

## FAMILY, SOCIAL CAPITAL AND INTERNAL MIGRATION IN ITALY: THE CASE OF THE PEOPLE OF TRAMONTI

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**Abstract:** Beginning with an outline of internal migration in Italy between the 1950s and the 1970s, the article aims to articulate a critical reflection on the role played by social capital in the development of Italian small firms. These issues are explored through an ethno-historical analysis of the experiences of a group of migrants from Tramonti, a little town in Southern Italy, whose success in the restaurant business provides the case study at the core of the paper. Since the 1950s, thousands of people have moved from Tramonti to Northern Italy, and many of them have joined the business of pizza restaurants. Although migration from this little town is just a small part of the substantial internal migration which took place in Italy in the second half of the 20th century, this case study allows us to explore some interesting questions pertaining to the study of both migration and small firms. After providing a brief historical description of the migration from Tramonti, the article attempts to explain and understand the success of this group of migrants by focusing on the key factor represented by social capital, while also offering a critical approach to the concept of social capital itself. This historical analysis shows how migratory chains consisting of family, kin and community ties have been transformed into strong social capital of prime importance to the business strategies of the Tramonti pizza-makers. This particular social capital was marked by strong family ties and values and worked through a “segmentary” logic of solidarity and fission. Indeed, this “entrepreneurial familism” was the main factor behind the success of the pizza makers (*pizzaioli*). The case study suggests, then, that familism is not necessarily an obstacle to economic improvement; instead, it is an essential component of the social capital, it can propel business success if it operates within the right social-economic context, like that of Northern Italy between the 1950s and 1970s.

**Keywords:** internal migration in Italy; family firms; social capital; entrepreneurial familism.

Antonio Giordano,<sup>1</sup> his mother and siblings have been owners of a small pizzeria and a small restaurant in Alessandria<sup>2</sup> for several years. He tells me that it had been his father, who had emigrated from Tramonti, a Southern Italian village<sup>3</sup> located in Campania, to begin the

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<sup>1</sup> Except where public figures are named, or the parties are easily recognisable, the names of interview subjects have been changed.

<sup>2</sup> Provincial capital in the Piedmont region. Unless otherwise noted, all cities and towns referred to in this article are located in Piedmont.

<sup>3</sup> The village currently has about 4,000 inhabitants.

family restaurant business. Giuseppe Giordano's history illustrates well the general dynamics of migration from Tramonti that is the subject of this paper. Giuseppe left the village in the late sixties to go and work as waiter at the pizzeria of Fedele Giordano in Cuneo, Piedmont. Fedele was a distant relative, who had migrated a few years earlier. After a few years of working and after marrying a girl from the village, Giuseppe and his wife decided to move to Alessandria to work for Felice Bordese, an uncle in law. After taking over and running the pizzeria for several years, Giuseppe and his wife opened another restaurant in town and left the first pizzeria to Giuseppe's nephews, who had been working with them. Giuseppe Giordano and his wife managed the new pizzeria for many years, and this is now managed by Antonio and his two siblings.

Giuseppe Giordano is just one of the hundreds of migrants that, from the fifties on, left Tramonti—where I conducted prior research on the local family structure (Capello, 2008; Capello & Colclough, 2010)<sup>4</sup>—to the North of Italy to start their own food service business or to become a *pizzeria* worker. The high percentage of pizza makers and restaurateurs distinguishes this specific migratory flow from the more common pathways that flowed into the Great Internal Migration and makes the migration from Tramonti particularly interesting.

The Great Internal Migration that, since the fifties on, led 4 million people from the South of Italy to the North, has been widely studied by sociologists, historians, and demographers (Gallo, 2012). However, this phenomenon may still hold much for the researcher to uncover, revealing issues, upon which it is worth reflecting, particularly when the complexity and diversity of migratory paths is examined through a micro analytic and ethnographic lens that focuses on social networks and the subjective dimensions of the process (Arru & Ramella, 2003; Badino, 2008, 2012; Grilli, 2007), rather than the macro-structural approach more commonly used in the study of internal migration. Since the latter was an expression of the Great Transformation (Gallo, 2012) that led Italy toward industrial modernisation, researchers have indeed mostly favoured the approach of investigating the links between migration and Fordist industrialisation and widespread urbanisation. In taking this approach, however, less obvious but equally significant issues have been overlooked. In fact, much is already known about factory worker migration, while little is known about the paths that conducted part of Southern Italian migrants to choose entrepreneurship and self-employment in construction or in the food service industry, where the migrants from Tramonti have played a considerable role, as we will examine.

Observing the dynamics of this small-sized entrepreneurial reality, born out of migration, allows us to examine, from an original perspective, some main issues, such as internal mobility and family entrepreneurship in Italy. Studies about small and medium-sized enterprises have long recognized the vitality of this industry within the Italian economy (Bagnasco, 1977; Sapelli, 2008) and the role played by family and community ties. The experiences of the Tramonti migrants add to this kind of analysis a sub-plot of migration and family strategies in the critically important food service industry. In the migration studies, this sub-plot represents a classic theme that, however, has not received such an attention within the researches on internal migration in Italy.

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<sup>4</sup> In total, nearly 5000 people have emigrated to the North of Italy and abroad (Imperato, 2008).

I have addressed these issues in my work using an ethnographic approach, oriented toward the anthropology of migration and relying on oral history. My approach is mainly based on the extensive literature regarding social capital in entrepreneurial activity; however, I assume the concept critically,<sup>5</sup> by taking into consideration all factors—familial, social and economic—influencing the entrepreneurial dynamics of the Tramonti pizza makers.

