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Starting a business as an immigrant in France: A viable integration path or a double disadvantage?

Submitted by:

Lucie Argentier

Student n° Strasbourg: 21918668

Student n° Olomouc: F191074

(+33)766412262 / lucieargentier@gmail.com

Supervised by:

Philippe Hamman, University of Strasbourg

Ondřej Kročil, University of Olomouc

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Argentier



MA Programme Euroculture Declaration

I, Lucie Argentier hereby declare that this thesis, entitled “Starting a business as an immigrant in France: A viable way towards integration or a double disadvantage”, submitted as partial requirement for the MA Programme Euroculture, is my own original work and expressed in my own words. Any use made within this text of words of other authors in any form (e.g. ideas, figures, texts, tables, etc.) are properly acknowledged in the text as well as in the bibliography.

I declare that the written (printed and bound) and the electronic copy of the submitted MA thesis are identical.

I hereby also acknowledge that I was informed about the regulations pertaining to the assessment of the MA thesis Euroculture and about the general completion rules for the Master of Arts Programme Euroculture.

July 31, 2021

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ABSTRACT

Placing the concept of integration as a two-way process at the core of the analysis, the objective is to investigate the obstacles which immigrant entrepreneurs face when creating their activity in France. It maps the different stakeholders involved in the process and analyses their implication. For this purpose, qualitative in-depth interviews of immigrant or refugee entrepreneurs, who have launched their project in the past five years were led and analysed using the grounded theory method. It was found that immigrants experience a loss of immaterial and material resources through displacement, the question of the access to capitals hence being at the forefront when starting a business. The access to informal and formal social networks in particular appeared as a pivotal element in their entrepreneurial path. While the development of specific support schemes has contributed to overcoming these obstacles, the general French environment and the entrepreneurship ecosystem still need to adapt to this public and facilitate their navigation among the different mechanisms. In doing so, they would benefit from the expertise of immigrant entrepreneurs who have personally gone through these hurdles, and who can act as role models for prospective immigrant entrepreneurs. This contribution adds up to the literature on immigrant entrepreneurship by focusing on the French environment, counterbalancing ethnic and cultural models, and underlining the centrality of the processes of immigration in explaining the obstacles and factors leading to entrepreneurship.

Keywords: immigrant entrepreneurs, refugee entrepreneurs, integration, economic insertion, theory of capitals, social networks, incubators

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADA [French acronym]: Allowance for Asylum Seekers

CDD: [French acronym] limited-term contract

CDI: [French acronym] permanent contract

CSOs: Civil Society Organisations

EC: European Commission

EU: European Union

ICI [French acronym]: Incubation Creation Inclusion, incubation programme by Entrepreneurs du Monde

INSEE [French acronym]: French National Institute of Statistics and Economy Studies

MIPEX: Migrant Integration Policy Index OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OFII [French acronym]: French Office for Immigration and Integration

OFPRA [French acronym]: French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons

QPV [French acronym]: priority neighbourhoods

RSA [French acronym]: Income of Active Solidarity

SSE: Social and Solidarity Economy

URSSAF [French acronym]: Social Security and Family Allowance Contribution Collection Offices

INTRODUCTION

Background to the topic

Over the course of the past two decades, the topics of immigration and integration have been ranking increasingly high on the European agenda, and the 2015 so-called “refugee crisis” have made them all the more important. The human flows of individuals coming from third-countries are given a special importance, “permanent migration to the EU and OECD countries ha[ving] reached record highs in recent years”¹. In 2020, it is estimated that 34 million of the European Union (EU) population were born in a third country². In the dominant narratives on immigration, the legitimacy of these human movements is put into question. Indeed, according to a document on international migrations produced by *La Cimade*, a French organisation committed to solidarity towards migrants:

States and legal texts constantly make differences between people who migrate, based only on the causes and conditions of their departure. These distinctions are made by host countries for sorting purposes, to legitimate the choice of the people whom they will agree to welcome or not: on the one side, the so-called “economic” migrants, who would have left their country “by choice”, and on the other, the refugees, forced into exile. It hides both the multiplicity and complexity of the reasons for departure, which are often interlinked.³

Oftentimes, the inclusion of immigrants in European societies is depicted as a final end, translating into immigrants reaching the same levels of integration as natives in the different fields concerned (from access to education to political participation). In statistical terms, this vision of integration would translate into the group of immigrants becoming virtually invisible, this group’s single components being merged into the group of natives. For example, in the field of employment, the unemployment rate for the group *immigrants* would equate that of the group *natives*. Yet, the figures put forward in policy papers suggest the incompleteness of the integration of third-country nationals, because of the gap between the immigrant group and the native group in what are called “key areas”. For instance, the European Commission’s (EC) Action Plan on integration and inclusion 2021-2027 highlights the discrepancies between immigrants and natives, the latter being used as the control group, the model to be attained.⁴ The adding up of these different indicators, of the gaps between the immigrant group and the native group in a variety of fields, is used to come up to the conclusion that immigrants need to integrate more into their host country.

Yet, the systematic comparison of the two groups presents a one-sided vision of integration. While covering a variety of domains concerned with integration, it fails to depict the multifaceted character of this concept. What is more, it hides the fact that integration is indeed a process which every individual goes

¹ OEDC/European Union (2018), *Settling In 2018: Indicators of Immigrant Integration*, p.13.

² European Commission, (2020) *Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027*, COM(2020) 758 final, p.2.

³ La Cimade, *Comprendre les Migrations Internationales*, <http://migrations-internationales.lacimade.org/>
[Translation mine]

⁴ European Commission, (2020) “Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027”, p.3-5.

through in a different way. Integration regards the native citizens just like it does the immigrants of a given country. It means that natives need to be integrated in the society, but they also need to be an active part of the integration process of newcomers to that country. In addition, the dominant vision on integration puts the emphasis on the integration of immigrants as a group, which in turn fails to represent the differences among the individual paths. The latter do matter, and so do factors such as whether migration was thought through or underwent, or the length of the stay in the host country.

The vision of integration endorsed is rather that of Klarenbeek, who objects that “integration can’t be objectively measured by socioeconomic indicators” and who calls for a “relational understanding of integration”⁵. She presents integration as a two-way process in which both natives and immigrants are active stakeholders, as opposed to a one-sided process where the responsibility relies predominantly on immigrants⁶. This understanding will be elaborated more on in the theoretical framework.

Rationale for the topic

The focus of this research will be on the professional integration of immigrants in France more specifically. Immigration has historically been closely related to work (see Theoretical Framework). Plus, the world of work is a microcosm in itself which reflects the different facets of integration, and where people are put in interaction with one another. In addition, work takes up an ever-increasing place in individuals’ lives in the Western societies. In one of the videos from the series “Inspire by Singa – Entreprendre ensemble” (Undertaking Together), by the citizen movement *Singa* which facilitates the interactions between newcomers to the country and natives, one immigrant entrepreneur says:

‘In France, I had the feeling that identity was very linked to work. Tell me what your work is, I will tell you who you are. And if I answer: I don’t have a work, it would be as though I did not exist’⁷.

This quote summarises the relation which many of the Western societies have to work, and informs about which should be the objectives of a professional integration. A successful professional insertion is reached when one has found an employed, stable and secure position, completed by a satisfying wage. Quite the reverse, unemployment, or a temporary, underqualified position are presented as the opposite of a successful professional integration of immigrants in their host society. This function of work in identity-building and socialising was long identified by Durkheim⁸.

Employment is often put forward as the main path to ensure one’s professional insertion. It also holds true when it comes to immigrants. According to Bommès and Kolb, most research on the economic

⁵ Klarenbeek, L.M. (2019) ‘Reconceptualising “integration as a two-way process”’, *Migration Studies*, p.2.

⁶ *Ibid*, p.1.

⁷ « Inspire By SINGA – Entreprendre ensemble », YouTube video, 12:05, posted by “SINGA”, April 30, 2020.

⁸ Barou, J. (2014) “Integration of immigrants in France: a historical perspective”, *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 21(6), p.5.

integration of immigrants has focused on employment⁹. However, entrepreneurship or “self-employment” constitute the second option to secure one’s “ability to pay”¹⁰, an option which is less researched:

“Much of the ferment attached to contemporary discourses on migration tends to focus on the causes and consequences of “superdiversity” rather than the concrete experience of work. And when work is the focus of analysis, it tends to concern itself with the relationship of migrants with large firms and the labour market per se rather than entrepreneurship.”¹¹

Besides that, scholars often raise the fact that in most Western and European countries, immigrants are more likely to work as independents than natives. In 2018 in France, 11.2% of the foreign-born were self-employed, while 8.8% of the natives were¹². As such, it is an interesting topic to investigate because it contradicts the general trends of the statistical comparisons between immigrants and natives. Hence, immigrant entrepreneurship is by no way a new phenomenon: in the literature, the motive of the merchant as a foreigner is pervasive¹³. At the European level, there has been a recent focus by policymakers on entrepreneurship as a way out of the crisis: the EC defined it as a “driver of economic growth and job creation”¹⁴. France is no exception: since the end of the 1970s, self-employment has been seen as a mean to revitalise the economy¹⁵. It has accelerated with the creation of the “auto-entrepreneur”¹⁶ status in 2008, an “incentive, simplified scheme” to create a business.¹⁷ This new status is hence at the crossroads between liberal and social policies, as a tool used both to ease the modalities to become an entrepreneur and to fight against unemployment. More recently, the focus on entrepreneurship, conflated with technological innovation and the promotion of a national excellence, culminated during the Macron presidency. Indeed, the head of state promised to make France a “start-up nation” in the course of his five-year presidential term.¹⁸

⁹ Bommès, M. & Kolb, H. (2006) “Migrants’ Work, Entrepreneurship and Economic Integration”. In: Penninx et al. (eds.), *The Dynamics of International Migration and Settlement in Europe: A State of the Art*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, p.103.

¹⁰ Ibid , p.100.

¹¹ Ram, M. et al. (2016) “Migrant entrepreneurship: Reflections on research and practice”, *International Small Business Journal: Researching Entrepreneurship* 35(1), p.2.

¹² OECD (2018) “Settling In 2018: Indicators of Immigrant Integration”, p.89.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933842983>

¹³ Pécoud, A. (2012) « Immigration, entrepreneuriat et ethnicité », *Métropoles* 11 [Online] ; Volery, T. (2007) “Ethnic Entrepreneurship: A Theoretical Framework”, Dana, L-P. (eds) *Handbook of Research on Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship*, p.32.

¹⁴ European Commission (2012), *Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan: Reigniting the entrepreneurial spirit in Europe*, COM(2012) 795 final, p.3.

¹⁵ Darbus, F. (2008) « L’accompagnement à la création d’entreprise. Auto-emploi et recomposition de la condition salariale », *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 175(5).

¹⁶ Literally translated: “self-employed”.

¹⁷ Abdelnour (2013) *L’entrepreneuriat au service des politiques sociales : La fabrication du consensus politique sur le dispositif de l’autoentrepreneur*.

¹⁸ Usine Digitale, « Emmanuel Macron : ‘La France doit devenir en 5 ans la nation des start-up’ » (May 10, 2017). Usine-digitale.fr. Accessed May 25, 2021. <https://www.usine-digitale.fr/editorial/emmanuel-macron-la-france-doit-devenir-en-5-ans-la-nation-des-start-up.N537789>

In parallel, there has been a significant rise in the number of public and private initiatives to support the prospective entrepreneurs during the creation phase, from the management boutiques founded in the 1970s to the currently developing incubator sector. With the increase in the number of refugees in France, associative initiatives have grown significantly, and, among them, programmes designed to open up the entrepreneurial ecosystem to newcomers to France. It is in this context, and with these recent evolutions in mind, that this research topic emerged.

Scope and rationale for the focus on France

The scientific literature on immigrant entrepreneurship first developed in the United States, under the expression “ethnic entrepreneurship”, where it was explained as an “obvious reaction to blocked opportunities in the labour market”¹⁹. It then spread to Europe, where the topic was handled in Northern European countries more than in others. In the case of France, according to Ma Mung and Lacroix, it was considered a “marginal phenomenon” since quite recently. The first studies, in the 1980s, focused on shopkeepers²⁰. The literature available focuses on the entrepreneurial characteristics of some specific groups, defined by their nationality or sector of activity. Their lacks a comprehensive as well as a revised framework of immigrant entrepreneurship in the French context. It is reckoned that, given the fact that the integration of the foreign-born populations in Europe is a national prerogative, and because of the great diversity in the EU countries’ immigration histories, this topic is best handled at the country-level. Of course, it is also expected that the findings of this research highlight important points to focus on at the supranational level.

Objectives of the research and research questions

The goal of this research is to provide a framework to understand the obstacles which immigrants are confronted to when seeking to insert professionally in France, and in particular to start up an activity. Besides, it is to propose an actualised model of the phenomenon which is grounded in the French context. While refugees face specific challenges compared to the holders of other statuses, both groups will be the subject of this research. However, some sections will be dedicated to aspects regarding refugees only. The topic having to do with integration, a fundamentally relational process, this study will map the different stakeholders involved and delineate their implication. It will also tackle the topic of the support industry, a new stakeholder which certainly has participated in reshaping the ecosystem.

The questions at the core of our reflexion are the following: **What do the barriers encountered by immigrant entrepreneurs reveal about the state of integration in France? How can these barriers be alleviated in order to improve the integration between immigrants and natives?**

¹⁹ Volery, T. (2007), p.31.

²⁰ Ma Mung, E. & Lacroix, T. (2003) “France: The Narrow Path”, in: Kloosterman, R & Rath, J. (eds) *Immigrant Entrepreneurs. Venturing Abroad in the Age of Globalisation*, Berg, p.180.

Structure of the paper

The first sections will delineate the methodology used to conduct this research, reflect on the vocabulary used in migration studies and justify the terms endorsed in this thesis. Then, a review of the literature on immigrant entrepreneurship worldwide and in France will be presented. After that, I will focus on theories which are central to understanding this research, namely Berry's acculturation model, Klarenbeek's explanation of integration as a two-way process, and the interrelation between integration and socialisation. A historical stance on the French way of dealing with immigration and integration will be provided as well.

Then, the core of this research will follow the trajectory of immigrant entrepreneurs; the first two sections will analyse their possibilities for professional insertion upon arrival and present a typology explaining the entry conditions of immigrants in self-employment. Then, the third and fourth parts will focus on the obstacles faced when starting-up the project, and introduce the social network as a central element to take into account to launch a project as an immigrant entrepreneur. The last two sections will delineate the limitations of the current frameworks when it comes to the involvement of the formal support schemes and the French institutional actors

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Method of analysis

The research was based on qualitative semi-directive interviews of immigrant entrepreneurs. In order to analyse them, the grounded theory method was used. This method implies "bottom-up coding", which means the interview is the primary source of ideas, and that concepts emerge from it, rather than pre-existing theories from the literature being imposed on the data²¹. The aim of this method is to generate a theory. During the first two phases of analysis delineated by Glaser (open coding and selective coding), I focused only on the interviews, first by explaining what was being said and how, and then by bringing a more analytical eye to it, and attaching "codes", i.e., concepts and themes, to it²². Only during the third phase of theoretical coding did I start confronting my findings to other theories and relating both the findings together and with the literature. According to Urquhart, "The idea here is that the literature about whatever you are researching is referenced after, not before, you build your theory."²³ Although I had led a literature review before starting the interviews and analyses, I made sure I focused on the data itself: the most important is to be aware of one's own biases and to stay open, in order not to push a

²¹ Urquhart, C. (2012) *Grounded Theory for Qualitative Research*, London: SAGE Publications, Ltd, pp 21, 31.

²² Neuman, W.L. (2014) *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, Pearson New International Edition, p. 477: definition of analysis: "systematically to organize, integrate, and examine; as we do this, we search for patterns and relationships among the specific details. To analyze, we connect particular data to concepts, advance generalizations, and identify broad trends or themes."

²³ Urquhart, C. (2012), p.21.

ready-made explanation on the data. In this method, secondary literature is used to validate, discuss, and enrich the generated theory.

Coming from a literary field, I naturally adopted an interpretivist position to analysing.

Criteria for the selection of the respondents

The participants were selected based on two criteria:

They have been through the experience of migration at some point in their life. Indeed, all of them left their country of origin, whether out of free will or because they were forced to, and France became their host country. All of the participants, to the exception of one, were born outside of the EU. The freedom of movements in the EU space, along with the existence of a certain European identity makes it somewhat easier for a European immigrant to move in another European country and to start a business there. However, one of the respondents originates from Romania, and has migrated to France after spending sixteen years in Austria. The perception of her country of origin and discrimination she was confronted to during her professional path has motivated her integration to our corpus of interviewees.

Secondly, the respondents were selected because they have made the decision to become entrepreneurs, whether before leaving their country of origin, quickly upon arrival to France, or even several years after they moved to their host country. Hence, all of the participants are entrepreneurs or project holders. The latter are currently in the process of launching their project, and have already been through a significant part of the creation process.

Objectives of the qualitative interviews

The aim was for each participant to retrace their path towards entrepreneurship, to design a map of the support they received in this process, but also to reflect on the obstacles they were confronted to, or the difficulties they still endure. The different temporalities in which the respondents find themselves are expected to bring diversified content. While some of the participants are counting what they are currently experiencing, others will have more distance on what they have been through and have the ability to put their path into perspective.

While quantitative data on immigration and integration often present immigrants as a monolithic group, without taking into account subgroup specificities nor the diversity of profiles and personal paths of the individuals, qualitative interviews make it possible to dive deeper into the individuality of each respondent. Cruickshank and Dupuis defend the perks of a qualitative method in the field of migration research:

“Quantitative methodologies cannot adequately reveal the depth of thinking and the rationalization processes underpinning their behaviour. Conversely, a qualitative approach can explore

participants' feelings, aspirations, motivations and attitudes and afford them an opportunity to reflect on their experiences".²⁴

It also enables to counteract the dominant narrative on immigration, by focusing on the individual's agency, as opposed to the passive state which immigrants are often reduced to by being those who are talked about in the mainstream media and the public discourses. Qualitative semi-directive interviews also enable the respondents to speak for themselves about their experience, the intervention of the interviewer being reduced to the strict minimum.

Designing of the interview guide

The interviews were conducted using an interview guide that was realised after a first review of the scientific literature available on the topic of immigrant entrepreneurship. This interview guide was used to conduct thirteen semi-directive interviews. Based on the unfolding of the first interviews, some of the questions were successively modified in order to improve their clarity (Appendix 1). Besides that, other questions were added later on in the interview process, for the purpose of theoretical sampling. These questions were generated by the analysis of the first interviews, when it became clear that some categories were missing.

Identification of the participants

The respondents were reached through different methods. At first, organisations which were likely to be supporting immigrant entrepreneurs were contacted. These organisations consisted of NGOs providing assistance to immigrants and refugees (La Cimade, France Terre d'Asile...), generic programmes and networks for the support of aspiring entrepreneurs (BGE Adil, Réseau Entreprendre...) as well as programmes specialised in the support of immigrants and/or refugees in their entrepreneurial endeavours (Singa, Entrepreneurs du Monde...). The aim was to be put in relation with immigrant project holders and entrepreneurs, and to be able to build trust with the prospective participants more easily. This identification method was also chosen to make sure that the right profiles were approached, and to ensure methodological thoroughness. The organisations specialised in the support of specific target groups showed more responsiveness than general ones. In total, eight respondents were reached via programmes or organisations specialised in the support of immigrants and/or refugees who want to become entrepreneurs.

A second identification wave was initiated when the first one no longer led to interviews. This time, prospective participants were reached directly through LinkedIn. They were identified as foreign-born entrepreneurs in the events and in the contents published on the social media of support organisations, whether supporting immigrants and refugees, or more general ones targeting aspiring entrepreneurs.

²⁴ Cruickshank, P. & Dupuis, A. (2015) "The adaptation of intentional immigrant entrepreneurs": a case study, *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review* 3(3), p.83.

After getting their contact details, the prospective respondents were contacted via email, LinkedIn or Facebook. The message included a mention of the person on behalf of whom the participant was contacted. Besides, it contained a presentation of the researcher, an overview of the research topic and of its objectives, as well as a presentation of the modalities of the interview (Appendix 2).

Profiles of the participants

Identity	Gender	Age	Nationality	Arrival in France	Immigration status / reason	Level of qualification	Sector of Activity	Location	Start of project
Mrs. A	F	39	Rwandan	2014	Refugee	Bachelor	Medical Equipment Support to patients	Lyon and surroundings	2016
Mrs. B	F	45	Syrian	Dec 2014	Refugee	4 years higher education	Catering (at home)	Lyon	Dec 2019
Mr. C	M.	34	Colombian	2011	Refugee	Master	Coffee-roasting Insertion of refugees	Paris and surroundings	2019
Mrs. D	F	31	Vietnamese	2019	Student visa Family	Master	Catering (at home)	Paris	2020
Mrs. E	F	64	Syrian	2016	Refugee	Master	Cultural association Insertion of refugees	Paris	Oct 2017
Mr. F	M	39	Mauritanian	2003	Student Talent Passport	PhD	Independent psychologist	Lille and surroundings	January 2021
Mr. G	M	32	Syrian	2014	Refugee	Master	Catering (restaurant) Sport Application	Paris	2020 (Both projects)
Abbas K.	M	33	Afghan	Jan 2019	Refugee	Master	Catering and event industry Insertion of refugees	Paris	January 2019
Andra W.	F	39	Romanian Naturalised Austrian	2019	Family	Master	Promotion of cultural diversity through clothing	Paris	In Austria: 2014 In France: 2020
Louay Y.	M	35	Syrian	Oct 2015	Refugee	Highschool	Online platform Independent documentary film	Lyon	Feb 2019
Alend H.	M	20	Syrian	2013	Refugee	Highschool	Online platform Support to foreign artists	Lyon	Nov 2018
Diana J.	F	38	Peruvian	2006 2016	Student Family	Master	Training and consultancy	Lille and Surroundings	2017
Vandolph C.	M	26	Philippino	2019	Gap year	Master	Support programme for expat Entrepreneurs	Paris	2020

The panel of participants is composed of six women and seven men, and the average age of the respondents is 36,5. Eight are refugees, and the second most common migration cause is family. All of the respondents started their projects in the past five years.

Conduct and transcription of the interviews

Considering the health situation at the time when the interviews were led – between January and May 2021 – and the geographical dispersion of the interviewees, all were done by videoconference and recorded. After some interviews, it was systematically proposed to the participants to choose between

French and English. All were conducted in French but one, and some of the participants switched to English to answer some questions. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours, according to each participant's speaking style. The videoconference enables to record both the sound and the image, which proved really helpful during the transcription process. However, because of technical issues, for some interviews, only the sound was recorded.

In the beginning of each interview, I introduced myself and recalled the reasons behind the interview and the way it would be led. I also let the interviewee ask any question he/she might have about the interview, the research, or its publication. I also tried to build trust and make the person comfortable by saying that we could skip a question if the person did not want to answer it, and to be as natural as possible, allowing myself to react to what the person said, to break the interview formal character. I also followed the direction the person had chosen to take rather than a rigid question order, and to pick up as far as possible on what the interviewee said. Indeed, according to Beaud, « the sociologist's art resides in his/her ability to adapt to the situation, to the person, and to create sympathy. »²⁵

I chose to transcribe the interviews in a literal way, thus respecting the hesitations of the participants and adding information about the tone of the voice when needed. Indeed, I found it important to translate the rhythm of the reflection which was in the making as the participant was talking. There is an added value to that: for Beaud, “A sociological interview is made richer and more interpretable when its transcription respects the silences, highlights the hesitations and the delays, underlines the changes of voice and the tone differences, notes the gesture and the facial mimics enhancing the speech.”²⁶

Ethical considerations:

In the email sent to contact the potential participants, ethical considerations were raised. The email included a section about the modalities of the interview, stating that the interview would be recorded in order to later on be transcribed. Then, it was mentioned that I committed to sending the transcription back to the person so that he/she could make some modifications if needs be and validate the interview. This first email also developed on the issue of anonymisation, which was proposed to all the participants.

Then, on the interview day, before starting the actual interview, I recalled to the participant the aim of my research as well as the modalities of the interview. I welcomed them to ask any question they would have before the beginning. When this introductory part was over, I introduced the need to have the interview recorded to allow for transcription and asked the respondent's approval. Only after the person's oral approval was the recording launched. At the end of the interview, I recalled each participant

²⁵ Beaud, S. (1996) « L'usage de l'entretien en sciences sociales : plaidoyer pour l'entretien ethnographique », *Politix* 35, p.245.

²⁶ Ibid, p.250.

what the following steps would be. I told them that the transcribed interview would be sent at a later date for approval. I also asked them whether they would like to be anonymised or not.

Lastly, the transcribed interview was sent to each participant so that they could make some modifications, as well as approve the document. In this last email, I again asked them if they had rather have their name appear in the final research, or if they would prefer to be anonymised, in order to make sure I had their consent and respected their confidentiality²⁷.

When anonymising, I was careful to suppress all information which could relate to the person, which includes presenting their project in a vague way, the projects often being very singular.

VOCABULARY

Migration vocabulary

Migrations studies invoke many different concepts, yet their meaning is sometimes equivocal and their use lacks consistency. Therefore, it is necessary to set clear definitions of these different words and of those endorsed, in order to clarify our research object.

The United Nation's (UN) page dedicated to Refugees and Migrants reads that the word "migrant" has no legal – and so, unequivocal – definition. In fact, the French and English definitions provided by the UN are not exactly the same. While both agree that an international migrant 'is someone who changes his or her country of usual residence, irrespective of the reason for migration or legal status'²⁸, the French definition is more precise. Compared to the English one, it adds a duration criterion: a "migrant" is an individual who has resided for more than a year in a country other than his/her origin country. Besides, it specifies that 'migrant' is used in reference to a person irrespective of the cause and lawfulness of the migration.²⁹ This definition creates a typology of migrations, stating that both these conditions (the "cause" and the "means") only call for two opposite options, the causes for migrating being voluntary or involuntary, and its means being either legal or illegal.

