Exclusion of Chinese migrant workers in a company in southern Italy: 
A case study

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15 December 2017
Leiden

Word count (excluding appendix): 15001
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INTRODUCTION

Immigrant workers are the new protagonists of the globalized world. In the past, Europeans were usual to migrate seeking for better life conditions; for instance, Italians used to migrate to the U.S. in the early 1900s. Today, on the contrary, migrants mostly move from developing regions (such as Asia, Africa and Latin America) to industrialized countries in search of economic opportunities. The phenomenon of migration has long generated interest among social scientists, especially since phenomena such as globalization and multiculturalism started gaining prominence in social science studies. In this context, the group of immigrant workers is one of the most important emerging classes of advanced capitalism, considering how the labor movements have always created a balance of power between classes (Castells, 1975). More broadly, there are some recurrent factors in the relationship between immigrants and their host countries. Firstly, since most of the immigrant laborers decide to be temporary workers in a foreign country, their consciousness of working conditions and valuation of work is not generally developed (Castells, 1975). Secondly, migrant workers often draw boundaries in the workplace, meaning that they “construct similarities and differences between themselves and other groups” (Lamont, 2009, p. 3).

This thesis will answer the following question: what are the causes for social exclusion of a group of Chinese migrant workers in an Italian company? The aim is to study exclusion from both perspectives: that of the immigrants and that of the host country. Specifically, exclusion is here understood as a lack of interaction, on two different levels, between the Chinese, in the Italian environment: on the workplace and, on a broader scale, on a national level. Moreover, exclusion is also intended as the way Chinese migrant workers are treated differently from Italians, on both aforementioned levels. Against this background, a case study conducted in a firm in the southern Italian city of Bari has been carried out to analyze the causes of exclusion on the workplace between the two groups of workers. The company at issue is part of a cooperative specialized in the transportation and logistics of goods. In 2008 the firm hired a small number of Chinese laborers as warehousemen. These workers are all male, first-
generation migrants from the Southeastern province of Fujian. At the beginning, the aim of this research was to understand whether the Chinese workers were integrated with their Italian colleagues. However, since after a first stage of inquiring the exclusion of the Fujianese workers inside the company was evident, the causes that lead to such social exclusion at work became my new focus. Indeed, my research is completely new since two dimensions—the perspectives of both the Italian and the Chinese employees—are taken into account on two levels of analysis: macro and micro. In fact, during my research, two levels of causality have been identified. Thus, the analysis of the former level will highlight whether such social exclusion is broadly affected by economic and sociopolitical causes. This stage has been identified as a ground level, where widespread ideas and the general studies among the Chinese and Italian communities have been researched. The latter dimension, the micro level, investigates in depth the efforts of the Chinese and Italian workers of the company in integrating and in drawing boundaries between themselves (Lamont, 2009).

Indeed, to the best of my knowledge, no in depth studies have been carried out using both perspectives simultaneously. As a student of Chinese culture and as an Italian citizen, I decided to conduct a case study that aims at highlighting both views. Moreover, I decided to investigate more on the issue of multiculturalism and how it is perceived in the contemporary era, to understand the breeding ground for new populist political powers, which particularly influenced Italy and other European countries over the last years. Finally, since today’s working class brings different cultures together and speaks different languages, it is important to study factors and actors on the workplace to analyze the Chinese working class community in Italy and the factors that lead to their exclusion. This study has thus been conducted at the aforementioned workplace where these two communities are required to cooperate on a daily basis.

No in-depth study of Chinese migrants has been conducted in the south of Italy (Ceccagno, Rastrelli & Salvati, 2010, p.132), especially because the largest part of Chinese migrant workers is settled in the north of the country, in cities such as Milan and Prato. Until the 1980s, almost all of the Chinese workers in Italy were from Zhejiang

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1 Fujian is a Chinese province in the southeast cost of the mainland. Fujian area shares a border with Zhejiang to the north, Jianxi to the west, Taiwan in the east and Guanddong to the south. I will use the word Fujianese to refer to the Chinese who come from this area. However, since the entire thesis just include the Fujianese, the words Chinese and Fujianese are used as synonyms
region, with a first establishment of leather garment workshop in Tuscany (Pieke, Nyiri, Thunø & Ceccagno, 2004). In the late 1980s and early 1990s Chinese from Fujian started moving to Italy as well (Ceccagno et al., 2010). However, the arrival of Chinese in the south of Italy is a recent and important phenomenon that deserves to be studied, especially considering how different the north of Italy is compared to the south - not only economically, but also culturally (Lynn, 2010).

Furthermore, “the economic factors are insufficient to explain the patterns of international migration” (Zhang, 2008, p. 19), in fact there are reasons to be analyzed as unique to the Italian and Chinese context. Firstly, Chinese migration flows changed a lot during the last decade (McKeown 1999; Pieke 2007; Pieke & Xiang 2010; Thunø & Pieke 2005), just looking at the range of people, who today migrate from China, which includes students, females and businessmen. After China’s economic growth became impressive in 1990s, scholars started to be more concerned with the Chinese diaspora and its relation with globalization (Pieke, 2007). Generally, Chinese communities have been studied as an ethnicity with a high level of mobility, as a result of the older trend of migration characteristic of the Fujian area (Thunø & Pieke, 2005). On the other hand, Italy has changed from a country of migration to a European setup for refugees2. Undoubtedly, the phenomenon of multiculturalism in Italy is a current and new issue. Refugee crisis aside, the process for the acquisition of Italian citizenship affects non-EU immigrants and second-generation immigrants in particular. Even if these people feel Italian, having lived all or most of their life in the country, they are required to undergo a bureaucratic process to get the Italian citizenship (Pagotto, 2012). Particularly, since early 2017, the Italian government has been divided on the debates on the “Ius soli”3, a law that allows the children of migrants to acquire citizenship rights. Such a differential treatment intensifies the gap between ‘us’ and ‘the others’. However, there are contradictory trends: the general public shows signs of impatience or xenophobia towards migrants, while employers are generally desirous of the cheap and obedient workforce provided by immigrants (Fassin, 2011). Recent Italian policies and widespread opinions on immigration, shared by the

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vast majority of the Italian population, show how Italy has so far failed to achieve multiculturalism (Buonaiuto & Laforest, 2011).

The thesis develops as follows. The first chapter will look at the social scientific theories for studying immigration and the general findings on Fujianese communities in Europe and Italy. The second and third chapters describe the method used during the research and the company in which the research has been carried out respectively. The fourth chapter deals with the macro causes influential for the non-integration of the Chinese in Italy, thus it will look at the economic and socio-political contexts of both Italian and Chinese. Finally, the fifth chapter explains in detail the exclusion logics constructed inside the working place through stereotypes and conflictual attitudes.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to find the reasons why a group of Chinese workers is socially excluded in an Italian company, it is necessary first to frame the discourse on migration and exclusion in sociology and anthropology. First, Richard Park introduced the relationship between migrants and the host countries in sociology with the establishment of the so-called assimilation theory. Assimilation intended as “process of interpretation and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life” (Park & Burgess 1969, in Alba & Nee 1997, p. 828). Milton Gordon (1964) contributes to the studies on assimilation theories, and he critically discusses what he calls “acculturation” and “structural assimilation”. Gordon argued that the acculturation, which he defined as the assumption of “cultural patterns” (such as languages, values, taste) by the minority group, is an undeniable cycle where prejudices and discrimination will decrease, or even disappear over time (Alba & Nee, 1997, p. 830). Park and Gordon’s views have been largely criticized because of their static view of culture and for not recognizing that the ‘cultural patterns’ can also be constructed in response to the conditions created in the host countries (Alba & Nee, 1997). According to assimilation theories (see e.g.: Gordon 1964; Park & Burgess 1969), the interactions of two or more groups encourage assimilation, as a social process that occurs spontaneously, guaranteeing multiculturalism. However, assimilation, using Milton Gordon’s (1964) term, implies “acculturation” of one group on another one. This vision
is now outdated because it minimized the consequences of the power of the state, which cannot always guarantee equality. Indeed, integration “is a two-way process, requiring adaptation on the part of both the immigrant and the host society” (King & Skeldon, 2010, p. 1635). De facto, this thesis considers integration as a bilateral mechanism, taking into account both the host country and the migrant perspectives.

The exclusion of an ethnic group from a host country is now studied with a transnationalist approach. The social studies on migration (Castells 1975; Castles 2002; Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton 1992) particularly evaluate the importance of contemporary phenomena, such as globalization, economic development and technological innovation. Hence, few studies analyze the issue of migrant workers and class struggles with the eyes of the capitalistic system and globalization (Castells, 1975). Finally, a first definition of transnationalism is given by Schiller et al. (1992, p.1): “We call this new conceptualization, ‘transnationalism,’ and describe the new type of migrants as transmigrants. We have defined transnationalism as the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement. Immigrants who build such social fields are designated ‘transmigrants.’ Transmigrants develop and maintain multiple relations- familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political that span borders”. Particularly, the innovation of the transnational approach is inasmuch as it takes into analysis both the host countries and the native countries of migrants as parts of one field of studying (Levitt & Nyberg-Sorensen, 2004). Indeed, transnationalism is closely linked to globalization forces and the increase in efficiency of technology (such as Email, Skype, internet, and low cost airline fares) (Portes, 1997). All these facilities help migrants in maintaining a close tie with their homeland and family, or can promote integration with the host country (for example by using digital vocabulary or app to learn the language of the host country). However, it is important to highlight that technology does not cause the transnational networks but it facilitates these (Castells, 1996). According to Portes, transnational people are also able to develop a duality in their attitudes and identity; he defined transnational communities as “dense networks across political borders created by immigrants in their quest for economic advancement and social recognition. Through these networks, an increasing number of people are able to lead dual lives. Participants are often bilingual, move easily between different cultures, frequently maintain homes in two countries, and pursue
economic, political and cultural interests that require their presence in both” (Portes, 1997, p. 812).

