

# 'GUEST WORKERS', ENTREPRENEURS AND THE ROLE OF ETHNICITY IN IMMIGRANT BUSINESS

*A Critical History of 'Ethnic Entrepreneurship' in Ghent, 1960-1980<sup>1</sup>*

**- Jozefien De Bock -**

In times of economic crisis, when unemployment figures are soaring, independent entrepreneurship is often seen as a way out of a situation of economic stagnation, both on an individual and a more general level. Those parts of the population that suffer disproportionately from unemployment are thought to be especially able to benefit from making the move to self-employment and becoming small business owners, taking their fate into their own hands. Not only locals but also immigrants make this move. This article studies those immigrants that were part of the 'guest worker migration' to Western Europe in the post-war period. What kind of businesses did they set up? What were the constraints and opportunities surrounding the establishment of these businesses? What kind of social capital did they use? And to what extent can we call this entrepreneurship 'ethnic'? It is these and other questions that this article will try to answer.

## I. Introduction

In (European) history, the study of small immigrant enterprises and immigrant entrepreneurship has for a long time remained relatively underdeveloped, as both historiographies concerned – that of small entrepreneurship and that of immigration – largely ignored the subject of immigrant entrepreneurs<sup>2</sup>. Apart from a number of early works, it was only at the turn of the millennium that historians began to pay more attention

to the specific historical experiences of immigrants in business<sup>3</sup>. Among sociologists, anthropologists and economists, on the other hand, ‘ethnic’ or immigrant entrepreneurship has been a much-researched phenomenon since at least the 1980s, first in the United States and Britain, later also in continental Europe<sup>4</sup>. Initially, this research tended to focus on socio-cultural explanations of immigrant entrepreneurship, looking at ethno-cultural practices and preferences of ‘ethnic entrepreneurs’. Later, it was accompanied

1. I would like to thank those scholars who reviewed a first draft of this article for their helpful and insightful remarks. I also want to thank Robrecht Declercq for his ideas on which literature to use and Tina De Gendt for a preview of her excellent book on the history of the Turkish community in Ghent, which appeared in March 2014. 2. ANNE-SOPHIE BRUNO & CLAIRE ZALC, *Petites entreprises et petits entrepreneurs étrangers en France, 19<sup>e</sup>-20<sup>e</sup> siècle : Actes des journées d'études des 23 et 24 octobre 2003*, Paris, 2006, p. 13, 15. 3. Examples of early works are NANCY GREEN, *Ready to wear, ready to work. A century of industry and immigrants in Paris and New York*, London, 1997 and MARLOU SCHROVER, “Gescheiden werelden in een stad. Duits ondernemerschap in Utrecht in de negentiende eeuw”, in JAN RATH & ROBERT KLOOSTERMAN (eds.), *Rijp en Groen. Het zelfstandig ondernemerschap van immigranten in Nederland*, Amsterdam, 1998, p. 39-61. I would also like to refer to JUDITH RAINHORN & CLAIRE ZALC, “Commerce à l'italienne : immigration et activité professionnelle à Paris dans l'entre-deux guerres”, in *Le mouvement social*, 191, 2000, p. 49-68; “Potverkopers, vijlenkappers, winkeliers en stukadoors. Nichevorming onder Duitse migranten in Marlou Schrover de negentiende-eeuwse stad Utrecht”, in *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis*, 26, 2000, p. 281-305; ANDREW GODLEY, *Jewish Immigrant Entrepreneurship in New York and London 1880-1914. Enterprise and Culture*, London, 2001; and, more recently, CLAIRE ZALC, *Melting Shops. Une histoire des commerçants étrangers en France*, Paris, 2010. Not much has been published specifically about Belgium. Without claiming to be exhaustive, the literature is limited to : FRANCIS SARTORIUS, “La place des Allemands dans l'industrie et le grand commerce en Belgique Durant les années 1890-1900”, in ANNE MORELLI (ed.), *Histoire des étrangers et de l'immigration en Belgique de la préhistoire à nos jours*, Brussels, 1992, p. 175-195; SYLVIE TASCHEREAU, VALÉRIE PIETTE & ELIANE GUBIN, “L'immigration à Bruxelles dans les années trente. Le cas particulier des commerçants étrangers”, in *Bijdragen tot de Eigentijdse Geschiedenis*, 9, 2001, p. 7-62; ANNE MORELLI, “Patrons issus de l'immigration : quelques réflexions méthodologiques”, in SERGE JAUMAIN & KENNETH BERTRAMS (eds.), *Patrons, gens d'affaires et banquiers*, Brussels, 2004, p. 299-310; ROBRECHT DECLERQ & FRANK CAESTECKER, “De opmerkelijke concentratie van Duitsers in de bontsector tijdens het ‘fin de siècle’ in België”, in *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, XLI, 2011, p. 101-133. 4. A number of important reference works are : IVAN LIGHT & EDNA BONACICH, *Immigrant entrepreneurs : Koreans in Los Angeles 1965-1982*, Berkeley/Oxford, 1988; EMMANUEL MA MUNG & GILDAS SIMON, *Commerçants maghrébins et asiatiques en France. Agglomération parisienne et villes de l'Est*, Paris, 1990; ROBIN WARD & RICHARD JENKINS (eds.), *Ethnic Communities in Business : Strategies for Economic Survival*, Cambridge/New York, 1984; ROGER WALDINGER, HOWARD ALDRICH & ROBIN WARD (eds.), *Ethnic entrepreneurs. Immigrant business in industrial societies*, Newbury Park, 1990; JAN RATH (ed.), *Immigrant Business. The Economic, Political and Social Environment*, London, 2000; ROBERT KLOOSTERMAN & JAN RATH (ed.), *Immigrant entrepreneurs. Venturing abroad in the age of globalization*, Oxford, 2003.

and criticized by research that pointed out the importance of structural explanations, focusing on the exclusion of immigrants from the economic mainstream as a main explanatory factor for immigrant entrepreneurship<sup>5</sup>. In an attempt to combine these two approaches, Waldinger *et al.* were the first to suggest a more “interactive model of ethnic business development ...based on immigrant groups’ access to opportunities, group characteristics, and the embeddedness of opportunities and resources within a specific set of historical conditions”<sup>6</sup>. However, this model has been criticized for a number of reasons, one of which strikes me as particularly important in the light of the ethnicization of much of the debate concerning post-war immigrants and their integration processes in Western societies : the fact that it is built upon the assumption that immigrant entrepreneurs are in the first place ‘ethnic entrepreneurs’, whose economic activities are determined by their ‘ethnic belongings’ and as such are intrinsically different from those of local, ‘non-ethnic’ entrepreneurs<sup>7</sup>.

In line with more recent research, which contends that “immigrant entrepreneurial strategies are not diverse just because of individuals’ different cultural and ethnic references, but because of their options and unequal opportunities of access”<sup>8</sup>, and which proposes a model of ‘mixed embeddedness’, taking into account “the characteristics of the supply of immigrant entrepreneurs, the shape

of the opportunity structure, and the institutions mediating between aspiring entrepreneurs and concrete openings to start a business”<sup>9</sup>, this article presents an exploratory study of immigrant entrepreneurship in a specific locality over the course of two decades in the post-war period. Rather than focusing on one ‘ethnic group’ (e.g. Turkish immigrants) or one ‘kind of enterprise’ (e.g. restaurants) at one specific moment in time, the article provides a broader scope, including immigrants of different backgrounds and their different entrepreneurial initiatives over a (relatively) long period. This allows for different kinds of entrepreneurship that would fall outside the ‘ethnic lens’ to be included into the discussion – without however claiming to quantify the importance of these differences – and for the role of changing opportunity structures and immigrants’ agency – related to ethnicity or to other social variables – to come to the fore. Further, the focus of the article lies on the immigrant entrepreneurs and their businesses *as such*; it does not address the different roles that these entrepreneurs and their enterprises have played for the (immigrant) communities in which they were embedded.

The article starts out with an overview of its methodology and sources. It then provides a short sketch of the economic and legal opportunity structures for immigrant entrepreneurship in Belgium during the period under study. Further, it discusses at length the kind of businesses that were set up

5. JAN RATH, “Introduction : Immigrant Businesses and their Economic, Politico-Institutional and Social Environment”, in *Immigrant Business...*, p. 3-4. 6. ROGER WALDINGER, HOWARD ALDRICH & ROBIN WARD, “Opportunities, Group Characteristics, and Strategies”, in *Ethnic entrepreneurs...*, p. 13, 21. 7. This criticism has been formulated very strongly in JAN RATH, “Introduction...”, p. 6 and ROBERT KLOOSTERMAN & JAN RATH, “Introduction”, in *Immigrant entrepreneurs...*, p. 6. 8. CATARINA REIS OLIVEIRA & JAN RATH, “Introduction to the Special Issue”, in *Migrações Journal*, 3, 2008, p. 21. 9. ROBERT KLOOSTERMAN & JAN RATH, “Introduction”, p. 9.

by “guest worker” immigrants in the city of Ghent during this period, relating the creation of these businesses to the issue of supply and demand, and to the socio-economic and legal opportunities and constraints with which the immigrant-entrepreneurs were confronted. Fourth, the article tackles the issue of ethnicity, conceived as a source of social, economic and cultural capital for immigrant entrepreneurs. Here, the question of what is ‘ethnic’ about immigrant entrepreneurship comes to the fore. A conclusion wraps up the main findings of the article, and evokes further questions that should be addressed.