The term "immigrant" also pervades the discourses on migration. The addition of the prefix *im-* implies the standpoint of the host country's population and a movement *towards* the destination country. As such, it is a relational term. According to the French High Council for Integration, an immigrant is "a person born a foreigner abroad and who resides in France"³⁰. The INSEE³¹'s explanations are crucial in

²⁷ Fujii, L.A. (2012) "Research Ethics 101: Dilemmas and Responsibilities", *PS: Political Science & Politics* 45, p.718: "Only by being fully informed, the logic goes, can a person give proper consent."

²⁸ United Nations, « Refugees and Migrants: Definitions », <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/definitions>; definition from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

²⁹ The French definition uses the term "*moyens*", i.e., the "means used to migrate".

³⁰ Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques, « Immigré : Définition », May 17, 2021. <https://www.insee.fr/fr/metadonnees/definition/c1328> [Translation mine].

³¹ The French National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies.

distinguishing between a “foreigner” and an “immigrant”, as these categories can in some instances intersect. Indeed, the term “foreigner” refers to one’s nationality, not to his/her migration path. While a nationality can be changed or coexist with other ones, the INSEE explains that “the immigrant quality is a permanent one: an individual still belongs to the immigrant population even if he/she becomes French by acquisition”³².

The afore-mentioned definition of an “immigrant” also enables to discard some definitions including the immigrants’ offspring into the “immigrant” category, such as Smallbone’s definition, often used by scholars in the field of immigrant entrepreneurship³³. It refers to immigrants as “persons who have been born abroad. Irrespective of their nationality and irrespective of whether they are considered to be ethnic minorities in the countries concerned, immigrants also include the offspring of immigrants”. This definition, while useful in many regards – it does not make any distinctions based on nationality or on the importance of a given national minority in the host country – cannot be retained because of its end, which contradicts the very word “immigrant”. A person born of immigrant parents in their host country cannot be referred to as an immigrant, this country being his/her country of origin. In this regard, a more accurate expression would be a native “with a migration background”, which equivalent in French is widely used. Lévy-Tadjine defines it as “any foreign person, or French by acquisition, born outside metropolitan France, or any person born in France and having at least one parent with a foreign nationality and born outside of France”³⁴.

The French equivalent for “newcomer”³⁵ to France was considered during the field-work, as it was used several times by our interlocutors at the organisations contacted and by participants. It is clear about the individual’s immigration path, and because it is more recent, it is more neutral than the terms “immigrant” or “migrant”, which have acquired a negative connotation by being used in anti-immigration discourses. However, it also carries a time indication which not only is vague, but which also virtually excludes immigrants who have been living in the country for a longer time. The French term “*primo-arrivant*” carries a more nuanced meaning, by referring to a person who has been through a migration path him/herself without adding a restriction of time, as does its translation into English, ‘newcomer’. Hence, it cannot be used for clarity reasons.

The terms retained for this research are “migrant” and “immigrant” as defined above. Indeed, this definition makes the movement from a country of residence – the country of origin – to another – the host

³² Ibid.

³³ Quoted by Rath, J., Eurofound (2011) *Promoting ethnic entrepreneurship in European cities*, Publication Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, p.15; Ram, M. et al. (2016), “Migrant entrepreneurship: Reflections on research and practice”, *International Small Business Journal: Researching Entrepreneurship* 35(1), p.3; and Davidaviciene, V. et. al. (2016), “Migrant Entrepreneurship in Europe: Challenges and Opportunities”, p.3.

³⁴ Lévy-Tadjine, T. (2004), « L’entrepreneuriat immigré et son accompagnement en France ». PhD thesis, Université du Sud Toulon Var, p.50.

³⁵ [French: “nouvel arrivant”]

country – a condition for a person to be referred to as a migrant. What is more, “migrant” and “immigrant” act as umbrella terms for different migration statuses (refugee, student, worker with a long-term contract, family reunion, talent pass...). It is useful for this research, where the paths of immigrants who have come to France for different reasons, and who hence have different statuses, are investigated.

The expression “third country national”, widely used in policy papers at the EU level³⁶, is useful as well. While traditionally referring to a person originating from any other country, it is used at the EU level to distinguish between immigrants from European countries and those originating from a country outside the EU borders. Besides, this distinction is systematically made in resources about migration in France: on the French administration official website, under the heading “Entry of a foreigner in France”, one thread is dedicated to “Europeans”, and another “Foreigners from a third country”³⁷.

Entrepreneurial vocabulary

The second element of our research object is the “entrepreneur”. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the entrepreneurship vocabulary has been pervaded by the Schumpeterian idea that “innovation” is at the core of any entrepreneurial activity. According to Schumpeter, an entrepreneur is an “innovator” and has five ways of implementing change on the market: “1) the introduction of a new/improved good; 2) the introduction of a new method of production; 3) the opening of a new market; 4) the exploitation of a new source of supply; 5) the carrying out of the new organization of any industry”³⁸. The subsequent definitions of entrepreneurship build on this understanding that the entrepreneur brings a new element on the market. In his article, Abu-Saifan underlines the definition of “entrepreneurship” derived from the business management literature: “entrepreneurship is an exceptional set of activities carried out by individuals with an exceptional mind-set in order to maximize profit”³⁹. The author adds that as defined, entrepreneurship is closely linked to success. The two afore-mentioned definitions imply that some individuals present a special disposition to entrepreneurship. Among the specific skills they have, Abu-Saifan retains opportunity seizing as well as risk taking. The “exceptional set of activities” are in line with Schumpeter’s idea of innovation. However, this definition is also useful in that it adds the profit dimension: an enterprise is a profit-making activity.

The definition adopted in this research is a minimal one. The entrepreneurial landscape has changed quite significantly in a context of economic crisis and of job scarcity. The previous definitions hide that evolution, as well as the aggregation of a certain number of new dimensions which now make up the reality of entrepreneurial activities. It does not take into account the rise of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE), nor the evolution of the associative world, which has resulted in some organisations

³⁶ European Commission (2016) *The Action Plan on the integration of third-country nationals*.

³⁷ Service Public, “Entrée d’un étranger en France », <https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/N105>

³⁸ Quoted in: Abu-Saifan, S. (2012) “Social Entrepreneurship: Definition and Boundaries”, *Technology Innovation Management Review*, p.23.

³⁹ Ibid.

becoming real “associative enterprises”⁴⁰. In this setting, profit-making is no longer a prerequisite for characterising an entrepreneurial activity. Instead, the entrepreneur is understood in this paper as the creator of an independent activity, be it a business, an association, or a cabinet in the case of the liberal professions. The idea of innovation remains, although at different levels depending on the single examples. Here, the mere creation of a new business, however traditional the idea might be, is deemed innovative: something that previously did not exist in the landscape was created in the process. At a higher level of innovation, Schumpeter’s definition is met: a new good or a new service has been created where there was a gap, or a new organisational method was introduced.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Immigrant entrepreneurship is not a new phenomenon, but scholars started studying it only recently. The first researches were led from the 1970s in the United States and in the Anglo-Saxon world. In this context, the expression “ethnic entrepreneurship” is used. It first referred to America’s national minorities, and then also included immigrant communities.

The first studies explained the phenomenon and high percentage of self-employed among certain minorities. Focusing on Chinese, Japanese and Black American self-employed, **Light** argued that their entrepreneurial endeavour is a consequence of the discriminations endured on the labour market⁴¹. The difference in self-employment between Asian immigrants and African-Americans in the retail sector is explained by the formers not having to compete with natives: they serve a specific demand which they are more qualified to satisfy, that of their conationals.⁴² This “disadvantage” theory is pervasive: **Baycan-Levent and Nijkamp** argued that despite immigrant entrepreneurs’ characteristics differing among European countries, a commonality is that they are “pushed” into self-employment because of unemployment, low participation and low status.⁴³ The “niche” or “middleman” theory explains the emergence of ethnic entrepreneurship within an ethnic community growing in number: the increase of potential consumers with specific needs call for the creation of specific businesses to satisfy them, and create a “protected market”⁴⁴. The cultural take on immigrant entrepreneurship also suggests that some

⁴⁰ Hély, M. (2009) *Les métamorphoses du monde associatif*, Presses Universitaires de France.

⁴¹ Light, I. (1972), *Ethnic Enterprise in America: Business and Welfare Among Chinese, Japanese, and Blacks* (University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London). p.7-11

⁴² Ibid, p.11-13.

⁴³ Baycan-Levent, T. & Nijkamp, P. (2009) “Characteristics of migrant entrepreneurship in Europe”, *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development: An International Journal*, 21:4, p.391.

⁴⁴ Volery, T. (2007) « Ethnic entrepreneurship: a theoretical framework », p.32; Pécoud, A. (2012) « Immigration, entrepreneuriat et ethnicité »; Ma Mung, E. (1994) « L’entrepreneuriat ethnique en France », *Sociologie du travail* 2/94, Migration et travail, p. 198; Sequeira, J. & Rasheed, A. (2006) “Start-Up and Growth of Immigrant Small Businesses: The Impact of Social and Human Capital”, *Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship* 11(4), p. 364.

ethnic groups possess cultural characteristics making them more entrepreneurial.⁴⁵ Moving away from the idea that immigrant entrepreneurs are automatically disadvantaged, some scholars have focused on “intentional”, highly-skilled immigrant entrepreneurs.⁴⁶

The French literature has had the tendency to focus on specific immigrant groups in terms of origin and business sector⁴⁷. **Ma Mung** put forward that the nationality had an influence on the activity taken on and adheres to the ethnic and cultural position on the phenomenon. Focusing on the Chinese and North African communities, he developed a theory highlighting the role of immigrant entrepreneurs in the autonomation of their ethnic community with regards to the native population. This autonomation is economic for Chinese, and concerns spaces and exchange networks for Maghrebi. Ma Mung argued that this autonomation grant communities the status of active stakeholders able to negotiate their identity and the French one.

Further studies focused more on the importance of the wider, institutional environment. **Aldrich and Waldinger** explained that the phenomenon is determined by the interaction of two elements: opportunity structures – including market and job market conditions, access to ownership, and public policies – and group characteristics, namely predisposing factors such as competences, human capital and size of the ethnic group, but also resource mobilisation. Ethnic entrepreneurship is thus determined not only by dependent, internal factors, but also by independent, structural ones. These two elements determine the emergence of “ethnic strategies”, that is the way ethnic entrepreneurs manage the opportunity structure and the resources at their disposal⁴⁸. **Volery** proposed an enhanced interactive model, where the ethnic and entrepreneurial dimensions both influence the entrepreneur. It involves the individual’s psychological characteristics, his/her creative processing of the existing opportunities, “cognitive heuristics” enabling him/her to develop strategies to ease the creation process and overcome obstacles, and information and knowledge to gain access to knowledge.⁴⁹ **Glinka and Brzozowska** focused on immigrant entrepreneurs’ identity formation and concluded that it is the result of the combination and interaction of three elements: being an entrepreneur, being an immigrant, and the sense of nationality.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Chrysostome, E. (2010) “The Success Factors of Necessity Immigrant Entrepreneurs: In Search of a Model”, *Thunderbird International Business Review* vol 52(2), p.141.

⁴⁶ Cruickshank, P. & Dupuis, A. (2015); de Lange, T. et al. (2020), “Highly-skilled Entrepreneurial refugees: Legal and Practical Barriers and Enablers to Start Up in the Netherlands”, *International Migration*; Sundararajan, M. & Sundararajan, B. (2015) “Immigrant Capital and Entrepreneurial Opportunities”, *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review* 3(3), pp.29-50.

⁴⁷ See Flot-Fresnoza, A. & Pécoud, A. (2007), “Immigration et entrepreneuriat : Les Philippins à Paris », *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales* 23(2), pp.199-216 ; Ma Mung, E. & Simon, G. (1990) *Commerçants maghrébins et asiatiques en France*, Paris: Masson.

⁴⁸ Aldrich, H. & Waldinger, R. (1990) “Ethnicity and entrepreneurship”, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 16.

⁴⁹ Volery, T. (2007), p.35-36.

⁵⁰ Glinka, B. & Brzozowska, A. (2015) “Immigrant Entrepreneurs: in Search of Identity”, *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review*, 3(4), pp.51-76.

Kushnirovich studied the economic integration of immigrant entrepreneurs in Israel, and found that it can influence their socio-cultural integration but did not determine it: instead, their nationality did.⁵¹

Kloosterman developed the mixed-embeddedness model to explain immigrant entrepreneurship, which is more adequate to the European situation. It focuses on the opportunity structure and on immigrant entrepreneurs' embeddedness in the wider economic structure and in social networks. This model gives more importance to the structural context, and translates the more regulated European institutional context, while undermining the importance of ethnic features.⁵² **Ram et al.** argued that it enables to "go beyond US-dominated models predicated on the so-called "ethnic resources" of migrant entrepreneurs".⁵³ Indeed, while the interactive model depicts the market as a "playing field in which immigrant entrepreneurs can insert themselves on the same terms as natives", Kloosterman's one pictures it as an "hostile environment" which confines immigrants to low-entry sectors.⁵⁴

Rath and Swagerman criticised models relying overwhelmingly on ethnic features and networks. They call for a more contextualised observation of the phenomenon and defend that it is interconnected with other capitals as well as with wider structural factors.⁵⁵ They have led a cross-national study in 32 European studies to focus on the application of regulations at the local level, the one which immigrant entrepreneurs are most directly in contact with. They argue that "ethnic entrepreneurship has up to now not played a major role in the overall strategy supporting the integration of immigrants"⁵⁶ because of the more important focus on salaried positions and the lack of understanding of the need for specific measures for immigrant entrepreneurs. Plus, the existing specific measures are meant to improve immigrants' capabilities rather than to change the wider environment to facilitate their insertion, and immigrant entrepreneurs are insufficiently involved in wider business networks. **De Lange** focused on the entry conditions of immigrant entrepreneurs in three European countries including France, concluding that while the creation of the "Talent Pass" visa was more promising than the previous scheme, France had a very narrow understanding of innovation.⁵⁷

Others have focused on network and capital theories to explain immigrant entrepreneurship. **Cruickshank and Dupuis** focused on the adaptation of intentional immigrant entrepreneurs and found that

⁵¹ Kushnirovich, N. (2015) "Economic Integration of Immigrant Entrepreneurs", *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review* 3(3), pp. 9-27.

⁵² Kloosterman, R. (2006) "Mixed Embeddedness as a Conceptual Framework for Exploring Immigrant Entrepreneurship", EUREX Lecture n°6.

⁵³ Ram, M. et al. (2016), p.2.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p.4.

⁵⁵ Rath, J. & Swagerman, (2011), p.19-20.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p.41.

⁵⁷ De Lange, T. (2018), "Welcoming talent? A comparative study of immigrant entrepreneurs' entry policies in France, Germany and the Netherlands", *Comparative Migration Studies* 27(6).

both agency and the general structure intervene in the process. They concluded that a successful adaptation relies on the use of various forms of symbolic capital at different stages of the creation process⁵⁸. **Sundararajan** argue that immigrants perform better than natives in recognising opportunities due to what they call their “immigrant capital”: their “unique perspective to view the cross-country needs within and outside their ethnic enclaves”, acquired thanks to their position as “boundary spanners” in multiple networks, which secures them access to different capitals and in turn favour opportunity recognition.⁵⁹ **Sequeira and Rasheed** argued that “strong” (informal) and “weak” (formal) ties both intervene in immigrants’ path towards entrepreneurship. However, they defended that strong ties compensate for a low human capital, but can prevent from developing outside the ethnic niche.⁶⁰ **Hoang and Antoncic** presented three key components of social networks: their content (information transiting between the two poles), their governance (what they are built on), and their structure (the pattern of connections).

A literature strand is dedicated to the specific barriers met by refugee entrepreneurs. **De Lange et al.** found that material and procedural norms, but also the governance structure of a country can become obstacles. In particular, the procedures length, the diversity of norms and multiplicity of governance as well as the access to financing pose issues for aspiring refugee entrepreneurs.⁶¹ For **Wauters and Lambrecht**, prospective refugee entrepreneurs face more difficulties accessing capitals because of the suddenness of their flee. They also tend to have more specific expertise which is hardly transferable in the destination context.⁶² Focusing on necessity immigrant entrepreneurs, **Chrysostome** developed a model delineating the factors for their success. He argued that factors such as ethno-cultural (resources provided by the ethnic niche), managerial (education and experience), financial, psycho-behavioural (relationship to risk and commitment) and institutional factors influenced their business survival.⁶³

In France, a strand of the literature focuses on immigrant entrepreneurs and formal support for business creation. **Lévy-Tadjine** contradicted the stereotypical view on “ethnic entrepreneurship”: based on a research he led in a general business support organisation, he argued: “The only specific elements are the immigrant’s social situation before creating a business and the choice of activity. He/she is more frequently in a difficult situation and engages more in the retail and catering sectors where the entry costs are reduced”.⁶⁴ Based on these findings, he reckoned that the “chosen immigration” mechanism, which favours migration to fill in positions in certain professional sectors, is risky since it confines

⁵⁸ Cruickshank, P. & Dupuis, A. (2015).

⁵⁹ Sundararajan, M & Sundarajan, B. (2015).

⁶⁰ Sequeira, J. & Rasheed, A. (2006).

⁶¹ De Lange, T. et al. (2020), “Highly Skilled Entrepreneurial refugees: Legal and Practical Barriers and Enablers to Start Up in the Netherlands”, *International Migration* 59(4), pp.74-87.

⁶² Wauters, B. & Lambrecht, J. (2018) “Barriers to Refugee Entrepreneurship in Belgium: Towards an Explanatory Model”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 34 :6, Routledge, pp. 895-915.

⁶³ Chrysostome, E. (2010), pp.143-148.

⁶⁴ Lévy-Tadjine (2006) « Réalités et mythes de l’entrepreneuriat immigré en France », *Migrations Société* 126(6), pp.19-34.

immigrant entrepreneurs to certain domains and reinforce the stereotypical vision of the phenomenon. **Servrank** highlighted that entrepreneurship was an “avoidance path” for many entrepreneurs supported by the network *Alexis*. He contradicted the idea that immigrant entrepreneurship is specific, highlighting that most of the entrepreneur’s projects were of an “assimilationist” nature, and concluded that general support schemes were adapted to this public.⁶⁵ Studying the specificities of African immigrant entrepreneurship in France, **Nkalkeu and Lévy-Tadjine** underlined that they accommodate between the socio-cultural systems of their origin country and the French one: when hiring, they are influenced both by the importance given to altruism towards members of their community and to competences. They have also found that the social status granted by entrepreneurship mattered to them more than profit, and that the choice of activity was influenced both by their origin and by the formal support received.⁶⁶

When it comes to the methodology, scholars have increasingly made use of qualitative methods⁶⁷, sometimes even of the grounded theory⁶⁸, to deal with the immigrant entrepreneurship phenomenon. **Cruickshank and Dupuis** hence defend that it “requires a qualitative approach to capture the realities of immigrant entrepreneurs and provide insights into their world view.”⁶⁹

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

Acculturation and integration:

In this research, integration is understood as a process which is psychological in the first place. According to Berry’s acculturation model, integration is but one strategy of acculturation out of four, among which an individual can choose to adapt in a new society. In his article, Berry refers to acculturation as defined by Redfield, Linton and Herskovits, that is as comprehending “those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups”⁷⁰. Before there is a perceivable change in individual or group behaviour, at the sociocultural level, the phenomenon of psychological acculturation takes place at the cognitive level. Berry’s model is based on two close-ended questions which the immigrant needs to answer to. These two propositions regard the way the individual chooses to relate to his/her own identity, as well as what stance he/she takes towards the host society. The extent to which the individual has an actual grasp on this mechanism is debatable, and the host society also has a crucial role to play in the acculturation phenomena. The combination of the answers to the two issues

⁶⁵ Servrank, P. (2007) « Les créateurs d’entreprise issus de l’immigration », *Economie Lorraine* 90.

⁶⁶ Nkalkeun. R & Levy-Tadjine, T. (2005) « La singularité de l’entrepreneuriat des migrants en France », *Revue Congolaise de Gestion*, pp.3-29.

⁶⁷ Cruickshank, P. & Dupuis, A. (2015), pp.77-93

⁶⁸ Glinka, B. & Brzozowska, A. (2015); Sundararajan, M & Sundarajan, B. (2015).

⁶⁹ Cruickshank, P. & Dupuis, A. (2015), p.83.

⁷⁰ Redfield, Linton, Herskovits (1946), quoted in: Berry, J.W. (1997), p.6.

give rise to four acculturation strategies, namely “integration”, “assimilation”, “separation”, and “marginalisation” (Chart 1).

Marginalisation happens when the individual chooses or is forced to give up on his/her cultural identity, while at the same time not willing or not being able to have relationships with the host society. A context of “separation” implies that the individual holds on to his/her cultural identity but does not have interactions with the dominant society. Assimilation would be the opposite of separation: the immigrant gives up on his/her cultural identity and embraces that of the host society, in which he/she actively mingles with others. All three of these strategies imply a loss which can prove psychologically detrimental to the person. According to Berry, this phenomenon can give rise to “acculturative stress”⁷¹, because the norms inherent to his/her culture and those governing the host society enter in confrontation, and hinder the capacity to think and act.

Integration appears as more promising, as it implies maintaining one’s cultural identity while at the same time interacting with the host society. However, the latter strategy requires “mutual accommodation”⁷², it implies both the immigrants and the host society to embrace integration as the model of acculturation to attain, and to actively participate in reaching this objective. Integration is a mechanism of compromise, of accommodation between one’s own identity, derived partly from one’s cultural and national background, and the context of the country of settlement. It is beneficial on a psychological level, as it allows the individual to keep a sense of integrity, of permanence through change, thus ensuring mental balance and personal realisation. In order to be successful, a balance needs to be found between the maintenance of what makes the person who he/she is and the arrangements made in order to relate to the new context. At the societal level, integration as previously defined is a factor enabling social cohesion.

⁷¹ Berry, J.W. (1997), “Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation”, *Applied Psychology : an International Review* 46(1), p.12.

⁷² Ibid, p.10.

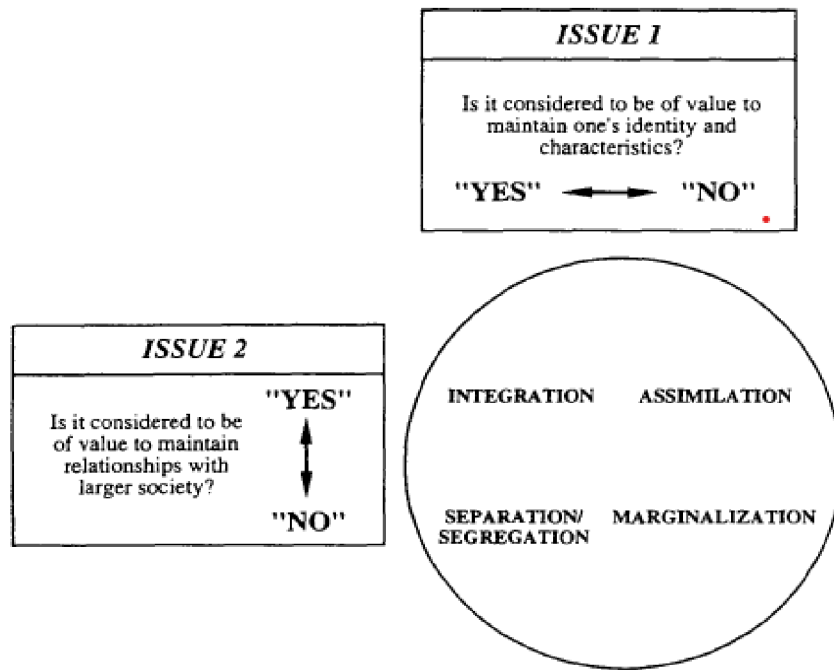


Chart 1 – Acculturation Strategies
Source: Berry, J.W. (1997)

History of French integration policies

Despite its long history of immigration, France only recently adopted integration policies. Indeed, before 1974, the prevailing vision was a *laissez-faire* one⁷³, as “the process of integration seemed to be working by itself”⁷⁴. According to Khellil, there were three waves of immigration from the colonies during the 20th century, each characterised by a certain mechanism. Until the interwar period, “cohabitation” was the norm, the contacts between natives and African workers – whose stays were short – being close to inexistant. The post-decolonisation period was one of “insertion”: immigrants’ stays were longer; they were granted economic and social rights and had more interactions with the French. The 1974 crisis saw the end of labour immigration, family reunification becoming the norm⁷⁵. Until the end of the 20th century, immigration was considered temporary; the need for integration policies arose when it became permanent. The history of immigration in France is hence tightly linked to labour: it was used as a tool to counterbalance a “population deficit” and to gain workforce. The post-war recruitment of the so-called “guest-workers” in Western European countries is quite an illustrative example.

However, France has historically had a protectionist stance towards its job market. In the field of independent work, France’s stance has been “to regulate (and restrict) access to trades: immigrants [were] not entitled to open independent businesses.”⁷⁶ The restrictive measures, which still exist to this day,

⁷³ Ma Mung, E. & Lacroix, T. (2003), p.173.

⁷⁴ Barou, J. (2014), p.5.

⁷⁵ Khellil, M. (2005) « La genèse de l’intégration », *Sociologie de l’intégration*, Presses Universitaires de France.

⁷⁶ Ma Mung, E. & Lacroix, T. (2003), p.174.

shapes the immigrant entrepreneurship phenomenon, attracting immigrants to particular sectors, other fields being closed to them⁷⁷.

