (Boyd, 1989; Werbner, 1990; Piselli, 1997; 1999). As far as arrival is concerned it is known that rarely the choice to migrate takes place without having reference points, support and help by fellow nationals already in that country (Massey,

Goldring and Durand, 1994; Palidda e Reyneri, 1995; Massey and Espinosa, 1997; Zanfrini, 2004). It is now established, for those who study the job market, both sociologists (beginning with Granovetter's work in 1974]) and economists (for example Manvaring [1984]) that, as far as finding work, unofficial routes are the important ones. This type of approach is particularly rewarding for studies of the Italian job market since it is characterized by a spontaneous social regulation where the greatest number of people find a job through informal contacts which include friends and acquaintances or through direct contact of the employer (Reyneri, 2002).

Important studies on immigrants have used the network and social web concepts to emphasize the role of strong ties (Grieco, 1987; Werbner, 1990) or the creation of an ethnic niche (Wilson and Portes 1980; Waldinger, 1994). More rarely, this approach has been used in empirical research on the underground economy (see Williams and Windebank, 2004 for an exception). In this research I am analyzing how, in black labor, the strong ethnical ties (even if the two do not always identify with each other) that foreigners establish, come into contact, through weak ties, with the local population. It is in this passage between two networks that the immigrant who does not find work in the ethnic labor market enters the local labor market and finds an irregular job with an Italian employer (Ambrosini, 1998; 2000; 2001).

As far as the latter is concerned one must consider that the employee (unless he does not have a permit) can, just as a national worker, report his employer. This would mean, according to some theories, that the employer believes that some guarantees exist based on the network and strong ties (Portes, 1994; Follis, 1998). I have therefore looked at the part networks play in this; I have looked into the type of relationship between contact and employee and

between contact and employer (Granovetter, 1974; 1998; Lin, Ensel and Vaughn, 1981) to try and understand how safe an employer would feel in case of a report against him when he hires without a contract or illegally.

According to Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) it is possible to find developing, within ethnic networks, types of sanction and social control (“enforceable trust” or “bounded solidarity”) that, by inhibiting non-conformist behavior of its members, would guarantee the employer from being reported (and consequently indirectly contribute to spread the belief in society that immigrants are dependable workers for the black market thus creating a negative social web effect). I have tried to verify the presence and role of these forms of social control within the networks in my research.

However one must bear in mind that it could be possible to find complicity rather than exploitation between Italian employers and foreign workers especially in areas or sectors with high level of black labor or with a long history of informal productions (Bagnasco, 1986; 1988) as pointed out, for example, by Capecci (1991) for the Italian workers in Emilia Romagna. This could even be more so for immigrants with a short range migration plan or for immigration that is not interested in a regular work relationship but only in economic gain.

Therefore, considering the above mentioned theories, in carrying out my research I have tried to understand the role of the ethnic and non-ethnic networks and to find out:

- If and when they play an information role about vacancies;
- If and when they represent a guarantee (real or presumed) for an employer against a report;
- If, how and when mechanisms of social control and sanctions against what we could call (with Hirshmann,

[1970]) the exit of a deserter, really activate within a network;

The development of relationships over time has been investigated in order to find out when they became stable, when they continued to be irregular and when and why the employer and employee broke up.

Certain characteristics of the network have been monitored: *the length* (the number of intermediaries that linked employer and employee) assuming that a greater number could have worse effects both on the information about the vacancy and on the guarantee in the employer's view; *the strength* (the strength of relationships among different people, keeping in mind the peculiarity of ethnic relationships) assuming that a greater strength can have better effects on informing of a vacancy and on the guarantee to an employer; *the density* (structural characteristic that indicates the proportion between actual and eventual relationships in a network) assuming a directly proportional effect between density and guarantee; *the width* (the number of people directly involved) assuming an inversely proportional effect between width and guarantee; *the direction* of the informative flow; besides of course the *contents* (information, trust, guarantee) that were involved.

