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Self-employment of Syrian refugees: unveiling social networks and human capital of food stall owners in Rio de Janeiro*

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Abstract
Integration of immigrants in their host societies is a key-issue on the refugee crisis throughout the world. Self-employment appears as means of survival representing the so-called necessity-driven entrepreneurship, which is rather common among immigrant survival strategies. Syrians in Brazil are the fourth largest nationality to seek refuge in the country. Therefore, the present paper aims at analyzing how ethnic and local networks of support are configured and influence the creation of new businesses, such as food stalls and restaurants. For that purpose, an exploratory study through in-depth interviews was conducted with Syrians in Rio de Janeiro, generating reflections on the institutional picture as well as the hosting conditions of the country. Key-findings include contingency factors showing evidences that social capital is more a function of brokerage across structural holes than closure within a network articulation, the family network importance as well as the establishment of a local support network.
Keywords: immigration, refugee, Syrians, Brazil, self-employment.

1. Introduction

Immigration issues are frequent news in global media. The arrival of legal and illegal immigrants to the United States, refugees to Europe and, in the South American context, the Venezuelans in Roraima, Brazil, all generate important reflections in today's society. Immigration is a phenomenon intrinsically connected to the political and economic conditions of the country of origin and host country, where the most sought destinations include European and North American countries. Moreover, social and economic integration of these individuals is paramount, especially to those who emigrate in precarious conditions, such as the refugees. In this sense, entrepreneurship becomes a possibility to promote social and economic development and stimulate local integration and economic ascension in host

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societies (Portes & Zhou, 1992). Especially self-employment appears as means of survival representing the so-called necessity-driven entrepreneurship, which is rather common among immigrant survival strategies (Chrysostome & Arcand, 2009).

Therefore, their human, social, financial and cultural capitals combine a distinctive mix of ingredients, which allow them to envision and engage in different segments of the opportunity structure (Kloosterman, & Rath, 2001).

Syrian and North African immigration peaked 60 million refugees, which were displaced from their homelands by the end of 2014 (Aiyar et al., 2016). That flow of immigrants was only seen in Europe after World War II. Current conflicts in Syria last for more than seven years, which forced the displacement of several million citizens. In Brazil, more than 120,000 refugee requests have been made in that period, with Syrians being the fourth largest nationality to seek refuge in the country (Brazil, 2017). Recently in Rio de Janeiro, several Arabic food stalls popped up around the city, especially in busy streets of high pedestrian flow. These Syrian newcomers discovered an opportunity for venturing, based on the Brazilian affiliation for Arabic food, focusing on low-cost snacks.

Historically, Syrian and Lebanese came to Brazil at the end of the XIX century and beginning of the XX century (Cabreira, 2001; Waniez & Brustlein, 2001), some of those working as peddlers, traveling to the hinterlands of Brazil, such as Minas Gerais, Goias, Bahia and other Brazilian states.

Although developed nations are major destinations for immigration, developing countries also face immigration issues acting also as host countries. Obstacles to settlement and integration include discrimination, access to credit, limited cultural adaptation and language issues (Portes & Zhou, 1992). Therefore, entrepreneurship might be an avenue to provide immigrants with social dignity in the host country, although very challenging, given the several obstacles, they face (Chrysostome & Arcand, 2009).

Anthropologists, geographers and sociologists traditionally have studied immigrant entrepreneurship. As it has gained importance on society, management studies embraced that research subject, especially addressing different angles of the phenomenon on “immigrant and ethnic entrepreneurship” research tracks, which is tightly related to “social entrepreneurship”.

Nevertheless, Refai, Haloub and Lever (2018) posit that with the growing numbers of refugees around the world, there is need to unveil different contexts, which forge their entrepreneurial identity. Thus, contextualization include linking research and observation of a certain groups to relevant facts, events, or points of view, which enable research and theory development (Rousseau & Fried, 2001), causing a broader understanding of entrepreneurship (Zahra & Wright, 2011).