Although the concern about the degree of “assimilability” of different nationalities has always been present and immigrants have faced waves of rejection and xenophobia⁷⁸, the past decades have seen a rise in the assimilation discourses and on the centrality of the Republican values which are deemed universal and must be adhered to. The French system is considered an assimilationist, universalist one by many scholars, since it turns a blind eye to differences, and refuses to recognise ethnic communities. According to Barou, “the reluctance to give accord official status to ethnic minorities can be explained by the Republican principles of unity and equality.”⁷⁹ Quoting Kezal, Barou defines assimilation as a process which “erodes both the public and private differences between and among groups.”⁸⁰ The latest policies have focused more on immigrants’ civic and cultural integration, with the introduction of “integration contracts” in 2003.

Integration: a two-way process:

As Berry’s model started to demonstrate, the integration process both involves the people who have migrated and their settlement society. According to Klarenbeek, it is a “two-way process” which end goal is to reach “a society in which there are no social boundaries between *legitimate members*, or insiders, and *non-legitimate members*, or outsiders”.⁸¹ This definition evokes the idea of “social standing”, that is the position occupied by an individual in the society. It also suggests the existence of power relationships between groups and individuals. As Klarenbeek argues, the legitimate members tend to have a higher social standing, which translates into a “better access to all forms of capital” and “the power to deny such access to non-legitimate citizens through mechanisms of social closure and stigmatisation”.⁸² Hence, the native population is an active stakeholder in the process of integration. They are both affected by the process and agents of it.⁸³ This stance is opposed to the idea of immigrants having to integrate *into* a host society, presented as a monolithic bloc. The literature on integration is pervaded by the idea of an already integrated society where social cohesion is a norm, and where immigrants enter as troublemakers threatening the status quo. Yet, the natives or “legitimate members” also go through this process of integration, and constantly have to reposition themselves in relation to others and to the

⁷⁷ This is the case for the liberal professions. See Observatoire des inégalités, “Cinq millions d’emplois demeurent fermés aux étrangers non européens », August 19, 2019, <https://www.inegalites.fr/Cinq-millions-d-emplois-demeurent-fermes-aux-etrangers-non-europeens>

⁷⁸ Before the Second World War, quotas were put in place based on a list of “races and people” based on their level of assimilability. In Barou, J. (2014), p.7-8. According to Milza, the closer the community is deemed from the national group, the easier its assimilation is perceived. In Milza, P. (1985) « Un siècle d’immigration étrangère en France », *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire* 7, p.7.

⁷⁹ Barou, J. (2014), p.4.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.7.

⁸¹ Klarenbeek, p.2.

⁸² Ibid, p.4.

⁸³ Ibid, p.8.

society at large. Klarenbeek explains that the literature has therefore participated in creating a difference between the immigrants, who have to go through the integration process, and natives, who would not be concerned by this issue.

The vision of integration as a one-way process which exclusively concerns newcomers hides a major strand of sociology having to do with the socialisation of individuals. There are few instances where the two concepts of “socialisation” and “integration” are put together, yet their conciliation is essential, and constitutes a cornerstone of the present research.

Integration and socialisation

Socialisation is a process which every single individual goes through, from his/her early childhood and during the course of his/her whole social path. It consists in learning and internalising, through interactions with others, the norms and values governing the society in which the individual resides. Durkheim has set it as a prerequisite for social cohesion⁸⁴. Tap adds that it is perpetuated by social groups and institutions in order to ensure their survival⁸⁵. The first socialisation phase, primary socialisation, is deemed the most significant for the construction of the individual. During this phase, the family and the school act as the two most important socialisation bodies. While social integration is the combination of three processes which take place at an external level and through which “the subject enters in relationships and social networks”⁸⁶, psychological integration takes place at the psychic level. It consists in the capacity to distinguish and identify social actors, but also to make the characteristics of these actors one’s own.

Tap’s work, which deals with the socialisation of individuals in a society where they were born and raised, presents elements which are crucial and applicable to the integration of immigrants in a host society. Indeed, the author writes that:

True social integration does not accommodate with assimilation, where the individual would lose his/her identity, nor with individualistic and sectarian differentiation which leads to discrimination and exclusion.⁸⁷

These words resonate with Berry’s acculturation theory in that both works present integration as a middle ground that allows the individual’s psychological well-being and makes collective life in a society feasible. Further, Tap argues that:

The social actor only seeks to adapt to his/her social milieu, to integrate it, to the extent that he/she feels like he/she can realise oneself within it, not only by his/her desires being met, but also because of the possibility to create something, to transform a given aspect of the external reality, be it physical or social, based on his/her own projects. Adapting is possible only in view

⁸⁴ Riutort, P. (2013) « La socialisation. Apprendre à vivre en société », *Premières leçons de sociologie*, pp.63-74.

⁸⁵ Tap, P. (1991) « Socialisation et construction de l’identité personnelle », Malewsk-Peyre (eds.) *La socialisation de l’enfance à l’adolescence*, Presses Universitaires de France, pp.49-74.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid. [Translation mine]

of self-accomplishment and of a transformation of the current equilibrium or the current adaptation model.⁸⁸

The above-cited quote, applied to immigrants, grant them more consistency, more individuality. They are not a homogenous group which sole objective is to adapt to their host society. They are individuals with an agency and projections of their own.

In recent years, the term “integration” has exclusively been used in the policy field, to refer to the inclusion of foreign-born individuals in the French society, thus creating a distinction between natives who are socialised while immigrants are integrated. Yet, “integration”, as defined by Durkheim, is a concept pertaining to sociology. It refers to “the processes through which the individuals participate in the global society through their professional activity, by learning the norms of material consumption, the adoption of family and cultural behaviours, exchanges with others, participating to common institutions.”⁸⁹ As such, the concept of integration is fully embedded in the socialisation process. Schnapper recalls, just as Klarenbeek, that no society is integrated per se. Like immigrants, natives thus need to be integrated with their society. However, newcomers in a society do have a peculiar position towards socialisation and integration: indeed, they have already gone through a process of socialisation and have integrated to a different extent with their society of origin. The norms they have had to internalise may be more or less distant from those of the host society. They will have to go through a different process of socialisation in order to make theirs the norms and codes of that society. What is more, the social position which they occupied back in their country of origin does not transfer in the new setting. Immigrants therefore need to create a place for themselves in the social net of their host country.

Malewska-Peyre tackled the question of how an individual responds to being subjected to the influence of several cultural and societal systems. The author defined this process as “intercultural socialisation”, that is “the influence of two or several cultures on the construction of the representations and on the learning of the knowledge, norms and behaviours”.⁹⁰ However, the author did so for young people whose parents have migrated to another country. There is no consideration as to how adults who were socialised in one social and cultural setting are socialised in their country of settlement. Their primary socialisation has already been completed. The two main socialisation bodies are rendered ineffective to them. Indeed, quite often, their families have been socialised in the same culture as they were and find themselves in the same situation. Besides, as adults, they also are outside of reach of the school. Other socialisation influences need to be found, and certainly the world of work is one of them, as it structures the life of adults in the Western societies.

⁸⁸ Ibid. [Translation mine]

⁸⁹ Schnapper, D. (2008), « Intégration nationale et intégration des migrants : un enjeu européen », *Questions d'Europe* 90, p.3.

⁹⁰ Malewska-Peyre, H. (1991) « La socialisation en situation de changement interculturel », *La socialisation de l'enfance à l'adolescence*, Presses Universitaires de France, pp.193-218. [Translation mine]

1 LABOUR IN A MIGRATION CONTEXT: THE INDIVIDUAL'S BACKGROUND IN QUESTION

1.1 DOES MIGRATION ENABLE CONTINUITY THROUGH CHANGE IN THE FIELD OF WORK?

Before coming to France, most of our interviewees were not entrepreneurs, nor did they envision to embrace this path. Eleven of the thirteen interviewees became entrepreneurs during their stay in France. Most of them expressed the wish to follow their original professional path, as Mrs. A., who was educated and worked as a psychiatric nurse in Rwanda:

I didn't immediately decide to go towards entrepreneurship [...] I wanted to do what my diploma... the same thing as I did back home.

Through displacement and the changes that it brings about, there is a willingness from immigrants to maintain a certain continuity in their personal path. Migrating implies a multiplicity of changes in their environment and personal life. However, work is one domain that they hope they can maintain control over. They are often comforted by the fact that they hold a degree in a specific field, and have acquired a significant professional experience over the years. These are tangible and objective proofs of their past and their competences, that should in theory ensure them a smooth transition to the French labour market.

Yet, the participants' trajectories seem to point to another direction. In theory, the professional background of immigrants is recognised. This is what suggests the exchange which Mrs. B, from Syria, had with her counsellor at the French employment agency (Pôle Emploi). Mrs. B. wanted to enrol in a training in order to strengthen her French level in the professional domain she was working in and to gain confidence. However, it was refused, as Mrs. B. counted:

But Pôle Emploi refused, they told me: "You already have a ten-year experience, you don't need that."

In practice, despite many attempts to apply for a position in their professional domain, the participants did not manage to find a job that matched their expectations. Indeed, Mrs. E., who originates from Syria and has worked for sixteen years in the hospitality and catering industries in the United Arab Emirates, explained:

But unfortunately, I, I met some difficulties, I encountered some difficulties, I, for months, I sent my CV here and there, no answer or negative answers.

Mrs. E's words suggest a long, time-consuming process of applying for positions which are in line with her profile and aspirations, without success. The confrontation with this reality gives immigrants the feeling of having to start from scratch again, not only in their personal life, but also in their professional path. This motive was confirmed by the subsequent reading of Giacometti's thesis, who also came to this conclusion⁹¹. Hence, immigrants have to create a place for themselves in a society that did not plan one for them. This motive of starting all over again is omnipresent in the narratives of the participants, in particular in that of Mrs. B:

Because in the beginning, really, I was... You cannot imagine what it means to leave everything behind, and to change everything, and to start from scratch. I am now 45 years old, before I was 40 [upon arrival to France], which means that I was in Syria for 40 years. That is, I don't know, maybe half of my life, because I don't know if I will live until I'm 80.

The story of Mrs. B exemplifies the idea that the feeling of discontinuity invests every single domain of life. In the interviews, the participants rapidly shifted from their professional life to their private one. Their feeling of losing grasp over one's life is complete, no field of their life is spared, which further reinforces the feeling that their past life is negated. An extract from Mrs. E's interview is particularly eloquent in this regard, when talking about the dominant discourse on the condition of refugees:

And also, I have a cause to defend to change the prejudices on refugees, that is the narratives: suddenly refugees came to France without anything, without « package ». ⁹² It's false... it's, for instance, take me: I had to come to France because my country is at war. So, that's it. So... I have my background, I have my competences, I just need time, I need support, the support from the French community to... to start again.

This extract highlights two topics. Firstly, it suggests that simultaneously to refugees' arrival to Europe, a stereotypical figure of the refugee emerged and gradually imposed to the collective mind: that of a person robbed of everything. This representation strives to the pathos, while at the same time constructing the image of European countries as providence spaces. Subsequently generalised to all foreigners, it initiates a power relationship where the natives control the way immigrants are represented. According to the report *Changing the Narrative: Media Representation of Refugees and Migrants in Europe*, refugees and immigrants are the subject of 67% of the articles considered for the study, while they are the ones who get to speak in only 3%. The author argues that "This lack of direct representation furthers the idea that migrants and refugees

⁹¹ Giacometti, C. (2015) « Insertion professionnelle et déclassement des réfugiés en France : entre réalité et perception », Master's thesis, Université de Poitier, Dumas, p.45.

⁹² [In English in the interview]

are worthy only to be talked about, most likely by someone who is not a migrant or a refugee, and that they have no particular expertise to contribute to society.”⁹³

Secondly, this vision of immigrants is a self-reinforcing one: whether knowingly or not, the natives act in a way that confirms this dominant narrative and hence denies immigrants the monopoly on their personal narrative. Through migration, immigrants are therefore confronted to an abrupt interruption in their path, which makes them feel like they have to start from scratch in France.

1.2 THE LACK OF RECOGNITION OF THE KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCES OF IMMIGRANTS IN THE FRENCH SYSTEM

The core of the issue lies in the confrontation between the immigrants’ representation of themselves and of their background, and that which the host society has of them and which is sustained by the dominant media narrative. In most of the coverage on asylum and migration, immigrants get their identity through their immigrant status only. They are stripped off other distinctive signs, in particular of their professional position: the study on media representation of immigrants reports that in 43% of the cases, the immigrant’s occupation is not mentioned, and in 27%, the immigration status is even used in place of the person’s occupation. According to the report by WACC Europe and CCME, this coverage

[...] continues the pattern of representation wherein the label of migrant or refugee is thought to convey the entirety of the story of a person. The lack of other occupational identifiers perpetuates the idea that refugees and migrants are hopeless persons in need of assistance to survive.⁹⁴

The immigrant status thus becomes the person’s only identity. Erasing his/her past, it makes his/her life start with migration and also shapes his/her future in the host country, justifying the assistance position in which he/she is placed.

In the labour area, a person’s qualification is measured by his/her diploma and the length of his/her professional experience. Eleven of the participants in this study have pursued higher education. Some of them hold several degrees or have undertaken subsequent trainings. For instance, Mr. C presented his academic path as follows:

In Columbia, I wasn’t an entrepreneur. I... I am rather specialised in a field linked to... research and... I was a jurist. So, I was doing research on the armed conflict, so that’s

⁹³ WACC Europe & CCME, *Changing the Narrative: Media Representation of Refugees and Migrants in Europe*, p.26.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p.27.

another topic. And in France, I followed law studies at La Sorbonne, and then about... about international security at Sciences Po... Sciences Po Paris.

Not only did he graduate in Columbia, Mr. C. also started studying again in France. These diplomas are proofs of immigrants' knowledge, and the insurance for them to have access to a position that is in line with their expectations, regardless of the country where they settle. However, despite the extent of globalisation of our societies, diplomas do not hold a universal value. Mrs. A. could not proceed with her career as a nurse, owing to the fact that her qualifications were not recognised in France, as she explained:

Then, when I obtained my [refugee] status, in 2015, I had the right to... to work. I wanted to do what my diploma... the same thing as I did back home, but I was told that my diplomas were not valid here, that in order to revalidate them I needed to study for a year.

Her knowledge and experience were discarded, because these were not obtained in France. It implies that know-how is context-bound, and thus opposes the universality of science and knowledge. It also establishes a hierarchy between countries and the quality of teaching delivered by their academic institutions. In France, many jobs are closed to third-country nationals, both in the public and the private sectors: according to the *French Observatory of Inequalities*, 5.4 million jobs (20%) are closed to foreigners, either because they require holding the French nationality or a French diploma⁹⁵. For instance, only those who hold a French diploma can exercise as nurses. Several of the participants thus undertook other studies in France for their expertise to be recognised.

Another issue that arises is that some get blocked in a vicious circle where the only issue is to multiply the academic paths, without any professional perspective. Mr. G, who has a background in Bank and Insurance at the University of Damas in Syria, talked about the different degrees he signed up for: he joined three Masters in different institutions in France. When reflecting on the length of his studies, he added:

[...] actually, the result is that now, the negative result, in fact now I'm 32, and I can't find a job, and I don't have a career. Yes, I ruined my life (laughs). I believe that now, the only solution is to follow on, so in fact, the only solution is to do a PhD now, a thesis.

⁹⁵ Observatoire des inégalités, « Cinq millions d'emplois demeurent fermés aux étrangers non européens », August 19, 2019, <https://www.inegalites.fr/Cinq-millions-d-emplois-demeurent-fermes-aux-etrangers-non-europeens>

Instead of being a way to increase immigrants' employability by increasing the number of jobs they can apply to, taking on new academic paths or trainings can have the reversed effect of blocking them in their student status.

The different professional experiences of the person are also undermined or negated. This is what Mrs. B experienced when trying to follow on in the aviation sector:

In Syria, I actually worked in an airline company for ten years, and a year and a half in a travel and freight agency for the air cargo transportation. This company has a subsidiary here in Lyon, in Saint-Exupéry. I wanted to follow on working in the sector, but it was really difficult [...]: I already have the experience, I know I have the experience and I am able to do it, but I need a training. And then, here in France, you always need a document, a certificate. The experience doesn't count, here. Always, you need a CAP, a BMA, I don't know, abbreviations which I had never heard before.

Mrs. B's path is a reveller of the paradoxical system in which immigrants find themselves: on the one hand, their diplomas are deemed insufficient to find a position in the field related to their degree. On the other, despite the proof and demonstration of the length of their experience, they still need to have it validated by the French system by taking an additional training.

In another context, Andra W., who founded her company in Austria before moving to France, saw her five years of experience as an entrepreneur diminished by business incubators when she wanted to receive help to launch her enterprise on the French market. In the beginning of the interview, she highlighted this experience:

I want to launch my project here in France, because I've already done it in Austria. And so, I have the experience... I already have the experience to launch the project.

However, it was not perceived as such by external eyes: Andra explained why she was not accepted in the programmes where she had applied:

[...] the reasons were that... we are rather not advanced because... so, ok, we have launched the project in Austria, but we don't have the experience on the French market, and... also because we are not launched yet on the French market, we don't have the sales experience yet and... well, to see how the French market... receives the project. So, for these kinds of programmes, we are not advanced enough.

In their study about highly skilled Syrian refugee entrepreneurs in the Netherlands, de Lange et al. explain that some of the interviewees "reported difficulties finding a waged employment matching their education and skill level in Syria".⁹⁶ These findings are also in line with the *Migrant Integration Policy Index 2020 (MIPEX 2020)*, which characterises France's labour

⁹⁶ De Lange et al. (2020), p.7.

market mobility as “halfway favourable” and “weak” on the grounds that France “delays and discourages the labour market mobility of non-EU immigrants more than most Western European/OECD countries”. The consequence of such policies, according to the MIPEX, is that it “can undermine immigrant men and women’s access to training, education and quality employment.”⁹⁷ Hence, the person is put in a situation where he/she is confident of his/her skills, but the latter are put into question by the system of their host country. They are confronted to the relativity of their knowledge and competences, which can give rise to a number of consequences at the psychological level.

1.3 THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF IMMIGRANTS’ BACKGROUND DEVALUATION

The fact that their value on the host country’s labour market is reduced or even negated does not leave the immigrants unmoved. In fact, they go through negative feelings, ranging from incredulity to an outright sense that they have lost their intrinsic values as individuals. The interview with Mrs. A revealed that she cannot make sense of the disqualification of her diplomas as a nurse:

[...] I was told that my diplomas were not valid here, that in order to revalidate them I needed to study for a year. It did not make sense to me because, for instance if tomorrow, - knock on wood – I have to leave here and go and live elsewhere, my diploma is accepted elsewhere. But at the same time, I comply with the laws, so I said: in this case I prefer following a training on something else and this way..., I can gain more competencies, other than the ones I already have.

The relativity of the theoretical and practical knowledge she acquired is illogical to her. Besides that, the requirement to validate again a diploma she views as acquired once and for all is perceived both as counter-productive and as a waste of time and energy. It leads her to a spirit of resignation, in that she would rather invest in new skills than repeating a course to comply with formalities, without added value for her. Indeed, this training is artificial: it makes the competences valid to the authority which does not recognise the skillset brought by the immigrant through displacement, but does not bring a fundamental change for the individual.

In Mrs. B’s words, frustration is perceivable. During the course of the interview, she came back several times on the impossibility to have access to a training to upgrade her professional French. The returning of this topic in the interview translates her disappointment and frustration. The following excerpt is representative of these feelings:

⁹⁷ Solano, Giacomo & Huddleston (2020), “France: Key Findings”, In: *Migrant Integration Policy Index 2020* [Online], <https://www.mipex.eu/france>

You know that here in France unemployment is high. It was really difficult. I asked, I even supplicated Pôle Emploi so that they let me follow a training just for a month, two months. I've already worked for 11 years, it means that I do have the experience, ok, we all agree. For instance, I know *airway bill*⁹⁸, I don't know how to say it in French, but I know how to calculate, I know how to go and see on the IATA. I knew everything: I already have an experience in an airway company and in an agency on top of that, a year and a half in agency. But I only wanted a month in order to know the specific language, and they refused.

In this extract, Mrs. B emphasises her experience in the air sector which she is convinced of and is objectively evidenced by her eleven years of experience. However, the only thing standing in her way to find a position in the area consists in a language training. In other words, she has some weaknesses when it comes to the medium, the language, but she does possess the hard skills required for the position. Her feeling of frustration originates from the numerical difference between her professional experience and the relative shortness of the training she wants to take in order to upgrade her professional French level. She also feels powerless because she is not in control of the situation and cannot direct her path.

This loss of control over one's own destiny can have detrimental effects on the individual's psychology. Indeed, labour participates to a great extent in the individual's self-actualisation. Being deprived of the means to fulfil oneself may cause a loss of self-worth. Mrs. E thus explains that her goal is to help refugees to overcome the same situation she has been through when she arrived in France:

Because for me, work is dignity, without work one is deprived of his/her dignity. People do not like to be reliant on, on governmental or public subsidies. They... they want to work, they want, hm, to create something for their future or for... the future generations, that is for their families, for their children.

This quote resonates with the one used in the introduction to this study: the professional status fully participates in identity construction. It is also perceived as a means of integration in a society, as an active element who participates to its advancement. Deprived of their ability to be active, and beyond that, negated in their expertise, the participants experience a drop in their social status and perceive themselves more negatively.

The consequence of the participants' original path being obstructed is twofold: they either experience inactivity, or are confronted to the necessity to accept a position for which they are overqualified.

⁹⁸ [In English in the interview]

1.4 THE PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES AVAILABLE TO IMMIGRANTS

1.4.1 The prohibition from working for asylum seekers:

When it comes to accessing work upon arrival, a first distinction needs to be introduced between asylum seekers and other immigrants. As long as they have not been granted their refugee status, asylum seekers are not allowed to work. Indeed, according to the public service's dedicated webpage, an asylum seeker cannot get a working permit during the six months after he/she lodged an application for asylum with the OFPRA.⁹⁹ In theory, after a period of six months since the application for the refugee status, the person is entitled to ask for a work permit. However, the request can be made only if the person is either in possession of a work contract or of a binding offer of work from the employer.¹⁰⁰ This possibility is fairly recent: it dates back to March 1st, 2019¹⁰¹. Before that, asylum seekers had no possibility to work at all. In practice, the refugees among our interviewees were not authorised to work until they were granted their refugee status and received their residence permit. Abbas K., an Afghan who arrived in France in September 2017, thus said he started working in January 2019. He explained this period of inactivity by the waiting period to get his application processed:

Firstly... the time to, to wait for the asylum request to be processed etc, so, to get the refugee documentation. So, it takes time.

This period is perceived as a time when the participants did not have the same rights as others. Indeed, both the narratives of Mr. C and Mrs. E highlight this inequality in terms of access to civic and economic rights:

After this time period, when I have the status... afterwards, when we have the status, we... have the same rights and the same duties as French citizens. (Mr. C)

“Not immediately. I tried once I got my documents, my status, etc, I have the right to work as... as everyone does here, as the French.” (Mrs. E)

The acceptance of their asylum application is expected and experienced as the end of a period of lawlessness, of return to normalcy. The obligation to be inactive contradicts the individual's own plans, and is perceived as “wasted time, as de Lange et al. suggest, due to the asylum

⁹⁹ The French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons, in charge of processing asylum applications.

¹⁰⁰ “Accès au travail d'un demandeur d'asile”, URL: <https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F2741> (April 21, 2021)

¹⁰¹ MIPEX 2020, France Policy Indicators. URL: https://www.mipex.eu/sites/default/files/downloads/files/france_questionnaire.xlsx

seekers' inability to focus on learning the language or on engaging in a professional activity.¹⁰²

Mrs A remembers this period as one when she had to put aside her aspirations:

“For me, it was a year and a half during which I was not allowed to work. So, I complied, but since I have always worked during my life, I... I was bored and I started volunteering”

For many, this forced inactivity is experienced as contradicting their natural tendencies and their need to be on the move. Mrs A found a way out of inertia by engaging voluntarily in NGOs.

Upon arrival, refugees are confronted to specific barriers, being forbidden to work and thus forced into inactivity. This inertia is lived negatively because it prevents them from engaging in an integration path.

1.4.2 A narrow margin of manoeuvre for the carriers of certain residence cards:

The asylum seeker status is not the only one hindering individuals' professional activity. Some visas considerably limit the range of positions which an immigrant can engage in. Mrs D, who originates from Vietnam and graduated from a Hospitality Management Master's Degree in Switzerland, was not able to proceed in this path because of the modalities attached to her student visa. Indeed, such a visa prevents its carrier from taking on a full-time job. As a result, Mrs. D was not able to find a job in the hospitality sector, because of the lack of part-time positions in the field, as she explains:

“I hold a Master Degree in Hospitality Management in Switzerland, and I have worked in the sector, in the field for about five years before moving here. And I was looking for the same thing here, but at that time, the hotel would only hire people who can work full time. And I, with my... status at the moment... at that time, it was a student visa, and it only enabled me to work part time. So, that's why I couldn't.”

Hence, Mrs D's visa is not compatible with a full-time position. At the same time, there is no prospect of part-time jobs in the sector in which she is educated and experienced. It virtually prevents her from working in her field of expertise. There are two ways out of this dead-end: either she finds a part-time job in another domain, or she gets another visa that enables her to work in the hospitality domain. The first option seems more likely, considering the length of the procedures to get a long-term residence permit. The extent to which Mrs D actually has a choice is therefore very limited.

¹⁰² De Lange et al. (2020), p.7.

This is not an isolated case: in our panel of interviewees, Mr. F, who holds a *talent pass*¹⁰³, was also confronted to a professional deadlock. As a researcher in the field of psychology, he did not manage to find any research laboratory because of his research speciality not matching the mainstream research topics in the field. However, when he tried to find an employed position related to his background, he was not able to get it despite the hiring process being launched: his visa barred him access this type of contracts.