Against this background, Chinese migrants have been described as the emblem of a transnational community, since they are usually referred to with the term Chinese Diaspora (Benton and Gomez 2001; Cartier 2003; McKeown 1999; Watson 2004) and in connection with the establishment of the so-called Chinatowns. Thus, my thesis describes the Chinese group as a community with a transnational identity; however, it is needed to distinguish between the transnational cultural patterns peculiar of the Chinese and the ones that are not specific of the Chinese, but arise as a reaction to the Italian attitude. Generally, Chinese international migration has been linked with negative aspects by some studies (Chin 1999; Kyle & Dale 2001), such as organized crime or exploitation. However, these characteristics are not peculiar of the Chinese community, but are actually just consequences of both: Chinese cultural patterns and the Italian system, as Ceccagno et al. (2010) argues for the case of criminality. Indeed, the Italian scholars identify a link between some Italian policies (such as the function of amnesties and the quota mechanism -which admit a fixed annual number of migrant workers to enter Italy-) and the spreading of illegal migrant trafficking (Ceccagno et al. 2010; Ceccagno 2015; Colombo & Sciortino 2004). Notably, the paradox created by the Italian regulation of the flows of people does not only facilitate the entrance of migrants into the countries through illegal ways (Colombo & Sciortino, 2004), but also boosts the Chinese community in having problems to integrate and in regulating their business, as the Prato case shows (Denison, Arunachalam, Johanson, & Smyth, 2009). Finally, contemporary Chinese migration is not anymore linked with the establishment of Chinese Chinatowns (Thunø, 2007). The studies conducted in Canada, Australia and the United States confirm that the Chinese “are not excluded as marginal groups but are part of multicultural societies” (Skeldon, 2007, p. 44). Finally, one of the causes researched for the exclusion of these Fujanese in the company is strictly linked with the understanding of what can be considered as a transnational pattern of the Fujanese culture. Particularly, how crucial is the Chinese attachment to the motherland to their exclusion within the company?

An important fact needs to be pointed out to understand the transnationalist aspect of Fujianese migrants: Fujian has a long history of “culture of migration” (Zhang, 2008, p. 20) due to its position and proximity to Taiwan. Fujian was a military and a sensitive
area until the economic liberalization in 1980s-1990s, when it became a strategic region for economic development (Thunø & Pieke, 2005). Additionally, Chinese authorities push the Fujianese people to migrate in order to increase the local standard of living (Pieke, 2007). The new Chinese migration (after the economic and opening up policy since 1978) is influenced by “different types of transnational connections and histories of previous forms of mobility” (Thunø & Pieke, 2005, p. 486) creating now a migration tradition considered by Fujianese as normal and necessary (Thunø & Pieke, 2005). Thus, China in the last few years lead the desire of Chinese migrants to become “modern”, which in China is usually synonymous of wealth, power, success and individualism (McKeown, 1999). The wage gap has been considered a major pull factor by neoclassical economic theories (Harris & Todaro 1970). However, explaining reasons for migration requires a deeper explication than economic necessity. As conceptualized by McKeown (1999), new migration relies on stability rather than on difficulties. The Chinese middle class is now able to afford the cost of the journey but is also bound to face social exclusion, language and cultural gap for a low skilled employment (Pieke, 2007). The smuggling of Chinese migrants is managed by the role of Chinese “snakeheads” “蛇头 (shetou)”. Pieke and Thunø (2005) argue that these Chinese migration brokers are not the origin of high number of Fujianese to migrate, but that the real cause should have been multidimensional researched, with the inclusion of social, cultural and political approaches.

In addition, the idea of modernity well matches with Chinese nationalism, since to be a Chinese transnational migrant should be evocative of the idea of the motherland abroad (McKeown, 1999). The diasporic nationalism is also remarkable in the so-called “myth of return” (Watson, 2004, p. 898), characteristic of the Chinese migrants who, despite having lived and worked abroad for a long time, consider the repatriation possible. Finally, as it occurred in both the old and the new Chinese migration order, families were and still are “the most basic institution on which migration networks were build” (McKeown, 1999, p. 317), especially because the new migration extends through the matured and familiar networks of the old migration (Thunø & Pieke, 2005). Overall,

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4 The system ideated by the local government to push migration includes education, journals, agencies etc. The last tendency in Fujian is the establishment of exit service centers arranging assistance airline tickets, job opportunities and other info to migrate in Europe (See e.g.: Thunø & Pieke 2005; Pieke 2007).
scholars identify the construction of a Chinese identity, among the Chinese migrant workers in Europe, based upon kinship, dialects, place of origin and occupation (Wu & Liu, 2014). The causes researched in this thesis will better clarify to what extent the exclusion of the Chinese in an Italian company depend on the transnational features of the Fujianese migrant workers.

As Shibutani and Kwan (1965) in “Ethnic Stratification” argue, following the Chicago School sociologist and Mead’s theory, the attitudes against an individual depend “not on what he is, but on the manner in which is defined” (Alba & Nee, 1997, p. 838). Orum (2005) argues that ethnic communities have the power to influence the host countries. Social identity theories bring into focus the response of an individual against a different social group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The notion of identity refers to both the personal and the collective sphere, however, in both cases, identity is not just naturally given but in reverse is culturally defined and constructed. Hence, on the one hand, the common identity is created by the collective ground and shared perceptions self-attributed (based on same language, same place of origin or same culture). On the other hand, the identity of a particular group is negotiated by the interpretation of the “others” (external and other ascribed) (Vertovec, 2001). The self-concept is driven by the other members of the group and by the comparison of the difference with the “others”. This negotiation affects the mutual representation and their identity itself. In this cycle of influences the boundaries of social life became fluid, hence the inclusion of some attitudes and the preservation of other transnational habits should not be seen as two conflicting social processes (Levitt & Schiller, 2004). Thus, “who is a stranger is continually being modified and contested with growing ethnic, cultural and religious tension in, as well as in between, societies and states.” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 213). Hence, the creation of a racial group means both defining its own group and, in opposition, “defining their position vis-a- vis each other” (Blumer, 1958, p. 4).

The studies among Chinese migrants in Europe revealed that different place of origin corresponds to different host countries in Europe, not only because of the networks — 关系 (guanxi), created among a certain group of people or place in a certain period, but also because different cultures of migration depend on their place of origin in China (Pieke et al., 2004). Indeed, policies and historical events can also influence such tendency. The integration of Chinese communities in their host countries is the emblem
of how this is not just a consequence of transnational behaviour, as imposed by the place of origin, but also by the circumstances of the host country. This is particularly why generalization among Chinese migrants in France or in Italy will give different results (Christiansen, 2003). Despite this, it is possible to draw some similarities and some differences among the Chinese migrants’ integration in Europe. For instance, Christiansen, through an analysis of different Chinatowns around Europe, identifies “the commercialization of the ethnic label in Chinese catering (and in some parts of Europe in the formation of Chinatowns) as an important element in identity-building” (Christiansen 2003, p. 174). Even though Europe as political entity does not play a fundamental role in the determination of Chinese integration, Europe generates some policies that contribute in consolidating migrant groups across ethnic differences (Christiansen, 2003).

Notably, the Italian immigration laws and policies create a system where the Chinese unskilled laborers depend on their employers, who compel them to accept hard working conditions (Christiansen, 2003). On the contrary, through the studies conducted among the Chinese community in Prato (see: Ceccagno 2003; Denison et al. 2009; Marsden 2014), it is notable that the Chinese business benefits the Italian economy enough to be considered indispensable to diversifying industries and creating a competitive market (Ceccagno, 2007). Thus, the data reported until today points out the “contrast between economic integration and social exclusion” (Marsden, 2014, p. 1240), characteristic of the Chinese community in Italy. Particularly, the causes for leading the Chinese in Prato excluded by the Italian community must be researched in the widespread popular opinion in Italy about the Chinese entrepreneurs (Ceccagno, 2007). This hostility towards the Chinese business starts from the competency between the Made in Italy and the Made in China in the garment industry, the former is known for its high quality for being fancy, while the latter is considered as bad quality but cheaper. In spite of its bad reputation, the Chinese brand boasts a great success due to its lower price (compared with Italian brands), and for being much more time efficient in production terms (Ceccagno, 2015). Overall, a discriminatory trend against the Chinese in Italy is boosted firstly by the fact that the great number of Chinese in Italy is a recent phenomenon, secondly by a widespread discontent due to the economic crisis started in 2003 experienced by the Italian industry (Ceccagno, 2007). Finally, Italy creates a system for immigrants based on “a vague form of multiculturalism and cultural assimilation” (Buonaiuto & Laforest 2011,
p. 53), differently from the model of the United States, Canada and England, bearers of melting pot and true multiculturalism. Generally, the first generation of Chinese in Italy tends to work for Chinese entrepreneurs, especially in the manufacturing sector, where they are usually exploited and are victims of bad conditions inside the workplace, (where they also use to sleep in). However, the second generation of Chinese started to succeed in Italy, thanks to their economic resources and their improvement in the Italian language (Marsden, 2014).