## II. Methodology and sources

The article looks at immigrant entrepreneurship within a local context, more precisely the Belgian city of Ghent, a context that differs substantially from that of the larger metropolises of Brussels and Antwerp as well as from the smaller, often village-like settings in the mining regions of Limburg and Wallonia, which form the background to most local migration research in Belgium. The period under study is 1960-1980, the era in which Ghent became a much more diversified city, from an economic point of view (evolving from a textile city to a city with different industries as well as a developed tertiary sector) as well as in the composition of its population. Ghent only began to attract larger numbers of international immigrants, as well as immigrants from farther

away than Belgium’s neighbouring countries, in the 1960s. The immigrants that were part of what is generally called the ‘guest worker migration’, coming from countries around the Mediterranean (mostly Turkey, Morocco, Spain, Italy, Tunisia and Algeria), became an especially important group of new inhabitants<sup>10</sup>. Still, and especially when compared to the other localities mentioned above, Ghent remained a city that counted relatively few non-Belgians among its population. By 1980, they still made up less than 6% of the city’s population. Therefore, in this era, immigrant entrepreneurship in Ghent was still rare, in relative as well as absolute numbers.

The broader research upon which this article is based was not aimed exclusively at immigrant entrepreneurs, but at immigrants’ economic integration in the receiving society in general, looking at different forms of wage work, unemployment, and the like. Entrepreneurship came out of the research as only one of several economic strategies employed by immigrants in order to provide for themselves and their families. The sources that were used to carry out this research were essentially a sample of individual immigrant files<sup>11</sup>, providing information on some 1,600 individual immigrants in Ghent, and a collection of interviews with immigrants and, to a lesser extent, their descendants as well as “privileged witnesses” such as employers, integration workers, etc. Part of these interviews (72 out of a total of 119) were carried out by

**10.** For a more extensive discussion on migration to the city of Ghent, see JOZEFIE DE BOCK, “Alle wegen leiden naar Gent. Trajecten van mediterrane migranten naar de Arteveldestad, 1960-1980” in *Brood & Rozen. Tijdschrift voor de geschiedenis van sociale bewegingen*, no. 3, 2012, p. 47-75. **11.** FRANK CAESTECKER & LIESELOTTE LUYCKX, “Het individuele vreemdelingendossiers een unieke bron over migratie en migranten?”, in PIERRE-ALAIN TALLIER (ed.), *Vreemdelingendossiers in het rijksarchief*, Brussels, 2010, p. 15-28.



*During the 1970s, the Las Tapas bar was frequently visited by Spaniards, Algerians, Tunisians, Moroccans and Italians. It was also a favourite hangout of Spanish language students. (AMSAB-ISC and STAM City Museum Ghent)*

other researchers, in the framework of master's theses and socio-cultural projects. I carried out another 47 interviews myself, most of which were life-story interviews, and added to those 16 of what I call "informal conversations", which were unrecorded and took place spontaneously – I did however keep notes of these conversations. No selection was carried out for the interviews that already existed – all available interviews were used; for the additional interviews I carried out myself, interviewees were selected in order to obtain a qualitative representativeness, so that immigrants from all six nationalities studied, both men and women, and both early and later arrivals were included in the sample.

This broader research into the integration of immigrants in the economic fabric of the receiving society allowed a first insight into the extent and nature of immigrant entrepreneurship in the locality under study. Some of the immigrant files mentioned immigrants that were originally enrolled in the alien register as independent entrepreneurs. 2.5% of Turkish (n=236), 6% of Moroccan (n=138), 7% of Italian (n=68) and Tunisian (n=113), 8% of Algerian (n=115) and 10% of Spanish (n=79) independent immigrants<sup>12</sup> set up a business soon after their arrival in the city – a small but not unimportant group. However, apart from their profession being mentioned (often in the most general of terms, such as "restaurant owner"), not much further information concerning their professional occupation could be gathered from these files. Most interviewees mentioned

businesses owned by other immigrants, and some of the initial interviewees, interviewed by others or by myself, had had their own business at one point in time (4 of the people I interviewed). Together with the literature on immigrant entrepreneurship, these first data formed the basis for this article. In order to further explore the specificity of entrepreneurship as a way of making a living, I set out to interview more people who had been entrepreneurs themselves or who were still running a business they had set up during or shortly after the period under study. I managed to interview 12 such people, and to have an informal conversation with another 10. I also interviewed 2 descendants of entrepreneurs and 6 employees. These people were chosen specifically because of their (link to) entrepreneurship, but here too, I opted for life-story interviews, letting people talk about their lives with a focus on Ghent, rather than setting up a questionnaire on the subject. However, I did ask them specifically about the reasons for their move to self-employment (none of the people I interviewed had been self-employed on arrival in Ghent), the way in which they managed to make this move (especially their financial trajectory in setting up their own businesses), the input of their family and friends, and their staff, clientele and merchandise (especially the origins of these last three).

I have used these interviews as descriptions of the past, providing information about the past experiences, motivations and strategies of immigrants. Even though this particular

12. By "independent immigrants", I mean immigrants who received a residence permit on the basis of their own economic activity (as an employee or self-employed), rather than as dependents (such as spouses or children) of another immigrant.

use of oral history has gone somewhat out of fashion over the course of the last twenty-five years, in favour of a more postmodernist approach (focused on the study of interviews as narratives and aimed at an understanding of past experiences and their meanings for the individual narrator, his or her cultural priorities and values, and his or her location within history)<sup>13</sup>, the use of oral history as a source of factual information was a valuable option in order to answer the questions with which this article is concerned.

I did not interview all immigrants who had a business in Ghent during the period under study. The interviewees were selected on the basis of their appearance in other immigrants' stories and their availability, i.e. whether I could trace them based on the information I had and the data that are freely available online and in the telephone guide, and through personal networks. Not only does this mean that I did not take into account entrepreneurs that were deceased or could not be found, it also that I did not go looking for those who were not mentioned in the interviews I used.

As this study of immigrant entrepreneurship in Ghent is based on a non-systematically gathered sample of immigrant enterprises in the city, it does not claim to be exhaustive. The purpose of this research, however, did not

require it to be quantitatively representative. The research methodology, moving from a general economic study to a more specific study on entrepreneurship, by gathering the memories of a wider group of immigrants concerning entrepreneurship and interviewing a wide range of (former) entrepreneurs of different nationalities and trades, allows for a broad range of experiences to come to the fore<sup>14</sup>. This provided enough material to tackle the specific research questions that were at stake.

### III. Post-war immigrant entrepreneurship in Belgium

The overwhelming majority of people migrating from the countries around the Mediterranean in the post-war period could be classified either as labour migrants whose migration was enabled by the job opportunities that existed in Western Europe, or as "follow-on migrants", who could migrate because of the provisions for immigrants to reunify their families in the receiving countries. Those immigrants that were economically active upon arrival were initially integrated in the economic fabric as manual wage labourers in the heavy industries and services of the receiving countries; few immigrants from the Mediterranean started out as white collar-employees or self-employed<sup>15</sup>.

**13.** On the interpretation of interviews as narratives, see for example CHAMBERLAIN, "Narrative Theory", in THOMAS LEE CHARLTON, LOIS E. MYERS & REBECCA SHARPLESS (ed.), *Thinking About Oral History : Theories and Applications*, Lanhan, Altamira Press, 2008, p.142-165. **14.** Probably even more so than, say, a systematic research into an archival source like the Register of Commerce would provide, as there, neither illegal or ephemeral businesses nor businesses that were run by Belgian partners of immigrants, which appear to have been important, would be retracable. **15.** Data on France, Switzerland, Germany and Britain in the 1960s, as well as data on France, Germany and the US in the 1970s, show an overwhelming majority of manual wage labourers among economically active immigrant newcomers. STEPHEN CASTLES & GODULA

KOSACK, *Immigrant Wor-*

However, after a while, some of these labour migrants and their (sometimes inactive) partners set up their own businesses, making the switch to entrepreneurship, sometimes permanently, other times only temporarily, for a shorter or longer interval in their professional lives<sup>16</sup>. The first of these immigrant entrepreneurs took to entrepreneurship in a period that was marked by a continuous decrease in the percentage of self-employed in the total labour force, a trend that was visible all over Western Europe<sup>17</sup>. In Belgium, while self-employment among the local population saw a continuous decline between 1970 and 1977, the percentage of employers and self-employed increased among immigrants during the same period<sup>18</sup>. When, from the 1980s onwards, the general percentage of self-employed started rising again – albeit at a slower pace in Belgium than in other European countries – the part taken up by immigrant entrepreneurs rose proportionally faster than average. Still, immigrants remained a minority among the total of self-employed (only 5% in 1985) when compared to their part in the active population as a whole (7.6% in 1981 and 7.8% in 1990)<sup>19</sup>.

Immigrants who wanted to become self-employed did not enjoy the same rights as

Belgians. Their professional activity required explicit approval by the Belgian authorities, and was dependent on the granting of a professional card, valid for two (later five) years. Any (aspiring) entrepreneur who did not have Belgian nationality and who was not exempt by law had to apply for such a card by means of a time-consuming and expensive procedure, the outcome of which was hard to predict, as there were no legal criteria determining the basis upon which the card would or would not be granted. Even non-Belgians that had been established in the country for a long time and had acquired a long-term residence permit were not exempt from this regulation. Citizens of EEC countries were eventually granted the right to set up business under the same conditions as Belgian citizens, without a professional card, but only from 1977 onwards<sup>20</sup>.