Of the two traditional methods of analysis of the networks present in international literature (Piselli, 1995) - the anthropological one of Manchester and the American structural one - the former has been chosen due to the topic and the tools available in the field. Attention has been paid, within the analysis of the network and of the chances and links in it, to the individual freedom of Ego, to its ability in manipulating the network to its advantages and, working with immigrants, to the importance of migration, life and work plans and the chances of work in the Italian illegal labor force. Continuous referral has been made to

contextual variables, such as the immigration laws in Italy, the spreading level and the characteristics of black work in the area and the sectors being analyzed.

Data and interviews

Perception of the Italian labor market

The interviewed immigrants have quite a clear idea about being able to find an irregular job in Italy. Their friends, relatives, fellow migrants before them, inform them about it and so before they leave their country they already know they will find work even without the required permits or even if entering illegally. As one of them said: “Come on, you know you can easily work illegally. The foreigners do it, the Italians do it, everybody does it. You know it well before you leave”.

Most of them are overstayers who have obtained permits through an amnesty. For many, these permits allow a minimum number of work hours for their stay but at the same time they also work illegally. Sometimes the worker pays his own social security and taxes without a formalization of the job, so that he can obtain a family permit that will allow his spouse and children to come to Italy (thanks to a law on family reuniting). In the end, immigrants, even the latest arrivals, are aware of being part of a widespread illegal system where the laws to follow are the informal ones established by Italian employers who are used to dealing with a labor force readily available, as much as and even more than the formal Italian laws.

Ethnic networks

The immigrants interviewed are mostly people who have had support from fellow countrymen,

relatives or friends at least in their first approach to their adventure. These ties have also indicated to them where to look for work, sometimes (in the case of women involved in domestic work, especially) they found them a job even before their arrival.

Nevertheless the two functions of the network are not necessarily superimposed. Sometimes one is put up without the guarantee of help in looking for a job because of lack of adequate information: the immigration networks that live in the underprivileged social and labor sections are not always part of the social web that could provide job opportunities, and they may not always have that social capital required to relate to an Italian employer.

Moreover sometimes help is not free. Quite on the contrary a contribution is requested in paying bills, groceries, etc, even if repayment may have an indefinite date (this looks like a way to reciprocate). Other research reveals job indication in exchange for compensation (Lagomarsino, 2003).

These data makes it necessary to strongly rethink beliefs that ethnic communities and ethnic ties are estranged to rationalization and instrumental behavior. For this reason it is preferable to observe the network rather than the community and to look at the *real areas of solidarity*, interaction even conflict from the individual's story (Piselli, 1995; Colombo, 1998) rather than emphasizing ethnicity as a resource in itself (this is the method I have followed in my research).

Identifying ethnic ties as strong ties could not always be true. Even if in a group based on common language, culture, religion or race different from the majority of the population, an awareness of its diversity, or *we-ness* (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993), is formed, this does not mean that this group will automatically develop collective identity or forms of solidarity or

unconditional obedience. What has been found out is that, for many of the interviewed immigrants, the people they feel the closest to are relatives, friends and those who actively help in finding work. So what is relevant and most important in the life of individuals from North Africa and, above all, Eastern Europe, are the micro-networks of personal acquaintances rather than large ethnical or cultural communities.

Help, information, assistance for many can only be given to relatives or close friends and, moreover, for a limited period of time. Solidarity is not an unlimited resource, not even among ethnic networks. As the representative of an Albanian association said: "Yes, if you are a relative of mine I can put you up, but only for a few days, then you have to make it on your own. Like a child, you teach him how to take his first steps but then he has to learn to walk on his own, he has to learn how to get around in the world by himself."