Recent Syrian refugee entrepreneurs in Brazil have received little attention from researchers, therefore, the authors decided to conduct a qualitative exploratory study among them in Rio de Janeiro. The present paper aims at unveiling how ethnic and local networks of support influence the creation of new immigrant ventures, such as food stalls and restaurants, in the case of Syrian immigrants of Rio de Janeiro. Moreover, authors aim at evidencing the influence of human capital elements, such as education and skills, on the germination of these new businesses. Thus, our specific research questions encompass:

RQ1: How ethnic networks support and influence new business creation of Syrians in Rio?

RQ2: What is the influence of human capital in new business creation of Syrians in Rio?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Immigrant, Ethnic Entrepreneurship and Self-employment

Immigrant and ethnic entrepreneurship are phenomena that deserve a multi-layered analysis including theories and analytical lenses coming from different perspectives, such as anthropology, sociology, geography, urban studies and entrepreneurship (Etemad, 2018). The challenges in the studies of migrants stem not only from ambiguous terms and definitions but also from different national systems of assessment of migrant conditions (Elo, Sandberg, Servais, Basco, Cruz, Riddle, Täube, 2018).

Recent studies regarding immigrant entrepreneurship are abundant in academic literature using different theories and views, such as studies regarding general aspects immigrant entrepreneurs in the US and Israel (Light & Isralowitz, 2019), addressing them as job creators (Picot & Rollin, 2019), unveiling business strategies (Wang & Warn, 2019) or barriers encountered by them (Muchineripi, Chinyamurindi & Chimucheka, 2019). Nevertheless, only few of them address the context of immigrants in emerging economies (e.g. Shinnar & Zamantılı Nayır, 2019; Bosiakoh, Tetteh, Djamgbah & Bosiakoh, 2019).

The phenomenon of ethnic and immigrant entrepreneurship was explored by seminal authors such as Barrett, Jones and Mc Evoy, (1996), Drori, Honig and Wright (2009), Achidi Ndofor and Priem (2011), Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993), Portes and Zhou (1992, 2012) and Zhou (2004). Of the many articles published on the subject, some highlight specific angles of the phenomenon, especially evidencing the positive impact of entrepreneurship in generating income and social mobility of ‘émigrés’. Examples are abundant in the academic literature on the subject, depicting Cuban refugees in Miami, Dominicans in New York, Chinese in U.S and U.K., etc. All of them reinforce the importance of researching specific ethnicities in each context (Portes & Zhou, 1992; Zhou, 2004).

Self-employment rates could be substantially high among immigrants, due to barriers regarding language, social networks, among others. Nevertheless, as evidenced by Fairlie and Meyer (1996), the levels of self-employment differ among the 60 ethnic and racial groups in the United States. Despite the reasons for that difference, the discrimination and difficulties into learning the local language would lead to variations in self-employment patterns (Logan, Alba, & Stults, 2003). For instance, Barrett, Jones, and McEvoy (1996), show high self-employment rates, namely between 11% and 14.9%, for some ethnic minority groups in Great Britain and North America. Recent studies also show the value of self-employment within ethnic minorities (e.g. Brynin, Karim, & Zwysen, 2019; De Luca & Ambrosini, 2019).

Racial and language discrimination are issues to be observed while studying ethnic minorities and immigrants (see Choi, Poertner, & Sambanis, 2019; Stein, Cavanaugh, Supple, Kiang, & Gonzalez, 2019). Seminal works of Nee, Sanders, and Sernau (1994) posit that some immigrants tend to move away from the under-employment conditions of informal ethnic economy, looking for formal jobs outside their ethnic enclaves. However, this is only possible when they speak fluently the local language or have enough qualifications to perform those jobs. This barrier, called ‘accent ceiling’ (Collins & Low, 2010), is not present for non-immigrant entrepreneurs or workers. Therefore, even those linguistic, ethnic or religious

minorities who achieved high levels of human capital (e.g. college degrees, work experience, or entrepreneurial background) might face discrimination. Sometimes host society's employers do not recognize their experiences or degrees (Lee & Westwood, 1996). Considering all that background, there are two possible paths for immigrants upon arrival. The first one is to find a job. Frequently for the illegal or unskilled immigrants, jobs within the ethnic enclaves, under-waged or barely legal. On the other hand, the well-educated and skilled ones might be able to get a highly paid job. The second path is the self-employment, for the ones that envision opportunities or are necessity driven; fulfilling their survival needs (Lee & Westwood, 1996; Collins & Low, 2010).