Contrary to the study conducted in England, where the Chinese workers for an English company gain the possibility to learn English and to get more close with the English culture (Pieke & Xiang, 2010), studies in Italy (Bonaiuto & Laforest, 2011) pinpoint the racialization of migrant domestic workers. First, Italy, in contrast with other European countries such as Germany and the United Kingdom, keeps receiving predominantly low-skilled immigrant workers (Ceccagno et al., 2010). Secondly, the reasons for circumscribing the Chinese workers to one set of jobs (such as logistic work, manufacture job and construction work) are not particularly different from those of other immigrant communities (Carchedi & Ferri, 1998). These reasons are the linguistic difficulties, the requirement of the company for low skilled workers and the need for long hours shifts for low wages. In other words, my study confirms the study conducted by Ceccagno et al. (2010) to the extent that the Italian firms are employing new migrant workers instead of Italian for two particular reasons: the migrants supply a form of constant work, and migrant workers are more flexible and less demanding than Italians (Ceccagno et al., 2010). Adding into the equation the notion that Chinese workers are also seen as tireless, their vulnerability, created by stereotypes and prejudices, and consequently their isolation both surge. However, because they actually think that they will start their own business in the future (Ceccagno et al., 2010), these migrant workers see both exploitation and exclusion as temporary.

2. METHODOLOGY

The case study presented in this dissertation has been conducted in a company in Bari, from December 2016 to March 2017. During these four months, five Chinese workers (out of a total of seven working for the company) and six Italian workers (out of a total of one hundred) have been interviewed. In order to preserve the interviewees’
privacy, all names have been changed. Moreover, the working system, the division of
duties and the interaction between Chinese and Italian workers have been examined and
critically analyzed through participant observation. A qualitative research design has been
chosen because the intent of this case study is to well describe not just the causes of the
exclusion of one particular Chinese community in an Italian company, but also the
perception of these individuals in reaction to a multicultural working environment.
Conducting qualitative interviews is certainly helpful if the intent of the research is to
study in detail a phenomenon or a situation, plus the meaning of this phenomenon for the
actors involved (Firestone 1987; Silverman 2006). In this sense, not just people and their
life stories are important to be taken into analysis, but also the way people spontaneously
address one particular topic during a conversation and their attitudes during the
interviews. As Spardley argues, interviewing is the best method to understand the world
from the subject’s point of view: “I want to understand the world from your point of view.
I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning
of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things
as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand?” (Spradley,
1979, p. 34). Indeed, interviewing is a basic mode to research the significance of
behaviors and feelings for the actors involved, through an interpretation of data.
Furthermore, anthropological studies moved from a static view of culture, as inspired by
Tylor, to a fluid and dynamic one, where the negotiation between actors and interpreted
never ends (Tweed, 2002). Thus, the interviews conducted in Bari emphasize the meaning
given by the actors involved, considering that the “meaning is constructed (not given),
multiple (not univocal), contested (not shared), and fluid (not static). And, most
importantly, meaning is inscribed by readers, listeners, participants, or viewers” (Tweed,

In order to have a good insight on the different ways and circumstances in which
they interact with the Chinese workers, the Italian workers have been purposely selected
from different backgrounds and positions inside the company. More specifically, the
Italians interviewed are the company manager (Mario), three supervisors (Giacomo,
Nicola and Francesco), one office worker (Anna, the only female worker of the company),
and one warehouseman (Antonio). On the contrary, the Chinese workers interviewed
were all warehousemen (the two Wu brothers, Liu, Xu) with the exception of Li, who
runs his own business in the north of Italy and acts as an intermediary between the Italian manager Mario and the Chinese workers. Thanks to my connections with one of the Italian employees, finding Italian company workers who were willing to be interviewed was fairly easy. On the other hand, I did not have any social contact with the Chinese group. Hence, I started with interviewing Wu, the only Chinese worker who seems to be close to the Italian group, and also the only one who is able to speak Italian. Thanks to him, I was able to get in touch with other Chinese workers. However, of the seven Chinese workers employed by the company, one was back in China for the holidays and one refused to take part in the study. Because, for security reasons, I was not allowed inside the company warehouse, all interviews were conducted in the workplace inside their meeting place (a bar in an industrial area in which the company is located), except the interview with Li, which was done by phone, for understandable reasons. The interviews lasted for about one hour and they were semi-structured. Both perceptions and facts have been researched through questions about their daily routine at work: such as their lunch, work schedule or future goals and perspectives. All the interviews have been recorded and transcribed in Italian.

Overall, the company accommodated my requests on studying the integration between the two groups; however, during the study some problems and limits emerged. It was not always easy to make an appointment with the people who I wanted to interview, since my timeframe was short and the full-time job of the interviewees did not allow them much spare time. The fact that I, an Italian citizen, conducted the interviews helped the communication with the Italian workers language wise; because of the same reasons such workers were also more inclined to talk and open up to me. On the contrary, the Chinese workers were more problematic to approach since they all have the same day-off (Saturday) and they were not keen on being interviewed in their own houses. The research includes both perceptions and facts; however, considering the limits in discussing issues such as discrimination and racism, it is necessary to differentiate between objectivity and subjectivity among these discourses. It is meaningful to analyze if there is a perceived discrimination, even if it will not necessarily coincide with the reality and the objectivity of fact; it is caused by many factors that are also important to point out. Finally, in order to clarify the mutual influence playing in the exclusion process, I decided to consider both perspectives, Chinese and Italian workers, simultaneously. Consequently, a clear
distinction of the causes involved is made in order to distinguish the indirect influences from the direct influences. Thus, the macro causes typify the indirect influences, whereas the micro causes describe the direct ones.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 THE COMPANY

I conducted a case study in an Italian firm, located in an industrial district in Bari, a city in Puglia region in southern Italy. The company is one of the largest logistic firms in the region, and it is specialized in food logistics, sorting the goods inside all major supermarkets in Puglia. In other words, every kind of food is packed in this warehouse, which is composed of areas divided according to the typology of the food that is handled (for instance: fruit, vegetables, meats, cold cuts and frozen foods). Furthermore, the company is now part of a cooperative specialized in the transportation and logistic of controlled food products. The company was never harshly affected by the economic crisis, thanks to the fact that the food sector is one of the most stable businesses in Italy. However, for a short period of time the company suffered a decrease in revenue leading to it being absorbed by a bigger cooperative that now counts three firms in total; the other two being located in northern Italy (Lombardia and Veneto regions). The two companies in the north are the core of the cooperative, and involve office and management work. By contrast, the company in Bari is only responsible for the coordination of the loading of food, thus the main operating area is the warehouse. According to the interviews with the warehouse supervisors, the company in Bari started hiring migrant workers as warehousemen in 2008, because of the success of employing migrant workers of different ethnicities (Albanians, Moroccans etc.) in the two branches in the north. According to several interviews with the employees, the decision of improving the warehouse revenue through the employment of migrant workers was taken because the Italian workers were too demanding (asking for holidays, days off, etc.) and they were less willing to work in the refrigeration sector of the warehouse. Finally, the company started hiring migrant workers from different countries but then, thanks to the friendship between the manager of the company Mario and an ex Chinese warehouseman Li, who used to work in one of the subsidiary companies in the north of Italy, the firm in Bari started hiring workers from the Chinese region of Fujian. Since the Chinese started working for the company in Bari,
it has been maintaining an average of ten Chinese workers out of one hundred employees throughout the years.

Through my interviews and through participant observation, I was able to collect detailed information on the structure of the work, duties, and sectors of the company. First of all, logistic firms characterize the entire district; the routes that connect the main city with this area are busy with trucks and other big vehicles, making the streets quite dangerous. The warehouse is the place where the majority of the interviewees work, most of whom are low skilled laborers. All of the workers in the company are male, except for one female (Anna), who works in the office as responsible for the salary of the workers. Furthermore, the hierarchy inside the company is characterized by five main figures: the manager, the head of the warehouse, the aforementioned female office worker, the supervisors of the smaller sectors in the warehouse, and the warehousemen. All the workers who have access to the warehouse are required to wear a uniform, composed by thick jacket and trousers, similar to a snowsuit. In fact, the food stock inside the warehouse is maintained at refrigerator temperature for sanitary and normative reasons, with each section and room having a different temperature depending on the type of food stored in it. Moreover, the Italian law requires the warehousemen to use specific Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). The company is open 24 hours a day, except for Saturday afternoons. The workers’ schedules constantly change, especially concerning night shifts, which are considered rather tiring, according to interviews with the Italians. In fact, the Italian workers are the only ones doing the night shifts. Anna explained to me that this decision was mainly taken for two reasons. First of all, because the Chinese do not have their own car; secondly, there has been times when the Chinese actually did the night shifts, however, they turned out to be less profitable, changing their daily routine. Thus, the manager decided to give to the Chinese employees always the same schedule, for the benefit of the company.