From the conversations with these immigrants it is clear that very often it is the individual himself (especially if male) who looks for the possibility to free himself from the network's pressure in order to develop independent life and work projects. This individualism is stronger for those who come from closer countries, have no definite time nor aim and their culture and education have lead to this thinking. In the interviews these type of answers were common among the Albanians, Romanians, Ukrainians and Moroccan (for confirmation about Albanians see IRES Piemonte, 1996).

These small networks, based on relations or long-dated friendships born in the native country, very often are reshaped or modified in the new country; they can also extinguish themselves or new ones can be created.

There also have been individuals with lonely

migration routes. Especially the first Albanians and Romanians who started arriving at the beginning of the 1990's right after the fall of the Regime in their countries. They took their chances without having any contacts nor knowing the language. This caused them to experience a longer period of difficulties, segregation and unemployment even if in the long run it did not lead to a worse situation thanks to the ties made once in the new country, especially, for someone, with the Catholic religious institutions.

Ties in the black labor market

Concentrating more closely on how the interviewed immigrants have found work: the basic data is that most of them found work thanks to the acknowledgement of a position available *by a fellow national*. Although the number of interviews are not sufficiently large enough to compare with official statistics on regular labor market, it is nevertheless possible to state that referral by personal acquaintances has been as foreseen, extremely frequent. It is a recorded fact that individuals with scarce or inadequate social capital, like immigrants in a foreign country who enter the unqualified labor force, can only use what is given them by interpersonal acquaintances and, especially for the newly arrived, by their ethnical acquaintances.

As foreseeable, the *chains are short* (one or two passages, rarely three). On the one hand, this data confirms the importance of personal acquaintances in order to find a job; on the other, though, it is important to understand similarities and differences with job finding of Italians, and, above all, if and which differences lie between regular and irregular work. What surfaces is that there are *no major differences* between my findings and those of other research using the same method *on the regular employment of*

immigrants (Mottura, 2001; La Rosa and Zanfrini, 2003). In my research, neither shorter information chains nor a smaller density of the networks is stressed.

Furthermore, it is emerging that the relationship between contact and worker is not particularly strong. Information about job vacancies often comes from people that the interviewed defined as “mere fellow nationals”. Often it seemed evident that the immigrant spoke of these contacts as people who were distant, people he had met upon arriving and whose traces had been lost at the moment of the interview. Even if it is also possible that this could be the result of the will to protect the acquaintances, considering the way I have contacted these people, I think it unlikely.

The same results were achieved in interviews with construction workers and agricultural workers; a little different were the results with women working in the domestic field, maybe because these women give more importance to personal ties and friendship, keep them longer and remember them more fondly.

It is important to point out that, with regards to the *contact-employer relationship*, often the ones who pointed out the vacancies did not work in the same company but in companies, factories, green nurseries, fields, woods nearby or they worked for the same employer but only in the past.

Going from the analysis of the information to the one of *guarantee*, as before mentioned, one can state without a doubt, that reputation (Grieco, 1987; Raubb and Weesie, 1990) of the contact is highly important. Belonging to an ethnical group as a base for the exchange (Grieco, 1987) between the employer and worker is also important, even if sometimes the employer generalizes to such extent that it includes all foreigners without a nationality specification. One can infer from the stories told that often *an employer cannot*

clearly understand the relationship between the contact and the worker just hired.

It is more reasonable, then, to assume that employers base their choice on *statistic discrimination* based on race: one trusts a worker and hires him because he belongs to an ethnic group which is reputed as having been trustworthy and have not caused any problem because belonging to networks of acquaintances that guarantee directly.

Maximum guarantee for the employer is recommendation of a friend, maybe Italian, or an acquaintance closer to him than to the worker. Greater familiarity, a longer-term relationship, a long professional relationship could assure the employer even more; better even a relationship outside the work environment. On the contrary, in cases where workers contacted the employer only because of information received from an acquaintance who was a former employee or from those who work for the employer's colleagues, the employer could only count on a *generic good experience* in the past or indirect guarantees based on the "word-of-mouth". But evidently these seem to be enough to trust the new worker.