### **From the South to the North, from mozzarella cheese to pizza**

Migration from Tramonti has given life to a true diaspora. Thousands of people from this village have migrated to the North of Italy over the years (Imperato, 2008), primarily settling in the provinces of Alessandria, Novara, Pavia, Parma, and Modena, where their entrepreneurial activities are most deeply rooted.

The diaspora from Tramonti is distinguished from other interior migratory flows by the mass involvement of Tramonti migrants in the food and dairy sectors. Some approximate figures give an idea of the amplitude of the phenomenon: currently the Association of Tramonti Pizza Makers estimates that 650 pizzerias are owned by people from Tramonti, but it can be assumed that many are not registered. In any case, considering that there are about 15,000 pizzerias in the North of Italy, the number of Tramonti pizza makers is significant. We can add to this number the fact that their diffusion in a multitude of cities and towns in the North, from Friuli to Piedmont, has generated a dense trans-local network of pizza makers and restaurateurs, joined together by multiple social ties and by the common symbolic anchorage to Tramonti, which is still strong even among second and third generation migrants.

One might think that for many migrants the decision taken to work in pizzerias was based on “cultural” factors, such as a strong tradition of producing or consuming pizza in the village of origin, particularly since the majority of other internal migrants mostly endeavoured to work in factories. However, this is not the case. In Tramonti, pizza was clearly known and liked as everywhere else in the Naples area, but there were no pizzerias there before migration began. The first person to open a pizzeria was, in fact, a pizza maker from the North who decided to return to the village. Therefore, the vast majority of the migrants involved in the pizzeria-restaurant sector had no experience in this field before migrating. The migration trajectory and the entrepreneurial success of the people from Tramonti does not begin with pizza, but rather with one of its key ingredients: mozzarella cheese, which the village and the surrounding area, long known for its milk and dairy production, produced in large quantities. In fact, the pioneers moved to the North immediately after the Second World War, to Piedmont at first, to test the waters for artisan dairies dedicated to mozzarella cheese production, which was totally unknown in these regions at that time.

The first to take this path and move to Piedmont to open a dairy factory farm was Luigi Giordano, also known as “Gigginò” a “Casettara” and later as “O Miliardario”.<sup>6</sup> Gigginò died

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<sup>5</sup> In developing this approach, I took inspiration from the work of Susanna Narotzki and Gavin Smith (2006) and, regarding Italy, Silvia Yanagisako (2002) and Simone Ghezzi (2007).

<sup>6</sup> Luigi Giordano was known in the village by reference to his mother, who sold socks (that is why “*a casettara*” “the sock seller”); the nickname “*o Miliardario*”, the Billionaire, clearly stems from his success in business.

a few years ago, and is still known and esteemed among the people of Tramonti today, having assumed a mythical persona and having become a model of ambition and success.

Giggino arrived in Piedmont in 1945, during the war, hiding out there after he had deserted. Attracted by the possibilities of the countryside around Novara, Giggino moved there in 1947 to open a small dairy factory to produce mozzarella cheese. Shortly after, he summoned his wife, parents, brother and sister to join him, and several other villagers to help him in his activity. In 1951 he decided to open a pizzeria in Novara—the first in that city—so that he would not waste unsold mozzarella cheese, or so the story is told. After a wobbly start, the two activities were successful and Giggino expanded into the business that would make him famous: opening pizzerias and selling them to other families from Tramonti. He first opened pizzerias in Biella for his sister and her in-laws, and another one near the small dairy factory in Oleggio with his brother. But, his main business, alongside managing the pizzeria in Novara, consisted of opening pizzerias and then selling them to other families after having taught the work to the newcomers, who were mostly farmers, without experience in the field. He selected these families considering the number of members and his personal relationship with them, and called them up directly from the village. These newcomers bought the premises in instalments and the family managed the business, recruiting other migrants from Tramonti as waiters and pizza makers. It was in this way that the chain migration started and self-propagated, directly involving large numbers of migrants in the restaurant business.

Giggino played, then, a decisive role, outlining the path that many others followed: settling in the suburban province and creating a family-based enterprise, such as the dairy factory, which he then left to a younger brother to run, and pizzerias. However, he was not the only pioneer, just a few years later, in fact, others drew up similar mobility strategies in other cities and towns in the North of Italy, contributing to the spreading of the diaspora.

Felice Bordese, also from Tramonti, opened the first pizzeria in Alessandria in 1956. Felice Bordese is Giuseppe Giordano's uncle in law. Bordese explained to me that another person from Tramonti had called him to Alessandria to work as a salesman for his dairy factory in a neighbouring village. Thanks to the advice and help received by the dairyman and after he called two brothers to work as waiters in the city to learn the job, he managed to open his own pizzeria. After a few years the three brothers were joined by a fourth one, who had just arrived from Tramonti. At that point, they were far too many for a single restaurant, so the two younger brothers broke away and opened another pizzeria in a nearby village in Lombardy.

These two stories embody the ideal management model of pizzeria growth and expansion that can be reconstructed from the interviews I collected.<sup>7</sup> According to this model, a pioneer with a strong entrepreneurial spirit succeeded in finding the right place and occasion

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<sup>7</sup> Regarding the ideal model, see the work of Silvia Yanagisako (2002), which shows how the memories of entrepreneurs often become an idealisation of company founders, who are transformed into models of a time of greater morality, commitment and success in business. A similar idealisation emerges from interviews with Tramonti pizza makers and their children; such an attitude makes more difficult to reconstruct the objective history of each company, but still provides insights into some significant aspects from a subjective point of view.

because of his personal ability and work ethic, and then summoned help from his family and relatives and, later on, entrusted them with his expanding business. In the ideal model, the initial resources came entirely from savings, from family and from work (since at that time, opening a pizzeria was not so expensive), and the businesses were created through spontaneous “budding” from the main branch, without tensions. Actually, very often the new businesses were born through “fission”, with a more or less consensual detachment from the original root.

