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ETHNICITY VERSUS STRUCTURAL FACTORS
IN NORTH AMERICAN HISTORY.
THE CASE STUDY OF THE ITALIAN ECONOMIC NICHES

INTRODUCTION

The whole 20th century was characterized by the phenomenon of mass migrations from Europe to North America, but the literature on this issue has proposed different and conflicting explanations on their causes and features. In particular, the debate on the causes of the persistence of migratory flows to the USA and Canada has been characterized by the polarization between structuralist and economic-focused approaches on the one hand, and theories that have looked at different combinations of reasons on the other. Within these frameworks, some scholars have stated how immigration to North America was basically due to the labor needs of industrial and financial capital¹ that created a global labor market², while other authors have underlined the existence of non-economic aspects³.

¹ B. Ramirez (1990), The perils of assimilation. Toward a comparative analysis of immigration. Ethnicity and national identity in North America, in: Lerda, V. G. (ed.) *From "melting pot" to multiculturalism. The evolution of ethnic relations in the United States and Canada*, Roma, p. 143.

Donna Gabaccia has underlined the role played by the new global polarizations in creating the trans-oceanic migration flows. She has highlighted how the industrial capital was no longer concentrated in the cities of North Europe, but moved to the new urban realities of North America and this migration of capitals created an enormous demand for unskilled workers. See: D. Gabaccia (2003), *Emigranti, Le diaspore degli italiani dal Medioevo a oggi*, Torino, pp. 70-71.

² L. Pots (1990), *The World Labour Market. A History of Migration*, London; S. Castles, M. J. Miller (1993), *The Age of Migration. International Population Movements in Modern World*, New York; J. D. Gold (1979), European Inter-Continental Emigration, 1815-1914. Patterns and Causes, "Journal of European Economic History", Vol. 8, pp. 593-679.

³ R. Ward (1986), Ethnic Business and Economic Change: An Overview, "International Small Business Journal", Vol. 4, Issue 3, pp. 10-12.

Moreover, in recent years the debate has seen the presence of more and more researchers that have chosen to analyze the migration phenomenon inside the framework of the transnational approach⁴, in opposition both to the theories of modernization⁵ and to the traditional perspectives based on national state focus⁶.

In any case, whatever interpretative approach to the causes and characteristics of mass migrations to North America during the 20th century we want to support, some consequences of this phenomenon are clear. In particular, we are accustomed to thinking of US and Canadian cities as remarkably heterogeneous places, populated by various communities and networks⁷. In fact, the existence of ethnic enclaves represents one of the most significant characteristics of the urban experience in Canada and the USA. Their presence has activated in the host societies different mechanisms of inclusion or exclusion⁸, and the literature has described them with different and controversial interpretative frameworks, such as the assimilationist or the multiculturalist as well as the transnational approaches⁹.

Moreover, it is evident how the immigrants have strongly affected the urban economic environment by acting as either business actors or labor force at the local markets. In particular, the presence of communities of immigrants or minority groups has often originated the birth of economic ethnic niches and specializations. In fact, the over-representation of some ethnic groups in specific sectors, both as employers and workers, of the urban economy is a reality that is easy to experience in North America.

⁴ D. Gabaccia (1997), Liberty, Coercion, and the Making of Immigration Historians, "The Journal of American History", Vol. 84, Issue 2, pp. 570-575.

Daniilo Romeo has interestingly highlighted the correlations between these transnational approaches and the world system analysis proposed by Immanuel Wallerstein and its focus on the role played by economic and political structures of the global capitalism in influencing mass migrations phenomena. See: D. Romeo (2001), L'evoluzione del dibattito storiografico in tema di immigrazione: verso un paradigma transnazionale, "Altreitalie", Issue 23; I. Wallerstein and others (1982), *World-Systems Analysis: Theory and Methodology*, Beverly Hills.

⁵ A. Appadurai (1996), *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimension of Globalization*, Minneapolis.

⁶ R. Alba, V. Nee (1997), Rethinking Assimilation Theory for a New Era of Immigration, "International Migration Review", Vol. 31, Issue 4, pp. 826-874.

⁷ *Little Italies in North America* (1981), Harney, R. F., Scarpaci, V. (eds.), Toronto, p. 1.

⁸ B. Ramirez (1990), The perils of assimilation. Toward a comparative analysis of immigration. Ethnicity and national identity in North America, in: Lerda, V. G. (ed.) *From "melting pot" to multiculturalism. The evolution of ethnic relations in the United States and Canada*, Roma, p. 143.

⁹ G. Gozzini (2006), Migrazioni e World History, "Altreitalie", gennaio-giugno, pp. 15-28.

The widespread existence of ethnic economic niches represents an intriguing, but also provocative and complex, topic for historians. In fact, studies on the economic behavior of ethnic groups should come to terms with beliefs and stereotypes that exist in public debates which are often affected by prejudices or even racism. In general, this kind of research implies facing the relevant ideological meaning of these topics. In this framework, historians usually describe ethnic job and business peculiarities by referring to different cause-and-effect analyses. The core of the debate is the different evaluations of the importance given either to the ethnic/cultural factors that feature the different immigrant groups or to the structural factors that define the host society and/or the global market.

In this perspective, the origins and development of an economic ethnic niche can be viewed as the result of a negotiation, often conflictual, between immigrants' ethnicity, traditions or skills and the demands made, opportunities offered and limitations imposed by the host society¹⁰. In fact, research projects carried out on comparisons of a single ethnic group in multiple locations usually show that local context has strongly shaped the economic ethnic experience¹¹. This means that the political, social and economic conditions of host societies have shaped the ability and propensity of immigrants to act economically and to gather in specific economic niches.

Consistent with the foregoing discussion, this article aims to compare the theoretical frameworks on ethnic economic niching discussed in the literature, by analyzing the role assigned either to cultural aspects or to structural factors (see Section 2). Moreover, in order to test the theoretical achievements, it focuses on the paradigmatic case study of the Italian economic niches in North America (Sections 3 and 4).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS ON ECONOMIC ETHNIC NICHES

The term “economic ethnic niche” is used here

to designate labor and business specialization involving the tendency of members of a specific ethnic group to concentrate in an activity or job associated with the production of a good or service¹².

¹⁰ J. Stanger Ross (2010), *Staying Italian: Urban Change and Ethnic Life in Postwar Toronto and Philadelphia*, Chicago, p. 137; J. Bodnar (1985), *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America*, Bloomington.

¹¹ J. Stanger Ross, *Staying...*, p. 137.