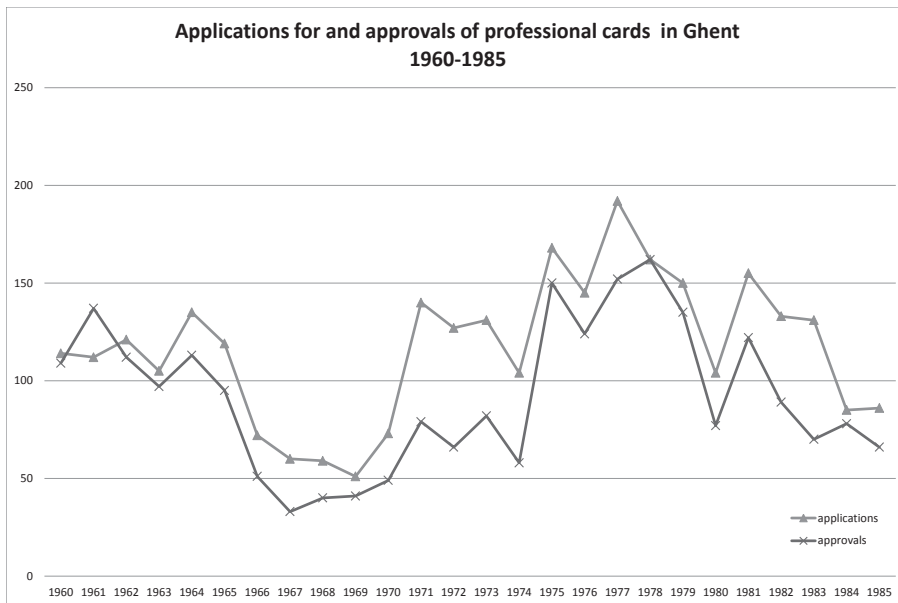
Graph 1 shows the number of applications for a professional card submitted by non-Belgians in Ghent for the period 1960-1985, as well as the number of cards that were actually granted. As the card had to be renewed regularly, these numbers cannot simply be added to estimate the number of non-Belgian businesses in Ghent. They do give an indication as to the extent of

*kers and Class Structure in Western Europe*, Oxford, 1985 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), p. 62-87; MICHAEL PIORE, *Birds of passage. Migrant labor and industrial societies*, Cambridge, 1979, p. 18. **16.** This moving between the status of self-employed and employee or unemployed was attested by BERBAGUI (2006) in her study of Maghrebi entrepreneurs in the department of the Rhône: DALILA BERBAGUI, "Trajectoires de travailleur-se-s indépendant-e-s étranger-ère-s dans le département du Rhône : mobilités et statuts socio-professionnels (seconde moitié du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle)", in *Petites entreprises...*, p. 123. **17.** JEREMY BOISSEVAIN, "Small entrepreneurs in contemporary Europe", in *Ethnic Communities in Business...*, p. 21. **18.** ALBERT MARTENS and FRANK MOULAERT, "Arbeidsproces, sectorale dynamiek en gastarbeid in België (1970-1977)", in *Immigrant en samenleving*, Deventer, 1982, p. 85. **19.** SERGE FELD & PATRICK BIREN, *La main-d'oeuvre étrangère sur le marché du travail en Belgique*, Brussels, 1994, p. 28, 57-60. **20.** FRANK CAESTECKER, "Eigen zelfstandigen eerst : geschiedenis van de beroepskaart in België" and "De beroepskaart, discriminatie van etnische ondernemers?", in *Bareel*, 59, 1995, p. 7-10, 12-15.



foreign entrepreneurship in the city (a few hundred, not thousand, entrepreneurs) and the impact of changing opportunity

structures, such as the onset of the economic crisis and the ensuing sudden rise in unemployment in 1974.



**Graph 1:**  
Applications for and approvals of professional cards in Ghent, 1960-1985.  
Source : Yearly reports of the city of Ghent, 1960-1985

#### IV. Post-war immigrant entrepreneurship in Ghent

##### The beginning : cafés and small shops

In the city of Ghent, 'guest worker migration' only took off in the early 1960s, when an urgent demand for labour in the building and textile industries attracted large numbers of Mediterranean immigrants to the city<sup>21</sup>. The first businesses that were set up by these 'guest workers-turned-entrepreneurs' were

cafés, catering for a clientele of mostly single immigrant men, who had been frequenting cafés, discotheques and snack bars run by Belgian men and women but who were also interested in having 'a place for themselves', where they were sure they would find others with whom they could speak their own language, exchange information about living and working in the city, and talk about 'home'. Often, these places also offered food and sometimes lodging, a service aimed at

21. JOZEFIE DE BOCK, "Alle wegen leiden naar Gent...", p. 52-53.

new arrivals that had nowhere else to go. Over the course of the 1960s, most of these cafés were started by Algerian immigrants, often by mixed Belgian-Algerian couples. In Ghent at that time, mixed couples were not that rare, especially among Italian, Tunisian and Algerian immigrants, but also among Spanish and Moroccan immigrants. Only among Turkish immigrants do mixed couples seem to have been much less frequent, and were mixed marriages almost inexistent<sup>22</sup>. Frequently, among mixed Belgian-Algerian couples, it was the Belgian woman who actually managed the café while her partner had another job. Examples of such cafés were *Kerdada* in the Meersenerstraat, which was held by Amar roughly between 1961 and 1967, then became *Makhlufa*, held by Makhluf; at the Vrijdagmarkt, there was a café run by Paula, the Belgian partner of Ayouda, from the mid-1960s until the early 1970s. In Oudburg, Christiane, the Belgian partner of an Algerian immigrant, held a café which was taken over by Said in 1965, until 1971, after which it was run by Maria, the French wife

of another Algerian immigrant, and became known as *Qahwa Maria*<sup>23</sup>. These cafés were frequented by a largely if not exclusively Algerian clientele, recruited from the growing number of single Algerian men in the city following a recruitment mission of the city's largest textile company, the Union Cotonnière, in 1963<sup>24</sup>, and supplemented in the weekends by crowds of Algerian party-goers, who had regularly been coming to Ghent from the North of France since the late 1950s<sup>25</sup>. By the mid-1970s, however, most of these cafés had disappeared, and it was the immigrants coming from Turkey, who had become more numerous than all other Mediterranean immigrants together, who became the most prolific in setting up new cafés. Again, some of these cafés provided food and shelter for those who had to find their way in an unknown city, such as *Schoonzicht* in the Tolhuislaan and *Emirdağ*, known as *Kosa*, in the Wondelgemstraat, where the stream of newcomers from *Emirdağ* in the mid-1970s found a place where they could stay while trying to find their way around Ghent<sup>26</sup>. The first cafés

22. Marriages with locals occurred frequently among the Spanish and Moroccan populations, where about one quarter of couples were mixed (22% out of n=32 for independent Spanish immigrants, 28% out of n=58 for Moroccan immigrants). Mixed couples made up half or more of 'Italian', 'Tunisian' and 'Algerian' couples, (50% out of n=18; 51% out of n=61 and 65% out of n=34, respectively). Only among the Turkish population in Ghent were married couples almost exclusively endogamous (99% out of n=130). JOZEFIE DE BOCK, "We have made our whole lives here". *Immigration, Settlement and Integration Processes of Mediterranean Immigrants in Ghent, 1960-1980*, PhD dissertation, European University Institute, 2013, p. 82.

23. Data from individual alien files and from the population register (population archive, City of Ghent); interviews with Salah (22/10/2009), Arafat (07/03/2008) and Lakhdar (29/07/2010), Ghent. (For reasons of privacy, the names of the interviewees have been changed throughout the article; however, the names of their businesses have remained as they were, because the large majority of these no longer exist and therefore cannot easily be traced back to their owners today.) 24. For more information as to the modalities of arrival of Mediterranean immigrants in Ghent, see JOZEFIE DE BOCK, "Alle wegen leiden naar Gent...", p. 54-55. 25. Interviews with Salah (22.10.2009), Arafat (7.3.2008), Ahmed (29-30.4.2008) and Ahmed S. (27.5.2008), Ghent. 26. TINA DE GENDT, *Turkije aan de Leie*, Tielt, 2014. Interviews with Suleyman A. and Celal K. from FREEK NEIRYNCK, SYLVAIN VAN LABEKE & AYSE ISCI (eds.), *Herinneringen/Hatiralara*, Gent, 2002; Interview with Faruk from LUC VANDEZANDE, *De positie van de eerste generatie Turkse mannen in Gent*, Master's thesis, Universiteit Gent, 1994; Interview with Mehmet (28.3.2011), Ghent.

set up by Turkish immigrants were situated in what by then had come to be seen as 'Turkish neighbourhoods', such as the area Sluizeken-Muide<sup>27</sup>. These cafés are reported to have attracted an exclusively male Turkish crowd, sometimes accompanied by Belgian women; their 'Turkishness' was mostly clearly advertised in their names: 'café Ankara', 'café Berbat', etc. Their clientele was often limited to people coming from the same region or even the same village in Turkey<sup>28</sup>. Finally, the 1970s also saw the establishment of the only reported 'Italian café' in Ghent that was aimed at a crowd of young, single Italian men. The *Sandokan*, run by Alessandro, an Italian immigrant who had arrived in the city together with his parents in the 1960s, catered for the stream of Italian newcomers that took off around the mid-1970s<sup>29</sup>.

As migration flows aged, immigrant entrepreneurs began to set up new kinds of cafés, some aimed primarily at immigrants, others at a more mixed Belgian-immigrant crowd. One of these new cafés was *Bakkara*, set up by the Algerian Amar and his Belgian wife in 1971. Amar's café attracted gamblers of very diverse backgrounds, locals and immigrants alike. *Bakkara* also attracted a clientele of young Arab-speaking immigrants, who were not interested in the 'old people's atmosphere' of places like *Qahwa Maria*<sup>30</sup>. In Ghent South, the city's entertainment district, where

*Bakkara* was initially established, there were also a number of 'Italian cafés' targeting the same gambling crowd<sup>31</sup>. Both the centre of town and the area around Ghent South saw the establishment of cafés, set up by mixed or immigrant couples, that were open to 'ethnically mixed' crowds, even though they were clearly branded as 'Spanish', 'Tunisian', 'Algerian' etc. – though not 'Turkish'. Over the course of the 1970s, the *Frascati*, an originally Italian café which had been turned into a Spanish café-restaurant in 1967 by a Spanish and later a mixed Belgian-Spanish couple, attracted immigrant men of many different backgrounds, including a local clientele of Spaniards, Algerians, Tunisians, Moroccans and Italians and a clientele of temporary visitors (mostly sailors) of different nationalities<sup>32</sup>. The same kind of clientele could also be found in *Las Tapas*, a Spanish bar held by a Spanish couple, albeit not in the evening on weekdays, when their main customers (Belgian students studying Spanish at the university or in night school) were present<sup>33</sup>. As opposed to the other cafés, the *Frascati* and *Las Tapas* sometimes catered for immigrant women (mostly Spanish women) as well, though only on the weekends, and more specifically on Sundays, when a number of women came to the café together with their husbands; in *Las Tapas*, women spent their Sunday afternoon at the big table, drinking coffee, while their men set at the bar, having a couple of beers<sup>34</sup>.