3.2 THE CHINESE WORKERS

The Chinese employees get to work by bike, cycling about 11 kilometers from their residence, whereas the Italians drive their car to work. There have been times when, for emergency reasons, for instance due to the snow, the Italians dropped the Chinese off at work. All of the Chinese workers in the factory live together in the same neighborhood,
known as the Chinatown of Bari, with three of them also living in the same apartment with their respective families. Wu and his brother are the only ones in the group who do not live with the others; they reside in a different area of the city, where the concentration of immigrants is lower. The task of the warehousemen is to dispose the different kind of packages, using forklifts to move heavy items. No cases of illegal or unequal salary have been mentioned during the interviews with both Chinese and Italian workers. In order to motivate its warehousemen, the company provides them with a wage bonus based on the quantity of goods they manage to stock; however, the bonus is personal and not collective. The bonus is given only to the fastest working warehousemen who contribute in maintaining a high level of productivity.

Through the interviews with the Italians, it emerged that the Chinese workers are limited to work in one sector of the warehouse and the decision on such limitation was taken when Chinese workers were first hired. This is because the section where they are employed (cured meat and cold cuts) was and still is the only one where knowledge of the Italian language is not required, as the items in are labelled with numbers and not words. On an early stage of the analysis, this decision seemed to be a matter of language skills, however, during the interviews I conducted with the Chinese it emerged that they are not interested in moving up in the company. Indeed, even if a Chinese worker with relevant experience in this sector acquired the Italian language skills necessary to succeed in this kind of job, it transpired that the Chinese workers do not consider either transferring to a different sector or being promoted in the company ranks a feasible option due to the fact that they see their job as temporary, although some of them have lived in Italy for more than eight years. Such a case never occurred during these years in the company, and none of the Chinese has never required changing position inside the company. Indeed, most of these Chinese employees are not sure about their future plans, and only one of them (Wu) plans to stay in Italy long-term. The integration of Chinese workers is hindered by the fact that they always work together with no prospective in changing their work routine and with no chance of cooperating with the Italians. Thus, the Chinese interviewees did not have any ambitions in moving up inside the company; as opposed to the ones described in other studies (Ceccagno et al. 2010) where both the employer and the employees were Chinese.
As already mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the friendship between the Italian manager Mario and Li, a former employee in the company, facilitated the arrival of Chinese labor at the firm in Bari. In particular, all the Chinese who I interviewed were working in or nearby Venice, where Li also lives and runs his business. Indeed, this friendship creates a triangular mediation between Li, Mario and the Chinese workers. Based on the interviews with Mario and Li, it emerged that sometimes Li helps the Chinese with their residence permit renewal or other bureaucratic issues. Particularly, the Chinese workers have described the figure of Li almost as a family member. They occasionally (for instance during the Chinese New Year) visit Li in Venice, or vice versa. Li and the Chinese workers are all from Fujian province (cf. Pieke et al. 2004; Pieke 2007; Thunø and Pieke 2005; Zhang 2008). Hence, the Chinese value of guanxi, among people who came from the same region, plays a key-role not just in terms of influences at work, but also in the daily routine of these Chinese workers. Significantly, the figure of Li could also be interpreted as the Chinese snakehead (Pieke & Xiang 2010; Zhang 2008), due to the fact that he used to gain money in return for his help. However, nowadays Li runs his own business and does not often go to Bari anymore. When the Chinese arrived to the company, Mario requested the presence of Li on several occasions, due to the language barrier and the need for briefing the Fujianese employees on their duties and on the rules of the company.

Moreover, the case study in Italy confirms the great flexibility of Chinese migrants to adapt to new working environments, as argued by Pieke and Xiang (2010). In fact, the Chinese interviewed in Bari had held various kinds of job positions and backgrounds in their work life, such as military career, leather and garment industry, and technology industry. The economic driving forces, as described by the Chinese interviewees, can be considered as the most relevant push and pull factors in their choice to move to Italy for work. Indeed, the wage gap between China and Europe remains substantial; however, all the Chinese workers interviewed were able to pay the 15,000 euros necessary to come to Italy around eight years ago. This amount of money is necessary to pay the snakehead, agencies, and lawyers and to get documents. The snakehead figure and consequently the illegal smuggling of people are described as facilitators and as the only way possible to come to Europe, and they are never presented as criminal actors by the Chinese
testimonies. Most of the Chinese interviewed were upset to have paid such amount of money, and are now working hard to make their investment profitable enough.

4. MACRO CAUSES OF EXCLUSION

I classified as macro causes, the economic and sociopolitical influences for the exclusion of migrant workers in Italy. Indeed, I expect these elements to be characteristic of the Chinese working class in Italy as a whole, and not only in my case study. On the contrary, the micro causes argued in the next chapter only apply to the Chinese and Italian workers of the company taken into analysis.

4.1 ECONOMIC CAUSES

To understand if economic factors are involved in the exclusion of the Chinese workers in Italy, it is legitimate to argue that immigrant workers are helping Italian economy and their integration should thus be strengthened by such reason. However, concerning the Chinese in Italy, the contrast between economic integration and social exclusion, as argued by Marsden (2014) is still great. In the past among scholars, migration was notably considered as an obstacle to economic development, while in recent years discourses on migration have changed perspective and this phenomenon is starting to be seen as a solution (Shiller & Faist, 2012). Finally, although it is customary for the Fujianese to work for Chinese entrepreneurs, helping the stratification and the diversification of European economy (Pieke et al., 2004), the employment of Chinese labour by Italians has grown considerably in the last decade. However, this does not imply integration.

Moreover, the economic crisis, started in Italy in 2008, helped to increase the unrest among Italian citizens. When the economic crisis started in Italy, a technical government led by Mario Monti was established, and the president started a saving decree for Italy having to make some unpopular decisions such as increasing taxes and reforming the pension system, in order to save the Italian economy, which was on the verge of bankruptcy. Therefore, these initiatives had a great impact on the social and economic life of the Italian population. Puglia has also been deeply affected by the economic crisis. Many companies had to close down and, due to the collapse of the production prices of agricultural products, many dishonest entrepreneurs started recruiting migrant, who work
in the countryside in terrible conditions for really low wages. As Ceccagno (2003) points out in her studies on the Chinese community in Prato, the widespread idea among many Italians that Chinese businesses are fomenting the economic crisis in the garment sector is an oversimplification. Francesco (50 years old, Italian, supervisor), who used to work in the garment industry, accused the Chinese of stoking the economic crises, setting low prices and low quality standards, instead of recognizing that the Italian company relies on Fujianese migrants, as a consequence of the Italian economic crises.

Italy is now a country in which a substantial workforce depends on migrant workers (Ceccagno, 2003). It is against this background that the Italian firm in question relies on the Fujianese workers because their working conditions, such as their flexibility, and their compression of personal and family life, create benefits and profits for the company, as Ceccagno et al. (2010) argue. The Italians, on the other hand, are usually more demanding, asking the firm for days off for personal reasons. Moreover, in several interviews with the company’s Italian supervisors and administrators it emerged that the Chinese were more profitable, working as quickly as possible.

“They (the Chinese) are people who work and who are never tired. They are, and I don’t want to make this about exploitation, but it looks like they are made for this kind of job. They are people who never seem tired, who handle labor better than we do. Thus, it is a guarantee for the company. If by any chance, they would leave all together, just seven or eight people less (out of one hundred), the company would be significantly affected. Hence, I believe that they are an integral part of the income statement of the firm. A good 30 percent of the company’s income is because of them. (...) Because if you consider that they do not have any family here...well some of them don’t, I know this is a bad argument, but it brings commitments. Your baby gets ill, a family shopping day, a wedding, or any other kind of occasion. They (the Chinese) do not have this kind of problem, they are always available, always on time, and they are the first to arrive and the last to leave“.

(Giacomo, Italian, male, 33 years old, taskmaster)

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Overall, the economic factors are not significant for the increase of the exclusion of the Chinese. On the contrary, the economic situation in Italy depends on migrant workers, sometimes also facilitating the rise of exploitation of such workers, since they are more adaptable and at the same time they are more in need of a job -having left their country precisely for such reason.

4.2 SOCIO-POLITICAL CAUSES

As socio-political reasons, causing the exclusion of a group of Fujanese in an Italian company, I have identified the transnational aspects peculiar of the Chinese living abroad, and the growing concern, among Italians, about the nation’s current difficult situation. With regard to Chinese transnationalism, I have classified the role of the strong Chinese guanxi (relationships) and the return migration trend as socio political factors influencing the exclusion process. Most Chinese interviewees do not only work together, but in some occasions also share the same apartment. All of the Chinese interviewed came to Italy followed by some relatives or following some of them who were already settled in the country. Some of them brought their wives and children along, making the house quite crowded for Western life standards. The ones who do not have their family with them regularly travel back to China to visit them during the Chinese holidays. Moreover, the technology used by the Chinese interviewed facilitates the transnational aspect of Chinese culture rather than integration. The tight ties in Chinese society and family play a fundamental role; families are still one of the cornerstones in the creation of diasporic networks (McKeown, 1999). Consequently, the studies on the Chinese community integration in Prato (Ceccagno 2003; Denison et al. 2009; Marsden 2014) confirm that the Chinese are more concerned by achieving success and recognition within their community rather than in the host country; this element further stresses their isolation (Denison et al. 2009). As argued by Thunø and Pieke, the local authorities in Fujian are building new “‘European village’ with European style houses to sell to migrants returning from Italy and Hungary” (Thunø & Pieke, 2005, p. 505). For instance, during an informal talk with the Chinese workers, I was shown a cell phone photograph picturing the house of one of the company’s former Chinese workers, who is now back in China and living in a nice, big, Western-style house. This example confirms both the idea of European
lifestyle as modern, and the importance of having a good reputation primarily among other Chinese rather than among the Italians.