¹² F. D. Wilson (2001), *Metropolitan Labor Markets and Ethnic Niching: Introduction to a Research Project*, Center for Demography and Ecology, University of Wisconsin-Madison, CDE Working Paper No. 99-29, p. 3.

Going beyond the definition problem, the point is to understand why an economic ethnic niche exists. With this in mind, the aim of this section is to present a literature review on the factors affecting the origins of this kind of niche.

The so-called “cultural thesis” suggests that ethnic business, and the consequent growth of ethnic niches, is the result of the cultural predisposition of particular populations for entrepreneurship and small business¹³. The entrepreneurial attitude and the tendency to concentrate on some typical businesses would be the consequence of a specific “way of living” and cultural heritage that support the choice of becoming an employer. In my opinion, the classic references for this interpretative pattern are Weber’s paradigm, which related the Protestant religious ethos to the spirit of capitalism¹⁴, and Schumpeter’s theory on entrepreneurship¹⁵. In this perspective, the cultural attitudes of specific ethnic groups also represent an advantage factor in small business and explain the successful results of some ethnic niches. In particular, some authors have written about the existence of an “ethnic economy”¹⁶ based on the idea of cultural features which would encourage sector and entrepreneurial specializations based on human or relational resources provided from inside the ethnic community.

Within this perspective, ethnic resources such as a hard-working culture, family ties and group solidarity provide not only the cultural predisposition for the set-up of small-business activity, but also some competitive ethnic advantages¹⁷. For example, long hours of hard work and frugal attitudes toward consumption give competitive advantages in small-business operations by helping to accumulate start-up capital and profits in labor-intensive sectors¹⁸. Moreover, family ties and ethnic social networks provide resources such as business information, or training and starting capital¹⁹.

¹³ I. Light (1972), *Ethnic Enterprise in America: Business and Welfare Among Chinese, Japanese and Blacks*, Berkeley; I. Light, C. Rosenstein (1995), *Race, Ethnicity and Entrepreneurship in urban America*, New York; E. Bonacichand, J. Model (1980), *The Economic Basis of Ethnic Solidarity: Small Business in the Japanese American Community*, Berkeley.

¹⁴ M. Weber (1952), *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by T. Parsons, New York.

¹⁵ J. Schumpeter (1961), *The Theory of Economic Development*, New York.

¹⁶ R. Waldinger (1986), Immigrant Enterprise: A Critique and Reformulation, “Theory and Society”, Vol. 15, Issues 1-2, pp. 249-285.

¹⁷ E. Bonacich (1973), A theory of Middleman Minorities, “American Sociological Review”, Vol. 38, pp. 583-594.

¹⁸ P. G. Min (1987), Ethnic Business: A Comprehensive Synthesis, “International Journal of Comparative Sociology”, Vol. 28, Issues 3-4, pp. 173-194, p. 176.

¹⁹ P. Chock (1981), The Greek-American Small Businessman: A Cultural Analysis, “Journal of Anthropological Research”, Vol. 37, pp. 46-60; C. Goldscheider, F. Kobrin (1980), Ethnic Conti-

Another ethnic resource highlighted in the “cultural approach” literature is the cheap labor force (the members of the enlarged family) provided by the ethnic networks, and this represents a common feature of many communities of recent immigrants, as a consequence of a cultural heritage that is strongly family values-oriented. The ability to mobilize and organize ethnic workers would be an important competitive advantage in labor-intensive small businesses²⁰. It is interesting to underline that if a cheap labor force is a strategic resource from the point of view of an entrepreneurial theory perspective, in terms of labor conditions it usually means a high level of exploitation in ethnic firms.

Strong ethnic networks may also represent the framework for vertical and horizontal integration of an economy along ethnic lines. The existence of ethnic sub-economy niches that cover all the paths of a product from producers or importers to customers, through retailers, would give important advantages to entrepreneurs that enjoy a greater degree of autonomy from the surrounding economic environment²¹. In this perspective, the ethnic employers also enjoy the existence of protected markets (the employer, the suppliers and the customers belong to the same ethnic community) based on culturally oriented consumer demand²².

For both immigrant employers and workers, ethnicity could be a source of social capital that provides advantages in the fight for access to limited resources²³:

Ethnicity, as a social collectivity, can be viewed as a form of social capital through which individuals gain access to resources by virtue of their identification and affiliation with the collectivity (...) Group membership is in itself a resource, structuring the individual's location and activities in labor markets.

In general, the core of the “cultural thesis”, presented in particular in the theorizations of Bonacich and Light, is to highlight the importance of the ethnic cultural processes, even if they reject any simplistic attempt to analyze entrepreneurial behavior as an automatic product of some specific ethnic

nity and the Process of Self- Employment, “Ethnicity”, Vol. 7, pp. 256-278; P. G. Min, *Ethnic...*, pp. 173-194; W. Zenner (1982), *Arabic-Speaking Immigrants in North America as Middleman Minorities*, “Ethnic and Racial Studies”, Vol. 5, pp. 457-477.

²⁰ J. Boissevain (1984), *Small Entrepreneurs in Contemporary Europe*, in: Ward, R., Jenkins, R. (eds.), *Ethnic Communities in Business*, New York; P. G. Min, *Ethnic...*, pp. 173-194.

²¹ K. Wilson, W. A. Martin (1982), *Ethnic Enclaves: A Comparison of the Cuban and Black Economies in Miami*, “American Journal of Sociology”, Vol. 88, pp. 135-168.

²² H. Aldrich, J. Carte, D. McEvoy, P. Velleman (1985), *Ethnic Residential Concentration and the Protected Market Hypothesis*, “Social forces”; P. G. Min, *Ethnic...*, pp. 173-194.

²³ F. D. Wilson, *Metropolitan...*, p. 4.

characteristics or as the result of a racial tendency to be in some way “culturally programmed” for self-employment. These authors underline the fact that only in the context of immigration does ethnic identity begin to take on significance for entrepreneurial behavior²⁴. A more radical interpretation of this approach is, for example, proposed by Werbner²⁵, who describes the “way of living” of some ethnic communities as particularly supportive of entrepreneurs, focusing on the combination of traditional family values and in-group solidarity²⁶.

The critics of these culturalist approaches focus mainly on their limited explicative capacity, for example in the identification of the specific factors that represent competitive advantages inside a complex cultural background. Moreover, the static representation of ethnic cultures is another controversial issue. Many authors have highlighted how these theories undervalue the dynamism that usually affects the cultural processes inside the immigrant communities²⁷.