27. HERMAN DEBBAUT *et al.*, *Onderzoek naar bewoners en bewoning in het gebied gelegen tussen Sluizeken en Muidebrug in de stad Gent*, Gent, s.d., and brochure "Turken in onze wijk" (De Zwarte Doos, archief Maurice Maréchal, not inventoried, 1982). 28. TINA DE GENDT, *Turkije...*, p. 125. 29. JOZEFIE DE BOCK, "Alle wegen leiden naar Gent...", p. 68. This café was named after a television programme, itself based on the books of the Italian author Emilio Salgari, which was very popular in Italy in the second half of the 1970s. 30. Informal conversation with Amar (9.7.2010), Ghent; Interview with Lakhdar (29.7.2010), Ghent. 31. Interview with Giacomo (31.7.2010), Ghent. 32. Interviews with Bertrand (23.7.2010) and Salah (22.10.2009), Ghent. 33. Interview with Isabel (18.1.2011), Drongen. 34. Interview with Isabel (18.1.2011), Drongen.



*This photo shows the staff of the Al Parma owned by Gianni Bombini. This was an Italian restaurant located in the south district of Ghent in the early 1970s. (AMSAB-ISC and STAM City Museum Ghent)*

Somewhat later than cafés came small retail businesses, mostly grocery shops, even though there were also other retailers, both formal and informal ones<sup>35</sup>. These small businesses appeared in an era of decline for small shops, as chain shops such as supermarkets were taking over the retail sector<sup>36</sup>. Like the immigrant-run cafés, these businesses were initially aimed at an almost exclusively immigrant clientele, offering goods (mostly foodstuffs) that had been part of the immigrants' life style 'at home' but that were hard to get hold of in the places where they settled. Those arriving in Ghent in the 1960s found no shops selling 'exotic products' there, except for the business of the Spanish 'Madame Billault', which was aimed at a bourgeois, Belgian clientele, selling Spanish wines at prices that were too high for labour migrants and their families<sup>37</sup>. If they wanted to buy special products, such as Spanish *serrano* ham, Maghrebi *couscous* or Turkish *bulgur*, or even Mediterranean vegetables and fruit such as peppers, aubergines, watermelons etc., they had to go to nearby cities with a longer history of immigrant settlement, where by the 1960s all of these products were available on markets and in immigrants' shops. Now and then, a group of friends or family would put an order together, and someone or a couple

of people would then drive to Lille or Brussels and buy these products in bulk<sup>38</sup>.

Mediterranean foodstuffs only became available in the city of Ghent from the 1970s onwards. By then, the market for such products had grown considerably, as families came to make up an ever-larger part of the city's immigrant population. Whereas the single men that dominated the immigrant population in the beginning of Mediterranean migration to Ghent had often contented themselves with living out of cans and only occasionally eating traditional meals, immigrant families were more inclined to invest time and money in the preparation of extensive family dinners with ingredients and flavours 'from home'<sup>39</sup>. At first, these could be purchased from a Belgian grocer at Sint-Jacobs who had seen the potential of the immigrant population that lived in the vicinity of his shop<sup>40</sup>. Later on, towards the mid-1970s, immigrant entrepreneurs began to set up their own grocery shops. Two of the earliest ones were Mohammed E.'s Moroccan shop in Oudburg, which from 1979 was taken over by his cousin and her husband and called *Berkane* (referring to the village where they came from), and Bertrand's and Carmen's Spanish *A Rapaza* (Galician for 'the girl'), both

35. Arturo e.g., an Italian immigrant who arrived in Ghent in the mid-1960s, 'peddled' leather jackets, which he imported illegally from Italy; later, he set up a jewellery shop. Interview with Arturo (14.9.2010), Ghent. 36. HEINZ-GERHARD HAUPT, "Small shops and department stores", in FRANK TRENTMANN (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, Oxford/New York, 2012, p. 274. 37. Interview with Isabel (18.1.2011), Drongen and Pedro (6.9.2010), Ghent. 38. Interviews with Arafat (7.3.2008), Ahmed T. (2.1.2008), Mohamed (9.2.2008) and Fatma (13.1.2011), Ghent. 39. ANNEKE VAN OTTERLOO, "Eating out 'ethnic' in Amsterdam from the 1920s to the present", in LIZA NELL & JAN RATH (eds.), *Ethnic Amsterdam. Immigrants and Urban Change in the Twentieth Century*, Amsterdam, 2009, p. 51. 40. Informal conversation with shopkeeper 'Vits' (02/07/2010), Ghent. He had clients of all backgrounds, but mostly Maghrebi and Turkish; from all interviews with Maghrebi and Turkish immigrants, it becomes clear that he was well known; people thought however that he was Greek or Jewish rather than Belgian.

of them selling Mediterranean produce and attracting a mixed Belgian-immigrant, mostly Spanish, Maghrebi and Turkish crowd<sup>41</sup>. Other small retail shops that were set up by immigrants in the late 1970s and over the course of the 1980s include ‘gift shops’, shops selling carpets and textiles, video rental shops, delicatessens, and shops that were a mix of all of these<sup>42</sup>, aiming at an exclusively immigrant (mostly Turkish, as they provided the biggest market) or mixed Belgian-immigrant clientele, depending on the kind of product that was sold. So, for example, the Italian delicatessens that popped up over the course of the 1980s were mostly aimed at a Belgian public with an ‘exotic taste’; there was relatively little demand for Italian products in Ghent from the immigrant population itself, as the majority of Italian immigrants who had arrived in the city from the 1970s onwards were working in Italian restaurants, where they could easily get hold of the products they wanted<sup>43</sup>.

It should come as no surprise that it was precisely these businesses that were the first to be set up by labour migrants and their partners. Apart from there being a market for them that was initially created by the growth of labour migration to the city itself, these kinds of businesses also required hardly any entry costs or technical skills and were relatively easily accessible, as a result not only of “ethnic markets” but also of so-

called ‘vacancy chains’, whereby businesses left by locals or other immigrants are taken over by newcomers – a typical characteristic of immigrant enterprises in the initial period of arrival and settlement<sup>44</sup>. One example of such a ‘vacancy chain’ can be discerned in the establishment of immigrant businesses along the Sleepstraat-Sint Salvatorstraat axis, where premises left empty by Belgian traders were re-opened by immigrant entrepreneurs<sup>45</sup>. The majority of Mediterranean immigrants in Belgium did need a special permit to run an independent business, (as mentioned previously) but apart from that, the legal barriers to setting up these kinds of small enterprises were relatively low<sup>46</sup>. The retail shops that these immigrant entrepreneurs set up were very basic, with cans of beans and packs of rice stacked up on simple shelves (as you can see in the picture on p. 24), so that hardly any investment was needed. Cafés were even easier to set up, as the building and its infrastructure were simply rented from a brewery, which in return obtained a monopoly on delivering the café’s drinks<sup>47</sup>. However, both cafés and small retail shops, especially those that aimed at an exclusively immigrant clientele, operated at very small profit margins, and had to earn it from hard work and long hours. Many of them did not succeed in making enough of a profit to keep their business going and had to close down or be handed over to somebody else after only a few years.

41. Interview with Bertrand (23.7.2010), Ghent; Informal conversation with Naima (15.7.2010), Ghent. 42. Informal conversation with Bayram (1.9.2010), Ghent. 43. Interviews with Antonio (9.8.2010), Mariakerke, and Giovanni (17.8.2010), Ghent. 44. ROGER WALDINGER, HOWARD ALDRICH & ROBIN WARD, “Opportunities...”, p. 21-28; ROBERT KLOOSTERMAN & JAN RATH, “Introduction”, p. 11. 45. HERMAN DEBBAUT *et al.*, *Onderzoek naar bewoners...*, p. 42. 46. During the period under study, no ‘certificate of establishment’ (see note 39) was needed for cafés or small retail shops. 47. Interviews with Alessandro (1.2.2011) and Ahmed S (27.5.2008), Ghent.



*A woman is seen posing in a retail shop in Ghent, in the late 1970s. Amongst the products on display we can distinguish paprikas from Morocco on the right. At that time, this vegetable was still fairly unknown among the Belgian population. (Foto uit LIEVE COLRUYT, STEFAAN BEEL, DIRK BRAECKMAN, Immigranten. Een poging tot benadering. Gent, s.d., s.p.)*

### Protected businesses

Much higher financial and legal barriers to independence were to be found in professions that were protected by law, such as butchers and hairdressers. These barriers, pertaining to the possession of a certificate of establishment<sup>48</sup> and also to the financial means to equip workplaces and shops, can explain why it took so long (until the 1980s) for immigrant-entrepreneurs to set up Islamic butcher shops in Ghent, even though there clearly was a fast-growing market for the products they had on offer, and especially for ritually slaughtered halal meat, with the arrival of Turkish and Maghrebi Muslims in the city of Ghent from the mid-1960s on. However, by 1985, there were at least four Islamic butchers in Ghent: Taieb and Reda in the Brugse Poort, Mohammed at Sint-Jacobs and Omar in the Sleepstraat, all neighbourhoods where many Muslim immigrants resided. Taieb and Omar had migrated to Ghent from Morocco, Mohammed was Algerian and Reda Tunisian; up until the mid-1980s, there are no reports of Turkish butchers in Ghent. All of them initially had an almost exclusively Muslim clientele, to which more and more Belgian customers came to be added, attracted by the good price-to-quality ratio

these butchers provided. Further, all of them had worked for several years under the supervision of a qualified Belgian butcher – thereby gaining experience in order to qualify for the permit to set up shop for themselves<sup>49</sup>. Picking up the needed business know-how while working for a Belgian employer allowed these immigrants to establish their own shops. Indeed, working for a small business gives people access to more and better information about small business opportunities, as well as more opportunities to acquire the relevant skills to set up their own enterprise, than does working for a large company<sup>50</sup>. Other immigrant entrepreneurs who followed this path were those Spanish immigrants who, in the 1970s, set up a number of medium-sized meat-processing companies, after having worked for some years in a Belgian company which did the same. These companies were working for the Belgian market and came to employ a relatively important number of mostly Spanish labourers<sup>51</sup>. This pattern of learning the trade ‘on the job’ and then setting up one’s own business is a way to entrepreneurship which, in the literature, is often linked to immigrant-entrepreneurs in the building sector<sup>52</sup>. However, even though