Moreover, as political influence over the integration of the Fujianese in the Italian company in question, I identify the idea of modern in China that is being pushed by the Chinese local government and the myth of returning to the motherland. The fast economic development experienced in China in the last decade contributes to the creation of a common idea of modernity and consequently in the decision of many Chinese to migrate to Europe for personal fulfillment (McKeown, 1999). Local authorities in Fujian have pushed people to emigrate in order to economically increase the local standard of life and modernize the area (Pieke, 2007). Thus, as Pieke argues, the reason why many Fujianese say that for him migrating is normal should be studied and taken into consideration as crucial (Thunø & Pieke, 2005). As Li explained to me, migration culture in his region began more than one hundred years ago. Moreover, the common idea of coming to Europe is to come for just a few years in order to make enough money to lead a good life once back in their homeland. However, this expectation often does not turn into reality, since Chinese migrants need longer than just a few years to save money while also paying back travel expenses. The phenomenon of “return migration” (Watson, 2004, p. 901) does not facilitate integration in the host country. Knowing this, Wu stated that, because he was thinking about remaining in Italy, he was the most inclined to learn the language and in making an effort to integrate with his Italian colleagues. This vision is not widely shared among his Chinese colleagues, who choose to stay for a short period. From Li’s words, it follows that the Fujianese migrants develop a culture of migration based on a false belief that they will become rich by working abroad.

“I really do not know why I came to Italy ...I thought I would become rich. (...) The Chinese here in Italy, as well as in the rest of the world, all come from the South of China. One hundred and fifty years ago in my country everybody used to emigrate to Malaysia and Singapore. Now they move everywhere. In my city, a city of more than one million people, more than 30% of the people live abroad, everywhere... Not so many in Italy, we are just a few here, much more are in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand. (...) Not many Chinese are in Germany really, there are more in Argentina
or Brazil now, and in Africa, in Zambia. Before, we used to leave China to look for a simple occupation, now it is also for doing business. Buying and selling, from China to Europe, to Africa. Everybody plans to stay just for three or four years, but then everybody remains (laughs). In Italy it is difficult to make money in just four years. Before, during the ‘80s and ‘90s, many Chinese used to move to Japan, just for three or four years, to make easy money: you work for three years and you aim at making two or three millions, so then you can come back in China. Not in Italy; here you make 1.000 euro and not one million euros.”

(Li, Chinese, male, 43 years old, former warehouseman and now entrepreneur)

Lastly, concerning the Italian macro socio-political influences, my research suggests that one further reason for exclusion lies in the massive refugee crisis that has been afflicting Europe. Italy is among the places in the continent most influenced by the presence of refugees. According to the data released by Eurostat, in 2015 the number of people who sought political asylum in Italy doubled compared to the previous year, to an extent where the numbers exceeded one million people (1.257.030). As reported by ISTAT⁶, 122.724 foreigners were residing in Puglia as of 1 January 2016, representing 3.0% of the registered population. Chinese citizens represented 6,3% of the total amount of immigrants, namely 5.115 individuals. The harbor of Bari, in particular, has always had a long history of immigration. In the ’90s a tidal flow of migrants from Albania, due to the economic crisis in their homeland, landed in the coastal cities of Brindisi and Bari. At the time, Puglia was not ready to welcome an exodus of such proportions, as there were no proper structures and facilities to host refugees. On the other hand, the Apulians responded with great humanity: during those years, community centers, schools and churches became new shelters for immigrants and refugees. After the Syrian civil war started, a large number of smugglers and human traffickers began to organize illegal travels by filling boats with people who paid large amounts of money to migrate, risking their lives during the journey. Hence, adequate place and facilities started to be built and many volunteers and NGOs were ready to mobilize in order to give some help and basic

needs. However, the fact that Italy has always been a home for people looking for better life conditions, I will argue that today it turned into a matter of envy among Italians.

In fact, the majority of the Italians I interviewed said they see migrants more as a problem than as a resource. This was particularly surprising for me, since during all the interviews with the Italians it emerged that the Chinese are essential to keep the company productive, thus, in this particular case, they certainly are a resource. However, when Italians think about migrants, they still see them as an obstacle to economic reparation. Another common occurrence is the confusion that the Italians I interviewed have in distinguishing refugees from regular immigrants and foreigners in general. This translates into generalization when talking about immigration. In fact, during the interviews with the Italian workers, the refugee crisis issue always came up as if the Chinese had something to do with it. Indeed, through the interviews with the Italians, the meaning of “being Italian” was perceived as threatened by their interaction with immigrants. The authenticity of Italian values has been described by them as fading and with a sense of melancholy. According to the interviews with the Italians workers, they perceived the measures taken by the government to solve the refugee problem as an act of treachery towards their fellow citizens, feeling abandoned and neglected by their own government. Particularly, I interpret all of this as if the Italian workers are worried in losing their affirmed position, not just in the working place, but also identity wise, losing the peculiarities that make them “Italian”.

As King and Skeldon (2010) argued: the social integration process includes also the political, economic and cultural aspects. Thus, integration as a whole, includes structural integration (the acquisition of rights and services such as healthcare, housing and education) as a key part of the process. Therefore, it is legitimate to argue that the whole immigration management hinders the possibility of real integration. Even if the widespread idea that emerged among the Italians interviewed, is that the government is helping foreigners living in the country rather than the Italian people; integration (meant as access to citizenship) is actually hampered by the Italian state. In fact, Italian bureaucracy and the security system hardly facilitate the achievement of structural integration. None of the Chinese workers interviewed were aware of the possibility and the operation of such services, offered by the State. Particularly one of the Chinese interviewed believed that only refugees “know the Italian legal system, because we (the
The analysis of the exclusion of a group of Chinese workers in a company in Italy has shown different cultural patterns that may be associated with the uniqueness of their place of origin and the host country. Overall, the Chinese interviewees showed a strong sense of belonging towards their home village. The *guanxi* among Chinese people plus their desire of returning to the motherland play a fundamental role, not just in terms of pull and push factors, but also in terms of exclusion within the host countries. Chinese migrants result to be a transnational community, but they are also positively helping Italian economy. On the other side, the economic and the refugee crises in Italy are relevant to understand Italian people’s perspective and the context in which they are entrenched. The recent economic and refugee crises also contributed to the creation of concern among Italians. Indeed, populism is the voice of the ones who feel excluded and dissatisfied. Finally, all these circumstances are relevant, although taking into consideration only the macro level, exclusion cannot be intended as systematic. The exclusion of the Fujianese employees depends both on the behaviour the Italian workers have toward them and on the Chinese workers’ willingness to integrate. In both circumstances, as explained above, exclusion is fomented: many Italians have issues in accepting a multicultural and diverse society and most migrant Chinese do not seem inclined to integrate in the host country.

5. MICRO CAUSES OF EXCLUSION

The micro dimension is significant to deduce the process of exclusion. The micro reasons explain in detail why, specifically, the Italian colleagues have excluded the Chinese workers. The macro reasons listed above are insufficient to explain the lack of integration of the Chinese workers in the company. If the macro causes contextualized the Fujianese migrants, arguing contemporary policies and widespread ideas on migrants among the Italians, the micro causes, on the contrary, explain the exclusion logic in this particular company. Thus, this chapter follows a temporary line for the non-assimilation process, created in order to draw an appropriate course of cause and consequence. A first phase characterized by cultural gaps and the construction of stereotypes, is followed by
the daily routine in which the two groups seldom interact at work, starting quarrels even of violent nature, in one particular instance. An explanation for such tension between the two groups can be found in the fact that the Italians discriminate because they, in turn, feel disfavored inside the company, as I show later. However, it is not easy to make a clear-cut distinction between integration and exclusion, on a micro level. In terms of migrant integration, the creation of boundaries at work (as intended by Lamont) derives from the moral standards of these workers: “Workers use these standards to define who they are and, just as important, who they are not. Hence, they draw the line that delimits an imagined community of ‘people like me’ who share the same sacred values and with whom they are ready to share resources. These communities may overlap with, or cut across, class and racial line” (Lamont, 2009, p. 3). Finally, these boundaries are unsettled, flexible and constantly evolving.

5.1 CULTURAL GAP

The cultural and language gap issue came up prominently during my interviews. The Italian interviewees stressed the differences in behavior, mainly due to particular customs and traditions. The majority of the Italians who I interviewed had no interest in knowing Chinese culture. The cultural differences, such as eating habits, working modes and general behavior emerged when the Chinese workers were first hired by the company. On the contrary, the way the Chinese felt towards the Italians was less critical. Furthermore, the interviews conducted with the Chinese, suggest that they perceived such bias against them. In particular, all of the Chinese interviewed were upset by the fact that they seldom had social interactions with their Italian workers. Wu, who I considered the most integrated of the group, explained how he was struggling with the intolerance he perceived. Moreover, Wu’s words underline his first difficulties and differences in approaching the Italians, such as the language gap. This was indeed the limit most mentioned by both groups as a hindrance for integration.

“I like everything about Italy. I like Italians, but Italians do not like us. (...) I am calm, I do not know why Italians do not like the Chinese... Maybe it is because they do not know Chinese culture at all. (...) Now I’ve been here for eight years, however, I did not like it here for the first two years. Now, yes, it is calmer. Everyday I have the same routine. Do you know why (it was so bad at the beginning)? The
first time I arrived in Italy, the most important thing was the language; this is it. Working hard and long hours is not a problem, but the language is.”