Immigrant that decide to venture might choose to cater to locals or to target their own co-ethics (Portes & Zhou, 1992; Drori, Honig & Wright, 2009). Immigrant and ethnic enterprises take advantage of foreign human resources, usually by paying lower wages. They also use their networks to gain specific information, such as suppliers or business practices (Light, 1972). The so-called ethnic enclaves might promote entry barriers related to specific knowledge, language and cultural options (Masurel, Nijkamp, Tastan, & Vindigni, 2002), further leveraging the competitive advantage of ethnic firms. These enclaves also constitute sources of supply and distribution (Wilson & Portes, 1980), as well as financial capital supplies, such as informal microcredit provided by their networks (Greene, 1997). Moreover, ethnic firms are generally low-tech, low-innovation, family-owned businesses, with less aggressive market tactics, focusing on ethnic enclave distribution channels (see Dimitratos, Plakoyiannaki, Pitsoulaki, & Tüselmann, 2010). Some might initially perform informal ethnic entrepreneurship (Ramadani, Bexheti, Dana, & Ratten, 2019).

However, not all immigrants are comfortable with their own communities; some seek distance from their co-ethnics (Cruz, Falcão, & Barreto, 2017). Also, in contexts when they encounter small communities of their own co-ethnics, eventually they will have to sell products or services to local customers (e.g. Ellemers & Van Rijswijk, 1997; Achidi Ndofor & Priem, 2011), due to limited size of co-ethnic market. That choice is embedded in fierce competition against established merchants.

Choosing services or products to be sold might also be determined by personal characteristics, experiences and ethnic knowledge (Portes & Zhou, 1992), which constitutes an effectuation strategy (Sarasvathy, 2001). In some communities, immigrant entrepreneur´s acquired knowledge of the host country´s environment might benefit co-ethnic future competitors, when compatriots help others to establish themselves in that same environment (Lee, 1999; Portes & Zhou, 1992). Therefore, if at some point immigrant entrepreneurs are dependent to their ethnic communities, at the same time they should develop their own connections with local suppliers and customers (Spears, Doosje, & Ellemers, 1997). Therefore, social capital importance is a growing trend among recent entrepreneurship research (e.g. Evansluong & Ramírez-Pasillas, 2019; Neumeyer, Santos, Caetano, & Kalbfleisch, 2019; Dana, Virtanen, & Barner-Rasmussen, 2019).

In addition, several authors (e.g. Islam, 2012; Kirkwood, 2009; Shinnar & Young, 2008; Shinnar & Zamantılı Nayır, 2019) evidence push and pull factors that influence small entrepreneurship among immigrants or minorities. Findings evidence pull factors such as gaining higher social status, use of personal knowledge and previous experience, family business tradition, and less complexity of business (Islam, 2012). On the other hand, push factors encompass the lack of higher formal education, the curse of unemployment, dissatisfaction with previous occupation, and family hardship. However, scholars agree with

seminal authors that motivations for entrepreneurship are complex and intertwined (Kirkwood & Campbell-Hunt, 2007; Mallon & Cohen, 2001). At a broad level, pull and push factors are almost equally apparent for both women and men. Women seemed to place less emphasis on money as a motivation for entrepreneurship and more on other factors such as family flexibility (Kirkwood, 2009). In addition, being pulled into business ownership means entrepreneurs are likely to have ongoing financial success (Amit & Muller, 1995).