It [the status] was blocking because it was an administrative position that was already open, for instance. [...] So, in the ranking, I was... the most suited profile, when it comes to the competences I had for the position, in fact. But then, when I handed in my documents, they found themselves... quite bothered, because... I have a document named "Talent Pass" or "Researcher Talent", or I don't know what. And apparently, this residence card was made so that foreigners working with French universities, in say, positions requiring highly qualified profiles. So, at some point, when you have no prospect of evolution, you either have to... find your own... create your own employment, but... or change your status... or other... there are other... possibilities, for example to... to get the nationality, for instance, and to be able to apply as... anybody who applies to a position, without... this researcher and foreigner status... complexifying the procedure, you see.

Besides the jobs closed to immigrants, certain types of visas restrict access to some positions. The case of Mr. F illustrates the precedence of nationality over qualifications. While he was selected for a job, the hiring process stopped when the employers found out Mr. F's visa was incompatible with the position. He was stuck with no prospects for a job due to his niche research topic and his visa limited his possibilities. All the solutions he came up with implied long, burdensome procedures. The French system thus grants a narrow margin of manoeuvre to immigrants, and is willing to welcome talents based on its own terms only. These findings point to an increasingly selective immigration management. Giacometti explains that it is due to independent causes, namely "institutional racism" which translates into « a very rigid foreign diploma recognition system and the requirement for local experience to be employed. »¹⁰⁴

1.4.3 The gender divide: being unemployed or underemployed?

Confronted to the impossibility to access the professional field of their choice, immigrants can start a training so that doors open to them. They are also often confronted to unemployment or underemployment. Underemployment or downward social mobility imply that the individual's

¹⁰³ "Passeport-talent": a four-year residence card targeting ten categories of "talents whom France wants to receive more", among whom researchers, business creators, performers, economic investors, etc. See Ministère de l'Intérieur, Immigration, asile, accueil et accompagnement des étrangers en France, « Le passeport-talent ». URL: <https://www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/Immigration/L-immigration-professionnelle/Le-passeport-talent>

¹⁰⁴ Giacometti, C. (2015), p.35.

level of education exceeds that required for the position he/she holds. It also holds true in the entrepreneurial field: de Lange et. Al have noted “deskilling tendencies”¹⁰⁵ amongst refugees who were already entrepreneurs.

In this research, it was found that males were more likely to be forced into inactivity than females. On the other hand, four of the six females interviewed took on or intended to take on a position for which they were overqualified.

Louay Y., a Syrian scriptwriter, counted his experience of inactivity and receiving public subsidies:

[...] for four months, I got... I lived... the idea of the RSA¹⁰⁶... you see? That’s why... I want to do things so that I am an active... person, in this society. [...] Why do newcomers have to stay dependent on the RSA, while at the same time we have a... a better opportunity to be financed in order to become active people in this society and... people who can also participate to financing the state itself? Why do I have to stay for 10 years, or even 5 years reliant of the RSA, so you can actually finance projects?

Unable to follow on his path due to financial constraints, Louay was forced into inactivity and dependence to social welfare. This situation did not suit him because it contradicted both a long-lasting dream of his, which he was not ready to leave behind, and his willingness to be active, to participate in the society. It is detrimental to him at the individual level, scriptwriting being part of his identity, but also at the collective level, because he feels he cannot be an agent of his host society. He is also frustrated because he believes that the subsidies he receives could be better spent if they enabled the individuals assisted to become active agents in the economic field and in the society at large.

Women seem to be more likely to be underemployed. A classical path for them seems to be in the field of care, in the service to individuals’ industry. Half of the women interviewed had the idea or implemented it. According to Kofman, the professional positions among immigrants are split on a gender basis: “Men often constitute the “elite” of migration flows [...] while women provide services widely associated with the spouse’s traditional role – taking care of children

¹⁰⁵ De Lange, T et al. (2019), p.80.

¹⁰⁶ Income of Active Solidarity, a French subsidy.

and elders, domestic chores and sexual services.”¹⁰⁷ For Giacometti, these are individual sociodemographic factors: “being a woman and being a foreigner increase the risk for deskilling”.¹⁰⁸ For instance, Mrs. D, from Vietnam, said:

I had a lot of free time back then, because I was working in childcare.

Later on in the interview, she added:

I think that there are a lot of housewives among Vietnamese women, who just like me... have studied, have special or specific experiences. It's not easy to find a job we like. And we have a lot of free time. [...] Because, if you don't work, you are not in control of your financial situation so it's always... you always have to ask your spouse money, and that's not incredible, it's not nice.

Mrs. D suggests that taking on an underemployed position is a way out of inactivity and boredom, and to make use of the time at her disposal. She also reveals that this situation is a commonality for women in general, and women from the same origin as her, in particular. During her interview, Mrs B also mentions childcare as the way out of inactivity:

“A woman from the parish proposed that I take care of her children. I told myself: why not, with pleasure, instead of staying... I really wanted to work, I wanted to do something, to integrate”

“I was going once a week, sometimes twice to take care of young children. So, I told myself that I would be a nanny. Around me, most people told me that it would be a field where we can find a job for sure [...] And after a year, there was another lady who suggested the same thing, to take care of her child, who is mentally retarded. I suggested, in order to take care of the two children, to look after them at my home. It was [an arrangement] between us, which is forbidden by the law. But they were really nice to me, they said why not, in order for me to earn a living. So, I took care of the two children for two years, from 2016 to 2018.”

Mrs B, just as Mrs D, mentions that taking on this position was a way to stay independent financially. In this extract, she also tackled the topic of job availability: while she could not follow on in the air industry, she can find a job in the care sector because it does not require specific qualifications, but also because it is a recruiting sector, where demand for labour is high.

¹⁰⁷ Kofman, E. (2008) « Genre, migrations, reproduction sociale et Welfare state. Un état des discussions », *Les cahiers du CEDREF* [Online], §19. [Translation mine].

¹⁰⁸ Giacometti, C. (2015), p.21.

Andra Weiss' case is different in two regards. She also worked in a field where she was over-qualified, but after she first migrated from Romania to Austria. Plus, instead of working in the care industry, she worked as a salesperson, as she explains:

“Well, I have started the typical path of an immigrant... from a country... which is not viewed, or perceived as a rich country. So, you have immigrants, migrants, expats, expats who are... who come from France, from Germany, from those countries who are well seen economically. And... so I... I worked, I worked in a shop”

For Andra, one's position upon arrival depends on his/her country of origin and the way it is perceived by others. Hence, migrants from third-countries are more likely to experience de-skilling than the so-called “expatriates” coming from industrialised countries. The findings delineated in this section are substantiated by the quantitative data delivered by the 2015 OECD report on the *Indicators of the integration of immigrants*. Indeed, it suggests that newcomers to European countries are more likely to be unemployed than natives. France is below the EU average on this matter: while about 65% of the working age population born in the country is employed; the employment rate of the population born abroad reaches 57% in 2012-2013.¹⁰⁹ Immigrant women in particular are more likely to be unemployed than their native counterparts, with an average difference of more than 5 percentage points¹¹⁰. It is partially validated by our research. Indeed, while the narrative of Mrs D suggests that many women have to stay at home despite their qualifications while their partners are employed, female immigrants seem to be more likely to take on underemployed positions than the males in this panel. This can help explaining the fact that the chances that immigrants with higher education degrees have access to a job matching their qualifications is 10 percentage points lower than that of their native counterparts.¹¹¹ They are therefore more likely to experience downward social mobility and to take on positions for which they are overqualified: at the EU level, underemployment touches 42% of the immigrants who obtained a higher education degree abroad¹¹².

¹⁰⁹ OCDE/European Union (2015), p.89, URL [Indicators]: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933216553>

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.88.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*.

¹¹² *Ibid*, p.123.

2 THE ENTRY CONDITIONS TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A TYPOLOGY OF THE REASONS BEHIND THE ENTREPRENEURIAL ENDEAVOUR

2.1 A DISCUSSION WITH THE EXISTING LITERATURE

A classical view shared in the literature on immigrant entrepreneurship is that the decision to become an entrepreneur is often driven by a “negative motivation”¹¹³ caused by “social disadvantage”¹¹⁴. According to Aldrich and Waldinger, the roots of immigrants’ entrepreneurial endeavour are to be found in the lack of opportunities in employed positions¹¹⁵. In a paper, Chrysostome opposes two profiles of immigrant entrepreneurs, whose level of qualification determines the reasons to engage in self-employment and, in turn, the subsequent entrepreneurial choices made.

The first profile, corresponding to the traditional one presented by Aldrich and Waldinger, is “necessity-driven”: for Chrysostome, necessity immigrant entrepreneurs are “immigrants who undertake business activities because they face various obstacles preventing them from having access to the job market. Their entrepreneurial activities represent the ultimate way to survive in the host country.”¹¹⁶ Scholars associate this emergency solution with low educated profiles, who turn to sectors with low entry barriers in terms of financial capital and skills, and limited perspectives for development. Hence, necessity immigrant entrepreneurs are more likely to end up in “vacancy-chain openings”, that is stagnating, saturated markets¹¹⁷, or in “ethnic niches”¹¹⁸, to serve their co-ethnics in specific goods and services, a position in which immigrants are less likely to be competing with natives.

The second profile, which has been the focus of interest of more recent researches, concerns the “opportunity immigrant entrepreneur”, also qualified a “highly-skilled”¹¹⁹ or “intentional”¹²⁰ immigrant entrepreneur. These adjectives highlight two characteristics: they are highly qualified and willingly choose to become entrepreneurs, their decision predating their

¹¹³ Wauters & Lambrecht (2008), p.902.

¹¹⁴ Yeasmin, N. (2016) “The Determinants of Sustainable Entrepreneurship of Immigrants in Lapland: An Analysis of Theoretical Factors”, *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review* 4(1), p.131.

¹¹⁵ Aldrich, H. & Waldinger, R. (1990), p.116.

¹¹⁶ Chrysostome (2010), p.138.

¹¹⁷ Kloosterman, R. (2006), p.5.

¹¹⁸ Kloosterman, R. (2006), p.7; Aldrich, H. & Waldinger, R. (1990), p.115; Volery, T. (2007), p.31.

¹¹⁹ De Lange, T. et al. (2019).

¹²⁰ Cruickshank & Dupuis (2015)

migration. Indeed, according to Cruickshank & Dupuis, they differentiate themselves through “adequacy of resources and intentionality”¹²¹. For De Lange et al., a highly qualified profile can attest of “at least three years of higher education or professional experience”¹²². The objectives of opportunity immigrant entrepreneurs, for Chrysostome, are of different natures: “make money by earning from their business more than they would have earned if they were immigrant workers, enjoy their independence, or accomplish a dream.”¹²³

This binary opposition in fact hides a diversity of paths, as well as the non-linearity of most individuals’ professional paths. Indeed, the immigrant entrepreneurs interviewed in the framework of this study rarely have a linear path. Most of them started their professional life in an employed position, and deviated towards entrepreneurship for a reason or another. What is more, as delineated in the previous chapter, while most of our participants can be defined as “highly skilled” as defined by de Lange et al., they were confronted to a series of difficulties while looking for a job in France. They later turned to entrepreneurship, but not always by necessity. Throughout their professional paths, they were submitted to a force relationship between their personal aspirations and the possibilities enabled by the sector: it is not just a matter of decision. In addition, what is viewed as a decision from an external eye might not be lived as such by the individual at the moment. A professional path is often made sense of by the individual a posteriori.

Hence, Vandolph C., a Philippino educated as a teacher, initially came to France for a temporary stay to work as an au pair. Yet, a combination of events put him in relation with another immigrant entrepreneur, and a position as a collaborator opened up for Vandolph:

I decided to become an entrepreneur... since last year; practically when we started EDGE with [name of collaborator]. Because it wasn't my plan before, because after my au pair I was planning to just go back to the Philippines, to go back there. But eventually, doors, opportunities opened along the way, and I decided to stay and to continue with the start-up company that I'm with right now, because I like it, and it's challenging.¹²⁴

This testimony contradicts the idea that the decision to become an entrepreneur involves a lot of reflexion and preparation. In this case, a combination of events, and essentially the meeting of one particular person paved the way for Vandolph’s entrance into the field of entrepreneurship. It was not a matured decision, but rather disrupted his original plans.

¹²¹ Ibid, p.78.

¹²² De Lange, T. et al. (2019), p.3.

¹²³ Chrysostome (2010), p.138.

¹²⁴ [This interview was led in English]

In this chapter, a typology of the different reasons behind immigrant entrepreneurs' shift to entrepreneurship will be presented.

2.2 ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS A PRE-EXISTING CONDITION

Two of the thirteen participants were already entrepreneurs before they came to France, and one had previous entrepreneurial experiences. However, prior to launching their business, they occupied employed positions. Both turned to entrepreneurship following a personal shift in the perception of their employed job. Diana J., a Peruvian woman who worked in a consulting firm specialised in marketing studies, decided to quit her job because she felt limited in this position:

[...] I had a good position, a good wage; economically, I wanted more. But the environment, at some point I told myself: it's not for me, because there was a bit of male chauvinism, a bit of... the Latino culture. A bit of male chauvinism. And I could see I was limited. If I wanted to grow, to evolve... well there was no place for it actually.

As there was no place for improvement nor self-realisation in her employed job, Diana decided to leave out of her own will. Andra W. also decided to quit, after holding several positions in project management, international sales and exports in a luxury company. This decision was motivated by a shift in her personal views: she gained increasing intercultural awareness and realised the unethical feature of her employer:

I travelled a lot, so I saw the world, and it opened up my eyes, it introduced me to multiculturalism, to cultural diversity. [...] Afterwards, I... I resigned, because... the company wasn't really ethical when it comes to... how to put it... to the companies... the producers we were working with. So, I resigned and I took a gap year... six years ago. And during that year, I changed direction, so I discovered social entrepreneurship through the organisation Impact Hub Vienna [...] And, there, I saw how people... created their own... company, and were really happy, despite the risk taken. And so, I was... really inspired to try it myself.

Andra W.' employed job was the place for a shift in her views. Travelling made her see the world as well as the company where she was working in a new light. She discovered an organisation dedicated to social and sustainable entrepreneurship at the right time, as she was gaining awareness as to the importance of working in a place in line with her ethics. She was thus brought to entrepreneurship following a personal shift and the meeting of social entrepreneurs by whom she felt inspired. In the same way, Diana Jimenez explains that turning to entrepreneurship was not a straight path, nor the product of a thoughtful decision: at first, she worked as a freelance along with a former colleague of hers:

And... I decided to stop, to resign, to set up on my own. But actually, there wasn't a reflexion: I'm going to create my company, or nothing, it was rather: I set up on my own

for some months, and we'll see what happens. And it actually ran smoothly. [...] So, I told myself: damn, we need to capitalise on all of that, we need to create our business. [...] But it wasn't... something thought through. But, opportunities arose, and I felt that... we had the competences, the values, the convictions to create something... a better company, with meaning, with a real impact.

In Diana's case, becoming an entrepreneur was the result of a progressive dive into independent work. She took this direction without formally registering a company nor thinking of it as the creation of an activity. She actually insists on the non-reflected character of her decision. Rather, she followed her inclinations at a given time. When she had the confirmation that she possessed the suitable competences to proceed, then she formally created a business. It was rationalised as a way to have power over the directions taken by the company: just like Andra, she was driven by the willingness to create a positive impact.

Another interesting point is that both women managed to create continuity through the change they brought to their professional life by inserting past experiences into their new path: Andra focuses on this point:

So... *Younited Cultures* was born... because of the experience we had during our professional path. So, discrimination was a rather... constant companion in daily life. So... When I... I got to know the social entrepreneurship sector... we asked ourselves: what kind of social issue do I want to... I don't know, to impact, to change, and so on. And so, discrimination, cultural diversity, was a topic for me [...] And since... I'm coming from... the luxury product industry, I wanted to combine my passion... for elegant things, which are beautiful in their simplicity. I wanted to combine this beauty with migrants.

Andra thus combined both her professional background and her personal experience of migration and discrimination into a new business project. She managed to create a continuity between different aspects of her past and combine them in a new, significant way. When they made the decision to move to France, both following their French partner, Andra and Diana had different standpoints when it comes to their company. While Andra prepared herself to export her company to France, Diana first decided to turn to employed work again. However, she soon realised she could not:

And then I decide to tell myself: well, I will... I will listen to myself: deep inside, I am... I'm not born to be an employee, so I can't force myself.

In the end, Diana decided to make use of her entrepreneurial experience in Peru to create a new company in France:

So, I quit, I resigned, and I told myself: well, I'm going for it, alone here in France, and we'll see. [...] But I went for it here in France for the second time, telling myself:

now I am... I was about 33, 34. And back in Peru, I was 30. So... well, I'm wiser, somehow, so I'm going for it. And that's it. It was about... following my instinct, my capacities, my competencies, rather than... than saying: I have the solution. So, I didn't really think about an object, a solution, I rather told myself: I want to do the same think as in Peru... as I did in Peru, here in France.

The personal and professional trajectories of Diana J. and Andra W. brought them to entrepreneurship through some detours, including employed work. However, being employed determined the subsequent sector in which they would set up their company. Self-employment appeared as a necessity for both of them, in order to stay in line with their values and their perceptions of themselves. In these two examples, the significance of the past experiences, personal or professional, is blatant. Hence, there is a resonance with their background, with their biographies. An entrepreneurial path can pre-exist migration, but it can as well be a product of this displacement.

2.3 MIGRATION AS A REVELATION OF AN ENTREPRENEURIAL VOCATION

For other immigrant entrepreneurs, the process of migrating proved determinant for the development of a business idea. The change of environment, of system, and the external eye which immigrants are able to have on their host country and on its market in particular are factors which positively influence entrepreneurial endeavours. For instance, Abbas K's experience in Italy and subsequent move to France were crucial for the making of his company:

Because I studied in Italy, and there I took a pizzaiolo course, and... and during the following week-ends, I would organise pizza parties for my friends etc, etc. And I really enjoyed this atmosphere, these things we did, etc. So, before I worked to organise during the week-ends pizza parties for people, and... but once I left Italy by going back to Afghanistan and after some time, I came back to Europe, this time to, to France, and I decided to completely change my life because... I wasn't satisfied of the things I did at the professional level.

In this testimony, the origin of Abbas' entrepreneurial endeavour is narrowly intertwined with his experiences of migration. His stay in Italy enabled him to acquire new practical skills in the catering sector. Then, his moving to France made him realise he wanted to make his free time occupation a full-time job. His idea was later shaped by his observations of the French market:

“But something I immediately noted in France, is that... the pizza market in France is big, and besides, people, Parisians, they often organise parties, events at home, but that there is no adapted service for... for their needs. And then, pizza here costs twice, three times more than... in Italy. So, that's the reason why I decided to embark in this field, but to... to differentiate myself with regards to the others, because the home-based pizzaiolo profession is a new concept, that is... when I launched my project in January

2019, there was nobody, no project which... in France, even at the European level, back then; we were doing research online etc., etc., and we wouldn't find anyone doing that.”

Abbas' training in Italy, as well as his observations of a market which he discovered with external eyes, enabled him to critically assess his chances to launch his project in France, and to determine which offer he could create to adequately meet French consumers' needs. His migration experiences were crucial for him to recombine his competences, what he wanted to do, into something new in the country where he had arrived. The added value brought by immigrants to their host country market, as employees or self-employed, was highlighted by a recent strand of literature. These studies correlate migration with innovation. Harnoss et al. thus insist that “immigrants tend to increase productivity in most countries around the world, largely because of the diversity of perspectives, experiences, and ideas that they contribute when working closely with locals in companies in their destination countries.”¹²⁵ Immigrants are thus carriers of innovation and growth, among others. Vador & Franke argue that cross-cultural experience makes people more entrepreneurial and enhance their creativity, which explains the high rates of self-employed amongst immigrants¹²⁶, rather than the lack of opportunities does.

When it comes to Mr. C, his interest for the question of refugees led him to discover social entrepreneurship:

“I started social entrepreneurship by joining... associations such as [name of organisation] for instance, of which I was able to be the President at some point, and where I discovered social entrepreneurship.

- “I think that the triggering event was... to acknowledge that I couldn't do anything else.
- *What do you mean?*
- It's important to be passionate because... I couldn't have a job in another sector than the SSE one, or... the humanitarian sector. And, it's just that... in France, I realised that you could either create an association, or create a company while still having the values of an association, which since 2014 enables the SSE. And... it combines the economic activity that enables autonomy, the creation of one's own employment, with values and personal views, I mean social and political ones. So, as soon as I understood that, I think that that was the triggering element: telling myself, there, I can have an economic activity and... while keeping in mind certain values.”

¹²⁵ Harnoss, J.D. et al., “Innovation without Borders. The Power of Human Migration in the 21st Century”, Boston Consulting Group, May 21, 2021, <https://www.bcg.com/fr-fr/publications/2021/how-global-migration-drives-innovation>

¹²⁶ Vador, P. & Franke, N., “Why are Immigrants More Entrepreneurial?”, *Harvard Business Review*, October 27, 2016, <https://hbr.org/2016/10/why-are-immigrants-more-entrepreneurial>

Mr. C, who was doing research on the Colombian armed conflict before migrating, managed to stay in the humanitarian sector, but also made use of his new experience as a refugee; his projects indeed mingle the two issues. He has launched an association and a social business, which end goal merge, as they are both committed to the professional integration of vulnerable groups. The association trains refugees in the field of agroecology while the company sells Colombian coffee, thereby helping victims of and former fighters in the Colombian armed conflict and raising awareness about coffee production among French consumers. The path he built for himself in France enabled him to pursue his engagement in his country, while adding another layer which reflects his experience as a refugee in France, and shifting position: from that of a researcher to that of a stakeholder in the field. The conditions of the French market, with the social and solidarity sector gaining increasing interest, constituted an adequate environment where Mr. C could develop what appears as a vocation. His migration path has thus introduced him to social entrepreneurship, while still enabling him to keep a form of continuity in his personal and professional life: his past experiences resonate in these new projects.

The migration experience as well as the context of the host country can act as triggering elements for immigrants, who discover the potential of an entrepreneurial activity thanks to the recombination of the elements constituting their lives. In both their narratives, Mr. C and Abbas share that they have discovered their vocation through migration. The resonance with one's background was also found by others who chose entrepreneurship as an indirect route.

2.4 ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS AN INDIRECT ROUTE TO SELF-REALISATION IN THE FIELD OF CHOICE

Some of the immigrants who came to France were determined and hopeful to find a position in the same domain as the one they had left. However, for a variety of reasons, many were confronted to an impossibility to follow on in the field they consider as their vocation. This is the case of Louay Y., who shared during the interview:

About two years after my arrival, I worked on two documentaries, but I had to stop with these two experiences because I was lacking financing. Really, I stopped these two experiences but I never stopped my dream which started more than eighteen years ago, back when I was in Syria.

His future as a scriptwriter in France was compromised due to financial constraints. However, Louay stayed focused on what he calls his “dream”, considering it was a temporary failure that did not put a final stop to his path in the sector. Instead, he managed to make use of his experience in the film and audio-visual industry to turn it into something different:

*De Zéro*¹²⁷ is an international platform that aims at distributing and producing documentaries in order to support the independent film industry, students in the field of documentary filmmaking as well as young producers, or producing companies in the field of documentary filmmaking. It aims at reinforcing solidarity among artists thanks to digital technology. Also, we have also decided to use documentary filmmaking to commit to social development, notably that of cultural and environmental institutions.

Louay took a step aside and observed the situation from afar. Then, he understood he could turn his blockage into an entrepreneurial opportunity. This way, he could both secure his economic situation, while still being able to realise himself by working in the field of his vocation. Taking his situation as a starting point for his reflexion, and generalising it, he developed a solution to support the stakeholders of the documentary film industry, and tackle the difficulties related to funding in this sector.

Mrs. A was also confronted to the impossibility to work as a nurse in France, her Rwandan diploma not being accepted. While she was looking for an employed position in the care sector, she got acquainted with an organisation providing help to refugees. At the time, the idea of setting up an incubator for refugees was at its genesis. It gave Mrs. A the idea to become an entrepreneur in the catering field. However, Mrs. A having a disease and wearing a home-made bandage, it triggered the incubator representatives' interest. They eventually were the ones revealing the originality of Mrs. A's homemade solution, and the meaningfulness of sharing it with others in the same situation:

I was willing to share my idea with others, because I saw a difference for myself. As soon as I started to wear it [the bandage], I went through less surgical procedures. That's why I told myself: this solution works out; I have to share it with others.

Therefore, the project is at the crossroads between Mrs. A's private and professional lives: on the one hand, it is enshrined in her daily life as a seek person, on the other, it is related to her professional experience in the medical sector, as she explains:

And then there's the fact that my project is part of a domain which I already know about. So, when people talk about medical things, I understand, at least the basics of it, unless we go into specificities, otherwise I understand.

Entrepreneurship also appeared as a compromise for her to work while being seek and needing to spend a considerable amount of time at the hospital. The interrelatedness of her personal and professional paths appears throughout Mrs. A's interview: she always considered these two aspects of her experience while answering the questions.

¹²⁷ Louay's project: "From Zero", "From Scratch"

In some cases, entrepreneurship was not considered in the first place, the individual wanting to follow on working in the profession he/she occupied in their country of origin. However, their initial plans were thwarted. Themselves taking a different stance on the situation, or with the help of an external eye, they are able to reconsider the tools and competences at their disposal and organise in a different way. This way, they can still have a link with their background through their professional path, and realise themselves in the field related to their vocation.

2.5 SELF-EMPLOYMENT AS A SUBSTITUTION PATH

The last category of entrepreneurs we could determine was those who clearly state that entrepreneurship consisted in a “substitution path”¹²⁸. They share a commonality with the “necessity immigrant entrepreneur” profile presented by Chrysostome: entrepreneurship is the “ultimate way”¹²⁹, an emergency solution. However, what sets them apart from this ideal-type profile is their level of qualification: they are highly educated and experienced in very specific fields. Indeed, Mr. F holds a PhD in psychology. He trained himself in order to work as a researcher in French universities:

[...] originally, I really followed a path in order to work rather in universities as a researcher or a teacher-researcher.