The story of Mario Amato, another one of the first pizza makers in Alessandria, is similar to those described in the previous paragraphs, even though in this case the tensions that often arise within the context of family entrepreneurship appears in a clearer manner. The first of ten children of a poor family of sharecroppers, Mario worked for a few years, immediately after school, on the outskirts of Tramonti as a bricklayer, until he decided to go north. Therefore, he contacted an uncle who had opened a dairy enterprise near Alessandria a few years earlier, and the uncle helped Mario and his father to open a pizzeria in 1964, lending them the money, which they paid back little by little using promissory notes. Shortly after, Mario’s younger brother joined them in the business, as did their sister, who had already had experience from a pizzeria in Brescia, and then Mario’s wife. In 1966 they opened another pizzeria for another sister and her husband in a nearby village, once again thanks to a loan. Eventually, all of the siblings as well as their parents, who helped take care of the grandchildren, joined the business, moving to Alessandria and the surrounding areas. They continued working together for some years, then Mario left the business and opened a new restaurant with another sister and her husband.

Since the ideal model implies that the members of the family help each other and work together for the common good, Mario says that he always treated his siblings as partners, leaving them the business without additional costs. Mario refers to his promise to his father to help his siblings, adding that “I felt great when I was able to create these things, then set up my brother, his wife, my sister... I felt strong, like I had arrived”. Still, there were tensions and conflicts, particularly with his sister and brother-in-law and with one of the brothers, with whom relations are poor. In this case, as in many others, tension between family members are the result of the formation of new families, because of the conflicts of loyalty between the family of origin and the conjugal family, which will be discussed in greater detail below, as it forms a fundamental aspect of Tramonti entrepreneurship.

The stories referred to above exemplify clearly the migratory and entrepreneurial model, started in the fifties and developed later on, by the inhabitants from Tramonti. This phenomenon took place in a context characterised by the economic growth, which involved in particular the North of Italy in the sixties and seventies (Ginsborg, 2003). It was a model made up of a number of young men and some women, following in the footsteps of pioneers such as Giggino, departed for the provinces of Northern Italy with the intention of starting a restaurant business, or joining the family, relatives, or fellow villagers who were already working in such businesses. These young men were subsequently joined by their own family members, and by other fellow villagers, and opened their own businesses, thus feeding the mechanism of mobility.

All this came about by means of the migration networks through which business partners and workforce were recruited, drawing first from the family channels, and then from the

neighbourhood in the community of origin. This primary social capital was the real force behind the success and dissemination of the pizzerias throughout the regions and provinces of North Italy, filling a relatively free niche. The migratory chains played a decisive role in influencing the evolution of the entrepreneurship of these migrants. In this sense, we can see how the social capital favoured the success of the pizza makers, as evidenced by the number and the spreading of pizzerias throughout northern Italy. Still, we must not underestimate the fact that social capital alone cannot explain the migration and the entrepreneurial phenomenon, as social capital only works in the context of other dimensions of social life (Bourdieu, 1980, 1986).<sup>8</sup> Moreover, as we shall see, the form of the social capital among the migrants from Tramonti cannot be taken for granted, since it has several specific facets directly related to entrepreneurial dynamics.

### **Social networks and migration chains**

To understand the mobility from Tramonti it is necessary to consider the context of origin. During the years of the Internal Great Migration, Tramonti was a rural place grappling with the crisis in the agricultural sector and presented few opportunities for its inhabitants, particularly for young people. Many of those interviewed reiterated that the only opportunities for work in the village were farming or migration. Although this is an obvious simplification, it shows the origin of the strong push that nourished the desire for mobility. The crisis situation and lack of opportunities was widespread throughout Southern Italy in those years. However, as we have seen, the migration from Tramonti took a different direction than that of the majority of other southern migrants to the North, who mostly sought jobs as waged labourers or clerks, above all in the great industrial factories. In the case at hand, instead, restaurant and entrepreneurial work prevailed from the start. As Pasquale Apicella said, “For us, being a pizza maker was the same as becoming an engineer or doctor...”. Working in a pizzeria was the main ambition of young migrants from Tramonti. While for other internal migrants, migration meant usually working in a factory and the main hope was finding a place in a large company such as Fiat (Fofi, 1976; Gallo, 2010) because the security that salaried work could offer, for people from Tramonti migration over the years became synonymous with work at a pizzeria. The main reason is to be found in the interaction between the migratory chain and the crucial desire to emulate the successful pizza makers.

To understand the differences between migratory patterns, it is necessary to pass from the macro-level analysis to the ethnographic meso-level, focusing on social and family networks as well as on the local clusters of meaning. It is only through the observation of personal experiences, both in the context of origin and in the place of arrival, that we can understand the different experiences of social and geographical mobility.

If we linger on the stories of pioneers who were decisive in shaping the migration pattern, we see that Bordese and Amato initially called the members of their families, as partners or collaborators, so that they could help them start in the business. Their restaurants were

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<sup>8</sup> As outlined by Luca Storti (2007) in his sociological study regarding the experience of Italian pizza and ice-cream makers in Germany, which is similar to the case I investigated.

mainly family businesses, although they recruited since the early years many fellow villagers and also others waiters not coming from Tramonti. The case of Giggino is somewhat different: in addition to his family and in-laws, he recruited from the beginning other villagers to work in the dairy factory, because, as he did not have experience in the field, he needed good workers. In every case, those involved in the activities were usually distant relatives, friends and fellow villagers, people he could trust, as his children pointed out. Also Giggino's main business of "brokerage" was based on analogous relations of kinship, friendship and common origins, since purchases were always made by means of long-term promissory notes. Thus, the bonds of kinship and neighbourhood nourished the trust that facilitated business. This does not mean that these relationships were free of tensions and conflicts, since Giggino earned a lot from his role as broker and provider of initial capital. While for many of those interviewed he was almost a hero, other migrants offer a less than positive view of his image and activities.