(Wu, Chinese, male, 36 years old, warehouseman).

Overall, Mario the company manager is one of the Italians whose relationship with the Chinese is strongest and most complex. He told me that he has great respect and regard toward the Chinese employees; however, during my interview with him, he explained the difficulties that he had to face in order to include the Chinese group. Indeed, Mario reveals his awareness of the fact that the Chinese are usually victims of prejudices at work, thus, he always tries to raise awareness among his Italian employees, but with little success. During rare occasions, the manager was invited to his Chinese employees homes to drink tea, smoke and eat together; at times they were also joined by the Chinese employees’ families. However, even the manager, according to him, is now the only Italian worker who does not have any prejudice toward the Chinese, claimed to have experienced a cultural shock at the beginning, due to the Chinese habit of spitting. Now, Mario, thanks to the help of his friend Li, learned how to negotiate and how to deal with Chinese culture. At the same time, the Chinese were required to adapt their habits to the new Italian context. Overall, however, the group of Chinese workers in Italy seems to have a transnational identity, because they keep their customs such as eating Chinese food and speaking their own language. Nonetheless, I believe this is happening essentially because the Fujianese spend more time among each other rather than interacting with the Italian colleagues. As Li suggested to Mario, the cultural gap is actually surmountable through communication.

“At the beginning of the activity, when these guys, whom, anyway, I strongly wanted; arrived, I had the possibility to evaluate their work and their skills. For them the job is an important duty, well, it is strongly interpreted as if it is. Well, there were some tendencies, which badly adapt with our way, of the so-called, civilized way of thinking. For instance: the act of spitting. Now, you know that for us, spitting is a form of vulgarity, especially for hygienic reasons. (...) However, for them [the act of spitting] is almost like a normal action, an habits. When they come working here, I discovered such thing, and I was embarrassed, I did not know how
to deal with them, I did not want to hurt their sensitivity. (...) Hence I referred to the head of their clan, who now is one of my real friends, he is like a brother for me (...) I naturally explained to him this situation, and he told me: ‘but why are you making a problem? You can just tell them; this is it’. This was a first element of shock.”

(Mario, Italian, male, 64 years old, manager)

Despite both cultures have long and profound food traditions, lunchtime is another instance in which the they are isolated one from the other. When the Chinese workers arrived at the company, the lunch schedule was the same for everyone. However, the two groups quickly fell apart, experiencing cultural differences, establishing now a habit for them to eat separately. The company provides a kitchen for the workers, which is located upstairs and equipped with a fridge and an oven. According to the Italians, their Chinese coworkers started to bring rice, meat, vegetables and fish, leaving it in the fridge. The Italians, finding the smell of the Chinese food unpleasant, start eating downstairs in a different room or outside and do not use the kitchen and its facilities anymore. Recently, the working shifts have been changed and the two groups also have different lunch times, but the Italians still never use the kitchen. The Chinese workers do not understand why they choose to eat separately and they believe this is due to the incompatible working shifts, expressing their regret about this. To sum up: (1) the Chinese are clueless about the reasons for such separation, probably because they are kept in the dark by their Italian colleagues who do not want to offend the Chinese, (2) the Chinese are the sole users of the kitchen. Indeed, the last affirmation is closely related with the next section of the chapter, which will reveal the beneficial position of the Chinese in the company, as well as the source of the Italian hostility towards their Chinese colleagues.

Blumer argued that the real essence of racist prejudice is linked to the sense of belonging to a larger group (Blumer, 1958). Certainly, the individual members of the Italian group do not all have the same feeling against their Chinese coworkers. For instance, the Italian warehousemen feel more hostile and adverse to the Chinese, whereas the managers and supervisors feel a sense of benevolence towards them. However, through analyzing the way in which the two groups described each other, it is possible to formulate a general definition of what “being Chinese” and/or “being Italian” means to
them. In the interviews conducted with the Italian workers, a sense of discrimination against their migrant colleagues was perceived. Indeed, they blur the line between racial and cultural features of the Chinese, recognizing them as inborn. The Italian group particularly pinpoints two aspects of the Chinese workers: the Chinese are tireless in terms of working, and they are dirty. These two aspects delineate a stereotype of a Chinese person who has lost his singularity and he behaves as the rest of his group.

“In my opinion, Chinese are made precisely for this specific kind of job. Indian people, for example, are used to work with the meat. In fact, up in the North, all those who work in the meat processing are Indian. (...) I told you, I believe that the Chinese person is really characterized, I mean, he has it in his blood. It is like, I know this word can sound bad, but he is like the Jewish. Jewish people, for example, have the “C” for commerce in their DNA. Hence, I believe that every community has something in particular, in their DNA.”

(Francesco, Italians, male, 33 years old, taskmaster)

“Hygiene...well, not all of them are clean. There are some of them whose skin is not perfumed like ours. I am a bit obsessed by this particular issue. (...) but they (the Chinese) sometimes, I know it is not a good thing to say, but they smell so bad, yes they s-m-e-l-l.”

(Antonio, Italian, male, 36 years old, warehouseman)

Through the interviews with both Italian and Chinese, it emerged that the Chinese workers seek an approach with the rest of the colleagues more frequently than the Italian workers. For instance, the Chinese sometimes offer the Italians a coffee or a cigarette. One time after work, some Chinese warehousemen brought some beers and shared them with their Italian colleagues. However, the two groups seldom spend time together outside the workplace. Most of the non work related communication occurs when the Chinese seek the help of their Italian colleagues in order to solve bureaucratic problems, such as paying taxes, renewing residence permits or for health problems.
5.2 ADVANTAGES OF THE CHINESE WORKERS

On a micro level of analysis, the exclusion of these Chinese is essentially fostered by the advantages that they gained inside the company, compared to the Italians. The Chinese workers are indispensable for the productivity of the firm, and this has been confirmed by the interviews with all the employees from both sides. Again, the Chinese laborers are seen as what really keeps the warehouse productive. Indeed, as I mentioned in the third chapter, they usually earn more than the Italians, because of the monthly bonus, which is based on individual output. However, the idea of bonuses has two consequences. Firstly, it increases competition among the workers. Secondly, since the Chinese emerge as winners from such competition, the Italian workers feel jealous and sometimes even discriminated by such loss. According to the various Italian workers that I interviewed, Chinese workers are generally more efficient in their tasks than their Italian colleagues. This seems to be particularly true in the case of the stocking of food bales to be distributed among various supermarkets. Therefore, despite the fact that the bonus system creates more competition and boosts productivity, it creates further reason for separation between the two groups. Moreover, during her interview, Anna claimed that the company now prefers to hire Chinese workers as warehousemen rather than Italians. Indeed, even the Chinese recognized their value inside the company:

“The Italians are really slow, in one hour (they dispose) 90 packages. In one hour we (the Chinese) dispose at least 170 packages. (...) It is impossible for the company to let us go. Do you know why? Because he (the supervisor) knows us. I have been working here for more than eight years, and he has known us for that long. We work hard, and he knows it.”

(Wu, Chinese, male, 36 years old, warehouseman)

“The Italians work slowly. Do you know why there are Chinese working in the warehouse? Before, the company knew us because we were employed in their branch in Veneto. Then, the managers from Verona came here to Bari to observe the productivity and they realized that the Italians were really slow, so they said: ‘at least ten Chinese need to be hired here’.”

(Xu, Chinese male, 38 years old, warehouseman)

Furthermore, during the interview with Nicola, the supervisor of the cured meat and cold cuts sector, claimed that the Chinese are much more flexible and helpful than
the Italians. Nicola asserted that he always tries to support the Chinese workers because he understands that the Chinese may get rather physically tired since they work harder. Consequently, the Italian warehousemen, who are described as arrogant by the supervisor, sense such ‘favoritism’ towards their Chinese colleagues, and thus they feel discriminated. De facto, the Chinese workers, as I mentioned in the third chapter, never work the night shifts. Moreover, as the lunch example also shows, the Italians at including their Chinese coworkers, but at the same time, they are aware of the difficulties faced by them and do not want to hurt them. Thus, the outcome is that the Chinese emerge as advantaged in the whole situation, causing envy among the Italian warehousemen.

5.3 REACTION OF THE ITALIAN WORKERS: CONFLICTS

The origin of conflicts should be intended in the conceptualization of “social group” and “social identity” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In fact, conflicts start with a sense of belonging to a certain group and inequalities just tend to accentuate intergroup conflicts of interest (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Both Italian and Chinese interviewees maintain that these quarrels are mainly powered by the creation of stereotypes, after experiencing the cultural gap discussed above. Specifically, both groups consider the warehouse aisles to be too narrow to work easily. In fact, it is inconceivable that two forklifts pass through an aisle at the same moment. Thus, each group accused the other to hinder their work. One significant manifestation of this tension occurred in 2013. In one occasion, after hearing a Chinese worker swearing, an Italian employee, believing it was addressed to him, physically assaulted the Chinese and as a result, was dismissed, while the Chinese maintained his position. As both testimonies reported below show, the precondition for conflicts is the fact that the Chinese workers are seen as ‘winners’ in the company. Indeed, I believe that one of the primary sources of racist attitudes and conflicts is the envy that the Italian warehousemen feel, as a consequence of the advantaged position in which they see the Chinese.