The theory that cultural and ethnic attitudes explain the existence of ethnic business niches has been criticized by researchers who claim that the so-called “structural conditions” are, first of all, responsible for ethnic business niches. The authors who embrace this structuralist approach do not connect the rise of minority-owned enterprises with the entrepreneurial orientation of particular populations as a consequence of ethnic advantages. On the contrary, they maintain that the choice of becoming an employer is, first and foremost, a consequence of the environmental conditions that the immigrants face in the host society. This perspective encompasses both the earlier block mobility theory and the most recent political-institutional approach²⁸.

²⁴ J. R. Barret and others (1996), Ethnic minority business: theoretical discourse in Britain and North America, “Urban Studies”, Issue 33, pp. 783-809, p. 789.

²⁵ P. Werbner (1984), Business on trust: Pakistani entrepreneurship in the Manchester garment trade, in: Ward, R., Jenkins, R. (eds.), *Ethnic Communities in Business*, New York, pp. 166-188; P. Werbner (1990), Renewing an industrial past: British Pakistani entrepreneurship in Manchester, “Migration”, Vol. 8, pp. 17-41.

²⁶ J. R. Barret and others, Ethnic ... , pp. 783-809.

²⁷ E. Engelen (2001), ‘Breaking in’ and ‘breaking out’: a Weberian approach to entrepreneurial opportunities, “Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies”, Vol. 27, Issue 2, pp. 203-23; J. Rath (2001), Do Immigrant Entrepreneurs Play the Game of Ethnic Musical Chairs? A Critique of Waldinger’s Model of Immigrant Incorporation, in: Messina, A. M. (ed.), *A Continuing Quandary for States and Societies. West European Immigration and Immigrant Policy in the New Century*, Greenwood, pp. 141-160; P. Werbner (2001), Metaphors of Spatiality and Networks in the Plural City: A Critique of the Ethnic Enclave Economy Debate, “Sociology”, Vol. 35, Issue 3, pp. 671-693.

²⁸ *Cultural resources, Ethnic Strategies, and Immigrant Entrepreneurship. A comparative study of five immigrant groups in the Toronto CMA* (2002), Lo, L., Teixeira, C., Truelove, M. (eds.), Toronto, p. 6.

The original theory that emphasizes the role of contextual factors at the origin of ethnic business is still based on the so-called Light-Bonacich school where these authors describe ethnic entrepreneurship as a reactive adaption to geographical, cultural and psychological dislocation²⁹. In particular, ethnic business is, first of all, described as a reaction to structural disadvantages experienced in the labor market, such as the impossibility of applying for well-paid positions due to the existence of linguistic, political, cultural or legal barriers. In this perspective, ethnic entrepreneurship becomes a sort of survival strategy under discriminatory conditions³⁰. Within this framework, labor market discrimination faced by immigrants and members of established ethnic groups may lead to the formation of employment niches in other sectors of the local labor market in which there are few, if any, discriminatory barriers³¹.

Beyond the negative effects of the barriers in the labor market, some authors highlight that the discriminated position of the immigrants in a host society could become an advantage. They maintain that “ethnicity” combined with an “acculturation lag” would produce a sort of double standard in the society that ends up being an advantage for the immigrants. In fact, they would be prepared to exploit opportunities (small-business) rejected by indigenous people³². In my view, this idea of the “ethnic advantage” seems to refer to Sombart’s paradigm about the special role played by foreigners and marginal groups in developing innovation and entrepreneurship³³. On the other hand, this approach has been criticized by authors who underline the paradox of a theory that maintains that the racialized minority are “advantaged by disadvantage”, with an implicit condoning of racism and ethnic segregation³⁴.

In the 1980s, Portes introduced the concept of the “ethnic enclave economy”, which, in my opinion, has represented an interesting evolution of the traditional theory of labor market segmentation and an attempt to match the culturalist

²⁹ I. Light (1984), *Immigrant and ethnic enterprise in North America*, “Ethnic and racial Studies”, Vol. 7, pp. 195-216.

³⁰ *Cultural...*, Lo, L., Teixeira, C., Truelove, M. (eds.), p. 6.

³¹ F. D. Wilson, *Metropolitan...*; S. Sassen (1995), *Immigration and Local Labor Markets*, in: Portes, A. (ed.), *The Economic Sociology of Immigration*, New York, pp. 87–127; M. Granovetter (1995), *The Economic Sociology of Firms and Entrepreneurs*, in: Portes, A. (ed.), *The Economic...*, pp. 128–165.

³² M. Bose (1982), *The Ugandan Asian success magic*, “New Society”, Vol. 16; I. Light, *Immigrant...*, pp. 195-216.

³³ W. Sombart (1992), *Liebe, Luxus und Kapitalismus. Über die Entstehung der Modernen Welt aus den Geist der Verschwendung*, Berlin.

³⁴ J. R. Barret and others, *Ethnic...*, pp. 783-809, p. 796.

and structuralist approaches³⁵. This theory does not focus on the “autonomous ethnic cultural processes”, but on the disadvantageous external structures they must adapt³⁶. In this perspective, this approach overcomes the optimistic interpretation of ethnicity as a paradoxical advantage for the racialized minority and focuses on disadvantages that immigrants have to face in the host society. At the same time, Portes does not deny the existence of cultural characteristics, but he has underlined the need for them to be adaptable to a disadvantageous environment.

The more radical “structuralist approach” highlights that the economic and social environment plays a strategic role in pushing the development of ethnic business. In this framework, the presence of competitive advantages of minority-owned firms (a cheap labor force and a protected market) is not denied, but they are explained in terms of wider categories used in social, economic and entrepreneurial studies rather than as ethnic features. In general, the economic and social environment defines the structural advantages and disadvantages that explain the birth of ethnic business, regardless of the ethnic characteristics of the employers. Many authors³⁷ seek an explanation of the existence of ethnic business at the level of global capitalism, racism³⁸ or urban restructuring³⁹. In general, these authors propose a shift from culturalism to structuralism, and demonstrate “a clearer awareness of the articulation between the social relations of the ethnic minority firm and the economic, political and social processes surrounding it”⁴⁰.

The interest in structural approaches is not without criticism. There is the awareness that these approaches are often accused of *determinism* because they don't take into consideration the importance of individual and relational resources that can reduce the impact of macro-variables on ethnic and minorities' economic behavior. Moreover, the critics have highlighted the static interpretation that may affect many structural approaches.