In any case, the migratory chains are above all a "re-functionalisation" of family, kinship and neighbourhood ties (Piselli, 1981; Signorelli, 2006). Migration does not damage the fabric of these ties, which are instead reactivated and, in some cases, strengthened by the experience of mobility, becoming indispensable channels of assistance and information. Moreover, the choice of leaving, even in the case of Tramonti, is almost always a familial one, and even when it appears to be an individual decision, the entire family becomes involved subsequently. In fact, in several cases the whole family moved north to work at the pizzeria.

Consider the events surrounding the migration of the Ferrara brothers, who first moved to Bergamo and are now permanently settled in Novara, where they have operated two joint pizzerias for many years:

*The first [to move] was my brother, who has unfortunately passed away. He left first thanks to... because we had some uncles, here in the area, in Milan, uncles in Bergamo who already had some pizzerias. It was in the seventies when we started, because we opened in 1979, my brother had already been here for about ten years, he was travelling around, he was in Bergamo for a little while with our aunts and uncles, and then he was in Milan and then through this uncle we got this place here, and he called us and we came up North. We'd never worked for anyone else, we came directly into this situation, with my brother who knew how to do a bit of everything, and he taught us, with some waiters, a cook, and then we got involved, and we managed this place here, and from there we opened another hotel in the city, we built it ourselves, I mean, we took it over ourselves, we did everything, a three star hotel. Yes, with our cousins, because our cousins were already in Bergamo, and he left and got together with the cousins in Bergamo, our paternal cousins. They were already here in the sixties. He was a waiter, a pizza maker, a chef; he jumped right into doing everything. He lived with them, I mean, he lived there but he had his own apartment. Then every so often I went there, but I went more as a tourist who like... I went there, because you know, we got along well with our cousins, I went just to take a trip, and I stayed there... then he got married in Milan, there was another uncle in Milan, another paternal uncle, who was on Corso Sempione in Milan, he had left a bit later than the ones from Bergamo ...*

The experience of Giuseppe Giordano, already mentioned in the beginning of the paper, is very similar. Bordese, his wife's uncle, had called him in Alessandria to be helped in the management of the restaurant, that later sold him. Some years later, Giuseppe opened another

pizzeria, and he called his two nephews, as well as some other young people from the village, to work in the restaurant. Bartolo Giordano, one of the two nephews, reconstructs the events:

*We stayed there for a few years... not long, because, in 1982, my uncle bought another place next to his house... they bought a house, next to the house where the restaurant opened up, and he bought it and left his old pizzeria to his nephews, me and my brother, to run. I was 23 years old. I'd already been married for a year. My brother was twenty. Then the employees who worked with my uncle, a couple of them he took with him, and a couple stayed with me...*

Although it is evident from the experiences described so far that family ties have played a primary role and the majority of the restaurants were a family business, many owners, from the very beginning, recruited also other young fellow villagers as waiters and pizza-makers. This practice broadened the range of the phenomenon, since the newcomers often opened their own pizzerias and restaurants, after some years as employees.

Also in the recruitment of these workers, social capital, as a generator of trust, played a decisive role. Although the interviews are ambiguous on this matter, we can imagine that the working conditions during the sixties and seventies in small businesses like those described above were far from ideal. People could work 12 hour per day, without a day off, and many employees were hired without a work contract. However, there were some benefits, too: the salary was good and from the outset, it was common practice to provide accommodation and meals free of charge to those who were alone. Additionally, some employees agreed to work hard with an eye on the ultimate goal of achieving their economic independence. The social capital guaranteed employers the opportunity of easily finding an available workforce that was trustworthy and easy to control. The young workers benefited from the opportunity to leave their village with a guaranteed job.

The migratory process was thus self-powered: the first arrivals recruited dozens more fellow villagers who, after some years, opened new pizzerias through savings and the experience gained through working for their family members, relatives and fellow villagers. Once on their own, these business owners recruited other waiters and pizza makers from their village.

Whether they were an extension of family ties or based on mutual acquaintances in Tramonti, the migratory chains were strong, in that they provided a real job from the start and support during the first period in the new place. The migrants were able to move to a virtually guaranteed job and were endowed with a series of contacts and connections that effectively supported them. For example, when an owner offered a job to a young villager who was not yet married, it was common practice to also provide accommodation by the owner's own family or in houses purchased for this purpose. This arrangement made it easier for the pizza makers and waiters to save resources to send to family or to invest in their own prospective businesses, but it also strengthened the control employers had over their employees, with whom the relationship was always "familial" with all the consequential advantages and disadvantages.

The certainty of being able to find work in the business of a relative or fellow villager and to learn the job and then set up one's own business obviously strengthened the propensity of young and even older people to leave the village. Many of the pizzeria owners interviewed explained that finding people to hire was quite easy. Until the eighties, it was sufficient to

spread the word among friends and relatives to find potential candidates. Particularly for young people, migrating to work in pizzerias was the only chance of finding a stable job and the only hope of improving one's economic and social situation. In many respects, between the 1970s and 1990s leaving for the North had become a "rite of passage" into adulthood, the fastest way to obtain economic independence and social recognition. In the seventies, my informants said, everyone wanted to leave, everyone wanted to become a pizza maker.