“There was a time when a campaign against the Chinese had been triggered. I mean, it was like everything could depend on the behavior of these people. It is like the story of who wins and is hated. I mean, who wins normally is appreciated from who is smart and values his skills, performance etc. Or it is like the story of the fox that could not reach the grapes and thus called them ‘sour grapes’; they are the
ones who are hated. And this was the case of these Chinese guys, who are excellent workers (...) For someone the job was essential, for others maybe not, so, this behavioral gap almost became, I would say, a form of pure racism. One time I had to take direct action against one Italian employee and I had to dismiss him, when things escalated to physical threats, resulting in the injury of a Chinese worker.”

(Mario, Italian, male, 64 years old, manager)

“Quarrels started because they (the Chinese) produce a lot. I cannot deny it, this is the reality. When they get in front with the forklift, because they want to pass first, the Italians stand behind and start to ring the bell and say “go on, go on” (...) many quarrels start because the Italians have to wait, and the Chinese do not want to move on the left side, and they sometimes use swear words (...) A few years ago, an Italian almost beat a Chinese to death. Yes, a fistfight, f-i-s-t-f-i-g-h-t. The Italian now is out and the Chinese is still working here. (...) I heard that it started because the Chinese began to swear, more than once, and the Italian went crazy; he also was a former boxer so he really beat him half to death, the Chinese had a hematoma in his head.”

(Antonio, Italian, male, 36 years old, warehouseman)

This unpleasant episode persists in the memories of the workers, especially considering that the Chinese worker who did not want to participate in the study is the victim in question. Moreover, he has been described by his colleagues, both Italian and Chinese, as having a rebellious personality. Overall, the Chinese group has learned how to react to the Italians’ provocations, by swearing and emulation their attitude. This is certainly a defense mechanism, which however led to the increase of an exclusion logic. Indeed, this mechanism may be understood as a reaction that enables the Chinese community to redefine their belonging ‘sentiments’ in distinction and defense against the Italian behavior. Furthermore, in the moment of interaction with the Italians, the Chinese workers perceived the prejudices and the envy of the Italians. Thus, this kind of behavior creates a circle of cause and effect where the Chinese react against the Italian and vice versa.
“If they greet me, I also greet them. If they do not greet me, I also do not greet them. If I run into someone who I know and he does not talk with me, I also do not talk. If they say good morning, then I also say good morning; if they shut up, I shut up too.”

(Wu, Chinese, male, 36 years old, warehouseman)

“Quarrels? well, yes, but just verbal quarrels. Because before they started to offend us, then we started talking back at them.”

(Xu, Chinese male, 38 years old, warehouseman)

In conclusion, the micro reasons for the failed integration of the Chinese with the rest of the workers correspond with the origin of stereotypes and prejudices among the Italian workers. The cultural gap, experienced during a first impression of diversity, pinpoint the differences between the two groups. However, I consider that one essential cause of the exclusion of the Chinese workers relies on the envy that their Italian colleagues feel, for losing their essential position inside the company. In fact, the Chinese workers emerge as the favored group in the company. To sum up, the Chinese are more required in the company than the Italians are, they usually earn the bonus, they use the kitchen and they never work night shifts. Consequently, the Italians’ racist behaviors increase, and eventually lead to conflict. As a reaction, when confronted by the Italians, the Chinese talk back by emulating their negative swearing and attitude. Finally, the micro causes reveal two important issues: (1) the exclusion of the Chinese employees is surely impelled by the Italian prejudices against them, (2) these prejudices and stereotypes are not only linked to the widespread idea of the Chinese culture, but also to what they mean by ‘being Italian’.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this thesis is to describe the causes for the social exclusion of a group of Chinese workers in a company in southern Italy. The clear boundaries created on the workplace are consequences of the combination of macro and micro causes. The study highlights a wide-ranging assessment of discrimination in the labour market, as a result of global and local factors. Particularly, the exclusion with regard to global factors is
intended as a result of economic forces in the capitalistic system and the globalized world. On the contrary, the local factors are identified in the limits of my case study, which analyzes what being an employee in the context of this specific firm means. Overall, it is legitimate to argue that on a certain level, the macro and micro causes are well matched, inasmuch as in both cases, the lack of acceptance of multiculturalism by Italians (both on the workplace and in Italy more in general) is closely related to their concern for losing advantages as Italian citizens and workers. Moreover, this case study, confirming theories on transnationalism (Vertovec 2001; Tsuda 1999), discloses exclusion as a two-way process, which is boosted both by the host country and the migrant workers. Furthermore, the existence of a transnational identity is closely related not only with kinship, languages and place of origins, as other studies (Wu & Liu, 2014) already pointed out, but also in response to inclusion or exclusion logics, as Tsuda (1999) argues about the identity of Japanese-Brazilians. In other words, the Chinese aspect of being an isolated community as an ethnic niche is reinforced by the context in which they live.

The thesis discusses cultural transnational patterns of Chinese migrant workers, sowing seeds for exclusion. Thus, my findings contribute to the understanding of Chinese transnationalism (Pieke 2007; Thunø & Pieke 2005; Pieke et al. 2004; Benton & Gomez 2001), highlighting the strong bonds that the Fujianese in Bari have with their motherland. In order to find the causes for exclusion, I had to distinguish the Chinese transnationalist features from the causes constructed following the host country. The interviews with the Chinese confirm that they migrate to Italy, in order to be able to earn enough money to conduct a good life once back in China. As Thunø and Pieke argued: “the purchase of houses, consumer goods and clothing such as Italian leather jackets and gold necklaces is about more than just social status or the good life. This conspicuous consumption should also be read as a form of practice that reflects aspirations to achieve a modernity and civility that previously had been beyond reach, indeed may in the past not even contemplated as a possibility” (Thunø & Pieke, 2005, p. 503). The hard work and the racial prejudices experienced by the Chinese workers are, in this respect, rewarded with a chance of good life in China or abroad in the future. The myth of returning to China remains strong among the Chinese employees, even though it appears to come true in a limited number of cases. Moreover, the transnational tie with their homeland may be seen as a cultural pattern recurrent in modern Chinese culture, directly linked with the guanxi
created among the people from the same place of origin. One of the transnational reasons leading to exclusion, in my case study, certainly is such migrants’ attachment to their motherland.

The study conducted inside a logistic firm in Bari disclaimed the assimilation theory as intended by Park; essentially because the Chinese workers are totally excluded despite the fact that a great number of them has been living in Italy for more than ten years. Moreover, contrary to other studies (Chin 1999; Smith 1997) conducted among Chinese communities abroad, this particular case revealed that the illegal and isolation aspect of the Chinese cannot be considered a cultural pattern, typical of the Chinese migrant community abroad, since I have not found it in my case. The isolation of the group and their past illegal behaviors in order to be able to migrate are not characteristics peculiar of the Chinese people, but are the result of the regulation of immigration as applied by the Italian State, as the studies of Ceccagno et al. (2010) also confirm.

My research has shown that the Chinese workers are excluded also because their Italian colleagues, concerned about Italy’s socio-political situation, are struggling to accept Chinese migrants. Through the comparison not just with the Chinese migrants but also with other migrants, the Italians see their stability and securities in danger. This case study has shown that the racial bias created among the Italians is powered by their concern for the Italian political and economic situation, which are certainly affecting Italian identity. The Italians fear of losing their values reflects a form of skepticism towards the political class. Finally, the research also focuses on the perceptions among workers, and these are based on ethnic stereotypes, having important effects on ethnic consciousness and national identity (Tsuda, 1999). Indeed, Chinese workers fall victims of racial prejudices by their Italian colleagues, who attempt to maintain their dominant position inside the mutual definition of identities. From the testimonies of the Italians interviewed, it emerged that the relationship between the Italian and the Chinese group is hindered by the economic and the refugee crises, impelling the aversion of Italians against foreigners. The interviews conducted with the Italians reveal forms of racial prejudice and, at the same time, a sense of pity towards the Chinese group. Indeed, racist preconceptions are been reinforced by their awareness of the fact that the Chinese are necessary for the firm. Precisely because the Chinese are indispensable for the productivity of the company, the Italian workers constructed their perceptions on ethnic stereotypes instead of by facing
the reality of facts. Thus, the Chinese and the Italian groups are influencing each other through the mutual negotiation between stereotypes and reality. In addition, the rise of conflicts has been linked with the envy experienced by the Italian workers. However, I do not believe that this adversarial situation is pleasant for either group, especially because all employees have described the episode of violence with contempt.

My study allows me to draw some conclusions, but most of these are limited to this particular group of Fujianese and Italians. Finally, the research encourages a need for more empirical studies that highlight the complex relation between Chinese local and global migration as an explanatory factor for inclusion or exclusion logics. As King and Skeldon (2010) argue, there is a link between internal and international migration, and these do not necessarily mean that the former is more homogeneous than the latter. Indeed, it is important to pinpoint that the migration flow is not just a consequence of economic disparities between countries, or between cities and countryside. Among discourses on Chinese immigrant integration, it is important to place Chinese workers in Italy into a “larger context of China’s rapid integration into the global capitalist world order” (Wu & Liu, 2014, p. 1405). Lastly, the importance of studying integration lies not just in the fact that nowadays we live in a multicultural word, but also because, in Durkheim’s view, integration is facilitated if the differences among the actors are minimized. In such system, solidarity can be developed in a workplace where disparities among workers are eliminated.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX

Semi-Structured Interview:

• Introduction
• Facts
• Feelings
• Future Prospects

QUESTIONS FOR THE CHINESE

Introduction
Present myself and broadly the research. Eventually, tell something about my experience and my feeling in China. Ask about the age and the place where he was born. (If he is married and he has child?)