48. In order to obtain such a certificate, would-be entrepreneurs had to provide proof, by means of a diploma, a certificate, or a document showing practical experience, that they had the required knowledge to set up a particular business. No difference was made between Belgians and immigrant-entrepreneurs in this matter. PIETER KERREMANS, “De vestigingswetgeving, een noodzakelijke drempel”, in *Bareel*, 59, 1995, p. 16-18. 49. Interview with Taieb (21/07/2010), Ghent; Informal conversations with Reda (8.3.2011), Omar (15.7.2010) and Mohammed (2.7.2010), Ghent. 50. ROGER WALDINGER, HOWARD ALDRICH & ROBIN WARD, “Opportunities...”, p. 44-45. 51. Interviews with Bertrand (23.7.2010), Ghent, and José (27.8.2010), Evergem (the latter was an associate in one of these companies). 52. JAN RATH, “A quintessential immigrant niche? The non-case of immigrants in the Dutch construction industry”, in *Entrepreneurship and regional development*, 4, 2002, p. 357-358; see also MANUELA MARTINI, “Des flux qui se mélangent. Provinciaux et étrangers dans le BTP en France (région parisienne, fin 19<sup>ème</sup> - première moitié du 20<sup>ème</sup> siècle)”, in CLELIA CARUSO, JENNY PLEINEN & LUTZ RAPHAEL (eds.), *Postwar Mediterranean Migration to Western Europe. Legal and Political Frameworks, Sociability and Memory Cultures*, Frankfurt am Main, 2008, p. 202.



many immigrants living in Ghent had been working as builders and ground workers for large and small companies, both Belgian and international, only few of them seem to have started as independent building-contractors during the period under study<sup>53</sup>. This is different for those who had arrived to work for one of the Italian mosaic makers who had been established in Ghent since the interwar period, many of whom did set up their own business after only a few years<sup>54</sup>.

### Restaurants

A last and numerically important category of businesses set up by labour migrants during the period under study were restaurants, providing 'ethnic food' and aiming for a local, Belgian clientele. Over the second half of the twentieth century, and especially from the 1960s on, throughout the modern industrialised world, several economic and socio-cultural developments (many of which, such as the growing importance of mass tourism, were related to the rise of affluence following the economic boom of the 1960s) turned eating out in general and eating out 'ethnic' in particular into a mass phenomenon<sup>55</sup>. Even though Ghent already had a number of 'ethnic eateries' where one could go and eat Chinese, Italian, Tunisian, Greek, etc. during the 1960s, the ethnic res-

taurant business in the city really took off in the early 1970s, when Gianni Bombini, an Italian entrepreneur who already owned a restaurant in Leuven, set up his first restaurant in Ghent. Originally from Bisceglie, a town in Southern Italy, Bombini had learned the trade by working in the restaurant of his fellow townsman (and member of his extended family) Mauro di Pilato, who by the early 1970s owned some fifteen Italian restaurants, spread over the whole of Belgium<sup>56</sup>. Bombini's *Al Parma*, situated at the Wilson square in the Ghent South area (where most of the earlier 'ethnic eateries' were also to be found), was apparently very successful, but only existed for two years, as it burned to the ground in 1974. Immediately after the incident, several new Italian restaurants were established in the city by Bombini's former employer, Mauro di Pilato, and by Bombini himself. From the late 1970s onwards, Italian restaurants opened their doors one after another, set up by one or several of the (former) staff members of di Pilato's or Bombini's restaurants. Most of these places were situated in the same area of Ghent South<sup>57</sup>. 'Ethnic eateries' other than Italian still existed, and new ones appeared over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, but no other 'ethnic food' became as popular as Italian food, for which the market seemed to be growing continuously – a phenomenon

53. However, from the late 1980s on, some of these labourers did set up their own business, often because they were forced to do so by their Belgian employers who, for economic reasons, preferred to work with subcontractors rather than with employees. At first, these mostly Turkish entrepreneurs were no more than fake-self-employed, working for their former employers, but as time went by, they became real independent companies. Today Ghent and its environs count quite a lot of Turkish entrepreneurs working in the building sector. KENAN DEMIRCI, "De onstuitbare opgang van de Turkse ondernemers in België", in *Bareel*, 59, 1995, p. 20-23; MUSTAFA AKPINAR, *Ondernemerschap bij allochtonen*, Master's thesis, Universiteit Gent, 2007.

54. Interviews with Roberto (17.3.2011), Destelbergen, Giacomo (31.7.2010) and Angela (15.2.2011), Ghent. 55. ANNEKE VAN OTTERLOO, "Eating out 'ethnic'...", p. 41-42. 56. Interviews with Giovanni (17.8.2010) and Marco (1.2.2011), Ghent; Informal conversation with Pietro (26.8.2010), Ghent. 57. Data from the population register (population archive city of Ghent).

that is also attested for the Netherlands and Germany<sup>58</sup>. Finally, even though now they are omnipresent in the city, Turkish restaurants in Ghent were rare until the second half of the 1980s; therefore, they fall outside the framework of this study<sup>59</sup>.

During the period under study, the capital for setting up a restaurant was still relatively low. Lin Pang calculated that in the beginning of the 1970s, a modest Chinese restaurant could be set up for some 500,000 Belgian francs (12,500 euro)<sup>60</sup>. In comparison, in 1970, the average daily wage of a male employee in the industrial sector was 526 francs; in 1975, it was 1,053 francs<sup>61</sup>. Furthermore, in those days, the qualifications that were needed to set up a restaurant could be gained through experience; until 1984, no certificate of establishment was necessary<sup>62</sup>. This experience could be gained by working for some time in somebody else's restaurant, and as such at minimal cost – as we have seen, most of the Italian restaurants in Ghent were set up by entrepreneurs who had previously worked as employees in the restaurant business. Still, as feasible as these investments might seem, they were still considerably larger than

those that were needed to set up a café or small retail shop. Like the owners of cafés and small retailers, restaurant owners relied on hard work and low pay to recover the investments they had made, and to make a living for themselves. However, unlike most of the former, immigrant-restaurant owners in Ghent chose to aim at a much wider and more profitable market than the city's immigrant population, targeting the local middle classes as well as students and tourists visiting the city : people who had money to spend.

Other kinds of specialized immigrant businesses, such as travel agencies and publishers, and independent professionals such as lawyers and accountants who specifically targeted an immigrant clientele do not seem to have existed in Ghent during the period under study. They began to appear in earnest from the second half of the 1980s on, as only then was there a 'group' (the Turkish population in the city) that was sizeable enough to allow for such a proliferation of specialized services and only then had a 'second generation', who had been trained in the receiving society and therefore had the knowledge and the qualifications to set up these kinds of businesses, come of age.

58. ANNEKE VAN OTTERLOO, "Eating out 'ethnic'...", p. 52-53; MAREN MÖHRING, "Staging and Consuming the Italian Lifestyle. The Gelateria and the Pizzeria-Ristorante in Post-war Germany", in *Food & History*, 2, 2009, p. 181-183. 59. The first Turkish restaurant in Ghent, *Bogazici*, was set up in 1974 and run by Suleyman A. However, this was the only Turkish restaurant until Abdilkadir set up his *Ankara* in 1985. The first Turkish snack bar was opened in 1977, next to *Bogazici*, but like restaurants snack bars only really experienced an important take-off from the second half of the 1980s onwards. TINA DE GENDT, *Turkije...*, p. 119-121. 60. CHING LIN PANG, "Business opportunity or food pornography? Chinese restaurant ventures in Antwerp", in *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research*, 1-2, 2002, p. 151. 61. Nationale Bank van België, *Belgische Economische Statistieken 1970-1980. Deel II. Tabellen*, p. 158-159. 62. EBRAHIM BENLAMCHICH, *Etnisch ondernemerschap : een casestudy onder Maghrebijnse zelfstandigen in Gent*, Master's thesis, Universiteit Gent, 1999, p. 77.



*The shop of an Algerian butcher Mohammed, in the early 1990s.  
The shop was renowned for its lamb meat. (AMSAB-ISG and STAM  
City Museum Ghent)*

## V. Ethnicity and the roads to (successful) entrepreneurship

In the literature, the social networks in which immigrants are embedded and the social capital that they can mobilize come to the fore as particularly salient for their advances into independent entrepreneurship. Indeed, the concept of ‘social embeddedness’, that captures this salience, first proposed in this context by Alejandro Portes, provides an interesting angle to look at immigrants’ paths to entrepreneurship<sup>63</sup>. However, it has to be used in a critical way. In much of the literature dealing with the social embeddedness of immigrant entrepreneurship, it is the ‘ethnic resources’ immigrants (are supposed to) have at their disposal, as a result of the (assumed) ‘ethnic solidarity’ and social cohesion within ‘immigrant communities’, that are pointed to as the necessary resources for immigrant entrepreneurs to enter and succeed in business<sup>64</sup>. A lot of research talks about ‘ethnic entrepreneurs’ rather than immigrant entrepreneurs, and is built on an “a priori-

categorization of immigrants as ‘ethnic groups’ and the concomitant assumption that, as ethnic entrepreneurs, immigrants act differently by default than mainstream entrepreneurs”<sup>65</sup>. With Kloosterman and Rath, I want to argue that this focus on ‘ethnicity’ has to be re-evaluated. Looking at immigrants’ self-employment in the city of Ghent during the period under study, I found that different immigrant-entrepreneurs have used their ‘ethnic social capital’ in different ways and to different degrees, and that often, other kinds of resources (family, colleagues, institutions, non-ethnic friends and acquaintances) have played an important role in their success. This coincides with the findings of other recent, empirical research into the history of immigrant entrepreneurship<sup>66</sup>. In the last part of this article, I will focus on three areas that are key to the establishment and success of (immigrant) entrepreneurship – sources of capital and information, personnel, and suppliers and customers – trying to assess for each what is specifically ‘ethnic’ about them and what is not.