Since migration was widely held in esteem in the local social milieu, at least until the nineties when things began to change, we can say that Tramonti developed a true "culture of migration" (Massey, 1993; Cohen & Sirkecki, 2010): a positive representation of the experience of mobility that fuelled the spreading of migratory projects (Capello, Cingolani, & Vietti, 2014).

### **Families and social capital**

The propensity of leaving to work in a pizzeria stemmed from the role played, since the sixties, by the pizza maker and restaurant owners as the "reference group" for the wider community. And, obviously, it derived from the social and economic success of many migrants, who over the years had been able to start their firm, to expand it and, in several cases, to open more than one pizzeria.

The migratory networks, centred on family and neighbourhood ties, shed some light on the departures and arrivals, on the different trajectories, and, to some degree, illuminate the entrepreneurial success, also because so many of the pizza makers began working for relatives and fellow villagers to gain experience and accumulate savings. From this perspective, these migration networks can be understood as "social capital", as relational resources at the disposal of the social actors, since they played a fundamental role in the growth of entrepreneurs in the restaurant business.

Social capital in the form of migration chains organized and fed the geographical mobility. Additionally, family and community relationships provided the main channel through which pizza makers were able to access the initial resources for starting their own businesses through the provision of loans, without or (more commonly) with interest, often with deferred payments under promissory notes or bills of exchange. It was common for several siblings to combine savings, thus putting together familial social capital and financial capital. Community and diasporic bonds could also be converted into essential resources that were non-pecuniary, for example for prime materials such as mozzarella. The dairymen were not the only ones to first open pizzerias, but they contributed substantially to the spread and success of Tramonti pizzerias by providing their products to various firms, through agreements in which the economic dimension was united with personal relationship of trust. Conversely, the success of the Tramonti pizzerias guaranteed a secure and expanding market for the various artisan dairies opened by people from Tramonti in various locations throughout northern Italy. While the economic character of this quasi-symbiotic relationship is clear, the interviews show that the bond of trust was not less significant. Trust, based on the bonds more or less tight of kinship, on the common origins, on Tramonti as a shared point of reference, facilitated agreements, favourable to pizza makers, who could, for example, postpone payments according to need. Similarly, many people I talked to stated

that they always used Tramonti suppliers because of a sort of moral duty to promote other fellow villagers. As often happens, however, one cannot easily disassociate the moral duty from other aspects, as seen once again the case of Giggino. When a fellow villager purchased one of his pizzerias in instalments, the deal included an unwritten but nonetheless binding rule under the contract: that the new pizza maker would continue for many years to buy the mozzarella supply from the factory owned by Giggino and his brother, thus increasing their volume of business.<sup>9</sup>

The case of Giggino reminds us that community networks provided the main path for families and individuals to go into business for themselves. Restaurants were often bought from relatives, by the previous employer or by other people from Tramonti. Although it was not a stringent norm, the pizzeria market was often a business kept internal to the trans-local community. In any case, the diasporic network was the main channel for information about the best restaurants, localities and economic opportunities. See, for example, how Giuseppe Ferrara explained how his uncle had settled in Bergamo and he and his brothers had found a place in Novara:

*And... this one, I mean, the ones arrived in Bergamo thanks to the same one... a person from Tramonti who my uncle knew, they were friends, that found this place and he, my uncle, went to see it and stopped there, through a friend who was involved in it, and then he left it to him. And in Milan, same system, one from Tramonti who sold pizzerias to everyone... A promissory note, yes, then you would pay... but they all got them like that! [ ... ] they bought them all without money the pizzerias here, but they were good years, when you worked, you earned, you deposited, you paid what you wanted to... they were good times.*

Even the buying and selling of the restaurants show the specific social capital of our subjects: a mixture of family and community ties, forming a climate of strong trust that served those involved particularly well in their purchase of pizzerias in instalments and with promissory notes, as Ferrara stresses. However, the social capital of Tramonti migrants presents a series of characteristics that must be further analysed to understand the remarkable development of these restaurant firms, a development that cannot be reduced to a single factor, as highlighted by the people I interviewed.

### **Social capital and entrepreneurial familism**

To understand the spread and success of these pizzerias, one must be cognisant of the historical and social context within which this phenomenon took place. This is clear to those interviewed, who often spoke in terms of “golden years” of the pizzerias, in contrast to the current, long-standing economic crisis. The arrival en masse of people from Tramonti, and the spread of these businesses largely coincided with the Italian economic boom years in the sixties and the seventies; but the true “golden period of pizza” was during the 1980s, a decade of economic expansion and consumerism, particularly in regions such as Piedmont,

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<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, it should be noted that all the participants emphasized the excellent quality of the products supplied from the dairy farm, which was among the first to sell pre-sliced mozzarella cheese, among other things.

Lombardy and Emilia where, by no coincidence, our pizza makers were manly located. The economic growth of Fordist northern Italy presented the ideal scenario for making the Tramonti migrant strategy possible. Similarly, and despite the efficacy of the personal and relational resources at their disposal, the Tramonti pizza makers are suffering under the current economic crisis. Focusing on social capital is not enough to understand the success of the pizza-makers because, as mentioned above, it works only in interaction with other socio-economic factors.