The conjunctural situation made it so that the number of researchers positions available decreased. What is more, Mr. F explains that his profile did not match the focus of university research laboratories: his interest for intercultural themes was at odds with the French trends in research, which tend to be very specialised and lack interdisciplinarity. A third factor preventing him from finding a position in universities is that he holds a very specific resident card, the “Talent Pass”, which opens up very specific positions. Mr. F sums it up by saying that he was confronted to a restricted array of choices:

[...] you either have to... find your own... create your own job by yourself, but... or change of status... or other... there are other... possibilities, for instance to... to have the citizenship for instance, and to have the possibility to apply as... as anyone else who applies for a job, without... this status of researcher and... foreigner... complicating the procedure, see.

The choices presented by Mr. F imply long procedures either way. There seems to be no prospect for an employed position in his situation, considering the residence permit he holds, which automatically closes off doors to him. The other solution was the one he ended up selecting,

¹²⁸ [In vivo code, Mr. F]

¹²⁹ Chrysostome (2010), p.138.

that is becoming a psychology practitioner, working as an independent. The participant later clarifies his position in relation to this choice:

And so, the path, the... substitution path was really to launch myself in my small, yes, my small... [psychologist] office, and... to embark in the adventure as a... an entrepreneur. So, that's why, that's how I... I made the decision to... but it really wasn't an easy decision to make, because that's not what I wanted to do in the first place. That's it.

The vocabulary used points to the lack of choice, to a decision imposed to him rather than chosen. Mr. F says he had to create a job for himself, as a consequence of the job scarcity in his field, and the feeling he had that there was no position available for him in particular. He also mentions the fact that it was a “substitution path”, that is a last recourse, a plan B because his original objective could not be fulfilled. Finally, the interviewee reveals the debate that took place inside of him: he did not choose entrepreneurship out of free will, and had to engage in an internal fight with his own aspirations before making the decision. The final sentence suggests that he had to grieve over his dream of working as a researcher. Despite that, there is still a continuity within his professional path, since Mr. F set up a psychologist office. This way, he could still use the knowledge and experience acquired, while having to adapt from a position in academia to one as a practitioner with direct contact with patients.

Mrs. B also had to choose entrepreneurship as a last recourse, though in a more radical way: indeed, her entrepreneurial activity has no link with her previous work experiences. She chose to set up an at home catering activity, and proposes Syrian food. She explains her choice as follows:

That's why, in the end I was telling myself: I need to do something. I took care of children, and then I came with the idea of opening a restaurant with my husband.

Just as Mr. F, she refers to her launching her own activity as a last solution. She rationalises it explaining that having a professional activity imposed to her as a necessity. Her decision was comforted by the environment in Lyon, the town where she lives:

I saw that the most common market here was food. Because everyone needs to eat. And this is a gastronomic city here, which enjoys eating, tasting different flavours, different food. I took a walk here in Lyon: Armenian food, Georgian food, you name it. Six years ago, there were not many Syrian restaurants. Of course, there have been Lebanese restaurants for a while, but Syrian ones, there were only two, three, maybe four. That's why we came up with this idea.

As was the case for Abbas K., Mrs. B was able to determine at a glance what was missing in the French city where she lives, and to seize an opportunity to develop a new offer on the market of her host country. Her migration background played a huge role in her business endeavour,

as did her Syrian origin: though she was unable to follow on in her field of expertise, she did manage to maintain continuity in some way, by using her Syrian background and culture in her professional life.

As was demonstrated in this chapter, the creation of an independent activity does not solely reside in a well-informed, mature decision. Nor is the degree of intentionality based on the level of qualification and length of experience of the prospective immigrant entrepreneurs. The opportunity versus necessity model is too schematic and binary and hides the plurality of the reasons behind immigrants' entrepreneurial endeavours. The experience of an obstructed job market can hence coexist with the discovery of entrepreneurship as one's vocation. While the temporality, the declared reason, as well as the way entrepreneurship was discovered can vary, and are therefore non-significant factors, some recurring factors are the non-linearity of the professional trajectories, as well as a varying degree of resonance of the independent activity with their biography, be it personal or professional.

3 A PROFESSIONAL PATH WHICH HIGHLIGHTS AND INCREASES THE OBSTACLES INHERENT TO THE CONDITION OF AN IMMIGRANT

3.1 A LOSS OF BEARINGS AND GRASP ON ONE'S OWN PATH

3.1.1 How to insert professionally without prior socialisation?

Migration to another country implies the loss of one's familiar landmarks. Indeed, the societal markers, norms and codes progressively acquired and incorporated back home do not hold in the host country. Through displacement, immigrants experience the relativity of their host country's social norms. Therefore, they must go through a process of socialisation to get acquainted with this new society. Mrs. B's explanation of what the loss of landmarks implies in practice is particularly striking:

For us, it was complicated because we are foreigners. Coming to a society which we knew nothing about, we didn't know how things are done. To begin with, it was really, really difficult to integrate, to change a whole way of life, a whole mindset even, because in Syria there were many things which we know here but we didn't know about back then. It's about changing a mindset. Becoming French is really about changing a mindset. It's about changing the behaviour between people: how to behave, how to get dress, even to get dressed, everything is modified.

Starting from scratch thus implies confronting to the unknow, having feelings of foreignness and strangeness. In French, the words "foreigner" ("étranger") and "strange" ("étrange") share a same etymology. Both originate from the latin *extraneus*: "from the outside"; "who is not family, from the same country".¹³⁰ The foreigners are those who are not included in the host society. From this feeling of non-belonging derives that of strangeness, because as foreigners, they do not share the same values, habits and customs as natives. This excerpt underlines the implications of socialising and integrating in a new society both at the external and internal levels. Mrs. B says that part of the changes is behavioural: changes in the way the person presents to others and interacts with them. Before these changes are noticeable from the outside, they stem from the modifications taking place at the mental level, which imply a change of "mindset", that is how the person thinks of his/her environment and how he/she subsequently chooses to relate to it.

Refugees are confronted to a very specific issue: as asylum seekers, they cannot integrate in the wider society or get acquainted with the French system, their lives being put on hold during an

¹³⁰ Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales (CNRTL), « Etrange », 2012, <https://www.cnrtl.fr/etymologie/%C3%A9trange>

average of a year and two months¹³¹. Many are placed in reception centres dedicated to asylum seekers, which renders contacts with the host society more difficult, as Mrs. A counted:

[...] so, when I left the [refugee] centre – in the centre we are many people, when we apply for asylum – we all know each other, so there is kind of a small community. But as soon as you get your legal documents, your status, you are asked to leave the centre. So, going away to live outside of the centre. So, you find yourself in the society, not knowing anyone. You don't have anyone to go to and visit.

Oftentimes, refugees are confined to a specific centre where they only interact with people who have been through the same hurdles, and with whom they create a group at the margin of the host society, a “small community”. When they get their refugee status, it is as though they were pushed into the wider society, which is still foreign to them, without having been prepared adequately.

The confrontation to the unknown and the feeling of otherness deriving from it leave the immigrants blocked, unable to act because they do not have the reference to do so, as Mrs. B revealed:

In fact, the problem when you're a foreigner is that you're not courageous enough. For instance, you are French, it means that you can get involved in something because you know everything, you know about the rules, the norms, the codes. I knew nothing.

The lack of understanding of their host country can prove detrimental to immigrants' agency: deprived from their capacity to comprehend the rules of the game, they feel like they cannot act because they miss some information, as Alend H., a 20-year-old Syrian entrepreneur, said:

We have many experiences in different domains and we have the energy and the desire to do something real. [...] But we always have difficulties in finding information, especially here in France.

It can block them in finding a professional position, because they are impeded by the scarcity of information available to them. In the domain of entrepreneurship, this lack of access to information is even greater: creating an activity indeed requires extensive knowledge of the functioning of the market in the host country. According to Kushnirovich,

The years of exposure to the host country is a crucial element of immigrants' socio-cultural integration. This is relevant for immigrant entrepreneurs even more than for salaried workers, since setting up and operating a business requires intensive contacts and communication with the native population and native-born representatives of institutions (authorities, banks, etc.).”¹³²

¹³¹ The average period for an asylum application to be lodged in 2017. See: Taché, A. (2018), *72 propositions pour une politique ambitieuse d'intégration des étrangers arrivant en France, Rapport au Premier ministre*, p.25.

¹³² Kushnirovich, N. (2015), p.12.

Entrepreneurship thus requires both an in-depth understanding of the host country's system, but also an extensive know-how when it comes to interacting with the different actors of the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

3.1.2 The confrontation to an unfamiliar system

A problematic that arises regarding adults who migrate to another country is that the start of their socialisation and their entrance in the professional world are simultaneous. The socialising process cannot be progressive in their case: an adult immigrant is preoccupied both about integrating and finding the means of his/her subsistence. However, the simultaneous integration in society and on the market doubles the difficulty to understand these environments, governed by different rules.

Most of the interviewees were not entrepreneurs prior to their moving to France. Consequently, they are not acquainted with the entrepreneurial world. This novelty to entrepreneurship adds up to the unfamiliarity with the French system at large. This obstacle was among the first to be expressed by Louay Y.:

So... secondly, I didn't... I wasn't... I didn't know well, or even anything about entrepreneurship here in France. Things in relation to the laws, on how to develop things here in France. But as the time went by, I worked well in order to develop my competences, also, the language, and it helped me to better understand this... field.

Louay shares how remote he was from the field of entrepreneurship: he did not know about the formal aspects, the legal framework, nor about the practical aspects of creating a business. He had to adapt, a process taking place in the long-term. Time is thus an essential resource for immigrant entrepreneurs to acquire the knowledge needed to understand the business environment in France, but it is scarce.

Beyond the general entrepreneurship system, immigrant entrepreneurs are confronted to difficulties in adapting to the position as entrepreneurs: Mr. F talked about how he experienced his transition to self-employment:

The difficulties are that, today, you find out that you actually have to specialise yourself in a set of technical competences, entrepreneurial competences, which entails for instance keeping a... an account, a, a, a balance sheet. And in fact, these are not things which I learnt to do as a psychologist. [...] So, you find yourself facing... a set of competences which... which maybe... gravitated around you, but which did not constitute the core of your profession. But as an entrepreneur, you need to be able to juggle with all these matters at once, you see, and this is the difficulty, actually.

The novelty and versatility induced by this position are other obstacles which impose to the prospective entrepreneur. As Mr. F says, it requires a variety of know-how which exceeds the

competences directly related to the activity embraced by the individual. These side issues are yet vital to ensure the activity is viable. Mrs. A underlined the same idea, saying that an entrepreneur needs to be an “octopus”, to master a variety of competences.

Working as an entrepreneur in France also implies to unlearn and re-learn skills which were taken for granted. During the interview, Mrs. B explains that she had to adapt her Syrian dishes to the specificities of the French taste, and therefore re-learn how to cook the dishes which recipes were transferred through generations:

It's not about: I know how to do this, because there are actual techniques, which you might not know about, because we have learnt, like that, from our mothers, from our grandmothers. [...] I remember how I did for [organisation], for 100 people, I counted for 100: 100 tabouleh, 100 hummus, 100... But in the end, there was so much food left. [...] I start to understand that French people eat a little [insisting on “little”] bit of salad, a little bit of rice, a little, a little cheese. That's an idea which I didn't know at all about before. I thought: when you serve many dishes, a huge quantity, it means you're generous. But no, that's a false idea, it means that you're wasting a lot. There are many things to learn, because it's really new, everything is new to us.

From the bigger framework, the laws governing the creation and the running of a business or associative activity, to the specificities of the French market and the even more specific tastes of the target group, the individual needs to acquire an extensive knowledge of the ecosystem. Nothing is insured, and the entrepreneur will somehow need to catch up with the knowledge of the average person raised in France. The fact that even those who were entrepreneurs before doubt themselves proves that an immigrant entrepreneur starts with a disadvantage in terms of knowledge and information. Andra W. shared that she perceived herself as not advanced enough in her project when she arrived in France:

But because, for me it's a new country, a new language, even though I already talked a bit of French, I wasn't... I wasn't sure of myself, and I wanted to start... with, step by step.

This example illustrates that having a background as an entrepreneur is not sufficient to pretend to start at the same level where one found him/herself before coming to France. One hence needs to adapt not only to the societal and cultural traits of France, but also to its market specifics. The fields in which an immigrant entrepreneur needs to gain knowledge add up and render the process of learning about these different facets even more complex.

3.1.3 The language barrier in question

The language factor adds up to the general lack of information and necessary knowledge to acquire. It further hinders the comprehension of the French society, system, and entrepreneurial ecosystem. Not sharing the same communication code can prove detrimental for the process of understanding and integrating in the host country. Rath & Swagerman thus argue that “A significant obstacle for any new entrepreneur is their lack of familiarity with regulations and procedures upon start-up of their business. Ethnic entrepreneurs are, however, particularly disadvantaged in this regards due to lower education levels and language barriers.”¹³³ While the education level is not a valid characteristic of immigrant entrepreneurs, the language barrier definitely is. Some of the interviewees thus shared it was one of the major obstacles in their path towards entrepreneurship, because it causes difficulties of understanding and blockages in expressing oneself, as Mrs. D said:

The barriers... the most important barrier for me is the language. [...] when I'm tired, it's hard to make more efforts in order to find a solution, and that's really hard. For example, before having an interview, I... I don't really feel confident... and you see, when you talk about your project, you need to be confident... and this I... I am lacking it. Yes, in order to promote, to have visibility, all of this, it's hard for me.

The language barrier translates into very concrete ways: it creates a boundary with the individual's interlocutor, because the immigrant entrepreneurs feels like he/she cannot convey the right meaning and properly translate his/her ideas. It requires an additional effort to understand a system which is complex per se. Besides, it negatively impacts the individual's self-confidence, which is perceived as detrimental for the success in the business environment.

The language can altogether block the person in proceeding in his/her life, as Alend H. suggests:

[...] and we're always afraid of starting to work and communicate with others because of linguistic factors. As a result, you can notice that we put our lives on hold until we learn French, without realising that we cannot acquire the language if we don't start to do something.

Because of the insecurity it creates, the language barrier delays the integration in the country of settlement, and prevents interactions, above all in the professional domain. It also limits the opportunities available, because information might not be available in other languages than French: Andra thus shared that she was limited in her research for formal support because she was doing her research in English.

¹³³ Rath, J. Eurofound (2011), p.45.

Additionally, the language barrier persists in time, despite the length of the stay in the host country. It can hamper the development of the immigrant entrepreneurs' activity and make him/her feel like he/she is limited. This is what Diana shared, despite the fact that she studied in France from 2004 to 2010:

“The second barrier in France... after all, I think it is... I think it was the linguistic aspect. You know, I speak French, but I'm not francophone, and as I do a lot of communication of the social media... well I make spelling errors and all of that, and it's, it's tiring for me, I don't want... I have followed French courses and all of that, but... grammar and everything, so it's a bit tiring, for me it's a barrier, at some point, when you want to go further in, in your communication.”

Mr. C raised the same issue:

“And... even if you don't want it, if you don't believe it, sorry, language, it keeps being a barrier, even after several years of learning, and even if you think you master the language orally, I think there are... there are specific writing codes, especially for external communication, and... the creation of editorial content attached to any communication campaign, any product. And... writing, written communication is very important, and for us, people who were raised elsewhere, it's something really frustrating and which still remains a barrier, in the sense of... it's not about writing correctly, or to write with a perfect spelling. It's also about writing maybe with... some popular culture content, the text needs to be cool, to be well written but in a light way, not too seriously as in a book... and... you immediately know whether it's written by a foreigner or by a French. This is another thing that... that blocks entrepreneurs a lot, me included.”

The two participants both raised the linguistic issue related to the communication needed to promote one's activity. While Diana believes she is limited in her communication because of the fear of making spelling errors which might hinder the professional image of her company, Mr. C shares that he can never be fluent and at ease with French as natives are.

Language hence represents a significant obstacle for immigrant entrepreneurs on the long run which adds up to a general difficulty in accessing and understanding information. Besides that, they are confronted to material barriers.

3.2 OVERCOMING THE MATERIAL LOSS TIED TO DISPLACEMENT

Another pervasive barrier to start as an entrepreneur consists in the lack of financial resources. Wauters & Lambrecht discussed the disadvantages which refugees face compared to other immigrants, one of them being the loss of belongings: “A third barrier under the heading of access to entrepreneurship is the lack of financial capital [...] Refugees have often left all their assets behind.”¹³⁴ Besides, the length of the waiting period to get their status is detrimental to acquire

¹³⁴ Wauters, B & Lambrecht, J. (2008), p.905.

economic resources: they are forbidden to work and only get an allowance amounting to 6,80€ a day.¹³⁵ When it comes to other immigrants, as they meet difficulties to find a job, it is difficult for them to build up an economic capital. Mr. C said on this matter:

The capital... the economic capital, it's also difficult to... start a business when you don't have money. You need to start from scratch, and reinvest, reinvest, reinvest ceaselessly, at least the first two, three years... the revenues or benefits you make.

The lack of economic resources is hence one additional barrier to start-up a business, but also a lasting issue, making so that the immigrant entrepreneur is in a precarious situation. Mr. C followed on in this direction:

And... this is complicated because... you can't pay yourself first, and meanwhile you don't have time to work elsewhere to earn a living. [...] And... so... many entrepreneurs find themselves in a very precarious situation, and... in the sense that they either had the chance to work before and to get the unemployment benefit, but it's often not, not enough to, to live. Or they get the Income of Active Solidarity, or they don't get anything so... after six months, a year, they cannot follow on [...].

Mr. C's words resonate with Mrs. D's path:

Actually, I found out that there are two types of entrepreneurs: one who... who has just started [...] and who wants to test his ideas, and he has securities in terms of financing. He does a gap year. So, he's working on his project while getting paid [...] The other type, it's like me: who doesn't really have financial security. And for me, what's important is... I want to launch my project, but it's been... a year I've been doing it, and I can't, I can't proceed any longer in the end of [program name] if it doesn't move forward.

A lack of economic resources can jeopardise the project viability, but it also put pressure on the individual, who is not able to support him/herself and constantly lives with the threat of not being able to survive or to have to give up on the project. Therefore, precarity implies both material and psychological threats, the individual being constantly aware and reminded of his/her unstable situation.

According to the literature on ethnic entrepreneurship, one huge barrier for immigrant entrepreneurs is the lack of access to bank loans, caused especially by a lack of credit history, which

¹³⁵ The Allowance for Asylum Seekers (ADA: Allocation pour Demandeurs d'Asile), created in July 2015. See Demarches Administratives, "Allocation pour Demandeurs d'Asile (ADA) : conditions, demande et montant, May 22, 2020, <https://demarchesadministratives.fr/demarches/allocation-pour-demandeur-dasile-ada-conditions-demande-et-montant>

would explain the recourse to family and the co-ethnic community to gather it.¹³⁶ For instance, Abbas K. struggled for months just to open a bank account:

Well, the banks, all the banks refused to... open an account. Some banks said... I am not employed, I don't have a CDI, a CDD¹³⁷, or a contract. And some banks would say I don't have a residence permit, with the provisional receipt they wouldn't accept. And... and each bank would find an excuse to impede the opening of an account.

Abbas had issues opening a bank account because his entrepreneur status is not deemed stable enough. He was thus confronted to mistrust. His refugee status further blocked the process and added up to the vision of precarity attached to the independent status. As suggests the expression "find an excuse", Abbas reckons that the refusals were ill-founded, they were made up to intentionally prevent him to have access to the advantages related to financial placements and loans. Microcredit is often cited as a mean to circumvent the challenge of accessing financial support. However, Louay Y. posits that it is a limitation to the development of bigger-scale projects by more vulnerable groups:

So, when I... for instance the Adie, let's take the *Adie*. Ok, so they fund, or they give a maximum amount of 10,000€. 10,000€ for instance, it is designed for micro-businesses [...] But there are some projects such as *De Zéro* for instance, which are better projects... also targeting the global economy, not only the French one.

While five participants managed to get grants from programmes, others, like Mr. G, lamented it is not always attached to formal support to launch a business:

On the other hand, at [*organisation*], there was no money. [...] So, I think, I don't know if there were any results at the end of the project, how many people participate, how many have made a project in the end... actually managed to launch a project in the end. Take me, I created a project, almost. It wasn't 100% launched, because of that, but I don't see the others who did the same as me.

While a lack of economic capital does not prevent the ideation phase of the projects, it can hinder its realisation and impede the prospective entrepreneur to effectively move from a project to an activity.

¹³⁶ Rath, J. Eurofound (2011), *Promoting ethnic entrepreneurship in European cities*, pp.50-51; Wauters, B. & Lambrecht, J. (2008), *Barriers to Refugee Entrepreneurship in Belgium: Towards an Explanatory Model* pp.905-906 ; de Lange, T. et al. (2020), *Highly Skilled Entrepreneurial Refugees: Legal and Practical Barriers and Enablers to Start Up in the Netherlands*, p.5 ; Cruickshank, P. & Dupuis, A. (2015), *The Adaptation of Intentional Immigrant Entrepreneurs: A Case Study*, p.82.

¹³⁷ CDI and CDD are acronyms for French work contracts. CDI: permanent contract; CDD: limited-term contract.

3.3 THE NETWORK: A CORE ISSUE

Another critical resource which immigrants lack upon arrival in their host country is a social network. It is another non-transferable resource from a country to another. Although the individual can maintain a network in the origin country, the distance makes it so that it will not be useful to set up in the destination country. For entrepreneurs, the network is even more important: it grants access to other kinds of resources, such as information, opportunities or financing¹³⁸. It is also crucial to gain visibility. In his “mixed embeddedness” model, Kloosterman thus posit that the immigrant entrepreneurs’ “social embeddedness” is significant.¹³⁹ Wauters & Lambrecht also reckoned that: “Being embedded in a social network is a helpful, if not a necessary, asset for an entrepreneur. Strong ties are even more important for ethnic entrepreneurs who start with few resources and lack access to credit.”¹⁴⁰ However, most of the research has been focused on the embeddedness in the ethnic community, not taking into account the wider social fabric. For Mrs. E and Mrs. A, the social network was a difficulty in the creation of their projects:

“Yes, access to network, me for instance as I am not French, it’s not easy for me, maybe for you it’s easier to find... the network through your... parents... for example, family, relatives, acquaintances, for me it’s not easy.” (Mrs. E)

“What was difficult in the beginning was... having access to people. In other words, if I don’t know anyone, how can I develop my idea? It will just stay in my mind.” (Mrs. A)

While Mrs. A presents the network as a prerequisite for the realisation of a project by acting as a facilitator, Mrs. E clearly sets a difference between immigrants and natives, by saying the formers are privileged when it comes to building a network. Her words convey the idea that social capital, that is, according to Bourdieu, the “aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group.”¹⁴¹, is acquired in part through pre-dating relationships. However, newcomers often have limited contacts in their country of settlement, which makes it harder to build new ones. According to the ethnic entrepreneurship literature, an immigrant entrepreneur finds resources through his/her ethnic network. Immigrants pertaining to large ethnic communities would therefore be

¹³⁸ Cruickshank, P. & Dupuis, A. (2015), p.82.

¹³⁹ Kloosterman, R. (2006).

¹⁴⁰ Wauters & Lambrecht (2008), p.908.

¹⁴¹ Bourdieu, P. (1986), “The forms of capital”, p.21. [Translation: Nice, R.]

favoured, because of the potentially extensive ethnic network they can mobilise, thanks to “internal solidarity”¹⁴². This view does not fit in the vision of integration endorsed in this research, nor does it illustrate the trajectories of our interviewees, who could benefit from co-nationals’, other immigrants’, as well as natives’ help in launching their activity.

Among the problems encountered, the lack of network can be detrimental to find clients, as Mrs. D shared:

What is difficult is to find French clients. Because of Covid 19, my clients are leaving Paris to go home... because they can work from home. But if I have French clients, they’re here, they don’t move more... not as much as expats. My clients now are expats, so they are foreigners.

Owing to her lack of connections among French people, and because her first target group consisted of foreigners, the interviewee is struggling to reach out to French consumers and expand her client base. Mrs. A said that she struggled to find patients and partners among companies, because she had no access to the medical sector, a field reputed for its closure:

Secondly, it was difficult having access to the patients. Indeed, the medical field is really, really restricted. You would send emails, thousands of emails without getting an answer. [...] And another point... was about finding companies willing to work with me. [My project] is in the same line as companies working on medical articles. These companies already have products, their products. So, they’re not willing to develop new products for another person. That was difficult as well.

Not having relationships nor being known in the field where she chose to develop her project, Mrs. A had little chances to have access to the stakeholders who could help her. She was confronted to a lack of responsiveness.

The social network is hence an essential resource in the professional world in general, even more so in the entrepreneurial one. Yet, immigrant entrepreneurs suffer from a lack of visibility because they do not have the contacts who could spread the word about their projects. According to Mr. C, the importance of the network is heightened in France, which makes it a national specificity:

“What I realised is that, in France, many things go through the network. And... be it in the job research, in the research for... customer acquisition.”

“I really have difficulties understanding the logic behind customer acquisition... here. It’s something I’m discovering and... it’s not my first reaction. Maybe in other cultures... of entrepreneurship, more emphasis is put on the product quality, the prices... the product competitiveness. Here, I feel like it’s, it might be in the second-place position.

¹⁴² Aldrich & Waldinger (1990), pp.123, 130.

The first one is more about how familiar you are with this company or its clients: do you know someone, do you... That's my impression... Anyhow, 80% of my clients, it was about that. I hope it won't stay this way, but, but I guess that it's always the case when you start. Because it's a new project, people are always wary: will they make it, will the quality be there, are they... serious people."