The foregoing discussion shows an emerging confrontation between culturalist-oriented and structuralist-oriented approaches to the topic of ethnic business and specialization. In recent decades, the literature has provided some interesting attempts at convergence. We can see the transition from researches

³⁵ A. Portes (1981), Modes of incorporation and theories of labour immigration, in: Kritiz, M., Keeleyand, C., Tomadi, S. (eds.), *Global trends in Migration*, New York, pp. 279-297.

³⁶ J. R. Barret and others, *Ethnic...*, pp. 783-809, p. 792.

³⁷ *Ibid.*.

³⁸ T. Bates (1994), An analysis of Korean-owned small business start-ups with comparisons to African-American and non minority-owned firms, “Urban Affairs Quarterly”, Vol. 30, pp. 27-248.

³⁹ S. Sassen (1991), *The Global City*, Princeton.

⁴⁰ J. R. Barret and others, *Ethnic...*, p. 803.

based on studies of structural or social static to analyses that focus on the evolution processes that characterize the ethnic niches.

In the middle of the 1980s, a group of authors tried to propose a synthesis with the so-called “interactive approach”⁴¹. In this framework, “interaction between group characteristics and opportunity structures” is the key factor that explains ethnic business. The primary argument of this interpretation is that entrepreneurship is “socially embedded”⁴². Later, at the beginning of the 21st century, a new theory provided an extended application of the “interactive approach” by incorporating the broad political context⁴³. The “mixed embeddedness approach” maintains that, in addition to the role of ethnic community networks, the studies on ethnic business “must consider the impact of laws, public institutions, and regulatory practices”. More generally, this theory “attempts to contextualize the interaction of micro-level cultural forces within the broader political-social and economic setting of the host society”⁴⁴.

With an explicit recognition of these interesting evolutions of the theory, the relation between ethnic/cultural factors and the host society’s features will be part of the analysis of the case study of the Italian economic niches in North American cities. They will be analyzed by proposing a dynamic interaction between ethnic elements and structural factors, with the idea that an economic ethnic niche is not a static building but rather “a socially constructed formation”⁴⁵.

ITALIAN PEASANTS IN NORTH AMERICA

Between 1891 and 1920, 3,807,294 Italians emigrated to the USA, and during the first decade (1901-1910) of the 20th century they represented 25.4% of all the immigrants who entered the country⁴⁶. In the same years, the American cities

⁴¹ R. Waldinger, H. Aldrich (1990), Trends in ethnic business in the United States, in: Waldinger, R., Aldrich, H., Ward, R. (eds), *Ethnic Entrepreneurs*, Newbury Park, pp. 13-48.

⁴² *Cultural...*, Lo, L., Teixeira, C., Truelove, M. (eds.), p. 7.

⁴³ J. Rath (2000), Introduction: immigrant business and their economic, politico-institutional and social environment, in: Rath, J. (ed.), *Immigrant Business: The Economic, Political and Social Environment*, Basingstoke, pp. 1-19; R. Kloostermann, J. Rath (2001), Immigrant entrepreneurs in advanced economies: mixed embeddedness further explored, “*Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*”, Vol. 27, pp. 89-201.

⁴⁴ *Cultural...*, Lo, L., Teixeira, C., Truelove, M. (eds.), p. 7.

⁴⁵ F. D. Wilson, *Metropolitan...*, p. 3.

⁴⁶ R. Daniels (2002), *Coming to America. A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life*, New York, pp. 188-189. Sowell has described this movement of people as “the largest exodus of people ever recorded from a single nation” See T. Sowell (1981), *Markets and Minorities*, New York, p. 101.

registered an “*Italian invasion*”, and the case study of New York is a dramatic example: there were 1500 Italians in 1860, but there were 1,070,000 in 1930⁴⁷. These data explain how Italian emigration to the USA at the beginning of the 20th century represented a paradigmatic case study of mass migration. It originated the birth of many urban ethnic concentrations (the *Little Italies*) all around North America, as well as the development of Italian economic specializations and ethnic stereotypes.

I propose an analysis of the literature’s achievements in the stories of the first generations of Italian immigrants who came to North America during the first decades of the 20th century. My purpose is to apply the theoretical frameworks discussed in Section 2 to this case study of mass migration. The focus is on host societies’ features, global conditions, immigrants’ characteristics and the interrelations/combinations between them.

The starting point is a significant picture: at the peak of the “great emigration”, at the beginning of the 20th century, many Italian emigrants, who had been small farmers or peasants in Italy, were not so in North America. In fact, according to the 1900 USA census just 6.2% of the immigrants with Italian roots worked in agriculture⁴⁸, although until 1896 almost half of the Italian immigrants were originally peasants, and during the first two decades of the 1900s the percentage of immigrants working as farmworkers in Italy increased in numbers⁴⁹. In general, there is “a basic consensus among immigration historians that the Italian influx in North America represented a historic transformation of agrarian populations into urban-industrial ones”⁵⁰.

What is the meaning of this sort of “escape from the land”? What does this apparent contradiction between professional skills or traditions, and employment, tell us about the factors influencing the economic experience of immigrants in

⁴⁷ M. Pretelli (2011), *L’emigrazione italiana negli Stati Uniti*, Bologna, p. 44.

⁴⁸ H. S. Nelli (1983), *From immigrants to Ethnics. The Italian Americans*, New York.

Donna Gabaccia has highlighted that “a sizeable minority of Italy’s migrants, furthermore, worked in rural areas” but she has also underlined how in the literature nobody has suggested “they were the structural or experiential equivalents of urban neighbourhoods”. See D. R. Gabaccia (2006), *Global Geography of ‘Little Italy’: Italian Neighbourhoods in Comparative Perspective*, “Modern Italy”, Vol. 11, Issue 1, pp. 9-24, p. 14.

Among the very few scholars who have studied the Italian American immigrants who worked in agriculture I consider particularly deserving attention the book by V. J. Scarpaci (1981), *Italian Immigrants in Louisiana’s Sugar Parishes, 1880–1910*, New York.

⁴⁹ D. Gabaccia (2003), *Emigranti...*, p. 74; Commissariato dell’Emigrazione (1927), *Annuario Statistico della emigrazione Italiana*, Roma.

⁵⁰ B. Ramirez (2007), Decline, death and revival of “Little Italies”: the Canadian and U.S. experiences compared, “Studi emigrazione”, Vol. 44, Issue 166, p. 338.

general and Italians in particular? The literature has highlighted a combination of factors⁵¹. First of all there were structural factors affecting the American host society, such as the rising prices of the land in far-west territories or the mechanization of American agriculture that required high investments. Secondly, there were elements linked to immigrants' expectations: urban environments provided more chances for social mobility and fast enrichment. Finally, the ethnic neighborhoods of the cities ensured ethnic advantages in terms of both approaching the labor market and facing everyday life challenges. As Bruno Ramirez summarized, "too poor and inexperienced to acquire land and pursue commercial farming, and increasingly in need to complement men's wages with the work of wives and children, the city offered the only possibility for survival and the hope for material improvement"⁵².