Additionally, it became apparent through interviews with the pizza makers that, from their point of view, a strong work ethic and a willingness to sacrifice were more important to the success of a business than the social and kinship relationships that they tend to take for granted. Working in a pizzeria—be it as owner-manager, wait staff or “at the oven”—demands long hours, constant dedication and a willingness to forego evenings off and holidays. As the subjects stress, it is not a job as hard as factory work, but it is a tough job that does not allow much rest or leisure. Mario Amato speaks explicitly and colourfully, in this regard: “We made a shit life here! We made endlessly sacrifices... all of us! We worked night and day, not even managing to eat in the afternoon... not even eating...”. Related to this discussion, he continues to explain why the family was so important as a source of employment:

*We always worked, you'd have to be really bad off... [to miss work] bad enough to go to the hospital, which is why being with family was extremely important in our work, because unfortunately, we did 9 am to 3 pm, went home, and by 5:30 you were back at the pizzeria, we worked until 1 or 2, how does someone keep up a life like this? So, I have tried as much as possible to have my family at work, so we could share the work.*

His daughter, who now owns the restaurant together with her brother, emphasises the human and family costs, “I’ll just say this: to ensure a future for the children, after I spent five days at the hospital, they sent me to live with my grandmother for six years, so they could work”. After that, from the age of 14 on, both she and her brother started working at the pizzeria with their parents.

This is not an isolated case. Giggino’s children were sent to boarding school until age 14, then they began to help in the pizzeria and in their father’s other businesses, while continuing their studies. “Oh, yes, we sure did give a hand!”, his daughter told me, and then emphasised her family’s super work ethic, “When they passed a law for a day of rest, for my father, it was a tragedy: close for a day? That’s not possible! It was also a very tough life, you started in the morning and worked until 3, because these places didn’t close, just an hour in the afternoon, then you reopened at 4 for the evening. Every day. My father did not agree with having a day of rest, he made us work, all the time...”. Among others we can also cite Bordese, who told me: “It was a horrible way to live!” Indeed, for many years at the beginning of his career, he worked two jobs, waking up at 5 a.m. to sell mozzarella in Genoa while his wife was at the pizzeria, where he worked through the evening.

These are just some examples of a recurring theme in the interviews, whose importance was stressed from pizza makers themselves. On the one hand, their emphasis on hard work is certainly due to a search for recognition and is an idealisation of their own efforts. On the other hand, it is undeniable that the personal workload for staff and family was intense.

All the effort and personal sacrifice were aimed to economic success and to the attempt to ensure a future for the children, as Amato's daughter said. The absolute value associated to family, its axiological centrality, is what has allowed a considerable level of exploitation of the staff and of the other family members, as well as self-exploitation. If a person totally dedicated himself to the pizzeria it was, according to the people I talked with, only because of the family, and if one sacrificed himself, it was for the family: "Help my family? Until death. For the others, wasted time", Amato told me.

The ethic of work for the family seems to have resulted in many cases in an overlap between the two worlds, and not infrequently in the predominance of the work duties over family life. In ways similar to those described by Simone Ghezzi (2007) for the small industry in Brianza,<sup>10</sup> work in the family often means that time spent working dominates over free time and family time, simply because all the family members were working inside the company. There is no lack of negative consequences: the children accuse parents of ignoring them and the parents complain that they sacrificed their lives for the business. It is not by chance, then, that many of the people interviewed have divorced, citing excessive commitment to their work as the cause.

In an apparent paradox, the valorisation of the family allowed also the exploitation of family members, as well as of other workers. Some of those interviewed, when told me about their first years of work as employee by other people from Tramonti, criticised the unstable work conditions and exploitation evident in the quite common lack of a work contract and the excessive hours they were expected to work. Such conditions were accepted as part of a program to eventually work for themselves after gaining experience and accumulating savings. As Ghezzi noted (2007), the familial dimension of the firm, its way of presenting itself as a "family" can easily lead to these negative practices toward employees. Even among migrants from Tramonti, the restaurant owners often painted their management and the employer/employee relationship in a patriarchal hue, particularly since the workers had been selected from among relatives and fellow villagers and supposedly could trust the employer more. This also meant a guarantee, arising out of community control, that employees would, for example, accept working off the books and not leave as soon as another good offer came along (a practice which, however, happened quite often, since the demand for waiters and pizza makers was strong). The patriarchal power relationships that defined the peasant family in villages were partially reproduced in the North in the management of pizza restaurants, thus favouring a tight control of the work force and allowing cutting the cost of work.

All these practices found their meaning within a cluster of values that we can define "familism". Familism is commonly used, following Banfield (1958), to describe and criticise a collective ethos in which the nuclear family, closed on itself, assumes excessive importance to the detriment of other relationships and of civic spirit. Still, it is possible to use this concept in non-evaluative sense, to refer to an ideology which is deeply rooted also in Tramonti,<sup>11</sup> as elsewhere in Italy; an ideology which places the family at the top of the hierarchy of local values, as the focal reference for the good life (Pardo, 1998), but

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<sup>10</sup> Brianza is a historical region of Lombardy, in Northern Italy.

<sup>11</sup> As shown in other essays that I have written (Capello, 2008; Capello & Colclough, 2010).

without necessarily implying the closure on itself of the nuclear family. In Tramonti, indeed, familism is related to a series of concentric spheres of importance, from the domestic group leading to the extended family, to kinship and the neighbourhood. The main problem arises from the possible tension between the primacy of the family by marriage and the loyalty due to the family of origin. Familism is simply the “spirit of strong bonds” (Dalla Zuanna, 2001), the ideological and axiological expression of the primacy of the family as a guarantee of existential, social, and economic security.

Tramonti was, above all during the central decades of the last century, marked by economic insecurity, which in part haunts the village still today. The migratory movement to a territory like suburban Northern Italy, characterised instead by a noteworthy prosperity, allowed the development of a particular strain of familism. From being, in the context of origin, a guarantee of social security, familism was converted into an ideological resource that stimulated personal sacrifice for the good of the family group, facilitated the control of the work force, and encouraged both cooperation and competition. In other words, all the various forces behind the success and the expansion of pizzerias.