63. CATARINA REIS OLIVEIRA & JAN RATH, “Introduction...”, p. 22; ROBERT KLOOSTERMAN & JAN RATH, “Introduction”. 64. ROGER WALDINGER, HOWARD ALDRICH & ROBIN WARD, “Opportunities...”, p. 35; CATARINA REIS OLIVEIRA & JAN RATH, “Introduction...”, p. 6. 65. ROBERT KLOOSTERMAN & JAN RATH, “Introduction”, p. 6. 66. In a 2006 collection of articles concerning immigrant entrepreneurship in France, Berbagui shows how, for Maghrebi entrepreneurs in the Rhône department, the networks of access to entrepreneurship follow a sector-related rather than an ethnic logic, and Lescure insists that taking into account ethnicity should not obscure the other social networks in which the foreign entrepreneur participates and that influence his or her practices. DALILA BERBAGUI, “Trajectoires de travailleur-se-s indépendant-e-s étranger-e-s...”, p. 124; MICHEL LESCURE, “Introduction. Les pratiques entrepreneuriales”, p. 215, both in *Petites entreprises et petits entrepreneurs étrangers...*, Paris, 2006. French historian Anne-Sophie Bruno has written extensively about the role of (ethnic) social capital and social networks for the economic integration of Tunisian immigrants into the labour market but also for their access to independent entrepreneurship. ANNE-SOPHIE BRUNO, *Les chemins de la mobilité. Migrants de Tunisie et marché du travail parisien depuis 1956*, Paris, 2010, p. 188-198.

### Sources of financial capital and business information

To set up one's own business, one needs a certain amount of financial capital, as well as access to reliable information about permits, laws, available business sites, management practices, and reliable suppliers<sup>67</sup>; sometimes, it can be advantageous to work together with one or more business associates. Generally, research in 'ethnic entrepreneurship' points to co-ethnics as the preferred source of this capital and business information for immigrant entrepreneurs, as well as the most likely business partners<sup>68</sup>. Especially for relatively small investments, such as those needed to set up a café or a small retail shop, ethnic networks can function as credit-providing systems, granting co-ethnics informal loans, allowing them to quickly gather large sums of money without interest and without a strict repayment schedule<sup>69</sup>. In Ghent, I found this scenario only among Turkish immigrants, such as Mehmet, a teacher from Ankara who had been sent to Ghent in the early 1970s by the Turkish government in order to teach Turkish language and culture to Turkish school children. When Mehmet thought about setting up a Turkish bookshop in Ghent in 1986, another Turkish immigrant, neither a relative nor close friend of his, lent him the money he needed: "For my business, I did not use

any banking credit. I was talking in the café to a couple of people; then, in the evening, someone came to my door: 'Mister Mehmet, this is for you. One hundred thousand Belgian francs'. One hundred thousand Belgian francs, in the year 1986. And there I go, I can set up my business. ... I had just said 'I have to save a bit of money', and the same evening, I got it. This man had sold his business, someone else had taken it, and he brings me the money. And of the repayment terms, he didn't say anything. He said 'here you go, whenever you can ...'. Within the year, I paid it all back. ... It was not exceptional, it was very normal. Very normal, with us, very normal. But now it has diminished a lot, we have become westernized, so, we have integrated hey? (laughs)"<sup>70</sup>.

Social networks that are bound by an ascribed ethnicity provide the confidentiality and social control required for this type of informal credit-raising<sup>71</sup>, which, because of its informality, also presents a number of risks<sup>72</sup>. In Ghent, however, aspiring entrepreneurs more often seem to have saved up a large part of their starting capital themselves, while borrowing the rest from family members or close friends, rather than from 'co-ethnics' in an abstract sense. In one case, to set up his own restaurant, a Moroccan immigrant had saved some

67. JEREMY BOISSEVAIN *et al.*, "Ethnic Entrepreneurs and Ethnic Strategies", in *Ethnic Entrepreneurs...*, p. 133-134. 68. ROGER WALDINGER, HOWARD ALDRICH & ROBIN WARD, "Opportunities...", p. 36-37. 69. MARK GRANOVETTER, "The Economic Sociology of Firms and Entrepreneurs", in *The Economic Sociology of Immigration: Essays on Networks, Ethnicity, and Entrepreneurship*, New York, 1995. 70. Interview with Mehmet (28.3.2011), Ghent; 'Berbat' could also borrow the money to set up his café from the 'Turkish community': "The money to set up the café came from other Turks. The Turks did not know banks, they lent money within the community. You needed money? Then you could just ask, it was no problem, because the Turkish people were very close". Informal conversation with Berbat's son (26.3.2011), Ghent. 71. ROGER WALDINGER, HOWARD ALDRICH & ROBIN WARD, "Opportunities...", p. 36. 72. EBRAHIM BENLAMCHICH, *Etnisch ondernemerschap...*, p. 48.

money himself; the rest he borrowed from his cousin<sup>73</sup>. As many immigrant entrepreneurs in Ghent were married to or living together with Belgian partners (almost always immigrant men with Belgian women), it does not seem too far-fetched to assume that in some cases, these women and their families lent them money<sup>74</sup>, even though none of the (former) entrepreneurs I interviewed confirmed this in so many words<sup>75</sup>. In the literature, bank loans to immigrant entrepreneurs are reported as 'rare'<sup>76</sup>; however, in several cases, I found not only mixed couples but also single immigrants and immigrant couples going to the bank to (partly) finance their business plans<sup>77</sup>. Alessandro, who set up the café *Sandokan* in 1976 and several other businesses in the same sector over the course of the 1980s, remembers banks to be quite easy with loans for catering businesses back in the 1970s: "In those years, you could easily get credit from the banks. Because the catering business functioned quite well in those years. You went to the bank for a credit of sixty, fifty thousand Belgian francs, I am talking about 1976, 1977, and nothing, I took a loan from the IPPA

bank, and that cost me, I don't remember, five thousand francs per month, I think, I don't remember..."<sup>78</sup>.

Clearly, not all capital needed for the setup of immigrant businesses was generated through social networks that could be qualified as co-ethnic; some of it came from people and institutions in the receiving society with whom there were no ethnic ties at all. The same remark can be made regarding the information immigrant entrepreneurs needed to set up and run their business. Research in 'ethnic entrepreneurship' shows that many immigrant entrepreneurs relied on a network of co-ethnics to obtain such information, and that more general business information networks, set up by institutions in the receiving society (such as traders' associations, local, regional and national authorities) were less known to them<sup>79</sup>. In Ghent, prospective entrepreneurs often gathered the necessary business information indirectly, while working in the business of another immigrant entrepreneur (this was the case for the Italian restaurant owners). Still, not all immigrant

**73.** Interview with Moh (10.10.2009), Ghent. **74.** The impact of the family networks of Belgian partners on the professional trajectories of immigrants has been attested by Venken for the case of 'Polish Liberators' in Belgium. MACHTELD VENKEN, "Polish Liberators and Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium during the Cold War. Mixed Marriages and their Differences for Immigrant Men and Women", in *Gender, migration, and the public sphere, 1850-2005*, New York, 2010, p. 60. **75.** Out of the twenty (former) immigrant entrepreneurs I talked to or found an interview with, ten were married to a Belgian partner (or at least, had been married to a Belgian partner at the time they set up their business). Only one of them mentioned how one of his competitors, who had also married a Belgian woman, received financial help from his Belgian parents-in-law. **76.** JEREMY BOISSEVAIN *et al.*, "Ethnic entrepreneurs...", p. 137. **77.** Bertrand and his Spanish wife bought their café-snack bar with a bank loan; Rabah and his Belgian wife acquired their restaurant with a bank loan of 200,000 Belgian francs; Pietro and his brother took out a loan to buy their restaurant. Interviews with Bertrand (23.7.2010) and Rabah (8.7.2010), Ghent; Informal conversation with Pietro (26.8.2010). **78.** Interview with Alessandro (1.2.2011), Ghent. **79.** ROGER WALDINGER, HOWARD ALDRICH & ROBIN WARD, "Opportunities...", p. 36-37; EBRAHIM BENLAMCHICH, *Etnisch ondernemerschap...*, p. 46-48; ELKE DE WITTE, *Ruimtelijk-economische analyse van etnisch ondernemerschap in Gent. Met toepassing op de Turkse gemeenschap*, Master's thesis, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 1997, p. 115-116.

entrepreneurs got their most important business information from co-ethnics. As we have seen, several immigrants acquired their knowledge from Belgian business owners, for whom they had worked for several years before setting up their own enterprise. Help also came from other Belgian contacts. Many entrepreneurs quickly found their way to a Belgian accountant (in those days, there were no immigrant accountants in the city), who was much better placed to guide them through the forest of regulations concerning small business-ownership<sup>80</sup>. Also, other kinds of contacts could prove helpful. When Isabel had to apply for a professional card, she took the paperwork to the Belgian couple (he a lawyer, she a magistrate) that had employed her sister-in-law when she first arrived in Belgium, who sorted everything out for her: “But afterwards, yes, I needed a permit, but I had experience in the kitchen. For me, the kitchen was no problem. And then, because in those times, we had many requirements, and I went to them, with all the papers, the señores magistrate and advocate, the family, and they took the papers off me and sent them to Brussels themselves”<sup>81</sup>.