2.2 Social capital as support to immigrant networks

Understanding the configuration of human and social capital are key to unveiling immigrant entrepreneurship. Human capital refers to the educational level, professional experience, and job skills (Bourdieu, 2011). Social capital, in turn, according to Achidi Ndofor and Priem (2011), is related to the professional network of the immigrant entrepreneur, including other entrepreneurs, suppliers, service providers, and even competitors. In this sense, Syrian refugees are driven by their experiences caused by harsh social conditions they are forced to. (Refai, Haloub, & Lever, 2018). In addition, Bizri (2017) argues that refugees manifest their social capital through a high level of responsibility and commitment to their coethnics, due to feelings of being unable to return to their homelands.

Moreover, Martes and Rodriguez (2004) suggest that a key factor to ethnic and immigrant communities is the configuration of their social capital, which are often associated with higher rates of business success, which is also corroborated by seminal authors such as Light (1972), Light and Bonacich (1988) and Putnam (1993). All these seminal works propose elements of social capital, which are present in ethnic and entrepreneurship businesses, including their solidarity, ethical and cultural values, knowledge, and skills. However, competition and cooperation between immigrant entrepreneurs might differ among ethnicities, as shown in earlier research (Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993; Sanders & Nee, 1996) as well as recent works (see Cruz, Falcao, & Barreto, 2018; Sithas & Dissanayake, 2019).

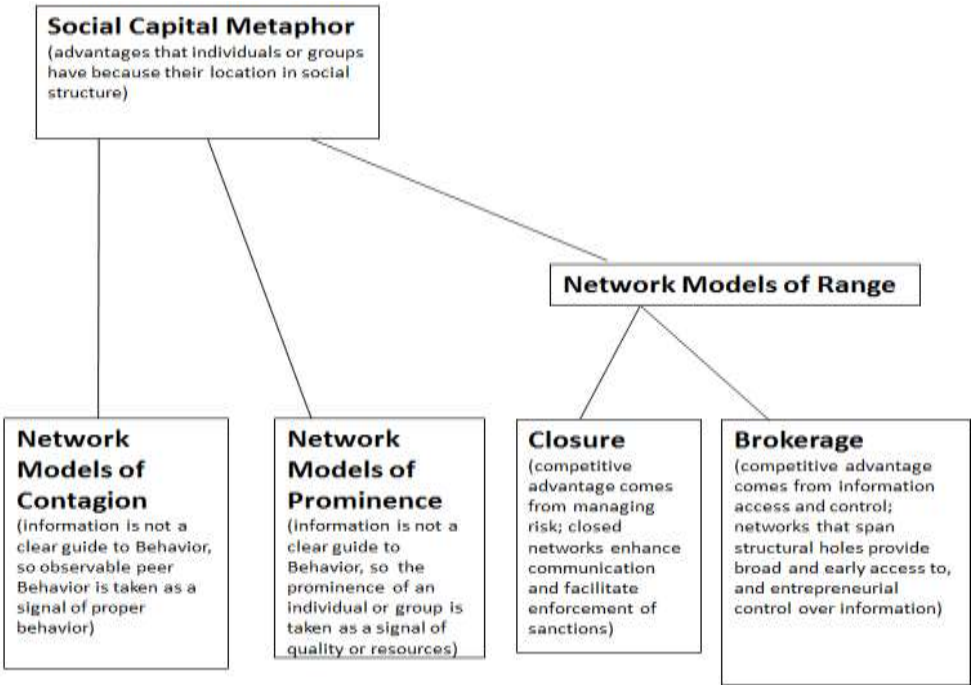
Current migration patterns are subject to family networks and friendship ties, related to their immigrant communities. Thus, from the standpoint of social capital, people who succeed are somehow more connected (Burt, 2000). Therefore, links between individuals and groups are established, alongside with trust, support mechanisms, or exchanges between those individuals and their groups. The prominence of the network support has been studied as an advantage for both people (Brass, 1992) and organizations (Podolny & Page, 1998). These support networks might even hold several Diasporas, such as the Jewish Diaspora in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean countries (Cohen, 2019) and Chinese Diaspora in Southern Asia (Elo, Täube, & Volovelsky, 2019).