The role of cooperation and trust in the expansion of pizzerias is clear. Trust enabled Bordese to obtain a loan from Giggino’s brother-in-law, which was essential to let him open the restaurant. Amato received the initial capital from his uncle. Although it was a loan with interest, Amato is still grateful for what he considers to have been indispensable assistance. Even Gennaro Coccorullo, who co-owns a pizzeria in Alessandria with his siblings and is a relative of Giuseppe Giordano, with whom had worked for a few years before branching out on his own, told me he resorted to informal channels to find the initial capital:

*How did you find the money?*

Eh, thanks to some friends, one person lent me x-amount, another friend x-amount... a few promissory notes... there was a trattoria, then we set up a pizzeria... that’s how it started...

*Who were these friends?*

Yes, all of them... there was this friend from Voghera... another friend, who was his brother-in-law, there was my cousin here, Giulio... he’s not here anymore, he had the Mezzaluna (restaurant), he was a great friend...

*And they gave you the loan with interest or...?*

No. They gave it to me like that, on my word... and you know, these are things that... you’d have to understand them yourself. When I paid it back, I gave them something extra... only right, in my opinion. So, we started, little by little...

In every interview I collected is patent the importance of the family and of kin and community bonds in obtaining the indispensable economic and personal help to opening and running a business. Bartolo Giordano said that it was only because of his uncle’s support that he managed to open a restaurant with his brother, and told me how he helped his brother-in-law:

*Yes, we were paying the rent, the management... to buy it... after 3 or 4 years, with no signature, no contract, no nothing... you pay the rent and after x amount of time, we realise that rent is already paying for the restaurant, so we bought it in 1985 after a little while... Yes, there was no deal, there was nothing contractual... but then the respect for our uncles was*

*very, very different from what it is today. It was... I considered them all fathers and the uncles that stayed with us I considered them fathers, really. There were my wife and I, my brother and his wife in that pizzeria and two, three years before, my brother-in-law had arrived; he had worked in Modena before and had lost his job, so he came, too. He was with me a year, in my house with his wife, and he worked with me at the pizzeria.*

The success of individuals was largely a collective undertaking, achieved through the work of social capital composed of strong family and community ties. A familistic social capital.

There is an implied yet frequent tendency in the literature to contrast familism with social capital, following Putnam's line of reasoning (1993). This is due, also, to the haziness of the concept of social capital itself (Bagnasco et al., 2001), that leads to an overlap between the idea of social relations as a resource<sup>12</sup> and the even vaguer concept of social capital as widespread trust and *civiness*. This conceptual overlap is not correct. Social capital is not necessarily civic, nor does it coincide with trust, but rather with all "social" resources (networks, reciprocity, and exchange of ideas) that in a specific context may be appropriate and used by the actors for their specific purposes (Bagnasco et al., 2001).

In the present case, familism supported social capital. But, the small entrepreneurs from Tramonti were skilful in bringing to fruition an array of relational resources, not only family and kinship ties. Connections with mozzarella cheese producers were a critical factor in finding start-up capital, as well as contacts with suppliers of coffee and beer who, until recent years, usually lent money at interest to more trusted customers in exchange for a monopoly on supply. The relationships created in the contexts of arrival with local people as well with the numerous migrants from the South were equally important. Indeed, other southerners were, for many years, the main and more trustworthy customers.

The familistic social capital therefore favoured cooperation at the family and community levels. But it favoured also competition between the families, between the "razze"—the extended patrilineal families that traditionally define the kinship system in Tramonti—. <sup>13</sup> Amato, with spontaneity, told me: "It was a race to see who was better, there was this competition. Because we came from misery." His son added: "I can tell you, our family and the Giordano group are the ones who did the most here (in Alessandria)." The competition, accentuated by but also governed once again by community control, could serve to inspire the hard work of all family members to be victorious over the other families. Viewing social capital only in terms of collective trust implies the risk of ignoring a defining characteristic of entrepreneurial activity—competition. Indeed, many people I interviewed opened more than one restaurant, invested resources and helped their siblings and relatives, because they wanted to gain prestige by winning the economic contest against the other families from Tramonti.

From the perspective of the pizza makers the ideal competition was among families, but this does not mean that there was no rivalry among members of the same family group.

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<sup>12</sup> As in the original formulation by Pierre Bourdieu (1980, 1986).

<sup>13</sup> I described the Tramonti family and kinship structure in the essays previously cited (Capello, 2008; Capello & Colclough, 2010).

A competition that often in the interviews was related to disputes and quarrels, frequently causing divisions within the family firm. Giggino and his brother parted ways after a few years because of the rivalry between them for leadership of the dairy factory. Amato argued with a brother, a sister and a brother-in-law, that left him to open their own business. Bordese parted early on from his two brothers to start his own business.

Many of these partings, or fissions, were caused by disagreements among members of the family, which reverberated within the company. Several of those interviewed said that the brothers left the business when their family situation changed, when “the women got involved”, echoing the patrilineal concept of kinship that was typical in Tramonti.<sup>14</sup> It is in such terms that Giovanni Amatruda, owner of a pizzeria near Savona, explained why he separated from his brothers after many years of working together:

*Sure as long as we all managed it together... so long as it was just us brothers, clearly, when the wife of one and then the wife of another gets involved... but I don't have anything against women, and I say this only because it, anyway ... I speak with my sister one way, and I can't talk that way to my sister-in-law, because she's an outsider, she's my brother's wife, but she's an outsider, so she might understand something different from what I mean, and these things, unfortunately, happen. But I would argue that, so long as we managed it all together, we had a good time and I prefer it like that.*