At the same time, the American urban environment provided a demand for labor that was compatible with the characteristics of the Italian workforce. In general, between the end of the 19th century and around 1920, 90% of Italian immigrants were unskilled manual workers⁵³. They were men, the unskilled "human machines" described by David Montgomery⁵⁴, who worked in the infrastructural and construction sector as well as in manufacturing industries. However, they were also women, who found their jobs in the garment shops, or in the textile industries, as well as in the needle districts or mill towns⁵⁵. Within this perspective, the "escape from the land" experienced by Italian immigrants at the beginning of the 20th century seems to be an example of negotiation between immigrants' traditions, skills and expectations, and the opportunities or limitations imposed by the host society.

Facing the impossibility of living in rural villages, the immigration chains created the conditions for a similar experience. Robert Harney has highlighted how migration chains, job search and localism explain the choice of Italian immigrants to gather in urban ethnic neighborhoods as a stronghold against the difficulties presented by the new surrounding environment⁵⁶. Moreover, Vecoli has described the role played by environmental discrimination: "the response

⁵¹ M. Pretelli (2011), *L'emigrazione italiana negli Stati Uniti*, Bologna, pp. 46-47.

⁵² B. Ramirez, *Decline...*, p. 338.

⁵³ D. Gabaccia, *Emigranti...*, p. 74.

⁵⁴ D. Montgomery (1987), *The Fall of the House of Labor. The Workplace, the State and American Labor Activism*, Cambridge, p. 83.

⁵⁵ B. Ramirez, *Decline...*, p. 339.

⁵⁶ R. F. Harney (1984), *Dalla frontiera alle Little Italies. Gli italiani in Canada 1800-1945*, Roma, p. 200.

of the *contadini* to discrimination was to withdraw even more into their ethnic enclaves”.⁵⁷

Within their ethnic cluster they tried to recreate in America the pre-modern rural villages they came from. Instead of building them in the countryside, they resided in the areas of the cities where they “could find affordable rents and at the same time be within walking distance of urban worksites and chantiers, close to labour agencies and other recruiters of day labourers”⁵⁸.

Moreover, the social and class stratification inside the migrants’ group was remolded in order to meet with the needs of the host labor market. For example, the *padrone system*⁵⁹, as well as the use of contract laborers or the presence of small subcontractors, was based on the old tradition of seasonal workers in Italian agriculture⁶⁰, and, at the same time, it suited the needs of the urban American economies for a flexible workforce.

However, the migration experience is part of the general social and economic trend. It is interesting to note that back in 1924 Foerster explained the urban choice of Italian immigrants as part of the universal phenomenon of urbanization typical of all “modern countries”⁶¹. It means that economic and social choices of immigrants also depended on the structural factors dictated by the trends in global capitalism – to begin with, the choice of migrating.

To make the picture more complex, it is useful to highlight some interesting controversies that emerged in the literature about the foregoing interpretation of Italian immigrants’ labor experience in the North American environment as an urban experience. In particular, Donna Gabaccia has highlighted that⁶²:

For the century between 1870 and 1970, the majority of Italy’s migrants were transient male labourers. Their workplaces— often temporary—were in the bush logging and construction camps of Canada, along railway lines under construction in North and South America and in Europe or on mass public-works projects building dams, waterworks, reservoirs and water systems in the US and parts of Canada. During the era of the mass migrations, these ‘men without women’

⁵⁷ R. J. Vecoli (1985), “The search for an Italian American identity. Continuity and change”, in: Tommasi, L. F. (ed.), *Italian Americans. New perspectives in Italian emigration and ethnicity*, New York, p. 92.

⁵⁸ B. Ramirez, *Decline...*, p. 338.

⁵⁹ H. S. Nelli (1964), *The Italian Padrone System in the United States*, *Labor history*, Vol. 2, pp. 153- 167; R. H. Harney (1974), *The Padrone and the Immigrant*, “Canadian Review of American Studies”, Vol. 5, pp. 101-118; L. J. Iorizzo (1980), *Italian Immigration and the Impact of the Padrone System*, New York.

⁶⁰ D. Gabaccia, *Emigranti...*, p. 74.

⁶¹ R. F. Foerster (1924), *The Italian Emigration of Our Time*, Cambridge, p. 418.

⁶² D. R. Gabaccia, *Global...*, pp. 13-14.

(Harney, 1979⁶³) did not work or live permanently in large cities although they often passed through cities or lived there in sufficient numbers through the dead, winter seasons of unemployment to be supported by a male-oriented strip of businesses (bars, brothels, boarding-houses, labour agents, restaurants, etc.).

In this perspective, we find out that Italian immigrants' experience in 20th-century North America included extra or suburban male-oriented settlements and labor camps as well as more gender-balanced urban neighborhoods⁶⁴. I think that these two different patterns of settlements were complementary, although with different seasonality. They were functional to the requirements of the demand coming from the labor market for a seasonal and mobile workforce, as well as to the needs of ensuring the reproduction of the labor force itself.

In the following decades the Italian experience was still influenced by environmental trends which affected the American urban environments. I am thinking about the phenomenon of relocation that affected many Italian districts during the 1950s and 1960s in North America as a result of the so-called processes of "urban renewal". The examples of Boston's West End⁶⁵, St. Louis in Missouri⁶⁶ and the district of Newark⁶⁷ were paradigmatic of a process of "gentrification" that resulted in a "brutal eradication of the Italian colony"⁶⁸ and in a mobility toward sub-urban neighborhoods.

⁶³ Here Donna Gabaccia refers to the notorious article by R. F. Harney (1979), Men without women: Italian migrants in Canada, 1885–1930, "Canadian Ethnic Studies", Vol. 11, pp. 29–47.

⁶⁴ Little..., Harney, R. F., Scarpaci, J. V. (eds), p. 5; D. R. Gabaccia, Global..., p. 14.

On the history of the non urban male-oriented settlements in Canada you can see the classical E. W. Bradwin (1928), *The Bunkhouse Man: A Study of Work and Pay in the Camps of Canada, 1903–1914* New York. On the Italian American experience, an interesting work is M. La Sorte (1985), *La Merica: Images of the Italian Greenhorn Experience*, Philadelphia.