This is a kind of *guarantee which "looks at the past"* and almost excludes the chance of a real and close social control because by hiring illegally the employer knows not to be able, in case of need, to depend on reprisal through personal relationships.

Generally speaking if we define as *dense* a network where actors know each other and *frequent* often and with continuity, several signals lead to interpret this role of the network not as a fundamental one. This is the case in agriculture and construction.

In the field of domestic work instead, a different way must be pointed out: besides a greater number of

contacts (the typical case of an immigrant who works in a family and who knows another family in need of a caregiver and activates her acquaintances to provide the name of a would-be worker) there are also more frequent cases in which the contact person is Italian.

Catholic associations have always been active in this sector. Parishes and help centers become reference points largely used by both Italian and immigrant families thanks to their humanitarian and charitable outlook. Besides this organized way of finding workers, Italian individuals also operate in finding a worker to work illegally.

The contact's role, though, cannot necessarily be interpreted as a family's search for a worker who will not report them. What is important is the *lack of information families, as employers, have*. And more so, in a caring job, it is the *quality of the work* and the *quality of human relationship* that is important for a family looking for someone caring for a close relative, father, mother, son or daughter. So the contact would offer guarantees such as honesty, patience, good manners and respect more than that of not being reported for illegal hiring. As far as lack of information on the part of the families, they often simply are not aware of having to pay benefits or sign a contract. As a family with a Philippine worker, for a few hours a week, said: "Obviously he has no contract. Never heard I have to pay benefits. I wouldn't even know how to go about it. If someone asks I'll say I have never seen him before." The fact that these jobs are not held in public places contributes to their illegality even among Italians.

There have been various statements of foreign women who said to have been mentioned to families by Italians "casually" met during their stay in Italy. These are often women with such cultural and accountable characteristics that allow them to easily establish

relationships with the locals and whose these “natural or cultural” characteristics represent a guarantee to the families about their behavior towards the person being taken care of and about reporting the illegality in order to get a contract.

As already mentioned, various people interviewed said to have begun working while still without a stay permit (a small number still is) and successively gotten one through amnesty. This stresses the importance of a *direct relationship* between employer and employee. One must not forget that the immigrants interviewed, and even some Italian workers, have worked illegally in very small companies and even families. In this situation, on the one hand there are obvious cases of exploitation and lack of rules but on the other hand, direct *negotiation* takes place between employer and employee. If the latter is looking for a stay permit he could find the way, especially if he has been working for some time, to let the employer know and even find a positive answer.

This kind of contract could become one of those above mentioned *complicity relationships* where there is a false contract for a minimum number of hours instead of the large number of hours worked (sometimes it is the worker who has to pay his own benefits).

If this kind of individual negotiation leads to a balance, it does even more when more than one component of the same network works for the same company. It is the case of a farming company whose representative of the employer I have interviewed. Seven Albanians, members of two families, have been working, alongside Italians, for the past ten years; some of them have even joined a trade union. The presence of members of the same network has a double effect here. On one hand it can guarantee, just because it employs many members of the same group, that the employer will not be reported at the slightest abuse of the law

regulating workers. On the other hand, though, it gives the network the power to stand by its requests. As this representative said: "When something happens or they think they are entitled to something, they start acting up and won't stop. So you have to make them happy". Their request is that, having obtained a regular contract with a permit, they *want to work more hours off the records* to earn more but not too many so as not to work too much. This balance leads to *gray employment*. Since the advantage is reciprocal this ethnic network, instead of simply guaranteeing, acts as a link in a complicity chain and in free riding.