Besides being an obstacle per se, the network can become a deeper issue if the immigrant entrepreneur does not include it as a strategy to develop the activity. Indeed, he/she might not perceive it as a determinant aspect of his/her success. Yet, as Mr. C argues, it is one of the elements prompting customers to buy to a company, as they are somehow related to its founder, or because it was validated by an acquaintance.

Immigrant entrepreneurs thus face a number of barriers enrooted in the lack of access to resources, material (financing) or immaterial (information, knowledge, network). These barriers add up and mutually reinforce one another. While the social network is an essential issue encountered by immigrant entrepreneurs who essentially lack this resource and do not necessarily seek to develop it since they might think the quality is sufficient to appeal to customers, it also consists in the main solution to a number of barriers met by immigrant entrepreneurs.

4 THE SUPPORT FACTOR: A WAY OUT OF THE PROBLEM?

According to Servranck, on average, immigrant entrepreneurs have access to less assets than natives do. In particular, they are less likely to have acquaintances embedded in the entrepreneurial field who could help them.¹⁴³ A crucial aspect for them is hence to build a network they can rely on during the different stages of creating and running their activity. This chapter will present the different kinds of stakeholders which immigrant entrepreneurs can count on, and in what ways these actors help them. We posit here that the network is key to solving the difficulties to access other types of resources essential to entrepreneurship, such as information, expertise, opportunities, or funding.

4.1 THE “CHANCE FACTOR”: HELPING ONESELF TO SUCCEED

Before diving into the opportunities leveraged by immigrant entrepreneurs’ network, it is necessary to focus on how it is acquired in the first place. While immigrants’ qualifications and experiences have been negated during their job research, they come back at the front stage during the process of creation of their activity. Indeed, many have access to information and contacts primarily because they know how to look for it. In other words, they are well equipped and can effectively rely on themselves to look for opportunities and thus ease the founding of their project. Bourdieu wrote about network constitution:

The existence of connections is not a natural given, or even a social given, instituted once and for all by an initial act of institution [...] the network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in short or long term [...]¹⁴⁴

It is therefore a process, a demanding task which requires both time investment as well as reflection in order to develop a strategy to be able to transform connections into relationships. Many of the participants have been through a preparation period to identify opportunities before they actually started their project. An expression which appeared on several occasions during the interview with Abbas K. is the fact that he found support opportunities “by chance”¹⁴⁵:

For me it was by chance. So... through... I think it was through internet researches that I found it. And... once I went to one of their events... I think it was... just to talk, to discuss with people, to improve the language. But it was there that I asked... all the

¹⁴³ Servranck, P. (2007) « Les créateurs d’entreprises issus de l’immigration », p.2.

¹⁴⁴ Bourdieu, P. (1986), p.22.

¹⁴⁵ [In vivo code, Abbas K.]

services they offered and they told me about their incubation project. Immediately, I told myself; this project interests me, so I participated.

In this excerpt, Abbas suggests that opportunities appeared to him, while he actually created some for himself, by taking initiatives in order to meet organisations helping refugees. This first contact, triggered by Abbas, ended up in a possibility of formal support by an incubator.

The interviewees' strategy therefore firstly relies on looking for appropriate contacts, through effective researches, in order to position themselves on the right track. Hence, networking was central to Vandolph C.'s entrepreneurial path creation in France:

That's the benefit of networking. That when someone... when someone introduces to you, this person can introduce to you with another person, then this another person introduces to you with another person, and they will try to introduce you with a particular event like that so you can participate. Yes. I'll tell you that's the main... skill I think for expat entrepreneurs that need to develop, especially... and that gave me these doors of opportunities and people, I got to meet a lot, actually. [...] my strategy is I try to meet at least one or two people or three people in a week, to have a conversation with them, to chat with them, to message them in LinkedIn. I participate as much as I can to different events that involves within the ecosystem, because I need to understand how it works, the culture how it's done, how they communication with it.

Here, Vandolph explained the dynamics of networking, saying that any contact can potentially give access to another, or open the doors to an event. Because he deems networking crucial for immigrant entrepreneurs in particular, Vandolph has developed a networking strategy in order to meet people on a regular basis, and to be granted access to events in order to enroot himself in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, to discover and decrypt it from within. This strategy relies on his own capabilities to go to and connect with people, and to gain knowledge of the functioning of the networks he joins. The internet and social media played an essential role in the strategy of both Abbas and Vandolph. It was also used by Diana, who shared that she did not look for formal support, but chose to rely on herself throughout her entrepreneurial path:

I told myself: I will look by contacts, I will go to events, by myself, you see, I told myself: if I want to make it, it's by myself, it's not... thanks to who, to someone.

Diana thus used her own resources to build her network and discover opportunities. She drew confidence from her previous experience as a student in France, during which she built her social network. Diana relied on social media to be sure she does not miss on any event of importance:

[...] I created my Meet Up account, I don't know if you know Meet Up. It's... it's... it's a platform where you can identify events, remotely or in person which are in... your fields of interest. I created a group, and from there, I started to create my own events to make myself known. But in the end, it was me.

Diana built a network of like-minded individuals based on their interest for similar topics. She met them during events dedicated to these themes. Plus, she took her strategy a step further by creating her own events and thus gaining visibility in the ecosystem she wanted to be part of. Her strategy was thus based on two motives: joining discussions staged by others to meet people with the same interests and demonstrate her interest; and participating in increasing the offer of events by launching her own, while at the same time becoming a recognised and active actor in the field.

These different instances prove that in the field of social network building, immigrant entrepreneurs can make use of their know-how, that is their cultural capital, to effectively insert in the ecosystem they target. They are already equipped with the competences needed to look for relevant information and use it to get in contact with people. They also know how to present themselves to people in order to join different networks, without having one at their disposal when they arrive. Plus, they are capable to reflect on strategies to identify the relevant actors and happenings that could help them in their entrepreneurial endeavour. As Diana's example proves, positioning oneself as an expert in the field, taking advantage of the available information but also providing others with content can prove determinant in building long-lasting connections which will give access to subsequent opportunities.

The entrepreneurial paths of immigrant entrepreneurs are by no way products of coincidences. Rather, it is the recombination of pre-existing resources which are used in order to create more opportunities: immigrant entrepreneurs not only use their previous experience and hard skills, as evidenced in chapter two, they also make use of their behavioural know-how, of their social intelligence to insert in networks which were previously closed, or unknown to them.

4.2 HELP FROM INDIVIDUALS AND PEERS: A TRADITIONAL SUPPORT

Sequeira and Rasheed define a network as the product “of both formal/professional (e.g., business contacts, banks, lawyers, local government, organizations and associations) and informal/personal (family, personal friends, acquaintances) connections.”¹⁴⁶ Informal and person-to-person relationships will be the topic of this section. Relatives, acquaintances, individuals on their own, but also communities, are traditional sources of support for entrepreneurs. For instance, in their critical review of the existing literature, Hoang and Antoncic argued that “the importance of prior network relationships in the venture formation process has received wide

¹⁴⁶ Sequeira, J. & Rasheed, A. (2006), p.361.

confirmation [...] [and] preexisting contacts, particularly to friends and family, serve as resource providers during the new venture process.”¹⁴⁷ Sequeira and Rasheed confirmed that “strong ties”, such as the ones between relatives, friends or members of a community, are especially important in the start-up stage.¹⁴⁸

Individual contacts can hold two different positions as resource providers. They can either provide direct support if they themselves have access to the resources which the entrepreneur needs. Besides, they can act as intermediaries between the entrepreneur and individuals or opportunities.

4.2.1 Direct support from individuals

Firstly, individuals can provide the future entrepreneur with emotional support. Upon arrival, they can help create the adequate conditions for the person to start his/her life in the host country. For Mrs. B, the presence of her family in France prior to her arrival was decisive to choose where she would settle:

We came in mid-December 2014, settled in the North of France to finalise our administrative procedures because in the prefecture there, there is not a lot of people, and plus my brother-in-law is a doctor in the North of France. [...] During the year 2015, we spent our time in the North of France, in this small village, which was really comfortable for us after the stress of the war and everything. It was an ideal time for us to distract a little, for the kids after the stress we had been through, the fear etc. Then, we decided to come to Lyon, because my brother and my parents are there since 2011-2012.

This extract implicitly suggests that Mrs. B benefited from her family’s experience, and willingly chose to settle in the North of France in order to shorten the length of the asylum administrative procedures. Plus, the environment in which she found herself was beneficial to recover from the traumas of the war and the flee. Her relatives acted as an anchor in that they directed her family’s geographic settling in France. Benefitting from stability is a prerequisite to insert professionally and to establish an activity.

During the start-up process, individuals can also act as direct service providers. They can offer the individual needed skills and services. Entrepreneurship, despite its seemingly lonely character, is an individual idea made possible through collective action. Owing to the plurality of competences which it requires, the conjunction of several individuals’ efforts is very likely.

¹⁴⁷ Hoang, H. & Antoncic, B. (2003), “Network-based research in entrepreneurship: A critical review”, *Journal of Business Venturing* 18, p.176.

¹⁴⁸ Sequeira, J. & Rasheed, A. (2006)

Diana J. thus mitigated her shortcomings in accounting and administrative requirements by calling on to her relatives, namely her husband and his uncle:

So, no, I did not look for help either, because I have my accountant, who is my husband's uncle, so [laughs] it helps a lot. And my husband deals with taxes and administration really, really well, so I was a bit lazy as well [...] But it's for the taxes, pay slips... all of that, insurances, what else... in short, all of that, it's another world. But I think if I hadn't had my husband, I would have looked for help [...]

Family and relatives can provide individual, first-hand support by offering skills which the entrepreneur does not him/herself possess. It avoids having to invest time and energy looking for other ways to get this indispensable know-how. Those who have access to these kinds of skills in their close network therefore have a comparative advantage. Conversely, an immigrant entrepreneur who just started needs to invest time in learning this entrepreneurial skillset and cannot rely on experts to provide these skills because of financial constraints. The case of Mr. F illustrates the difficulty to acquire the different competences needed:

But, so, doing it, even willing to do it well, you are less at ease... you are less confident when you go in that domain, rather than on the core of your profession. [...] For me, really, it's actually something doing violence to me, cognitively, because they say: you need to be an accountant, as well as a good communicant [...] But, the consequence is... to understand that all of these are actual jobs, and if you want to do it right, you need to... surround yourself with all the people competent to do each of these... to deploy each of these competences, by accompanying your activity. And this is not someone... it's not the capabilities of an entrepreneur who begins overnight because... there, his status and, the status doesn't enable him to do something else than... entrepreneur.

Mr. F's testimony evidences the fact that one cannot excel in all the competences indispensable to an entrepreneur. The interviewee is hence split between the certainty that he cannot perform as well in entrepreneurial skills than in the "core of [his] profession", and the fact that he cannot hire experts in these domains. For him, it is impossible to work alone as an entrepreneur and do everything right. He thus faces discomfort and frustration, because he is not in full command of his activity.

The informal network can also prove useful in order to test one's activity, as Mrs. D's case illustrates. Indeed, her partner's colleagues served as a group test:

So, I do, I do a test with ten, twenty people who are the colleagues of my ex-partner. And, there, they find that the idea is great, that the quality is great, and so I pursued.

Relatives and acquaintances can hence provide the prospective entrepreneur with time and availability to be the first to try and judge the goods or services imagined. As potential clients, they can provide insightful feedback and help gain more understanding of the target group's

expectations. By doing so, they also provide the immigrant entrepreneur with emotional support and a first external yet benevolent opinion.

4.2.2 Individuals as intermediaries:

The second position which individuals can occupy vis-à-vis the entrepreneur is that of intermediary or mediator. Because they detain certain information or have certain connections, they can open their network and make the link between those resources and the entrepreneur. For instance, several of our participants got access to formal entrepreneurial support thanks to individuals in their network. This is the reason why already settled co-nationals or other immigrants can be of great help, because they diffuse information through the word of mouth. Aldrich & Waldinger highlighted the importance of “settlement characteristics” for immigrant entrepreneurs, which include the size of the ethnic community¹⁴⁹. Alend H. thus got to know about *Singa*'s incubator thanks to a friend of his:

I got access to the incubator of *Singa* through a friend. Here... all the Syrian people here in the city of Lyon, we are... our world is very small. Yes, so I had access to *Singa* through a friend, and a friend of mine, Louay Y., got access through me. So, that's how it works [laughs].

Among our interviewees, we can hence trace back the information flow between different people. Alend was successively the recipient and the holder of the information. He got access to an opportunity thanks to an intra-community knowledge, and then decided to help another benefit from it as well. Louay confirmed this by saying:

But... when it comes to the incubator, it was through my friend, who was part of the second cohort before me, I joined the third cohort. It was... I got in contact with him and then he... he was the one who opened up this door to me with *Singa* Lyon's incubator.

The wording of this excerpt suggests that the provision of information is dependent on one's contacts. Plus, the idea of “opening” a door or a window implies that the network acts as a bypass to unblock opportunities which normally should have gone unnoticed and therefore remained closed to the individual. It illustrates how essential but also context-dependant access to information and opportunities is. The informal network is necessary to gain information which is not readily accessible. Online immigrant communities were mentioned several times as sources of information regarding general or entrepreneurial administrative procedures. Through these dematerialised networks, immigrants share experience to guide one another.

¹⁴⁹ Aldrich, H. & Waldinger, R. (1990), p.123.

Besides providing information and opportunities, individuals can put through the prospective entrepreneur with other individuals. For instance, Diana's husband, who is French, shared his contacts with her:

So when... when I arrived, I was obviously with my husband, and we lived in the Parisian area, in the 92. But he already lived there, so he was the one who kind of put me through with his ecosystem, but there were not many people in his environment. Because he works in the mass retail, so a sector of course a bit different from mine. And he told me: there's a woman... I know a woman working for an association for women [entrepreneurs].

Diana's husband, despite his remoteness from the domain, was able to contribute to her entry in the entrepreneurial ecosystem by providing her with a first contact. From there, she could follow on strengthening her network, because the first step was already taken, and helped her gain confidence. She said that her first client was part of this same association. The help of a native French can therefore prove really useful.

Informal relationships can also help the prospective entrepreneur to find his/her first clients, as was the case with Mrs. B. Upon arrival in Lyon, she joined a parish which significantly helped her family settle in, by providing them with tips and contacts in both their daily and professional lives. Members of this community not only put her through with a formal support organisation for entrepreneurs, they also participated in spreading the word about her activity:

I started to work on my own, to plan events around us, which encouraged me to start actually. I started with small orders at the parish, thanks to the word of mouth, around us in a network we created around us, it worked very well.

In her case, the role of the network was significant:

But in order to be self-employed, I found that really, you need a network, a huge network to work. Each time, it's through the word of mouth: there was a woman of whom I knew the sister, there was a woman of whom I knew I don't know who, there was our neighbour who asked me... But working like that as an entrepreneur, really you need a network, you need support to be known and then to launch yourself. But like that, on my own, in my opinion you can't do anything, if you don't have a network around you, a network that supports you.

The combination of single contacts and a bigger informal community helped Mrs. B to constantly find new clients, as those who were already clients shared with others their positive experience. In fact, the difficulty is to start: even with a good offer, if nobody has heard about it, it will go unnoticed. However, the pre-existence of a strong support network is key to get known by a wider audience. Indeed, contacts will mediate between the activity and potential clients by taking the position of the quality guarantor. Their renown to other people will become

a proxy, a caution for entrusting the entrepreneur's offer, even when not knowing the founder personally.

The informal contacts help the entrepreneur build his/her network through the word of mouth. They do so out of solidarity and sympathy for the person, because they are related to him/her in some way. In turn, they bring into play their connection with other persons to contribute to the entrepreneur's network expansion, which favours the expansion of his/her activity.

4.3 THE RECENT INCREASE IN FORMAL SUPPORT SCHEMES: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PROSPECTIVE IMMIGRANT ENTREPRENEURS?

Since most of the participants were contacted through support organisations, the majority have benefitted from a formal support to set up their project. "Formal support schemes" are understood as programmes dedicated for prospective entrepreneurs, at different stages of development, in order to equip them with the know-how and tools necessary to starting up and running an activity. Most of the interviewees were accompanied on the long-term, that is for several months, by associative structures specialised in the support of immigrants or refugees, such as the incubators of *Singa*, *La Ruche*, or "Combo", a programme by *Makesense*. Others followed shorter, more theoretical programmes proposed by national networks for the support of entrepreneurs, such as BGE Adil. Through incubators, prospective entrepreneurs can shape their idea and develop their project. Then, accelerators enable entrepreneurs to scale-up their activity once it is already running.

4.3.1 Direct support from formal support schemes:

As was the case with informal connections, the formal network, here support organisations, can provide both direct help and resources, and act as opportunities opener. The basic mission of formal support programmes is indeed to equip prospective entrepreneurs with the hard competences, practical know-how, and soft-skills necessary to become an entrepreneur, as Cuzin & Fayolle's definition of support schemes evidences: "[...] Through this relationship, the entrepreneur will obtain multiple trainings and access resources or develop competences useful to project achievement."¹⁵⁰ Mr. C explained more in depth what these specific trainings entail:

So, at the very beginning, it was the creation of a business model, and... visual identity, creation of editorial content, the web page, for instance. It was the very beginning. And, secondly, it was how me do a marketing, a customer identification strategy, how we do

¹⁵⁰ Cuzin & Fayolle (2004), quoted in: Chabaud, D. et al. (2005), « Accompagnement de l'entrepreneur et légitimité institutionnelle : le cas d'un incubateur », p.6.

a fund raising, etc. And, I think the third step will be about how we go to... to the next level: how to grow, expand the teams, etc.

Formal support schemes hence put tools at the disposal of prospective entrepreneurs in order to increase their chances of successfully developing. As explained in the previous chapter, immigrants willing to become independents may have really specific experiences and skills. However, they are often unfamiliar with activity creation. Basing one's business creation on improvisation is too risky, especially when not knowing the French system; support programmes thus propose very specific steps to follow so that the project is based on solid foundations and to maximise the chances for success. This is why these programmes usually last for several months: they collectively accompany entrepreneurs through the different start-up and development stages by mixing up theory and practice. It brings us to the second role of a formal support programme: it provides the individual with guidance, puts him/her on track and therefore brings him/her the security and validation needed. According to Chabaud et. Al, the support entails a "contingent exchange relationship": the support relationship, which entails tailored support and proximity, does matter as much as the content of the support.¹⁵¹ It is particularly useful for immigrant entrepreneurs, whose experiences and qualifications are often unvalidated when they arrive in the host country. Mrs. B talked about the pivotal role which *Entrepreneurs du Monde*¹⁵² played for her:

That's why I explained to you that really, when you arrive in a country which you know nothing about, you need somebody to guide you. And I really found that in my project with *Entrepreneurs du Monde*. Through a volunteer who supported me, through advice, through start-up assistance, they asked several associations to make me orders. But, if I hadn't been followed up by them, how could have I started? How could have I known what I was supposed to do?

According to Mrs. B, her success lies primarily with the back-up provided by her support organisation, with the duration of the support and the adaptation to her own specific needs. She underlines the guidance role taken on by the organisation and the volunteer who supported her. On her own, it would have been difficult to start, even with an idea in mind, because she did not know where to start, nor in which direction to go. The programme gave her steps to fulfil in order to gradually develop her project. Knowing that someone was there any time she needed help was as essential as the actual support she received.

¹⁵¹ Chabaud, D. et al. (2005), p.8-9.

¹⁵² "World Entrepreneurs": organisation responsible for the incubator programme ICI: Incubation, Creation, Inclusion, which goal is to enable "vulnerable people" to insert professionally in the catering domain.

4.3.2 Formal support schemes as opportunities openers:

Formal support schemes also contribute to creating bridges among entrepreneurs and with other experts. Most programmes include mentoring sessions where prospective entrepreneurs can get advice from experts of different fields¹⁵³, a support which Mr. G benefited from:

[...] we have updates to say: where are you at now? A month from now, where will you be? What do you need? There's this... ticketing programme. So actually, I can ask for... meetings with, with experts. So, if I'm blocked with the strategy, they plan a meeting with a strategist, who tells me, who grants me an hour to find a solution to my problem. [...] So, honestly, I got there with an idea that existed mainly on paper, and I left with an application. If I hadn't been there, I think that until now, I would still have the idea to make a game, but I would never actually create it.

The support thus entails individual help tailored to the specific needs of the entrepreneurs-to-be. The responsible organisation gathers a pool of experts who volunteer their time and competences to help the beneficiaries in advancing their projects. The variety of resources required to launch an activity are centralised by the programme so that it is readily available to the project holders. Hence, their needs are anticipated, which avoids them to have to look for expertise on their own, and thus saves their time and finances. They also get the opportunity to connect with locals whom they could call on to for future advice. Just as Mrs. B, Mr. G said that the programme was determinant for him to develop his idea, it provided him with the adequate framework to turn an idea into a concrete project.

Moreover, support programmes mix group trainings with individual follow-up. Singa thus proposes a “collective dynamic”, and ICI a 3-month “collective training”¹⁵⁴ The collective character favours the creation of “synergies” between entrepreneurs, as Andra W. put it, and establishes an emulation environment. They themselves participate in enriching the programme with their own perspectives, as Mrs. A's experience illustrates:

The project holders as well, we talk to each other, we exchange ideas. Because there are people who have... who had more advanced projects. For instance, in the first cohort, when I started, I was working on the idea. But there were also people who were already working, in catering for instance, they were already working. So, they would share ideas with you, about what didn't work out for them, so that you could pay attention, for instance...

¹⁵³ Among the services provided, *Singa* hence proposes a “professional network”, and *Combo* a “community of intercultural entrepreneurs, mentors and partners”. Singa France, “Incubation”, <https://www.singafrance.com/incubation>; Combo by Makesense, <https://combo.makesense.org/>.

¹⁵⁴ Singa France, “Incubation”, <https://www.singafrance.com/incubation>; Incubation Creation Inclusion, “Le parcours d'accompagnement », <https://incubationcreationinclusion.fr/parcours-daccompagnement/>.

Because the project holders do not join the programme at the same level of advancement and do not progress at the same pace, the most advanced can share experience, best practice, advice or even contacts with others. While the least advanced can use the inputs to gain time by avoiding some mistakes, the ones ahead can deepen their understanding of some issues, as was the case with Abbas:

And... but in the project *Combo*, my project was more advanced than others', the other projects were just [at the stage of] the idea, to develop their idea, but my project was already launched. So, yes, but in the end, we can say that I also benefited to, to enrich with trainings.

The perk of such programme for the beneficiaries is that they learn while doing, are actively involved in building their project, but they can also act as helpers and counsellors for others. In addition to equipping them, giving them resources and putting them through with experts, formal support programmes are network expanders. They act as true springboards for the incubated, whose visibility outside the structure is increased. Among our participants, we observed a tendency to the multiplication of the support programmes: five respondents followed different programmes, a trend justified by Mr. C as a mean to further expand their network:

Actually, what we're looking for mainly is network, and... I think it's one of the most important things while launching a... a project. [...] And... it's easier when you're recommended, when someone introduces me. And unfortunately, people who... especially newcomers, they don't have this network. And it's precisely in incubators that you can... you can start creating it.

Through support programmes, prospective entrepreneurs also get access to more information about existing opportunities, which they would not have heard of without being supported. For instance, Mrs. E managed to develop partnerships with public and cultural organisations thanks to her support organisation's backing. These collaborations are now the core of her association. Mr. G actually pinpointed a very crucial matter:

And, and I entered for several reasons. One of the reasons was the marketing, in fact. If I go and sell this game to *Rolex* or *BNP Paribas*, if I introduce myself as a Syrian refugee whose idea is to create a tennis game, it's something. If I say: I am at [*organisation*], a French incubator, I am a 2020 [*organisation*] laureate to create this game, and I am supported by them, and... how to say... I learnt to develop this project the French way, I think I can find... I can be more serious, and they will see me more... I think... finding a client will be easier. So that was, the word maybe: to have the legitimacy, the legitimacy, yes.

Beyond the visibility it grants them, immigrant entrepreneurs get legitimacy from being part of these support schemes. This legitimacy aspect was validated by Chabaud et al. in their empirical

research. Support thus enables entrepreneurs to “progressively obtain confidence, image of reliability, reputation, and lastly an institutional legitimacy, by following both a cognitive and socio-political legitimisation strategy.”¹⁵⁵ Indeed, it gives them a tag, a “label” for Chabaud et al: the name of the incubator or that of its directors grants them prestige. Their expertise and seriousness are consecrated, validated because they were selected by the organisations among a pool of candidates. Incubators, which train “cohorts”, enable immigrant entrepreneurs to have their competences validated without having to obtain French diplomas: they still get the renown from institutions other than the ones which traditionally sanction the competences acquired during the course of an academic path. They benefit from the symbolic capital of the support programmes or of the organisation’s managers. Durand, re-explaining the concept formulated by Bourdieu, defines symbolic capital as “the volume of recognition, of legitimacy and of consecration accumulated by a social agent within the field where he/she belong.”¹⁵⁶ This is exactly what immigrant entrepreneurs get by joining a formal support scheme: they get included and hence recognised in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Not being able to get socialised through the traditional socialisation institutions – namely family and school – immigrant entrepreneurs are given the possibility to join incubators which act as socialising instances by artificially building a support network to them. The project holders are then responsible for their network to thrive and last in time by investing in it. A parallel can be made between the formal support schemes and those whom Bourdieu calls the “people who are known”: they indeed have the power to represent a whole group by their sole name:

Everything combines to cause the signifier to take the place of the signified, the spokesmen that of the group he is supposed to express, not least because his distinction, his “outstandingness”, his visibility constitute the essential part, if not the essence, of this power, which, being entirely set within the logic of knowledge and acknowledgment, is fundamentally a symbolic power; but also because the representative, the sign, the emblem; may be, and create, the whole reality of groups which receive effective social existence only in and through representation.¹⁵⁷

Ultimately, the immigrant gains his/her identity as an entrepreneur because it was granted to him/her by an organisation or an individual which legitimacy and expertise were first sanctioned. As raised in the first chapter, qualifications are not sufficient to ease immigrants’ access to entrepreneurship. Plus, their status as immigrants, and even more so as refugees, constitutes a barrier per se because of the representation people have of it. Diana Jimenez suggested that

¹⁵⁵ Chabaud, D. et al. (2005), p.11.