However, despite the existence of writings such as the two quoted above, the focus of scholarships on Italian case studies during mass migrations has a sort of original urban imprinting coming from the explosions of researches carried out in the 1970s. Among them there were the influential studies on Cleveland, Chicago, Boston and Buffalo. See: H. S. Nelli (1970), *Italians in Chicago, 1880-1930. A study in Ethnic Mobility*, New York; A. M. Martellone (1973), *Una Little Italy nell'Atene d'America*, Napoli; V. Yans-Laughlin (1977), *Family And Community: Italian Immigrant in Buffalo 1880-1930*, Ithaca; J. W. Briggs (1978), *An Italian Passage. Immigration to Three American Cities, 1890-1930*, New Haven.

⁶⁵ H. J. Gans (1962), *The Urban Villagers. Group and Class in the life of Italian Americans*, New York.

⁶⁶ G. R. Mormino (1986), *Immigrants on the Hill. Italian Americans in St. Louis. 1882-1982*, Chicago.

⁶⁷ M. Immerso (1997), *Newarch's Little Italy. The Vanished First Ward*, New Brunswick.

⁶⁸ H. J. Gans, *The Urban...*, p. 240.

ITALIAN ECONOMIC NICHE IN NORTH AMERICA

In the previous section I introduced the history of the various Italian communities in North America. In a culturalist perspective we could expect the emergence of similarities in the behavior of these Italian American groups, but the history tells us about a lot of differences. I want to go deeply into the causes that can explain why Italian immigrants have acted so differently. In particular, in this section I want to focus on the variability in economic niching of first generations of Italian immigrants in North America. The questions concern both what they did and why.

Vecoli, in his “Contadini in Chicago” [Peasants in Chicago], highlighted how Italian immigrants, although unskilled workers for the most part, were poorly represented among the blue-collar workers of the big factories in Chicago⁶⁹. The choice made by Italians in 1910s and 1920s Chicago of an outdoor job rather than to work in big factories has been interpreted as a sign of continuity with their rural background⁷⁰. Vecoli highlighted how the Italian *contadini* came to terms with Chicago within the framework of their ethnic background. In this perspective, I think that Vecoli’s approach represented the reaction to the assimilationist paradigm by maintaining the existence and survival of the migrants’ culture, in this case expressed by the choice of a specific economic ethnic niche⁷¹.

Vecoli’s approach, based on a sort of culturalist perspective, was affected by the static representation of immigrant heritage that was typical in the 1960s, but, in my opinion, it has also underestimated other empirical factors. In fact, although it is true that most Italian immigrants were unskilled workers, as both contemporary researchers and historians have highlighted,⁷² and above all peasants – some immigrants had remarkable skills. In particular, many of them had been construction workers in Italy⁷³. In fact, the data tell us that in 1906, among all emigrants from Italy, 75,000 were skilled construction workers, and they became 95,489 in 1912, 14.43% of the total⁷⁴. The fact that Italy had also shown a relative specialization in the export of skilled building labor supply is

⁶⁹ R. J. Vecoli (1964), *Contadini in Chicago. A Critique of the Uprooted*, “Journal of American History”, Issue 3, pp. 404-417, p. 410.

⁷⁰ R. F. Harney, *Dalla...*, p. 201.

⁷¹ S. Cinotto (2006), *Glocal Italies: un possibile nuovo percorso per lo studio storico delle comunità italoamericane*, “Altretalia”, January-June, pp. 38-51, p. 40.

⁷² F. Coletti (1911), *Dell’emigrazione italiana*, in *Cinquant’anni di storia italiana*, Milano; E. Sori (1979), *L’emigrazione italiana dall’Unità alla seconda guerra mondiale*, Bologna.

⁷³ P. Audenino (1990), *Un mestiere per partire. Tradizione migratoria, lavoro e comunità in una vallata alpina*, Milano, pp. 3-5.

⁷⁴ Ministero Affari Esteri (MAE) - Commissariato Generale dell’Emigrazione (1926), *Annuario Statistico dell’Emigrazione Italiana 1876-1925*, Roma, p. 208.

an interesting factor that can give us some explanations about the birth of many Italian niches in the construction sector all around America.

Moreover, Chicago's story of Italian niches tells us something about the existence of ethnic advantages and stratification in the labor market. In this perspective it is interesting to read what Dominic Candeloro has written about the refusal of Italian newcomers to be employed in the slaughterhouses of the cities, because they considered these jobs "disgusting" and they did not want to compete with the low wages of African American workers⁷⁵.

However, the negotiations between immigrants' expectations and the host society environment were not balanced. The trends emerging in the labor market have tended to show a dominion of labor demand. For instance, in 1911 just 5% of Italian men who worked in Pennsylvania's mines had been miners in Italy, while the data show that among the less recent immigrants, 49% of German and 84% of Scottish immigrant miners had previous experiences in the sector back in their home countries⁷⁶. Harney has explained these evidences as the result of a bigger availability of new immigrants to job mobility due to the increasing difficulties in finding jobs in the labor sectors which were appropriate to their professional skills⁷⁷.

A similar experience has been described by Mary Ellen Mancina-Batinich with the Italians in Minnesota⁷⁸. At the beginning of the 20th century they gathered in the area of Duluth, where the men worked in the iron mines, and in Dilworth, to build the railway and to work in the grain industry of Saint Paul, Minneapolis. It was another example of how Italian immigrants looked for job opportunities without any visible remora to shift to job opportunities provided by the labor market, even if they were far from their professional background of farm workers.

Moreover, the book by Mancina-Batinich is also interesting for its description of Italian women's labor activities in these miners' and railway laborers' villages. She described the existence of ethnic niches of boarding houses managed by Italian women: for example, in 1922 in the mining town of Eveleth, 85% of the families had boarders. Mancina-Batinich describes this specialization of women as being the result of a merging of market demand and the cultural background of Italian women as hard-working housewives. From this perspective, structural factors seem to play a major role in defining immigrants' job and business choices

⁷⁵ D. Candeloro (2003), *Chicago's Italians. Immigrants, Ethnicity, Americans*, Charleston.

⁷⁶ Dillingham Commission (1911), Vol. 45, p. 273.

⁷⁷ R. F. Harney, *Dalla...*, p. 204.

⁷⁸ M. E. Mancina-Batinich (2007), *Italian Voices. Making Minnesota Our Home*, St. Paul.

and placements, but the immigrants could use their ethnic and cultural resources to gain advantages.