Isabel turned to her Belgian contacts, even though by then both her husband and her sister-in-law were working for the Spanish Madame Billault, who was an entrepreneur herself. Immigrant entrepreneurs who were married to a Belgian partner also often benefited from their help, even if only because of their language proficiency and their general knowledge of the Belgian system. Marco, an Italian immigrant who had arrived in Ghent to work for Gianni Bombini and who later set up his own restaurant, acknowledges the importance of having had his Belgian wife run the business together with him: “What is true, which has helped me a lot is my wife, yes. Certainly. A lot. In the sense that I had the good luck that I met a beautiful girl, and a good one ... And she, being Belgian, has helped a lot to realize, to go forward, for the language, for the accounting, for the permits, for the work, for everything, that, yes”<sup>82</sup>.

Further, the search for a business partner was not always a matter of co-ethnics either – some businesses were set up with a Belgian partner<sup>83</sup> – and most of those partners that were co-ethnics were related through close family ties (siblings, cousins, etc.)<sup>84</sup>. Family

**80.** Interview with Moh (21.7.2010), Ghent. Informal conversations with Berbat’s son (26.3.2011), Naima (15.7.2010) and Bayram (1.9.2010), Ghent. **81.** Interview with Isabel (18.1.2011), Drogenen. **82.** Interview with Marco (1.2.2011), Ghent. **83.** For example, Mehmet K. a Turkish immigrant who arrived in Ghent in 1976, set up an independent business together with his Belgian friend and colleague. Reda and Mohammed, both butchers, worked together with a Belgian partner before they started for themselves. For them, this ‘association’ was a necessity, as they were not allowed to start a butcher’s shop on their own until they had gained enough experience. Interview with Mehmet K. from ROBIN MERTENS, *Minder-heden of beter verleden? Turkse migratie in eigen beeldvorming. Het herinneringslandschap van een lokale gemeenschap te Gent*, Master’s thesis, Universiteit Gent 2000; Informal conversations with Reda (8.3.2011) and Mohammed (2.7.2010), Ghent. **84.** Amar, for example, set up his first Algerian café, *L’Amicale*, together with his brother. Pietro bought his first restaurant together with his brother. Iberica Ltd., one of the Spanish meat-processing companies (see above, p. 16) set out as a partnership of two brothers, but came to include several ‘fellow ethnics’ within the partnership, who were not related through family ties. Informal conversations with Amar (9.7.2010) and Pietro (26.8.2010), Ghent; Interview with José (27.8.2010), Evergem.

ties seem to have been important in the choice for and the access to entrepreneurship in general. Settled entrepreneurs could lend money to aspiring entrepreneurs in the family; they could sell (one of) their business(es) to family members, family members could work in their business and gain the necessary experience to start up themselves, etc. Mohammed E., supposedly the first immigrant grocer in the city, sold his first shop to his cousin and her husband, lent another cousin money to set up a restaurant, then trained this cousin as a butcher in his own shop, and eventually sold the butcher's shop to him<sup>85</sup>.

#### Immigrant entrepreneurs as employers

Ethnic networks seem to have been more ubiquitous when we look at immigrant entrepreneurs as employers. Stereotypically, immigrant employers are thought to recruit their labour force by mobilizing direct connections to the "ethnic community" from which they emigrated; as such, they ensure themselves of loyal and trustworthy employees, who are moreover likely to accept sub-standard working conditions<sup>86</sup>. There are also practical issues, not least of which is

language. One Spanish entrepreneur in Ghent who employed an almost exclusively Spanish staff allegedly never learned to speak Dutch throughout his life; he preferred Spanish employees so he could speak to them in his own language<sup>87</sup>. However, in Ghent, most immigrant businesses that were set up by labour migrants and their families were too small and worked with profit margins that were too low to make it viable for them to hire a paid labour force. As is the case not only in many small immigrant businesses, but in small businesses in general, the work was often divided among unpaid family members, with partners and children helping out a lot<sup>88</sup>. In many cases, the business was only part of the family income, and one or even both partners kept working either full-time or part-time as wage earners on the regular labour market, at least until it became clear that the business on its own would be able to support the whole family. When Lakhdar and his Belgian partner Martine took over the café *Athlétique* from an older Algerian man, Lakhdar kept working full-time and only worked in the café in his free time; it was Martine who ran the place<sup>89</sup>. This 'double strategy' is often reported for immigrant entrepreneurs<sup>90</sup>. In most Turkish

85. Informal conversation with Naima (15.7.2010), Ghent; Interview with Taieb (21.7.2010), Ghent. 86. ROGER WALDINGER, HOWARD ALDRICH & ROBIN WARD, "Opportunities...", p. 38.

87. SONIA VANOUTRYVE, *Immigratieproblemen: een sociografische studie van Spaanse werknemers te Gent*, Licentiate thesis, Universiteit Gent, 1968, p. 58. 88. SERGE JAUMAIN, *Les petits commerçants belges face à la modernité (1880-1914)*, Brussels, 1995, p. 252-253.

89. Interview with Lakhdar (29.7.2010), Ghent. Isabel's husband maintained a full-time job, working for Madame Billault, when they had their café *Las Tapas*. During the day, Isabel worked there on her own; at night, her husband came to help out, so she had more time to prepare the tapas. Bertrand and Carmen both kept their regular jobs when they took over the *Frascati*; Bertrand continued to work full-time as technical designer for a Brussels company, whereas Carmen now and then went out cleaning and serving for the people for whom she had earlier been a live-in servant. Ayse and Riza had a gift and textile shop, which was run by Ayse, while Riza kept on working full-time. Interviews with Isabel (18.1.2011), Drongen, and Bertrand (23.7.2010), Ghent. Informal conversation with Bayram (1.9.2010), Ghent. 90. For Turkish families, see JEREMY BOISSEVAIN *et al.*, "Ethnic entrepreneurs...", p. 138.





*Immigrant entrepreneurship could be found in bars, butcher shops and small groceries but also in gift shops that offered specific articles for immigrant populations. This particular shop was named after the city Emirdağ, the city of origin for many Turks in Ghent. (AMSAB-ISG and STAM City Museum Ghent)*

and Maghrebi businesses that were run by immigrant couples, it was the man who was the face of the business, even though the workload was divided between both partners. At the *Berkane* grocery, Naima did not show her face in the shop very often, only when her husband was tied up elsewhere; she did help with tasks such as cleaning and unpacking. Celal K.'s wife helped out in his café and shop, also more or less behind the scenes<sup>91</sup>. This was not always the case, however. Ayse ran her own gift and textile shop in the Jozef II-straat between 1978 and 1982, when she passed away<sup>92</sup>. The role of women was generally different in the 'Spanish' businesses, as it was in Spanish migration to Ghent in general, where the majority of women arrived in the city as labour migrants rather than as dependent partners<sup>93</sup>. In the *Frascati*, Carmen was the one running the café most of the time, her husband Bertrand only helping out after work; the same was true in *Las Tapas*, where Isabel was the real café owner, whereas her husband Agustín only came to help out when he was off work<sup>94</sup>. In mixed immigrant-Belgian families, women were also important to the family business, and not only because they, as Belgians, were exempt from the discriminatory system of the professional card. As we have seen above, several of the "Algerian cafés" that were set up over the course of the 1960s, 1970s and even 1980s were not only registered under

the name of the Algerian immigrants' partners, who were Belgian (or, as in the case of *Qahwa Maria*, French), but were actually also run by these women, while their Algerian men kept a full-time job elsewhere, and helped out in the café in their spare time. Still, these cafés were identified as 'Algerian cafés', as they attracted an Algerian clientele, and provided a place where Algerian immigrants could feel at home. Paula on the Vrijdagmarkt, Christiane and Maria in Oudburg, Annie in the Kerkstraat, Jenny on the Griende square and Martine in the Fabiolalaan all ran 'Algerian' or 'ethnic cafés', attracting an immigrant crowd with whom they did not share any 'ethnic background' whatsoever<sup>95</sup>. Here, the stereotypical image of 'ethnic entrepreneurship' becomes very muddled.

### Suppliers and customers

The importance of ethnic solidarity and ethnic networks for the concrete development and functioning of immigrant businesses has to be nuanced further when we look at these businesses' supplier networks. Whereas the 'ethnic opportunity'-literature generally sketches relationships between immigrant entrepreneurs and suppliers belonging to the same 'ethnic community', and points at the advantages of their 'ethnic solidarity' and ensuing mutual trust, hardly any of the entrepreneur-supplier relationships I found in

91. Informal conversation with Naima (15.7.2010), Ghent; Interview with Celal K. from FREEK NEIRYNCK, SYLVAIN VAN LABEKE & AYSE IŞCI (eds.), *Herinneringen...* In the café *Berbat*, the wife of the owner gave up her job in a textile factory to help out in the family business. Her work was mostly done behind the scenes, cooking the *köfte* and other food that customers could order. Informal conversation with the Berbat's son (26.3.2011), Ghent. 92. Informal conversation with Bayram (1.9.2010), Ghent. 93. JOZEFIE DE BOCK, "Alle wegen leiden naar Gent...", p. 61. 94. Interviews with Isabel (18.1.2011), Drongen, and Bertrand (23.7.2010), Ghent. I also heard of two other Spanish women, Mercedes and Aurora, who ran cafés in Ghent, but these cafés were rather aimed at a Belgian crowd. 95. Interviews with Salah (22.10.2009), Lakhdar (29.7.2010), Ghent, and Abdeslam and Nelly (10.11.2009), Wondelgem; data from the population register (population archive city of Ghent).