More data that lessens the role in sanctions played by the network is found in cases where a report against the employer has been filed. Two cases are about bricklayers who had found work thanks to a fellow national. What is very interesting is that, on both occasions, the contact continued to work for the employer who had been reported and live with the employee. One of the bricklayers worked with four cousins. The bricklayers held out under the weight of irregularity and exploitation, typical of the underprivileged and those with no resources, but at the end reported the employer. Interviewed about the reaction of the fellow nationals who had exposed themselves in order to make the contact, they said they did not feel a particularly strong reaction but simply "advised" against it. The Albanian who worked with his cousins said he underwent a "small reprisal" when he left but that these were solved unofficially with the help of the union.

The network, even if it acted in trying to dissuade from reporting an employer, did not censure or inhibit non-conformist behavior and did not advocate the exclusion of these. This is also probably due to the nationality of these immigrants: an Albanian and a Romanian. These nationalities are characterized by strong individualism and not very strong group

solidarity.

As a trade unionist, working at the immigration office and of South American origins, stated: “if an immigrant works in the black market only because he cannot find alternatives and therefore accepts situations one would normally not accept. He only reports the employer if he can or only if he can no longer stand the situation. If there are fellow nationals working for the same employer, maybe he warns them to see their reactions but in the end the decision is his alone. There is a lot of individualism, especially among certain nationalities”.

In many other cases, in the caregiver sector, many abandon their jobs with families or elders whom they feel are too rude or demanding. Even if there is pressure from a fellow national not to leave, it could have no effect. These relationships are usually on a one-to-one basis and therefore a *highly limited extended* network. The most that can happen is the end of a friendship or relationship or the loss of information in case of job availability. These sanctions may seem serious to a newly arrived immigrant but lose value with time when an immigrant has learned to “walk on his own feet” and has activated other personal channels in order to find a job. If the contact has been an Italian, it could very well be that the relationship existing at the moment of the engagement, no longer existed when the immigrant resigns.

In this case, as in others, the main role is played by the degree of endurance and of the need of the immigrant. Even if with a stay permit (or maybe for the need to renew it) the immigrant will endure situations, job conditions and pay that most Italians would not, because of his or her difficult economic situation. Defection occurs, followed or not by a report, only in exceptional cases, as the last resort when any other way is no more possible. In many other cases, though, what

counts is reciprocal advantage and the will of the immigrant for an immediate economic gain.

And this is what employers count on. They rely on the need and *the impression* the worker makes at the job interview. A few studies and witnessed accounts in the sector show that these are *small business* owners, especially in the construction business, with low education level and mostly former workers who had *themselves worked illegally in the past* for years before going on their own. It is not surprising, therefore, that they are the first *not to consider black labor dangerous* and to think to have to face a very small number of reports. A Romanian who had worked illegally in construction and farming for small companies admitted: “the employers are good psychologists. They look at you and understand if you are in need. If they feel that you are hungry, they'll hire you without problems, permit or no permit.” Workers then report an employer almost only when there is a new job lined up.

Further data indicates a lesser need of the Tuscan employer for strong and reliable guarantees tied to strong ties on the part of the immigrant in case of being reported. These are the cases, not many, but nevertheless important ones, of individuals who have found work through *direct contact with the employer*, or even, and this means more than a mere statistic, *through formal channels*.

By direct contact we are not referring to previous encounters but to a first meeting and the beginning of a relationship on the job. Workers, both in the green nursery field and construction field, go on site to look for work and end up working for a few hours without a contract. The same happens if the worker has a permit, even if, obviously when it expires the worker will look for another job if he understands that his permit will not be renewed. Reporting the employer, due to the short time on the job, is not thought of. Not

even by the employer who knows that none of his workers will testify against him for someone he has only seen a few hours. When the immigrant has no permit he might stay on and work as long as possible asking for the possibility to apply for a permit in the future.

Among the Romanians interviewed, not few have expressed their satisfaction in their situation. They work hard and long hours in the farming sector which allows them high income and a worry free situation since very rarely they can be discovered and checked by the police because they work practically hidden in woods and farms.