¹⁵⁶ Durand, P. « Capital symbolique », in : Glinoeur, A. & Saint-Armand D. (dir.) *Le lexique socius*.

¹⁵⁷ Bourdieu, P. (1986), p.24.

her expertise was more likely to be recognised than that of a refugee who fled his/her country because of war:

It's a tag which you put there [pointing to her forehead], which I had to change, even though there was a positive vision of Peru [...] If I came from a country which is currently in a conflict, at war, they won't really believe me when I talk about creativity and everything, because... I couldn't, certainly I couldn't have exercised my profession in a country at war.

The perception which natives have of the immigrants' country of origin plays a significant role in the way they evaluate the individuals' competences. An unstable political context as well as its psychological consequences shape the representation made of refugees or immigrants coming from countries perceived as less developed. It conveys the image of a person stripped of everything, including his/her competences.

In some cases, an intermediary, be it an organisation or an individual, acts as a guarantee for the immigrant entrepreneurs by discarding the existing prejudices and validating his/her competences and experiences. However, this ecosystem has its own limitations.

5 THE LIMITATIONS OF THE CURRENT SUPPORT SYSTEM

5.1 THE EXCEPTIONAL: THE PERVASIVENESS OF THE CULTURAL CAPITAL

In chapter 4, we underlined the fact that access to formal support schemes was often the product of chance. Indeed, the information about professional training opportunities in the field of entrepreneurship is not readily accessible to the target group: the participants had to rely on their own capacities to research information and to make connections which could lead to discovering such opportunities. Plus, the potentiality to have access to the information is quite thin: oftentimes, it comes down to one specific contact. The immigrant entrepreneurs interviewed were therefore particularly well equipped, both in terms of social and cultural capitals. As such, they can be called an exception. However, through their trajectories, it is possible to grasp that of other individuals, who did not have access to such resources. Indeed, the participants often made reference to “counter-examples”, who were confronted to larger scale obstacles.

Some respondents thus said their experience was easier than others’ when it comes to the language barrier. This is what Abbas suggested:

So, it... I really took time also... to learn the language, learning the language. But I can say that... that for me it was way faster than for other refugees... people like, like me, like Afghans who have no link between their mother tongue and French. So, it was very complicated.

Even though he was confronted to linguistic difficulties, Abbas reckons that it was easier for him to learn French than for the vast majority of refugees, and especially for those whose native language is very distinct from Romance languages. Having lived in Italy, Abbas was in contact and therefore could get more familiar with Romance languages. For others, it can be even more of a long, cumbersome process. Among the interviewees, five were already familiar with the French language, though at different levels. According to Mrs. A’s experience, the language barrier can add up to the overall difficulty to access formal support programmes for those who are not fluent:

[...] in my country, I was already bilingual, I spoke English and French. I see the other entrepreneurs who don’t know the language, it’s a bit complicated to understand the instructions, the explanations, I find it’s difficult.

Thanks to her linguistic resources, it was not difficult for Mrs. A to follow the trainings delivered by the incubator. However, she raises the question of the language barrier for those who do not master French. Most of the programmes are indeed held in French, even those dedicated to immigrant entrepreneurs. Hence, the person might miss on some crucial information or take

more time to appropriate the information and make use of it. For instance, Mrs. D had difficulties in following the programme because it was delivered in French only:

It's only in French, and I had much, much... difficulties to understand their follow-up. I know I have to make efforts, and that's why I continue until now. But it's really... it's for French-speaking immigrants.

The programmes are virtually impossible to access for non-French speakers, as little possibility exists to benefit from trainings in other languages, despite the number of foreigners living in France and the target groups of some of these support schemes. For many foreign workers, proficiency in English is deemed sufficient. However, the French environment remains unfavourable for foreigners who are not fluent in French.

The participants' narratives also indirectly reveal how difficult it is for immigrants to become entrepreneurs while not benefitting from adequate information from formal programmes or individuals familiar with the ecosystem. Abbas said bankruptcy was very frequent among refugees:

[...] they work for... they work for some years, and with a little... a little saving they put aside they launch... they turn to entrepreneurship, but unfortunately after some months they... they go bankrupt because there are many questions they can't answer, concerning the knowledge of the culture, of the people, of market study, etc, etc. And I can say that maybe, for me, because I, I studied economics, it helped me a lot to... to know a lot more than other refugees, maybe.

According to him, what distinguishes him from others and prevented him to fail was his academic background in economics, which constituted a solid ground on which to subsequently develop his activity. Moreover, many do not benefit from advice and have to improvise because they do not know about specific tools such as market study, consumer identification and testing. They have developed their project without confronting it to the wider environment and adapting it, their good or service offer thus not meeting the consumers' demand. Mrs. B also mentioned quite an illustrative example:

There are people I knew, they were Syrians, they came here, they wanted to work. They opened up grocery stores. A year later they closed down. But why, it works very well. They told me: I didn't count the expenses well, I didn't count this, there was something I had to pay but I didn't know, I didn't choose the premises well. Many, many excuses. It was a man I knew very well, he told me: I was working well, but I can only pay the rent, the electricity, my phone, and I don't have anything left to live [...] He told me: I made mistakes, I didn't count, so, he closed.

In this case, an insufficient knowledge of the general and entrepreneurial French systems made so that the project was not viable. Indeed, the person got to know about certain taxes only after the activity was launched. As a result, the original business model was no longer valid.

These counter-examples enabled us to indirectly grasp parcels of the trajectories of those immigrant entrepreneurs who were blocked in the process or failed in their endeavour because they did not have access to adequate resources. It underlines once more how essential to entrepreneurship, but also not readily accessible cultural and social capital are.

5.2 WHEN ELITISM AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION TRANSCEND BOUNDARIES

The issue that arises from the previous observations is that those who are already well equipped in terms of hard skills and connections are more likely to have access to formal support schemes. Many programmes, not accessible to all, based on a selective process and operating on the model of small cohorts¹⁵⁸, seem to replicate the functioning of higher education programmes and thus reproduce a certain elitist model which contradicts the idea of equal opportunities. In this regard, it is quite significant that the name of one programme by La French Tech is “Prépa”¹⁵⁹ rather than “pre-incubation”, as other organisations have named this type of programmes.

A detour through the functioning of the French system can inform the processes at play in the recruitment of project holders by support programmes. The French academic system is often deemed “elitist”: as Merle explains, there is a growing “segregationist democratisation” of education in France. Indeed, even though working-class students have more access to education than in the past, there is a differentiation between the fields which they choose and those selected by students from privileged backgrounds, which are deemed more prestigious.¹⁶⁰ This tendency increases in higher education. Making use of international comparisons, Merle adds that while countries like Poland and Germany have implemented “inclusion” policies in order to reduce inequalities, the French education system is based on many different curricula.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ ICI supports 12 prospective entrepreneurs each year. See Incubation Creation Inclusion, “Le parcours d’accompagnement », <https://incubationcreationinclusion.fr/parcours-daccompagnement/>

¹⁵⁹ “Prépa” or “classe préparatoire”: an intensive two-year French curriculum designed to prepare students to the competitive examinations to enter higher education schools.

¹⁶⁰ Merle, P. (2015), « L’école française, démocratique ou élitiste ? », *La vie des idées*, p.2.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, pp.5, 10.

Among the participants, the answer to whether they thought immigrant entrepreneurs had similar opportunities as natives was mostly positive. In Mrs. A's discourse, there were many instances of emphasis on the similarities in the difficulties encountered:

I knew that even people who were born here, coming from other fields, when they change professions, they would struggle as I do. It does not depend on where you come from. There might be some things which the person knows more about than I do. [...] But fundamentally, we are all going to struggle in the same way. [...] People who were born here... we are all actually on the same page.

Most of our interviewees, as previously mentioned, hold higher education diplomas. They are well equipped in that they have both qualifications and experiences in very specific fields. While their status as immigrants was detrimental to their professional insertion in the first place, their cultural and social capitals then come back to the foreground. Hence, we posit that previous cultural capital can help catch up and, after a while, be on an equal footing with natives when it comes to getting opportunities as entrepreneurs. Mr. C underlined this issue, by emphasising the typical sociological profile supported by incubators:

And... unfortunately, my world is not very heterogeneous... sometimes who are the people who... who join incubators, often these are people who have done studies, who... who already have a rather confirmed academic or professional training. And... for the people who... who haven't studied, often people who are... who are not alphabetised... this information does not reach them and they cannot benefit from it and... and this is where I find it is rather... it is rather unequal, and... and there is not much, much... there's not much diversity. Actually... when you make this kind of projects, of incubators to support refugees to... to create their companies in France, the topic of diversity and inclusion are... at the foreground. Whereas in the processes of... of call for candidates and dissemination of information, there is no inclusion nor diversity, so it's a paradox that I always find in all the incubators; that you find the people who are least in need of help to launch their business who are supported by this kind of structure. And... it corresponds to different logics. On the one hand, who imagines these calls for project: so, often they are... people who graduated from higher education schools and who... who have this habitus of, of social reproduction.

Mr. C questions the concept of inclusion applied to refugees and immigrants, and reframes it in socio-economic terms. According to him, the person's ethnic origin does not disfavour him/her as much as their socio-economic background does. Hence, formal support schemes training individuals to be entrepreneurs often select homogeneous profiles, that is from a privileged background, highly educated, and with a significant professional experience. Indeed, they meet the requirements to join such programmes. This argument suggests that, even though immigrants and refugees face barriers because of the need to adapt and of their immigration status, they can eventually overcome them if they possess the necessary capitals and prove themselves. However, people from underprivileged backgrounds; be they natives or immigrants, are less

likely to join such programmes, as they do not possess the required resources, such as the level of education or the social codes governing these environments. In this context, low-educated, or even analphabet immigrants stand no chance of accessing such programmes, because they are too remote from this ecosystem.

The first barrier consists in knowing about the existence of such programmes. Another detour through the sociology of education is useful here to complete the picture. Draelants, actualising Bourdieu and Passeron's concept of "inheritor", argued that we can talk about "initiated"¹⁶² students: not only have they inherited cultural capital, they also have access to "non-public information, which is not known by all and has no vocation to be."¹⁶³ Based on this information, they can make informed decisions about their orientation, and build a strategy to ensure they get access to prestigious sectors.¹⁶⁴ People from less privileged background are not initiated, they do not have access to information and cannot act on it: as such, they can be called "outsiders". We reckon that this mechanism is also at work in the professional ecosystem. Indeed, this logic has spread outside the academic field with the development of selective professional trainings.

Secondly, the application system can represent an obstacle per se for individuals who are not familiar with it and who could be discouraged by it. According to Mr. C, the way the calls for projects are thought encourages the recruitment of profiles similar to that of the people in charge of creating them. Indeed, it is difficult to understand what the lack of access to resources entails when one is not directly confronted to it. Thirdly, during the selection of profiles, people who have a clearer project idea are privileged, as Louay shared:

Actually, I can say that there are opportunities here in France to get funded. But, the projects, or the companies who have better projects are the ones well financed. [...] the others need to be granted a period during which... their idea is built again, or they are helped so that they can develop their idea into better projects.

The prerequisite to join some programmes is indeed to have a general project idea. Less privileged profiles could need more upstream preparation and follow-up to refine an activity idea, based on an assessment of their competences and experiences, and complementary trainings to bridge the gaps in their knowledge. Well-equipped immigrants already face obstacles to find an

¹⁶² [Translation mine : « initiés »]

¹⁶³ Draelants, H. (2014) « Des héritiers aux initiés ? Note sur les nouvelles modalités de la reproduction sociale par l'école », *Social Science Information* 43(3), p.6.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p.15.

employed position. The individuals remote from employed work as well as from self-employment, not being able to access support programmes which could help them develop the skills needed, are threatened by both poverty and social exclusion.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, we noted a tendency to the multiplication of the programmes of follow-up among the participants. For instance, Louay was incubated by *Singa*, then joined *Manufactory* through the first edition of the *French Tech* Tremplin programme, and was doing an acceleration at *Singa* as a laureate of the second edition of the *French Tech* at the time of the interview. While it helped him focusing on different aspects at several stages of his activity development, it also participates to the closeness of the sector. Indeed, the individuals who are already involved in the ecosystem occupy spaces which are already limited.

5.3 ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A CLOSED SECTOR?

The previous section helped understanding how the mechanisms at play in the selection procedures of incubators leaned towards social reproduction rather than inclusion. In this framework, only immigrant entrepreneurs who are well equipped in terms of resources are privileged. However, this privilege seems quite relative, when digging deeper into which general and entrepreneurial paths are opened to immigrants. Indeed, the general rule is that of closure.

Concerned with inclusion and equal opportunities, more and more private and associative structures were created to target vulnerable groups especially. *L'Adie*, founded in 1989, is one of the pioneers in the field: it defends the right to entrepreneurship for all, and targets especially people who have no access to traditional financing. This is also the case of *Singa*'s incubator, created in 2016 for newcomers or project holders invested in favour of inclusion or migration. It paved the way for the creation of programmes targeting this public in the last five years.

Others have developed dedicated paths, besides the general ones they already proposed, such as the programmes “Fighters” by *Station F*, and “Tremplin” by *La French Tech*, two technology-oriented incubators. The first is addressed to entrepreneurs from “anywhere”, especially from “less privileged environments”¹⁶⁵ (individuals from priority neighbourhoods ‘(QPV)¹⁶⁶ and refugees are mentioned). “Tremplin”¹⁶⁷ targets “aspiring entrepreneurs from tougher backgrounds”, “from populations chronically underrepresented in our tech ecosystem.”¹⁶⁸ Besides

¹⁶⁵ Station F, Programme « Fighters », <https://stationf.co/apply?program=fighters>

¹⁶⁶ [QPV: Quartiers Prioritaires de la Ville]

¹⁶⁷ The translation, « Springboard », is quite significant.

¹⁶⁸ La French Tech, programme “Tremplin”, <https://lafrenchtech.com/en/how-france-helps-startups/tremplin/aspiring-entrepreneurs/>

people from QPV and refugees, it is opened to students on a scholarship and social benefits recipients.

With the multiplication of programmes with positive discrimination policies, there was also an effort to open up the ecosystem to more diverse profiles. However, our research suggests that it is not enough and that the entrepreneurial sector remains a closed, segregated environment. Indeed, immigrants only have access to certain types of programmes, they cannot choose among the whole panel. According to Mr. G, the existence of parallel systems confines immigrants, and refugees in particular, to some programmes only:

I think that ... because it was made for refugees, it was really easy to get in. [...] If you are the major in a class of bad students, actually, in another class, you will be the last. So, I am in this situation: if I apply for *La French Tech*, I will be the last among the French. But if I apply to a refugee programme, I will be accepted easily, because I have been in France for six years, so I have developed some expertise by now. But... how to put it... the problem is that if we only make projects for refugees alone, it will be bad projects, or projects like now: everyone will create restaurants, or food trucks. Yes, that's not bad. But I'm certain, if it was the same programme for... for French, it will be to create social entrepreneurship... [...] And I, I want to be treated the same, I don't accept that, because I am a Syrian, the expectations are lessened.

Mr. G deplores the general lack of ambition and expectations when it comes to projects carried by refugees. According to him, less is expected of them because of their status and the representation attached to it: considered as fundamentally lacking resources, their capabilities are undermined. In turn, it deteriorates the level expected to enter these dedicated programmes. It also creates a difference between elitist, very competitive programmes, and those targeted programmes for vulnerable groups, which correlate socio-economic barriers with a lack of cultural capital.

Immigrant entrepreneurs thus find themselves in a deadlock, more general programmes being less easily accessible. In the past few years, some educational and professional paths were opened up to refugees, thanks to a system of partnerships between organisations specialised in the integration of refugees, and public or private actors. For instance, *Each One* enables newcomers to France to join prestigious educational institutions and companies, thus opening up very closed paths, as Mr. G explains:

Cause what's happening... now the associations, they are helping the refugees to go to school, for example, to go to university. Like me. So, for me, if you want to study a Master's, or a Bachelor, it's easy, because almost all the universities, they can take you.

Many of the limitations that existed no longer hold true. However, there is a compartmentalisation, a lack of bridges between the different schemes: once they are done with the programme, it is very hard to proceed within the general framework: after doing a Master's in a business school, Mr. G was unable to proceed with a PhD. Likewise, after working within two big companies, he was unable to find another job, despite the experience he demonstrated. Mr. G said:

To make a first step, there are hundreds of organisations in France. Like now, every three students, they are making an association, for helping refugees. Everybody is helping you for writing your CV, motivation letter, for the interviews... development of your professional project, things like that, learning French... [...] I need step 2, I need *Station F*, I need, I don't know, maybe *La Ruche*. I need someone to take me to the second level. Tell now, there is no programme for this. The only programme is... *La French Tech*. And this is what happened. This is the same scenario... with the PhD. I have to apply with all the French people who are better than me, honestly.

The problem resides in the continuity after the dedicated programmes. Then, the individual comes back in the common law system and is still confronted to the same barriers. Outside the paths traced for them, gateways in-between the specific and general schemes are missing. Immigrant entrepreneurs engaged in such programmes are likely to be confronted to a glass ceiling. There is a lack of inscription of the concepts of equal opportunities and positive discrimination in the wider French environment.

The partnership logic ruling these programmes further reinforces this compartmentalisation: for instance, *Singa* partners up with *La French Tech*, a public initiative with a wider impact (it entails a 17.000€ grants and recruits more individuals). Hence, it is easier for entrepreneurs who are already part of the *Singa* community to enter this scheme, and to have access to more resources. Among our panel, four participants were incubated by *Singa* and benefited from a *La French Tech* grant. There is a resource concentration and a confirmation of the profiles already supported: individuals who are already in the ecosystem hence get access to more opportunities, while those outside of it struggle to join general programmes on their own. For example, Mr. G is struggling to join *La French Tech* on his own, and calls this situation a “monopole”:

French people who went to *La French Tech* don't go there because they went to *France Terre d'Asile*. Because in fact they sent their online application, just like everyone. So, I need to send my application individually.

Besides that, there has been a specific emphasis in the recent years on what is deemed innovative. The technology sector has become an embodiment of innovation. Some incubators, such as *Station F* or the public initiative *La French Tech*, are devoted to activities entirely or partly directed towards new technologies. It acts as an incentive for prospective entrepreneurs: they

are more likely to receive formal and financial support by choosing this path. Among the participants to this research, five have a project related to new technologies. Conversely, it can reinforce the barriers for entrepreneurs in other fields, as they might face more difficulties entering support schemes. Mr. C said on this matter:

There is also the funders and public institutions financing this kind of projects, who privilege also... tech projects... projects based on... entrepreneurship in a start-up nation meaning. So, we see, we see other profiles and topics are not privileged, like crafts, agriculture... really simple professions like being cabinetmakers, plumbers... these are things people know how to do, they do it really well and can live off this... a plumber, if he has a good network, a good project, I think he can live well and pull through. It's just that we don't think about that, and we're not being inclusive when creating this follow-up. So, we're reproducing... the same circles, actually, social reproduction, but behind an inclusion speech.

According to him, because innovation is almost exclusively understood through a technology lens, it bars access to many, and can thus reinforce already existing barriers, also because financial grants are increasingly tied to this criterion. Hence, this guideline closes the doors to a more diverse entrepreneurial environment, both in terms of profiles and projects.

Another reason why the ecosystem can be deemed closed is that there is a concentration of the support programmes in metropolitan areas. During our research, we found programmes exclusively in big cities. Mr. C also reframed the accessibility issue in geographical terms, opposing the “centre”, well-served, and the “periphery”, characterised by a lack of entrepreneurial support programmes:

Yes, I think the question arises... it's rather... I think the question does not oppose natives to newcomers... I think the question opposes... the centre to the periphery. And, from where I stand, it's a lot easier to be... an entrepreneur in big cities, for instance in Ile-de-France, in big cities, rather than... becoming entrepreneurs... I don't know where, in a town in Ariège or elsewhere. I think there is a hyper centralisation of the support programmes. And... it's easier to fund a project... based in the centre than in the periphery. The question would rather arise in that sense. I find that... we mostly have the same... opportunities to have access to entrepreneurship.

All of the participants hence live in or around a metropolitan centre, which eases access to opportunities and network.

Despite being at the foreground when it comes to the professional integration of immigrant entrepreneurs, the private and third sectors is influenced by pervasive tendencies of elitism and social reproduction, making it still difficult for less privileged profiles to access entrepreneurship.

6 THE ROLE OF THE FRENCH INSTITUTIONS IN QUESTION

The informal network, such as family, peers, and individual relationships of other kinds, are reckoned traditional supports for entrepreneurs. Over the past decades, private and associative actors became essential stakeholders in easing entrepreneurs' path towards entrepreneurship. Immigrant entrepreneurs started to be targeted more recently, their specific needs and difficulties being recognised. De Lange thus dates back the development of entrepreneurial support schemes dedicated to refugees or immigrants to 2015 and the increase in the number of refugees coming to Europe¹⁶⁹. In the current scheme, and in the light of the interviews conducted, the state and institutional actors appear as the main absent.

6.1 AN INCOMPLETE INTEGRATION PATH?

The understanding of integration as a two-way process presupposes the interaction of two poles. The first one is made of immigrants, both collectively and individually. The second one consists in the host society at large. However, individual citizens on their own cannot guarantee the success of this process: instead, an overarching instance giving the impetus is needed. As is the case with primary socialisation, a socialisation body is crucial in guiding the individual in his/her acculturation in France. In the case of adult immigrants, the family and the school are rendered inefficient. The state, through its public integration policies, has taken up this role since the 1980s. It has created a variety of bodies in charge of immigration and integration, the most recent being the French Office for Immigration and Integration (OFII¹⁷⁰), which goal is to provide support for the welcoming, integration, and possibly for immigrants' return to their country of origin.

Yet, the reality of integration in France in the professional domain is closer to the one-way vision delineated by Klarenbeek, as the responsibility for integration seems to rely predominantly on immigrants. Indeed, while the institutions should act as guides, our research suggests that they do not fulfil this role nor the immigrants' expectations. Mrs. E shared her thoughts about her integration and that of refugees in general:

I suffered from this, that is from the difficulty to integrate. Once you have your status, you have your papers, that's not enough. How to integrate in a community, in a society, because... in the moment you have your status, you have your document, it's your new country. You need to integrate. So, I found that for instance, for others, immigrants or students, it's easier for them to find their way. Conversely, refugees, it's not easy to...

¹⁶⁹ De Lange, p.5.

¹⁷⁰ [Office Français de l'Immigration et de l'Intégration]

to find their path, to create their... professional path, so I made the decision, as I am a refugee, to be a *role model*¹⁷¹ for other refugees to follow the path which I've started.

There appears to be a lack of guidance from the institutions, once the person has fulfilled the administrative prerequisites. The state's role in this domain hence limits itself to getting the person through the procedural, formal requirements which immigration entails. This perception is shared by Mr. C, who argued that until recently, European countries had a humanitarian management of immigration:

[...] I think there was a change of paradigm in Europe with the support for refugees. [...] And... before that, there was a transfer of the... support to refugees based on what was already seen on-field, that is in camps in Africa, in conflict zones in the Middle-East or in Latin America, where we would support refugees in a humanitarian way, and that's normal, because people are... in a humanitarian need to meet their most basic needs, so food, housing... information, etc. And... I think that traditionally, in Europe, support for refugees was kind of modelled on this humanitarian aid logic in Europe, in France. And... I find that from 2015 on, we realised that there were two different tendencies on how people integrate in cities, in developed countries, or on-field, in conflict or humanitarian crisis situations. And from then on, many, many initiatives were created, to say, there, people in industrialised countries might not urgently need to eat, to find an accommodation, to know where to sleep, how to get dressed; instead, they rather only need help, somebody to give them a hand to create their own employment, an economic activity, start their studies again, or just being inserted to join... a company. All of these initiatives were mainly born from the civil society or private foundations and companies. And I think the state didn't follow this tendency, so the state stayed with... old institutions, old allies like [*organisations*] which aid is more humanitarian, that is the management of reception centres [...], the management of more... basic things.

This excerpt highlights the fact that there was a transposition of the humanitarian support for refugees, regardless of their destination environment. The measures implemented were mainly of an emergency nature, in order to secure assistance to refugees, and are per se temporary solutions. Conversely, integration is a long-term solution enabling individual and collective life in a given society. This kind of management is a continuation of the situation prior to the emergence of integration policies, when immigration was considered a short-term phenomenon. According to Mr. C, short-term, humanitarian measures are meant to fulfil one's basic needs, that is to ensure his/her immediate survival (health, food, and accommodation). Long-term measures, however, would enable the individual to project in the future, to gain the means of his/her autonomy and self-realisation. While institutional actors have stayed focused on this assistance understanding, private and associative stakeholders have imagined a more sustainable, durable integration path, focusing on the individual and the peculiarities of each lifepath.

¹⁷¹ [In English in the interview]

Conversely, the current state management does not focus on a global, gradual approach where empowerment, training and professionalisation are at the forefront. Instead, the past twenty years have seen the rise of a discourse on integration focusing on the knowledge of and adhesion to France's Republican values, which echoes with past immigration policies based on the "assimilability" of immigrants.¹⁷²

Indeed, since 2003, France has instigated a "contractualisation of integration", with the creation of different integration contracts.¹⁷³ According to Hachimi-Alaoui and Pélabay, this paradigm shares commonality with that of "civic integration": in this understanding, integration becomes a prerequisite rather than a process, it bears moral connotations, allowing to distinguish between good citizens and individuals who cannot integrate. Additionally, it is an unbalanced contract, the responsibility of which relies primarily on immigrants.¹⁷⁴ This one-sided process has been integrated by immigrants and shows through in the discourse of several participants, such as Andra's:

"In order to integrate yourself, the initiative has to come from you, it will not work... upside down, the state will not contact me: welcome to France, here is what you can do, here are... our offers. No, it doesn't exist."