Corroborating with the idea in which migrant entrepreneurs are first economic actors, who predominantly understand their ethnic social capital as a strategic, economic resource for action, Tolciu (2011) cited that the phenomenon of migrant entrepreneurship could be understood only when accounting for both the external environment and the internal limitations. The author presents a framework of a bounded rationality approach, where entrepreneurial outcomes can be viewed as a matter of optimization under constraints. In a more recent work, Tata and Prasad (2015) presented an advanced understanding of immigrant family businesses by assessing how the overall social capital of the family business owner influences business performance, pointing out that specifically, relational social capital

influenced access to resources and information, and structural social capital influenced access to resources.

Burt (2000) proposes a diagram of network mechanisms (see figure 1) responsible for social capital effects. According to the author, "there is an impressive diversity of empirical evidence showing that social capital is more a function of brokerage across structural holes than closure within a network, but there are contingency factors" (p.345).

Figure 1: Social Capital, in Metaphor and Network Structure



(Source: adapted from Burt, 2000)

Given the importance of networks in the context earlier presented, Wilson (1998) in his work on Mexican immigrants communities in the United States, identified five principles of immigrant networks. First, networks are multi-local, covering multiple geographic destinations, although importance of each destination may change over time. Second, anchorage points in any geographical location are the workplaces where immigrants find employment, so labor market conditions structure where immigrants go and where they remain. Third, new geographical locations are often accessed through the "weak bond strength", leading to geographic dispersion, and over time, some weak ties may be converted into strong ties through marriage or "*compadrio*". Fourth, networks are generally dense and diffuse, weak-link or knowledge networks constitute "social capital" for its members. Finally, given the geographical dispersion in the workplace and/or grouping of the type of work found among immigrants of any origin, the recruitment of labor occurs mainly through the members of a dense network, especially by their close relatives (Allen, 2000).

Shinnar & Zamantılı Nayır (2019) revealed specific aspects regarding immigrant entrepreneurs in a developing economy. First, immigrant entrepreneurs rely on their unique human and social capital while establishing their new ventures because of their ability to identify opportunities based on insider knowledge of the market in their host countries. Second, they forge trusting relationships between their coethnics thanks to language, cultural,

and religious ties and knowledge, which allow them to engage in less economically marginal activities in the context of emerging economies.

Finally, social capital is intrinsically linked to human capital as shown by Sumption (2009). The author researched the growing importance of social networks in informal recruitment of Polish workers in the UK. Positive aspects of social networks relate to the improvement on efficiency of recruiting, due to reduction of its costs and increase of its speed. On the other hand, the configuration of social networks can hinder the integration of these individuals in the long term, making it difficult for immigrants to find future jobs that demand more qualification.
Issues of acculturation and identity reconstruction among refugees also affect their social ties with the host society and coethnics, as shown in the study of Bosnian and Herzegovinan who resettled in the Australian cities (Colic-Peisker, & Walker, 2003).

On the next section, we detail human capital implications on refugee or immigrant owned business.

2.3. Human Capital implications on refugee or immigrant business

Another aspect that is crucial for understanding performance and success of immigrant and ethnic entrepreneurs is human capital. Becker (1993) defined human capital as the stock of knowledge, habits, social and personality attributes, including creativity, embodied in the ability to perform labor to produce economic value. It could be simply defined as a collection of traits – all the knowledge, talents, skills, abilities, experience, intelligence, training, judgment and wisdom possessed by individuals in a population. These resources represent a form of wealth that can be directed to accomplish their personal goals as entrepreneurs. Regarding family businesses, Basu (2004) argued that despite the importance of the family in their businesses, ethnic minority entrepreneurs have diverse aspirations, such as business-first, family-first, money-first and lifestyle-first aspirations. Nevertheless, their educational and family background affects entrepreneurs' aspirations, as does their stage on the family life cycle. Moreover, differences in aspirations are related to the nature of business, the way in which it is managed, the recruitment of professional managers and entrepreneurial performance. Her findings also highlight the diversity and complexity of the interaction between ethnicity, culture, class and entrepreneurship.