In the domestic field three women found jobs by answering an advertisement in a paper in Florence by Italian families. Two of these women already had a permit, the other obtained it after she was hired by a retired police officer to look after his sick wife.

An employee in the reporting office of a construction trade union told the story of “a young Moroccan with a permit read an advertisement for a position as a carpenter. He went for the interview and was hired. He worked illegally for some time but when his permit was about to expire he asked for a contract. The employer refused and so he came here and filed a report. This does not happen often, but it does”.

Some final but not conclusive considerations

Personal ties are important in order to get into the black labor market. This is the first outcome of my research so far, and it supports long standing sociological research. In particular, for immigrants who have no formal resources or are newly arrived and therefore not yet settled in the local society, the first

natural step to take is to use the ties with their fellow nationals. These are the people with whom they are strongly related or with whom friendship dates back to their home country. There are also several cases where, though from the same country, contact and worker do not have a strong tie, being it less bound, short lived and started in Italy.

It is rarer, and this would be the case to better safeguard the employer, that the contact is Italian. When it happens, mostly among caregivers, his role and presence guarantee the reliability, morality and respectability of a person who will live-in, but will not do much for a report not to be filed (which might only remotely happen.)

More often, rather, the outcome of an Italian contact is a regular job, maybe a good position in a factory or maybe a job where the worker can choose to work in gray employment. This is all rather normal, thinking that a local contact is part of a “higher” social web with a “better” social capital.

Finally, rare but very significant cases of total absence of a contact, past relationships or use of formal means have been documented.

A first analysis of the quality of the relationship between contact and employer shows quite a weakness in these relationships. In general, a high density of the network does not surface. The number of people involved, the length of the chain, also in the disclosure of information about positions available, is quite small, but this does not differ much from the general data of job finding in the regular job market and even less so for immigrants.

Another important fact is the extremely reduced size of the micro networks to which the immigrant belongs, and these are the only ones to have effective

relevance for job finding.

If the networks are important, their function in the immigrant's black market job finding is not always the same. We can say they have *maximum information power*; *average power of indirect guarantee based on ethnic discrimination* (positive or negative); but, at least from our findings, *low sanction and social control in the case of desertion*.

This is understandable on the basis of many factors: structural *characteristics of ethnical networks* like *restricted numbers* play a part; the *personal characteristics* of an immigrant, especially the fact that some nationalities are highly *individualistic* thus reducing organizational ability and want of conformism also play a part. The *ability to endure* and the *need* inhibit reports. When it is filed it is the last resort and at that point the network cannot stop desertion.

Especially in the *gray* employment market, *reciprocal advantage* that the network can support and which is the best antidote against distrust, plays a part.

Institutional characteristics, both formal and informal of the reference context also play a part. Above all the fact that most of the interviewed work in *very small companies* in the construction and green nurseries business whose employer had himself been employed in the black market. In some cases, especially when the employer is a family, black labor is *normal and accepted*. The thought of the risk of being reported is blocked out by years and years in the business this way without any consequences. The chance of a *direct contact* between employer and employee means they solve everyday problems as they come up, finding *compromises* and becoming accomplices and this behavior favors gray employment like among the Italians.

The frequent amnesties have defined the situation for many where, by beginning to work in the black market, because of lack of documents, they establish a relationship with the employer and once the worker has obtained his permits and the relationship gotten stronger, the worker and employer become accomplices in finding ways to get around labor laws. Immigrants and employers who did not know each other in the past, easily manage to agree on a minimum number of regularly paid hours, enough to renew the permit, and work the rest of the time in the black. Each knows of the other's advantage and rarely this complicity breaks up.

Moreover, the bad reputation of someone who has filed a report can only be spread within a *small group*. The immigrant, notoriously more *mobile* on the territory and among places of work, can easily escape this kind of social control.

The *lack of control on the job market*, finally, reassures employers and lowers the risk perception thus reducing requests of assurance and guarantee.

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Biographical Sketch

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