Facts
2- Da quanto tempo vivi in Italia?
   When did you move to Italy?
3- Hai vissuto in qualche altra città in Italia prima? (Se sì, che tipo di lavoro facevi?)
   Have you ever lived before in Italy, in another city? (If yes, which kind of work did you have?)
4- Hai la tua famiglia in Italia o in Cina? (Se ha la famiglia in Italia, sono venuti prima loro o ti hanno seguito?) (Se non ha la famiglia in Italia, hanno in progetto di venire?)
   Where does your family live? (If your family is here, did they come together with you or after?) (If they are not in Italy, do they plan to come to live with you?)
5- Come sei arrivato e con chi (amici, famiglia? Chi ti ha aiutato nel trasferimento?)
   How did you arrive here and with whom? (Friends, family..) Did someone help you?
6- Che tipo di visto hai? Come hai ottenuto il permesso di soggiorno?
   Which kind of visa do you have? And how did you get it?
7- Che lavoro facevi in Cina prima di trasferirti in Italia? Hai un titolo di studio? What kind of job did you have in China? Do you have any educational background?
8- Perché hai deciso di trasferirti in Italia?
Why did you decide to move in Italy?
9- Come hai trovato questo lavoro?
How did you find this job?
10- Dove sei andato non appena sei arrivato? Come hai trovato casa?
How did you manage the accommodation when you came?
11- Dove e con chi vivi?
Where do you live and with whom?

Feelings
12- Mi parli del suo lavoro attuale. (Ti piace l’azienda? Perché?)
Now tell me about your job. (Do you like the company, your job? Why? What duty do you have in this job?)
13- Perché hai deciso di lavorare in un’azienda Italiana e non in una comunità Cinese?
Why did you decide to work for an Italian company and not for a Chinese one?
14- Pensi che lavorare in un’azienda Italiana sia meglio o peggio che in un’azienda Cinese?
Was it a personal choice to work here? If yes, why didn’t you choose to work for a Chinese company?
15- Vivere e lavorare in Italia è come l’avevi immaginato prima di venire? Cosa credevi “meglio” e cosa credevi “peggio”? (Cosa sapevi dell’Italia e degli Italiani? E del lavoro? Che tipo di informazioni avevi e come le hai ottenute?)
Was the life and the job in Italy the way you expected? What was “better” and what was “worst”? (What did you know about Italy and Italians before you come? And how did you get this information?)
16- Quali difficoltà hai riscontrato quando sei arrivato in Italia?
What kind of difficulties did you have when you came? Have you ever experience any racial discrimination?
17- Ci sono state delle situazioni che ti hanno fatto sentire discriminato?
Have you ever experience any racial discrimination?
18- Quali difficoltà hai trovato a lavoro? (Lingua, competenze)
What kind of difficulties you had when you start to work here? (Language, skills)
19- Frequenti quasi esclusivamente Cinesi o hai degli amici Italiani? (Con i tuoi colleghi
che tipo di rapporto hai?)
Do you usually meet Italians or Chinese when you are outside the job? Do you get along with your colleagues?
20- Quali sono le principali differenze culturali tra Cinese e Italiani? (E in relazione al lavoro? ) E quali le affinità?
What are the main differences and similarities that you identify between Italians and Chinese?
21- Cosa preferisci e cosa non ti piace (a livello culturale, lavorativo, e sociale) degli Italiani?
In terms of works and culture, what do you like about Italians? And what do you dislike?
22- Cosa preferisci e cosa non ti piace (a livello culturale, lavorativo, e sociale) dei Cinesi?
And what about Chinese?
23- Lavori in gruppo o da solo? (Se in gruppo, con Italiani o con Cinesi o entrambi?)
Preferisci lavorare con Cinesi o con Italiani?
Do you usually work alone in own “section” or do you have a team? (If he has a team, it is composed by both nationalities? Would you prefer to work with Chinese or Italians?
24- Hai una comunicazione diretta con il tuo capo? (Se no, vorresti averla?)
Do you have a direct communication with your chief or do you get to know your duties through someone else (indirect communication)? And what would you prefer?
25- Quante ore lavori in media a settimana? Vorresti lavorare più o meno di quanto lavori? E perché?
How many hours do you work per week? Would you prefer it in another way? And why?
26- Quanto spesso torni in Cina? E perché?
Did you come back to China since you came? How often do you go back home? And what was the reason for travelling back?
27- L’azienda solitamente è incline alle tue necessità? (Per esempio ferie, malattie, etc)
Do you think the company provides you with your necessity (holiday, healthcare)?
28- Senti di aver acquisito delle capacità o conoscenze da questo lavoro?
Do you feel that this job helps in yourself development (or skills)? Do you think you can go upwards in the company?

Future Prospects
29- Per quanto tempo pensi di rimanere in Italia e quali sono i tuoi progetti per il futuro?
How long do you think you will stay in Italy? Which one are your plans for the future?
30- Continueresti a lavorare con Italiani o preferiresti tornare a lavorare con i Cinesi?
Would you like continue to work with Italians, or would you prefer something else?
31- Cosa ti manca di più della Cina?
What do you miss more about China?
32- Conclusion: Ask if he had something to add or that he would like to talk about.

QUESTIONS FOR THE ITALIANS

Introduction
- Present myself and broadly the research

Facts
1- Da quanto tempo lavori in questa azienda?
Since when do you work for this company?
2- Che tipo di lavoro facevi prima?
Did you have another job before? Which one?
3-Hai un titolo di studio?
Do you have any educational background?
4- Hai famiglia?
Do you have family?
5- Hai mai viaggiato in Cina o in oriente? (Se no, ti piacerebbe andarcì? Perché?)
Have you ever travel in China? other East countries? (If not, would you like to go?)
6- How did you find this job position?
7- Qual è la tua posizione nell’azienda? Quali sono i tuoi compiti e le tue responsabilità?
Which kind of position do you have in the company? Which kind of duty and responsibility do you have?
8- In quale tipo di circostanza lavorativa hai a che fare con i Cinesi?
In which kind of circumstance you need to work with the Chinese workers?
Feelings

9- Ti piace il tuo lavoro? Perché hai deciso di lavorare qui?
Do you like your job? Why did you decide to work for this company?

10- Che tipo di rapporto hai con i tuoi colleghi? e con quelli Cinesi?
Which kind of relationship do you have with your colleagues? (With the Chinese colleagues and with the Italians?)

11- Fuori dall’ambito lavorativo, hai mai intrattenuto una conversazione con i tuoi colleghi Cinesi? (In che ambito?)
Outside the working context have you ever spoken with your Chinese colleagues? (If yes, in what kind of context?)

12- Per quale motivo ritieni che l’azienda assumi personale Cinese piuttosto che di altre etnie?
Why do you think the company hired Chinese workers and not ones of other ethnicity?

13- Come valuti il lavoro dei Cinesi nell’azienda?
How would you value the work of the Chinese in the company?

14- Come pensi sia vista dagli (altri) Italiani la cultura Cinese?
How do you think is Chinese culture perceived by the Italians?

15- Quali pensi che siano le principali differenze culturali tra Cinese e Italiani? (E in relazione al lavoro?) E quali le affinità?
What are the main differences and similarities that you identify between Italians and Chinese?

16- Cosa preferisci e cosa non ti piace (a livello culturale, lavorativo, e sociale) degli Italiani?
In terms of works and culture, what do you like about Italians? And what do you dislike?

17- Cosa preferisci e cosa non ti piace (a livello culturale, lavorativo, e sociale) dei Cinesi?
And what about Chinese?

18- Lavori in gruppo o da solo? (Se in gruppo, con Italiani o con Cinesi o entrambi?)
Preferisci lavorare con Cinesi o con Italiani?
Do you usually work alone in own “section” or do you have a team? (If he has a team, it is composed by both nationalities? Would you prefer to work with Chinese or Italians?)

19- Hai una comunicazione diretta con il tuo capo? E con tuoi colleghi Cinesi? (Se no, vorresti averla?)
Do you have a direct communication with your chief or do you get to know your duties through someone else (indirect communication)? And what would you prefer?

20- Quante ore lavori in media a settimana? Vorresti lavorare più o meno di quanto lavori? E perché?

How many hours do you work per week? Would you prefer it in another way? And why?

21- L’azienda solitamente è incline alle tue necessità? (Per esempio ferie, malattie, etc)

Do you think the company provides you with your necessity (holiday, healthcare)?

22- Senti di aver acquisito delle capacità o conoscenze da questo lavoro?

Do you feel that this job helps in yourself development (or skills)? Do you think you can go upwards in the company?

Future Prospects

23- Vuoi e pensi di poter fare carriera in questa azienda?

Do you think you can go upwards in the company?

24- Quanto ritieni importante il “lavoro” nella tua vita? e nella tua routine?

How much important would you consider your job in your everyday life?

25- Pensi che il fenomeno dell’immigrazione in aumento nel nostro Paese, possa essere un problema o un vantaggio? e perché?

Do you think that the increase of immigrants in our country is a vantage or a problem and why?