"I don't know if it's their duty. If I want... if I want to live in another country, it's up to me to integrate, and then to contact organisations which... help integrating. But... the other way, it doesn't work."

Andra reckons that integrating newcomers is not the state's prerogative. Instead, it is up to the immigrant to take initiative. This idea is so deeply enrooted that the state taking initiative is deemed abnormal: in Andra's discourse, the expressions "upside down" and "the other way" reveals that she finds illogical to think of the institutions as the instigators, as guides and providers of information.

The creation of integration contracts enhanced the emphasis on the compliance to rules and values which have been set a priori, rather than on a joint process of accommodation and a focus on individuals. The state lays down the rules and provides some linguistic and general training about France, but is not fully involved in the process. The "civic training" is meant to "help understand the French principles and values and the functioning of the French society in its more practical aspects."¹⁷⁵, including housing and work. However, these sessions, lasting for

¹⁷² Barou, J. (2014), p.8.

¹⁷³ Hachimi-Alaoui, M. & Pélabay, J. « Contrats d'intégration et « valeurs de la République » : un « tournant civique » à la française ? », *Revue Européenne des migrations internationales* 36(4).

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ OFII, « Accueil et Intégration », <https://www.ofii.fr/procedure/accueil-integration/>

24 hours in total and spanning over four days, can only be theoretical. There is a dearth of more practical, tailored, and long-term follow-up which newcomers highly need. Hence, Mr. C and Mrs. E defined the institutions' role as "basic". In this framework, the newcomer has to comply with cultural and civic requirements, but is not given sufficient tools to actually understand the functioning of the host country in order to become part of it. According to Mr. F, this unbalanced relationship translates the fact that foreigners have more duties than they have rights:

I think that... foreigner, foreigners are always made to understand [pause to reflect] ... and this is everywhere... they are always made to understand that... they have, there, Macron has formulated it last time actually... in, I saw it in a press article, he said to undocumented migrants that they had duties before they have rights.¹⁷⁶ [...] And... this makes this... social deskilling to, to the second zone, in which some individuals are put and where others are put [...] That is to say that foreigners will, they always are in... in a... conditionality, as we say: we accept you, but you have to be able to give a bit more than what is asked from people who...

Besides not providing immigrants with the tools to build their path and to gain their autonomy, the institutions do not fulfil the intermediary role expected from them. Indeed, Diana J. was not able to benefit from formal support because she had no idea it existed and she could benefit from it:

But I never saw... in France, or in Paris, support for foreign entrepreneurs. But I didn't look for it either.

Hence, there is a segmentation and a lack of coordination between the different mechanisms. Institutional actors, the first in contact with newcomers, should identify and assess the needs and expectations of each profile, to then act as a platform and refer them to specialised actors. Currently, these gateways are scarce. Public actors have a facilitator role to play, especially because the French professional and entrepreneurial ecosystems are complex. Andra W's experience with navigating the social entrepreneurship sector is illustrative of this general difficulty:

And... what I found... a bit "challenging"¹⁷⁷, a bit difficult in France, was that there are too many options within social entrepreneurship, too many networks, too many... resources...

¹⁷⁶ On May 21, 2021, the French President told undocumented immigrants: "You have duties, before having rights. You don't arrive saying "we need to be considered, we have rights". We have a welcoming culture and things will go right if everyone does his/her part and says 'I comply to the rules, I try to integrate, I learn the language.'" See France Info, "Emmanuel Macron aux sans-papiers : "Vous avez des devoirs avant d'avoir des droits" », May 21, 2021, https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/europe/migrants/emmanuel-macron-aux-sans-papiers-vous-avez-des-devoirs-avant-d-avoir-des-droits_4632921.html

¹⁷⁷ [In English in the interview]

Upon arrival, help is needed to clear the field and make it easier for immigrants to navigate the professional environment. A tailored follow-up provided by one fix person, starting early on and lasting in time is needed to make the economic insertion smoother and quicker.

6.2 THE INSTITUTIONS BETWEEN PRESENCE AND ABSENCE

Beside not focusing enough on long-term solutions and not fully endorsing their role as facilitators, on the matter of immigrant entrepreneurship, the institutions stand back compared with other actors. Indeed, public actors lag behind when it comes to proposing support ensuring long-term integration. Rather than giving the impetus and providing opportunities, the institutions delegated to other actors such as training centres or associations. According to Mr. C, the state is more of a funder which action takes place a posteriori:

And I think the state didn't follow this tendency, so the state stayed with... old institutions, old allies [names] which aid is more humanitarian [...] But the thing... long-term integration projects, integration in its larger sense, they preferred to delegate... not delegate, but they tolerated the civil society, NGOs doing it, and they just put themselves as providers of funds for this kind of projects. So, we don't see, we don't see an... incubator... held by the state, or managed by the state, it doesn't exist. When we see for instance the role of the Inter-ministerial delegation... it's a role... first we don't really understand what they do, then it's more of an observer... an expert... yes, a funder role, I'd say. And the bulk of the support is done by associations... or the private sector.

Despite being recognised an essential actor in the integration of immigrants, the role of the state does not meet the expectations of the participants. Indeed, for Mr. C, the institutions' role is marginal: they do not come up with initiatives, but rather fund to a certain extent projects imagined and managed by the private and third sectors. Thus, the creation of projects depends on the financial and human capacities of companies, foundations, and NGOs. According to Mr. C, the institutions' approach is more passive, indirect and reactive: he mentioned an "observer" role, which entails analysing the field from afar without being actively involved, and providing recommendations on an ex-post basis. Private and associative stakeholders have hence invested a gap left by the state in the integration domain, enabling the interaction of immigrants with a variety of actors and with citizens. The case of Mrs. E exemplifies Mr. C's reflexion:

- Hm... once we created the... the [associative] status, we started the... the first grant was by... the Culture Ministry, so we had support. And then, we... this year, last year, from the Paris City Hall.
- *So, this support came after creating the project, it didn't help you creating it per se?*
- No... no. At first, as I was incubated, it's... *Singa* France which helped us establishing the first partnership even... prior having the legal status, I mean.

This excerpt shows a role reversal between associative and institutional actors. While the latter should guide the newcomer and refer him/her to experts in the professional field of his/her choice, here, an associative actor provided long-term support and made it possible for Mrs. E to be supported by public actors once her project was already advanced. Again, this institutional support came a posteriori, which suggests its lack of continuity.

Indeed, the state and different dedicated institutions are present upon the immigrants' arrival in France, in order to complete administrative procedures. When it comes to refugees, this phase is longer and involves more public support. Asylum seekers are put in a situation of assistance while they are waiting for their application to be lodged, by being provided civic and linguistic training, a subsidy, and sometimes an accommodation. Once they get their refugee status, this assistance suddenly stops, as well as all support. Due to the duration of this first phase, refugees have high expectations as to the role of the state, and get disoriented by its discontinuity. Many end up in the common law assistance system, receiving subsidies and more or less followed up by the employment office, without getting tailored support based on their profile of newcomer, as Louay Y. shared:

[...] there isn't any [state] role, as I said, there is a step missing, the first stage, it's non-existent. So how... take me: if I had not contacted with *Singa* Lyon's incubator; so, in my case, I stayed for two years... for two years approximately with Pôle Emploi... as other citizens or newcomers in France. Yet, the only thing that they did propose to me was a French course.

Louay questioned the state role in integration, which he deems insufficient to meet the needs of immigrants. According to him, one step is missing in the integration path to equip newcomers with the necessary linguistic skills and knowledge of the system. This model does not give a chance to less-resourced individuals. Indeed, the support comes back later in the immigrant entrepreneur's itinerary, when his/her project is deemed interesting and viable enough to be supported, as Louay said:

I do not mean that the state doesn't do anything, but it certainly doesn't do enough. It's only when... for example when you are able to improve or develop your idea so that it becomes a better project, then you are able to find or meet with organisations or institutions such as *Bpi France* or *La French Tech*. Beforehand, however, there is nothing.

This scheme automatically makes differences between well-resourced individuals and others, who get excluded from opportunities because they do not have the means to find them. The chance factor thus comes back at the forefront, and there is a selection between those who possess cultural capital, can look for information and build a network, and those who cannot on

their own. For instance, Andra was confronted to a refusal from financiers to invest in her project because she could not prove experience on the French market:

And I, well, I... contacted several financing organisations, but... the answers were quite... the same: it's important to have been launched for a year on the market to... to demonstrate, to prove how the... product works on the market, to see its potential, and then... it's easier to... receive... financial support.

As it is, the system functions backward: while Andra would have needed financial support to launch her project on the French market, financial institutions are cautious and require the proof that her business is sustainable and that they are not taking risks. From the beginning, a sorting is made between those who possess resources to make it on their own, and those who do not. As such, it is a highly elitist system based on merit and capabilities, where support must be earned.

Compared with what is expected from newcomers, the institutions are insufficiently involved in the process. The means they have developed do not meet their proclaimed ambitions in the field of integration. The linguistic trainings proposed to newcomers are one such example of this lack of investment. Indeed, an A1 level in French is expected, and the trainings to reach it are compulsory. Based on the individual's knowledge of French, the training can last between 100 and 600 hours. The course length has significantly increased in recent years. However, with an A1 level, the person only gets a basic knowledge of French which is not sufficient to insert professionally: according to the OFII website, it corresponds to a level of "discovery" of the language.¹⁷⁸ What is more, it only enables daily communication, but has no professional focus. Louay lamented this lack of professional orientation:

Yet, the only thing that they did propose to me, was a French course. But in the meantime, I needed to lean about the French language applied to my professional field. This is something which does not exist here... How can I put it, learning professional French, applied to each sector, it doesn't exist here in France. It is... it is complicated. You see? We had... we had to learn just the language which is used between people. But say I have an appointment with... with a filmmaker, a producer for instance... I don't have the tools to contact him or to discuss with him. Actually, at the start, when I had to sign my contract or renting my apartment, I didn't understand anything, because I only had the A1 level in French.

Besides only enabling limited contacts with natives, the language courses provided to immigrants are too theoretical and general. They are not tailored to each path, and have no professional aims. It does not ease, and even delays or blocks the individual's professional insertion.

¹⁷⁸ OFII, « Le contrat d'intégration républicaine », <https://www.ofii.fr/procedure/accueil-integration/>

6.3 INSTITUTIONAL ACTORS: A BARRIER PER SE?

Not only are institutional actors insufficiently involved in the integration path considering the needs of immigrants, they can also reinforce the barriers to entrepreneurship this public already have. While there has been an increasing focus on entrepreneurship and innovation, especially in the technology sector, the public incentives are perceived by some as nothing but a discourse, not followed by the necessary means:

I think there is a... how to put it? Incitive side to it that makes many people... feel stimulated to go for it: they say “you need to go for it”, you need to be, there, you need to take the lead, this kind of speeches that we find very often in the political field, where people, really, they talk like... like coaches actually? But why would you need trainers if you need to do something which is natural. So... if we need coaches, it’s because we are doing something which is not... which is... which is in a highly competitive playing field, and where you can’t know in advance... what will work and what won’t.

This discourse on entrepreneurship has actually pervaded that of some participants, who would offer this advice to a prospective entrepreneur. The French institutions have emphasised the entrepreneur status as a way to curb the unemployment rate and to make the French economy more competitive. However, the means did not follow the discourse, and can endanger more vulnerable groups which are not supported in their endeavour and lack resources. In particular, there is not enough focus on immigrant entrepreneurship: in Taché’s document outlining propositions in favour of integration, employed work is still the main focus when it comes to economic insertion.¹⁷⁹ Conversely, only one subsection and one subsequent proposition regard entrepreneurship. Immigrant entrepreneurship remains an unthought for the institutions, which might explain that the administrative procedures are not adapted to this public. Many participants found administrative burden and inertia were major obstacles in their entrepreneurial path.

First, administrative burden is a problem per se. Indeed, for Mrs. D, it was a real uphill battle that caused much emotional distress:

The French system is complicated. The administration is really complicated. I think it’s exhaustive, but it’s too complicated, and nobody knows everything. And when people don’t know, they say anything... and that really stresses me out. For instance, I tried to create a self-employed status. It took me a year to do so. And then, I found out that I was mistaken. I should have chosen “independent worker”, it’s a different type of status for which I have to pay much contribution ahead. And when I found out... I called the URSSAF, and they told me: no, you were mistaken, so you need to wait for another year to change, and this year you have to pay this amount. And I’m completely chocked and hopeless. But then... I search, I search... and there actually are solutions. But it took time, and stress... this, I don’t like so much. And every single time there is something,

¹⁷⁹ Taché, A. (2018), pp.83-84.

I need to call Pôle Emploi, URSSAF, Amelie... it's a catastrophe... it really demotivates me.

For most of the interviewees, the French administrative system was reputed for its complexity and slowness, and the entrepreneurial one is no exception. Their experience validated this pre-conception. Both these elements show through in Mrs. D's narrative. The lack of knowledge of it and of expert guidance can lead to more or less serious mistakes and delay the project launch. It also has psychological impacts on the individual, because the whole project relies on the right completion of these procedures. This extract also illustrates the lack of support from the institutions framing entrepreneurship in France, such as the URSSAF.¹⁸⁰

Beyond the lack of help, the institutions can be at the origin of the administrative barriers by artificially creating obstacles. Indeed, what emerged from the interviews is that the administrative mechanisms are not adapted to immigrants. Sometimes, civil servants strictly apply the procedures without adapting it to this public. Abbas' experience of registering his company was complexified because of his status as a refugee and an entrepreneur:

And then... I... I launched my project a bit later, because usually in... in the beginning of your support path you must launch your project but, I had issues, I had issues with regards to the bank [account] opening, and also with my entrepreneurship status etc, etc. So, for all these reasons, it takes, it took a lot of time, because back then I didn't have... I had my refugee status, but I hadn't received the residence card yet, etc. So, without the residence card, it's so complicated to... to do things.

Despite his asylum application being lodged, Abbas had no document proving he was a refugee. He was dependant on the administration's own timeline to proceed with his personal project. He was blocked in different administrative processes, each adding up to the other. Once again, the segmentation of the different administrative mechanisms complexifies the immigrant entrepreneur's path: indeed, each procedure is dependent on the completion of another one. It creates a vicious circle where some conditions not being met, the whole process is delayed and the different procedures are on hold, each institution expecting another to deliver a document to complete the file. Immigrants, and even more so refugees, have extra paperwork to fill in, and the documentation they have at a given time is not always accepted by some administrative bodies. Mr. C. gave another example:

And... then there are... a thousand things, but it's more of administrative issues, and... Say, for example... if, a refugee, a newcomer has high residential mobility. [...] And it's often old addresses, and when creating the company, the bank account address, and

¹⁸⁰ [Social Security and Family Allowance Contribution Collection Offices]

the current... address, need to correspond with the address given for the company registration. It's a huge administrative headache, there are many things like that. Since people don't have a stable... home, they have to change all the time... it's almost impossible that when creating the company, all the addresses on the identification documents will correspond to the current address. So, some prefectures, sorry, some chambers of commerce are more used to it [...] but some in other departments are... intolerant, so people need to change their residence card, and it takes almost six months, for some even a year... before registering the company. So, imagine, that's huge, huge. Many had to do it. In other words, you're blocked for a year to create your company. Nobody's going to wait for a year.

Besides having to wait for getting the residence card, opening a bank account, or finding an accommodation, immigrants, and refugees in particular, have difficulties registering their company because they do not meet the administrative criteria. These obstacles enroot in their very status as immigrants or refugees. The rigid institutional management further delays their economic insertion by requiring more paperwork. Plus, it creates territorial disparities: while civil servants in regions receiving more immigrants and refugees are familiar with this situation and are more likely to accommodate, others will tend to comply with the procedure without adapting on a case-by-case basis. The current administrative requirements are therefore not adapted to the immigrant public, and further creates barriers in their entrepreneurial path. When Pôle Emploi does propose trainings to prospective immigrant entrepreneurs, they do not meet their needs, because of their theoretical and short-term features, as Louay explained:

[...] through a... a short training lasting for seven or ten days, I forgot really, it was, say, ten days... with... with Pôle Emploi [...] Ten days, it can't work for just ten days, [a newcomer] needs a month so that all the things are well explained to him/her. How can I launch my company, while at the same time not being able to take the necessary steps in French?

When immigrants do join common law mechanisms, their peculiarities are not taken into account. They are expected to follow the same trainings as natives, while not being in possession of the same background information, and while lacking language proficiency. More adapted trainings, including more practical content and lasting longer, are crucial.

Besides being burdensome, the administration is characterised by its inertia. In Louay's words, it has to do with the "closed mindset" of many French institutional actors. It is characterised by a lack of both support and responsiveness, while expecting beneficiaries to meet high requirements. Louay's use of a metaphor illustrates the current state of affairs:

I think that I understood the situation, that the state wants to... to be a... one of the best economies, be it in Europe or... or worldwide. But how can we achieve this with a... for instance if I travel to Paris with a... car which drives only... at 20 km/h for instance. It doesn't work. If the state, the French state is willing to become... among the best

economies worldwide, we need to use means such as the TGV, it's not with cars, old cars. [...] So, the state needs to work well, it's not just about initiatives like Bpi France, or La French Tech. We need other administrations, because not everyone bears projects reliant on technologies, or new technologies.

The participants' answers about the role of the public actors suggest that the current discourse on entrepreneurship presents high ambitions, but does not give people the means to reach them. Indeed, the current management is slow, too restrictive when it comes to the sectors that need to develop, and gives too little means to prospective entrepreneurs. The cautious, sometimes even rigid mindset of some institutional actors also participate in blocking innovation and economic liveliness by imposing too complex measures, especially for the immigrant public for which the administrative tools are not adapted.

CONCLUSION

The obstacles faced by immigrants in their entrepreneurial path are to be related with the barriers they encounter in the wider professional domain. Indeed, as the classical ethnic entrepreneurship theory has revealed, immigrants suffer from discriminations which bar them access to their host country job market.¹⁸¹ It matters to focus on the pre-entrepreneurship trajectory, because the majority of the participants in this study originally occupied employed positions. In this thesis, it was found that immigrants' qualifications and experiences are undermined or altogether negated. What is more, their statuses can bar them access to certain sectors or even to work. As a result, they are not in capacity to be agents of their own path, and experience deskilling or unemployment.

In this framework, the profile of the “necessity-driven” immigrant entrepreneur, “pushed” into self-employment, was developed.¹⁸² While France is characterised a long-standing destination country for low-educated immigrants¹⁸³, the highly-educated amongst its foreign-born population has increased by 6.4 percentage points between 2006 and 2017.¹⁸⁴ The opposition between low-educated immigrants forced into entrepreneurship and well-resourced intentional ones is hence too schematic, as it hides a plurality of paths. The different cases showed that while entrepreneurship was never the participants' first professional choice, a combination of factors, wherein migration played an essential role, provoked this shift. A commonality is the resonance of one's personal and professional background in their entrepreneurial projects. Therefore, immigrant entrepreneurship cannot be explained by cultural or ethnic factors, but rather through the lense of immigration and integration processes, as more recent studies have proven.¹⁸⁵

The literature has not emphasised enough the extent to which the barriers encountered by immigrants on their entrepreneurial journey are tied to the processes of immigration and socialisation in a new setting. Indeed, as newcomers, they essentially lack resources, be they immaterial (information, language proficiency, network) or material (economic). The issue is that they simultaneously have to socialise in this new setting and insert economically. Those who had

¹⁸¹ Light, I. (1972), Aldrich, H. & Waldinger, R. (1990).

¹⁸² Chrysostome, E. (2010).

¹⁸³ OECD/EU (2018), p.26. It is also the case of other Western European countries: Austria, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p.69.

¹⁸⁵ Vandor, P. & Franke, N. (2016); Harnoss, J. et al. (2021); Sundararajan M. & B. (2015).

been in France for longer, or who already knew the language, faced less difficulties. Hence, it confirms the theories underlining the importance of capitals by immigrant entrepreneurs.¹⁸⁶

Among all resources, the network appeared as the most essential to develop successfully as an entrepreneur in France. Indeed, both informal and formal networks can provide the prospective entrepreneur with different resources, directly or as intermediaries. Different stakeholders proved determinant, including the family, acquaintances, communities – religious, of immigrants or co-nationals -. Mapping these different actors help putting the ethnic entrepreneurship model into perspective: in France, the ethnic community does not play an essential rule in enabling immigrants to become entrepreneurs. However, formal connections, such as formal support schemes, and especially those dedicated to immigrants or refugees, proved determinants, because they guide, act as platforms and grant the immigrant entrepreneurs the legitimacy they need. While Levy-Tadjine concluded that general support schemes were sufficient for immigrant entrepreneurs¹⁸⁷, our study points in another direction: this public needs a more extensive and in-depth support, especially if they are newly arrived. They also need a support group that is aware of their specificities and know how to adapt accordingly.

Yet, the current French business support framework is too segmented, and because of the specialisation of some programmes, immigrant entrepreneurs can have hurdles to join general, common right mechanisms. A middle ground is needed between specialised programmes and general ones, so that both are open to immigrants and respond to the needs of different groups. Indeed, the interviews underlined the closure and tendency to social reproduction of the entrepreneurship ecosystem: one's qualifications and experiences (i.e., cultural capital) are determinant to enter these schemes, and more social inclusion would be desirable.

While individuals, both immigrants and natives, and private actors as well as civil society organisations (CSOs) actors are involved in the integration of immigrants in France through entrepreneurship, and testify of a true “two-way” dynamic, the public institutions adopted a more classical vision. Actually, they make the responsibility for integration rely predominantly on the immigrants' side. They focus more on the administrative, contractual side of immigration, leaving long-term integration solutions to private actors and CSOs. The integration path thought by the public sector is segmented, not adapted enough to this public, and focuses on “excep-

¹⁸⁶ Cruickshank, P. & Dupuis, A. (2015); Yeasmin, N. (2016).

¹⁸⁷ Levy-Tadjine, T. (2004).

tional” profiles who managed to make it on their own. As highlighted by Rath et al., the institutions have insufficiently adapted their regulations and mechanisms to immigrant entrepreneurs, and have yet to focus on changing the wider environment to make it more favourable.¹⁸⁸

Limitations

Due to the method of identification of respondents, we mainly had access to highly-skilled individuals who could count on supportive social networks. A majority have benefitted from formal follow-up, which has helped them in overcoming the obstacles encountered. Hence, I did not have access to less-resourced individuals. Yet, the findings and examples of other people’s stories counted by the participants can help making a projection: the same obstacles as those identified apply, certainly to a bigger extent. Plus, less-resourced immigrant entrepreneurs who lack social networks cannot have access to the support schemes which could help overcome these barriers.

Avenues for future research

There is room for future research in the field of immigrant entrepreneurship in France, notably when it comes to its relation to sustainability and inclusion. Indeed, while this research did not focus on the types of projects created, we observed a tendency to include a social dimension to the project: eleven of them have either focused on projects based on solidarity and inclusion, or part of the project presents this dimension, or they are willing to “give back” and help others as a side activity. A subsequent question that arises is whether they were influenced by their environment, in particular those who joined a formal support scheme, by their immigration background, or by the liveliness of the French SSE ecosystem.

Another possibility is to investigate the obstacles faced by less-resourced prospective immigrant entrepreneurs who have not benefitted from formal support. Just like the researches led by Levy-Tadjine or Chabaud et al., it would be interesting to further study the support provided to immigrant entrepreneurs by dedicated programmes such as *Singa* or *La French Tech*.

¹⁸⁸ Rath, J. (2011).

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Can you introduce yourself briefly?

What is your educational and professional background?

Can you tell me more about your path to France?

What triggered your decision to become an entrepreneur ? Why in this domain in particular?

Can you tell me more about your project? / Can you tell me more about your entrepreneurial path ?

Did you benefit from dedicated formal support to launch your own activity? Why (not)?

How did you get to know about this support organisation?

To which of your needs did the support programme respond?

Did you benefit from support from individuals on their own? Of what kind?

Can you tell me about the role of the institutions in your entrepreneurial path?

How did you have access to the information? to the network?

What kind of obstacles did you face in your path towards entrepreneurship?

In your opinion and based on your experiences, what do you think could facilitate immigrants' access to entrepreneurship?

What kind of advice would you give to a newcomer / an immigrant who wants to launch his/her project in France?

Would you say you had the same opportunities as a native to become an entrepreneur in France?

Do you think there are peculiarities in being an entrepreneur who is an immigrant, as compared with native entrepreneurs?

What was the impact of the covid-19 on your activity?

What kind of future do you envision for your activity?

APPENDIX 2: EXAMPLE OF IDENTIFICATION EMAIL

Dear _____,

My name is Lucie Argentier, I am a Master student and am conducting a research on newcomers' access to entrepreneurship in France.

I got to hear from you thanks to _____. I would like to conduct an interview with you. The aim of the interview is to explain your path towards entrepreneurship, from the birth of the idea, to the support you received and the difficulties you have been through in this path. I have prepared some questions and could send them to you if you would like to have a more complete idea of what I'm asking.

I have already conducted interviews with 10 entrepreneurs with an immigrant or refugee background. I would like to get other insights, so your participation would be really helpful.

I do not ask questions regarding your personal life or the reasons for your arrival to France. Indeed, the questions regard your entrepreneurial path only. I can also anonymise the interview if you would prefer. In addition, I always send the interview to the interviewee once transcribed, so that he/she can modify some information if needed, and then validate it.

Your participation would be highly valuable to my study, and I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,
Lucie Argentier