Ghent were situated within ethnic boundaries. Immigrant entrepreneurs in Ghent mostly worked with Belgian suppliers: cafés got most of their drinks from the brewery from which they rented the property; grocery stores bought a great deal of their produce from local Belgian fruit and vegetable suppliers; restaurants worked with local Belgian suppliers for their bread, fruit and vegetables, meat, etc. Only for specialist produce that could not be obtained locally did immigrant entrepreneurs look farther away, to Brussels, Antwerp, and even abroad<sup>96</sup>. The suppliers of such specialist produce often were co-ethnics but equally often, they were not. For *A Rapaza*, Bertrand went shopping every Friday after work at *Gallio*, a Spanish fishmonger's at the Quai de Mariemont in Brussels; back in Ghent, his customers would be waiting for his arrival to pick up their sardines, *boquerones*, *calamares*, etc. He also had to buy other products, such as Spanish preserves, *chorizo*, wines and liquors, in Brussels, from a Spanish wholesaler called *Vinespa*. He got to know these suppliers through his contacts with the Spanish couple who had run the café-restaurant *Frascati* before he and his wife had taken over<sup>97</sup>. Marco, who owned an Italian restaurant, bought his produce from Brussels-based wholesaler Sergio Ferrante, with whom he came into contact via one of Ferrante's representatives<sup>98</sup>. The Moroccan grocery

*Berkane* on the other hand got most of their Mediterranean fruit and vegetables from an Italian supplier in Brussels, Sonia, with whom they conducted their business until she quit<sup>99</sup>. The data I have do not allow me to determine the exact nature of these entrepreneur-supplier relationships; however, recent research has shown that these are not necessarily determined by ethnic affinities, and that other characteristics, such as spatial proximity and economic stability of the suppliers' company, are more important, especially after the initial starting period<sup>100</sup>.

The same nuance has to be brought to bear when looking at immigrant entrepreneurs' customers. Research has shown that only a few immigrant entrepreneurs rely exclusively on customers from their own ethnic groups<sup>101</sup>. This is certainly also the case for many immigrant entrepreneurs in Ghent, especially those for whom there was a relatively small number of co-ethnics present in the city. They relied on a broader mix of customers, including immigrants from different ethnic backgrounds and Belgians. 'Spanish' cafés such as the *Frascati* and *Las Tapas* served a broad, ethnically diverse clientele, including Belgians. 'Moroccan' and 'Spanish' shops such as *Berkane* and *A Rapaza* attracted immigrant customers from all around the Mediterranean with their Mediterranean

96. Most suppliers of Mediterranean or more specific Spanish, Italian, Turkish, Maghrebi produce were based in bigger cities such as Brussels and Antwerp. The case of Veyssel Bicici's grocery in 1975, the produce came from suppliers in Antwerp and Amsterdam. Copy of a newspaper article "Turken kopen bij Turkse middenstanders", 8.12.1975 (no further information) (private archive Sebahat Kubat). 97. Interview with Bertrand (23.7.2010), Ghent. 98. Interview with Marco (1.2.2011), Ghent. 99. Informal conversation with Naima (15.7.2010), Ghent. 100. ANNICK GRANDMANGE & HÉLÈNE STEINMETZ, "Les fournisseurs d'une petite entreprise juive polonaise de Lens, 1945-1952", in *Petites entreprises...*, p. 243-244. 101. JEREMY BOISSEVAIN *et al.*, "Ethnic entrepreneurs...", p. 146.



*A Turkish bar owner in Ghent, in the early 1980s.  
(AMSAB-ISC and STAM City Museum Ghent)*

produce, while ‘Turkish’ gift shops such as *Emirdağ* attracted many Belgian clients too. Most ‘Italian’ restaurants counted hardly any Italians among their clientele, but served an almost exclusively Belgian or tourist crowd, as did most other ‘ethnic eateries’, such as the Tunisian *El Hanna* and the Moroccan *Le Plaisir*<sup>102</sup>.

Sometimes, immigrant businesses were endowed with an ‘ethnic identity’ that had little or nothing to do with the actual ‘roots’ of their owners. This was especially the case in the restaurant business. As ‘Italian’ restaurants attracted more clientele than other ‘ethnic eateries’, it was not uncommon for immigrants from elsewhere to give their enterprise an ‘Italian’ outlook. This is what Rabah, an immigrant from Algiers, did when he set up his own restaurant in 1985. Like many other owners of Italian restaurants, he had worked in an Italian restaurant, where he had learned the trade. He did not want to present the place or himself as ‘Algerian’ to his potential customers (he mostly aimed at tourists who came to visit Ghent for the day), thinking such a move would be bad for business: “As I had learned to cook in the Italian restaurant [where he had previously worked], I had decided to set up an Italian restaurant. I didn’t want to profile myself as ‘Algerian’; moreover, I couldn’t. Like all Muslim immigrants,

Algerians were not well regarded, whereas Italians were. When I worked in the Italian restaurant, I also had to present myself as if I was Italian; if I didn’t do this, there were people who didn’t want to be served by me”<sup>103</sup>.

That Rabah was made to present himself as Italian while working in an Italian restaurant shows that his former employer – who was Italian – made use of the same kind of ‘ethnic strategy’ that Rabah himself used in setting up his own ‘Italian restaurant’, performing ethnicity in order to conform to the expectations of his clientele. ‘Italian’ restaurants, just like ‘Chinese’ and ‘Greek’ restaurants, had to be presented in a way in which the public wanted to see them, and had to serve the food the public expected to eat in such places. Their ‘Italianness’ often had little to do with where the people who ran these places came from, nor with the food they ate there<sup>104</sup>.

## VI. Conclusion

A historical overview of the development of immigrant entrepreneurship in the city of Ghent has shown how those immigrants-turned-entrepreneurs who arrived during the period of ‘guest worker migration’ initially set up businesses that were aimed

**102.** Interviews with Isabel (18.1.2011), Drogen, Bertrand (23.7.2010) and Moh (21.7.2010), Ghent; Informal conversations with Naima (15.7.2010), Bayram (1.9.2010) and Khalifa (14.4.2008), Ghent. **103.** Interview with Rabah (8.7.2010), Ghent. **104.** Möhring provides an extensive discussion of this staging of ‘Italianness’ in the Italian restaurant, showing how three elements (the dishes, the decoration, and the staff) are combined to meet the expectations of the customers. MAREN MÖHRING, “Staging and Consuming the Italian Lifestyle...”, p. 198-200.

at an exclusively immigrant crowd. From the early 1960s onwards, many immigrant cafés popped up, joined in the 1970s by small retail shops, both businesses with low barriers to entry, for which little capital or technical know-how was needed. It took somewhat longer for Mediterranean immigrants to set up businesses for which specific skills, permits and equipment were required. This explains why Islamic butchers only came to be established in Ghent in the 1980s, even though there had been a growing demand for halal meat ever since the arrival of Muslim labour migrants and their families in the mid-1960s. These first immigrant butchers had learned their trade on the job, working for a Belgian butcher; such informal on-the-job training also led to immigrants from different backgrounds setting up restaurants, using ‘their’ ethnicity in order to attract a Belgian clientele that was looking for an exotic experience. ‘Italian’ restaurants in particular became highly successful.

According to Bommès and Kolb (2006), in much of the literature concerned with “ethnic niches” and “ethnic businesses”, immigrant entrepreneurs are characterised by four central attributes : their horizontal and vertical networks are drawn from the same ethnic group; they rely on employees and customers of the same origin; trade creditors belong to the same ethnic community or come from the same country;

and unpaid family work seems to be of particular importance<sup>105</sup>. Studying immigrant entrepreneurship in Ghent, I came across all of these characteristics. On the one hand, some entrepreneurs combined all of them (especially some café owners and a number of small shopkeepers); on the other hand, there were also cases in which the immigrant entrepreneur hardly made any use of his or her ethnicity at all (such as Arturo, the peddler of leather jackets and later jeweller). Most immigrant entrepreneurs however seem to have made use of both ethnic and other (social) capital in the starting up and running of their businesses. Such a double allegiance has also been noted in recent research on Turkish business owners in Germany<sup>106</sup>. Certainly in Ghent, which was a relatively new destination for Mediterranean immigrants and which only had a small number (in both absolute and relative terms) of immigrant inhabitants during the period in question, looking beyond the ‘ethnic network’ was a must for aspiring entrepreneurs. As we have seen, for many of them, local contacts, especially Belgian spouses, have been a great asset. Even though mixed marriages seem to have been more common than might be expected (see above), the occurrence of such marriages among immigrant entrepreneurs is remarkable. Undoubtedly, a Belgian spouse was of enormous value to an (aspiring) immigrant entrepreneur, not only because he or she was exempt from the system of the professional

**105.** MICHAEL BOMMÉS & HOLGER KOLB, “Migrants’ Work, Entrepreneurship and Economic Integration”, in *The Dynamics of International Migration and Settlement in Europe. A State of the Art*, Amsterdam, 2006, p. 116. **106.** ANTOINE PÉCOUD, “Self-Employment and Immigrants’ Incorporation : The Case of Turks in Germany”, in *Immigrants & Minorities*, 2, 2003, p. 256-257.

permit, but also because he or she spoke the language, had an often large social network in the city, etc. However, other, looser relations with locals (such as accountants or former colleagues) seem to have been quite valuable too. Old world kinship and ethnic ties on the other hand became more interesting as they were more embedded in the receiving society, and as they had a more successful experience with entrepreneurship, so that they could supply the necessary

resources (especially information and capital) newcomers needed to set up their own businesses. Finally, the evidence suggests that small enterprises run by immigrants actually have a lot in common with small enterprises run by non-immigrants (such as the use of family members as unpaid labour) – a fact that too often remains understudied in the literature on immigrant entrepreneurship and that deserves to be explored further.

*JOZEFIEN DE BOCK (Belgium, °1984) received her PhD at the European University Institute in Florence in 2013. In 2014, she was one of the curators of the STAM-Ghent City Museum project “Sticking Around. Over 50 years of migration to Ghent”, presenting the results of her PhD research to a wider audience. Her research interests include the history of human mobility, integration processes of immigrants in receiving societies, and cultural diversity past and present.*