The example of Italians in 1910s Montreal is also significant⁷⁹. During the decade preceding World War One, the city experienced enormous growth and new infrastructures were built to meet the needs of the new population. This urban explosion was at the origin of an impressive socio-economic transition experienced by Italian immigrants. From being hired to build railroad tracks in remote areas of North-West Canada, Italians began to work on a large scale in the urban labor market of construction and infrastructure. Also, in this situation the reaction to this change in labor demand in some way met with the social and cultural needs expressed by the Italian community. In fact, as Ramirez and Del Balzo⁸⁰ have highlighted, Italians, during the second decade of the 20th century, showed a “collective determination to combine the advantages provided by an access to an urban labour market with those resulting from the use of free cultivable land in the city’s outskirts”. The process of negotiation made Italians move their residence north of the city, where they could cultivate urban gardens and, at the same time, be closer to the source of the new urban labor demand. The process of negotiation with the “ethnic needs” found some balance in the choices of settlement and in the building of social and communitarian experiences.

The case study of Italian workers in the cigar industry of Ybor city, in the area of Tampa, Florida, is very significant of the dominion of economic needs⁸¹. The apparent contradiction between looking for a job in the cigar factories and their background as farmworkers that characterized many Sicilian immigrants who reached Tampa was clearly justified by the excellent wages and the opportunity to improve their economic status quickly. It is interesting to highlight how fast the creation of an “ethnic tradition”, which made Italian immigrants “masters at their work”, was. At the same time, the Italian women “were signaled out as being very good bunch-makers and rollers”. The success of this newly created ethnic specialization is testified by the fact that, as Anthony Pizzo has described, “in the course of a few years, six cigar factories with Italian affiliation emerged in the scene. They were: George F. Borrotto, La Vatiata, Leonardi-Hayman, Filogamo and Alvarez, Val Antuono and Andrea Re”⁸². The birth of these Italian companies in Ybor city has highlighted how in this case study the invention of an

⁷⁹ B. Ramirez, M. Del Balzo (1981), *The Italians of Montreal: from Sojourning to settlement, 1900–1921*, in: Harney, R. F., Scarpaci V. J. (eds.), *Little...*, p. 74.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁸¹ A. Pizzo (1981), *The Italian Heritage in Tampa*, in: Harney, R. F., Scarpaci V. J. (eds.), *Little...*, pp. 134-136.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 135.

ethnic specialization helped the transition from proletarians to entrepreneurs for a significant group of Italian immigrants.

The examples of Chicago, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Montreal and Tampa show how Italian immigrants developed multiple and alternative patterns of economic specialization. In fact, they were outdoor workers (construction workers), factory workers (in the cigar industry) or miners. There were different kinds of Italian economic niches, due to various macro and local factors, and as a result of the process of negotiation between the characteristics of the host society and the background of the immigrants. The results of this negotiation were varied and first-generation Italian emigrants' *economic style* in America was not static.

The foregoing discussion suggests that the economic experiences of Italian immigrants at the beginning of the 20th century were the combined result of the international labor market conditions, local structural socio-economic conditions provided by the host society, and hometown traditions and cultural background brought from Italy. From this perspective, in my opinion we need to put together the theoretical frameworks of the studies on ethnic niches described in Section 2 with the achievements of three different historiographical traditions of Italian immigrants in North America: the assimilation tradition, the communitarian studies on the persistence of ethnic cultures, and finally the transnational labor market approaches. In particular, the latter proposes a provocative interpretative hypothesis that has been well summarized by Donna Gabaccia⁸³.

Beyond, and against, the assimilation tradition based on national focuses, and despite empirical differences that I have described above, Gabaccia maintains that in the global labor market Italian immigrants did not accept just any jobs and their choices were not random. In this perspective it is possible to assume the existence of Italian economic niches. In fact, she has not denied the differences I have highlighted in the Italian niches, but she has explained them by combining Italian "attitude" and host society expectations. It means that she has underlined that Italian jobs were not only different in comparison with those that happened to be typical of other ethnic communities but they also depended on the host nations' environment, because each country gave a different evaluation of Italian workers.

In particular, Gabaccia has written that the construction sector represented the most significant labor niche in terms of Italian male workers in the world. To support this argument, Donna Gabaccia has proposed a long list of historical examples of the presence of Italian immigrants in construction niches all around

⁸³ D. Gabaccia, *Emigranti*, ..., pp. 94-106.

the world, where they were known as the masons and laborers who built the infrastructure of modern capitalism.

In order to explain the existence of recurring Italian specializations in the world labor market, Gabaccia has not referred to the “cultural” approaches described in Section 2, but she has highlighted the implications of both the conditions through which emigration happened and the labor background of Italian emigrants which interacted with the needs of the host societies. For example, she has underlined the role played by the mechanisms of intermediation which often led to the creation of subcontractors or a contracted jobs system that are typical of the construction sector. Moreover, the tradition of taking on seasonal jobs, even if in agriculture, is, in Gabaccia’s view, another explanation of Italian specialization.

To summarize, Gabaccia maintains that Italian specialization is the confirmation that national differences played an important role in the world labor market. Labor demand was not indifferent to ethnic background of labor supply (or to gender), and this would be the explanation as to why Italian immigrants found different jobs to the Chinese or Germans or other ethnic groups.

In this perspective, Robert F. Foerster had already stated in 1924 that Italians occupied a distinctive niche in the international labor market in the early 20th century⁸⁴. Gabaccia’s and Foerster’s analyses agree that most of them were the unskilled workers or “human steam shovels”, known as the “Italian coolies” or the “Chinese of Europe”, who built railways, tunnels, streets or waterworks⁸⁵.

In my opinion, from this perspective, the over-representation of Italian immigrants in the construction sectors of many American cities seems to be more the consequence of the necessity of the immigrant labor supply to meet the needs dictated by the global labor demand, rather than the result of a negotiation between immigrants’ background and the conditions provided by the host society.

Within this framework, the *glocal* approach to the history of Italian economic enclaves in American Little Italies, recently proposed by Simone Cinotto, could be inspiring⁸⁶. He calls for the need for an interpretation of the experiences of the many Italian diasporas⁸⁷ as the hub of a transnational network of relations,

⁸⁴ R. F. Foerster (1924), *The Italian Emigration of Our Time*, Cambridge.

⁸⁵ D. Gabaccia (1992), International Approaches to the Study of Italian Labor Migrants, in: Pozzetta, G., Ramirez, B. (eds.), *The Italian Diaspora: Essays in Honor of Robert Harney*, Toronto; R. F. Foerster, *The Italian...* .