More precisely, the tension within a family business emerges because of the familistic logic itself, which can lead to a conflict of loyalty between the family of origin and the conjugal family. From the male perspective, from the perspective of those interviewed, the head of the family is divided between fidelity to his own brothers (and to his own *razza*, the agnatic line symbolised by the last name) and the interests of his own nuclear family, as exemplified by the future of the children. Parting ways and opening an independent business is the best option, and the best way to avoid further tension in the original group of brothers and sisters. It is in these terms that Bartolo Giordano explains his decision to part ways from his in-laws, after many years of shared management of their business:

*Then, at a certain point, my brother and I, my brother-in-law and his wife, my wife and the wife of my brother, we were a few too many, so before there was any misunderstanding, I bought a kiosk bar, with my brother-in-law and I put him in it. I gave 70% to them, and I kept 30, for what my son and I could give, because they were there all day, we went to give him a rest in the afternoon, from 3 to 6, when the pizzeria was closed. For six years I worked at the pizzeria... I went to the kiosk with my wife till 6, then I went and work at the pizzeria. This went on for six years, then after six years I said enough, I explained to my in-laws my intentions and they could decide what they wanted, to take the kiosk alone or listen to me and take another place, because the hours I was keeping were no longer sustainable. Then in 1999, a friend's place, a friend from Tramonti, maybe he was joking, said, do you want to buy it? What do you want? Let's go ... the day after I bought it... Yes, over the years things change, children grow up, demands... it's right to make things clear. I have decided to clarify a few things, in the sense that... if you don't make things clear in a company, if someone, for instance, leaves us too early, it's a disaster, so it's better to make things clear.*

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<sup>14</sup> A similar logic, connected to a strong agnatic ideology, was found by Berardino Palumbo (1991) in san Marco de' Cavoti in Campania and by Nevill Colclough (2000) in Ascoli Satriano in Puglia.

Not all partings between relatives come from quarrels and misunderstandings. In reality, the division of the original group, and the removal of one or more family members from a business owned by the parents or the siblings—the *frereche*—can solve or prevent tensions, bringing back a productive working relationship. In 1956, Pio Apicella initially took over one of the first pizzerias that Giggino opened, in Oleggio, near Novara. A few years later he and his wife joined his two brothers in opening a larger pizzeria under their ownership. After having worked together for several years, they parted ways, but Pio explained that he continued to collaborate with his brothers, buying mozzarella cheese and tomatoes together to reduce costs, for example, or exchanging waiters when needed.

Fission is not necessarily negative. If we think of the success of Tramonti migrants more in terms of growing and spreading of firms than in terms of stability, invested capitals and earned profits, fission from the mother company is one of the key factors, together with other practices such as “franchising” (the opening of new restaurants by the pizza maker or his children) and “budding” (the birth of new restaurants related to the first through various kinds of relationships).

I use the term “fission” in the meaning given to the concept by Evans-Pritchard (1940), because I am convinced that we can interpret the whole dynamic of the Tramonti pizzerias by resorting to the segmentary model<sup>15</sup> of fusion and fission. Siblings join together to more easily gather the financial and labour resources necessary to start up the firm and, once united as a family group (the Vitagliano, the Giordano, etc.), they compete against the other families. This group parts ways, either partially or definitively, when one of the siblings decides to establish a new lineage-based company, with the goal of ensuring the future of his/her nuclear family. As Evans-Pritchard (1940) noted, the fission of lineages could actually have positive effects, allowing for a more effective ecological adaptation. The fission of the Tramonti family companies has had a similar function in an economic context that guaranteed sufficient resources for all, although these resources were dispersed in the different towns of Northern Italy. Moreover, just like it happens among the Nuer and other segmentary societies, division could prove to be the best means for defusing conflicts, subsequently allowing for collaboration between the companies that were born through fission.

Once again, familism plays a crucial role in these segmentary dynamics, which are based on the primacy of the family and the tension between the family of origin and the family by marriage. The value given to the family of origin means that its members should try to remain united or, in any case, to help siblings as much as possible. But, as those interviewed noted, the children are equally if not more important, and therefore it might be necessary to part ways to ensure individual businesses for them.

The experiences of the Tramonti pizza makers offer instances of the positive function of familism, which encouraged a certain type of economic and entrepreneurial, family-run activity, such as the pizzerias. Social capital is often idealised in the sociological literature on entrepreneurship in Italy, and put in contrast, more or less implicitly, with familism:<sup>16</sup> the

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<sup>15</sup> Provided, of course, the model is not viewed in a rigid and stereotyped manner. In applying Evans-Pritchard’s insights to the dynamics of these firms, I found inspiration in the work of Yanagisako (2002).

<sup>16</sup> Regarding the ideological dimensions of the concept of social capital, see Narotzki (2007).

former is often seen as the main development factor for Northern and Central Italy, while familism is commonly perceived as one of the causes of the backwardness of the South. In the present case, these two elements are not in conflict with each other. Rather, we are faced with an “entrepreneurial familism” (Ghezzi, 2007) that unites the Tramonti pizza makers with Northern Italy entrepreneurs such as the artisans from Brianza. For these artisans as much as for the Tramonti migrants, this kind of familism has been one of the secrets of success, albeit it has implied a fair dose of negative elements, as Ghezzi (2007) also demonstrates, such as the legitimisation of self-exploitation, working off the books and patriarchal control over the labour force.

One last point should be stressed. The emphasis on social capital and networks in the analysis of entrepreneurial activities should not lead to an underestimation of the larger economic and political context where they were born and they operate (Narotzki & Smith, 2006). In our case, geographic mobility is the crucial factor. In a difficult economic context such as that in Tramonti, the familistic social capital is first and foremost a guarantee of security. Migration toward a more favourable environment, like Northern of Italy during the years of economic expansion between the fifties and the seventies (Ginsborg, 2003), transformed it in a resource for entrepreneurial development.

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