⁸⁶ S. Cinotto, *Glocal...*, p. 41.

⁸⁷ It is interesting to underline how, with the development of the transnational approach, the use of the word “Diaspora” related to Italian immigrants’ communities has become more and more frequent. It highlights the overcoming of interpretative frameworks based on national historiog-

also inside the global labor market. In the context of this transnational network, the local identity of immigrants, such as Italian identity, has survived and the ethnic enclaves have become the central hubs of a transnational economy⁸⁸. I have found this approach useful for two reasons. Firstly, the overcoming of the assimilationist assumption that immigrants, sooner or later, necessarily identify themselves with the host country. This gives me some tools for understanding the survival of Italicity regardless of any support from culturalist approaches. Secondly, Cinotto's approach highlights the possibility of looking at the role played by Italian proletarian newcomers to the host market economy, not just as a result of the negotiations between the features of the local host economy and society on the one hand, and the supposed-to-be-static ethnic characteristics on the other. He is able to do it by introducing the global/transnational point of view on the local labor market.

The foregoing discussion has suggested to me that both Italicity and the Italian proletarians who arrived in North America during the 20th century have had a role to play, defined also by the division of labor inside the global market⁸⁹. In particular, to give, "a priori", the *Italian worker* and his ethnic identity the right position in the mechanism of the labor market has represented an element of efficiency for the capitalistic economies, regardless of the specific characteristics of the host local economies. The construction of an ideal Italian attitude for specific jobs, and its survival, has become a necessity for the good operation of a transnational capitalist labor market throughout the 20th century, as well as for the best exploitation of the labor force.

raphies in favour of point of view that look at the global migration chains (See for instance: *The Italian...*, Pozzetta, G. E., Ramirez, B. (eds.); R. Vecoli (1995), *The Italian Diaspora, 1876-1976*, in: Cohen, R. (ed.), *Cambridge Survey of World Migration*, Cambridge, pp. 114-22; P. Verdicchio (1997), *Bound by Distance: Rethinking Nationalism Through the Italian Diaspora*, Madison; R. Viscusi (1993), *Il Futuro dell'Italianità: il Commonwealth Italiano*, "Altretalieu", Vol. 10, pp. 25-32; D. Gabaccia, F. Ottanelli (1997), *Diaspora or International Proletariat? Italian Labor, Labor Migration, and the Making of Multiethnic States, 1815-1939*, "Diaspora", Vol. 6, pp. 61-84; D. Gabaccia, F. Iacovetta (1998), *Women, Work, and Protest in the Italian Diaspora: An International Research Agenda*, "Labour/Le Travail", Vol. 42, pp. 161-81; D. Gabaccia (2000), *Italy's many Diasporas*, Seattle.

⁸⁸ S. Sassen, *The Global...* .

⁸⁹ My attention toward transnational approaches has also been influenced by Micaela Di Leonardo's work on the impact of global economy on ethnic aspects of the American society (see M. Di Leonardo (1984), *The Varieties of Ethnic Experience: Kinship, Class, and Gender among California Italian American*, Ithaca).

I have been also influenced by the "Global Labour History" approach promoted by the "International Institute of Social History" (IISG) of Amsterdam since the 1980s, which has represented an inspiring example of how to connect global and local in labour issues. For an overview on this approach, see *Global Labour History* (2012), De Vito, C. (ed.), Verona.

Within this framework, the “escape from the land” of Italian immigrants could be interpreted as a mass movement of the workforce from pre-industrial economy to economic specialization and niching inside the market economy of the 20th century. Italy provided an unskilled labor force for the growing international market and Italicity has worked to support this process⁹⁰. Moreover, Italy also provided small Italian entrepreneurs who, as *padroni* and subcontractors, played a strategic role in the insertion in the glocal labor market of the first generation of Italian immigrants in North America.

The glocal approach to the economic behavior of the first generations of Italian immigrants does not deny the importance of the theories on ethnic niches described in Section 2. In a glocal perspective, economic ethnic niche is not a static building either, but rather “a socially constructed formation”⁹¹. In order to understand this process of dynamic formation we must contextualize the interaction of micro- and macro-level cultural forces within both the broader political-social and economic setting of the host society⁹² and the conditions ruled by the global labor market.

If the global labor market created the conditions in order to provide the “industrial reserve army” for the growing North American economy, the Italian workers, when they arrived in the USA, adapted themselves to this geographical, cultural and psychological displacement⁹³. In this context, ethnic business and labor choices were a reaction to structural disadvantages experienced on the labor market, such as the impossibility of applying for well-paid positions due to the existence of linguistic, political, cultural, union or legal barriers. In this perspective, ethnic niching becomes a sort of survival strategy under discriminatory conditions⁹⁴ and it meets the needs expressed by the local labor demand. Within this framework, the labor market discrimination faced by Italian

⁹⁰ Conversely, I am not able to find totally convincing, in particular for the North American experience, the approach recently proposed by Mark Choate in his successful book *Emigrant Nation. The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge 2008). The 20th century mass migration of Italians toward the USA and Canada is hardly to connect with the Choate’s notion of Italy as a “global nation (...) centered in the Italian peninsula, and based upon transnational, cultural, economic and political ties across international borders” (p. 244) with a sort of strategy that linked colonialism and emigration in a project of “emigrant colonialism”. I think that in his impressive and very well structured analysis of Italy’s strategy to support emigration, Choate has undervalued the role played by the transnational labour market and global economy in determining mass emigrations.

⁹¹ F. D. Wilson, *Metropolitan...*, p. 3.

⁹² *Cultural...*, Lo, L., Teixeira, C., Truelove, M. (eds.), p. 7.

⁹³ I. Light, *Immigrant...*, pp. 195-216.

⁹⁴ *Cultural...*, Lo, L., Teixeira, C., Truelove, M. (eds.), p. 6.

immigrants led to the formation of the ethnic niches⁹⁵, where there were few if any discriminatory barriers⁹⁶. Finally, it seems to me that many aspects of stereotyped Italicity, such as family and communitarian networks as well as paternalism or respect for hierarchies, were functional to facilitate integration and reduce the risks of conflictual approaches.

⁹⁵ F. D. Wilson, *Metropolitan...*; S. Sassen, *Immigration...*, pp. 87–127; M. Granovetter, *The Economic...*, pp. 128–165.

⁹⁶ F. Iacovetta (1992), *Such Hardworking People*, Montreal & Kingston, pp. 155-162.