Syrians refugees that hold university degrees, or were students when fled their homelands to neighboring countries (e.g. Turkey and Jordan) or to Europe (see Aiyar et al., 2016; Baltaci, 2017), initially have expectations to get a formal job. Due to issues of discrimination or aspects of assimilation in their host countries, they might get frustrated and decide to venture (Baltaci, 2017) within their ethnic enclave, facing bold competition among coethnics. Andersson and Hammarstedt (2015) show that although the presence of ethnic enclaves increases the propensity for self-employment in Sweden, a strong network size implies increased competition for customers among self-employed immigrants. Other research (Lamba, 2003) propose that a significant proportion of refugees find that their human capital has little or no value in the Canadian labor market, which is explained by a combination of structural barriers that the social networks may not be sufficient to compensate for their downward occupational mobility.

Research on Arab American entrepreneurship found that several factors influence success of business, namely, start-up capital provided by families and friends, training and education,

support networks and support organizations (Smith, Tang, & San Miguel, 2012). In addition, both churches and mosques gave initial support and essential services demanded by new Arab American entrepreneurs, according to the authors.

For immigrants, self-employment often appears more attractive than a regular wage due to higher earnings, enhanced professional standing, a greater sense of independence (Baum & Locke, 2004; Shane, Locke, & Collins, 2003). Self-employment also provides flexibility to accommodate family needs (Zuiker, 1998) as well as a mean to achieving upward mobility (Portes & Zhou, 1992) in the host country.

In the case of Syrians in Rio de Janeiro, researchers found that they were necessity-driven entrepreneurs, pushed into entrepreneurship as a last resort, because of adverse circumstances such as job loss, unemployment, limited/blocked career mobility, or exclusion from the primary job market (Feldman, Koberg, & Dean, 1991; Smith, Tang, & San Miguel, 2012). For immigrants, human capital acquired in their native land is often not transferable to the primary job market within the host country, but can be applied toward self-employment. For example, Tienda and Raijman (2004) suggest that well-educated immigrants in the United States opt for self-employment as a way to achieve economic mobility. Push factors include those that block opportunities to pursue employment in the primary job market, forcing immigrants into self-employment as a way out of poverty, unemployment or under-employment (Shinnar & Young, 2008).

Frequently, immigrants, who tend to be excluded from the primary job market, develop an alternative to this less desirable secondary job market through business ownership, given their low prospective returns to wage/salary work because of discrimination, language barriers, incompatible education or training, and blocked promotional paths (Portes & Zhou, 1992; Choi, Poertner, & Sambanis, 2019; Stein, Cavanaugh, Supple, Kiang, & Gonzalez, 2019). Individuals from poorer, developing nations are more likely to be driven by necessity factors in comparison to aspiring entrepreneurs in developed nations (Acs, Desai, & Hessels, 2008)

3. Methodology

3.1.Data collection and sampling

The main data collection strategy was the in-depth interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), conducted both in Portuguese or English, with 14 Syrian refugees entrepreneurs established in metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro. All interviewees were owners of Arabic food stalls established on busy streets of several neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro, such as Copacabana, Botafogo, Largo do Machado, Downtown and neighboring city of Niteroi. Researchers conducted a non-probability convenience sampling method (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Although nonprobability sampling bring some limitations due to the subjective nature in choosing the sample, in this case it was especially useful because the target population meet certain practical criteria, namely Syrian immigrants which own food stalls, established in central neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro (see Patton, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In addition, other characteristics of the subjects were key to choosing this sampling method: easy accessibility, geographical locations of the subjects, availability during the day, or the willingness to participate on the research (Battaglia, 2008). Apart from the 14 interviewees selected, four subjects refused to be interviewed, limiting the original choice of interviewees.

Interviews took place between August and October 2017, mostly on the street, near their Arabic food stalls. Field notes and observations complemented data collection. The interviews

lasted from 20 to 60 minutes, were recorded using a smartphone and further transcribed integrally. At the request of the interviewees, their names were preserved. The researchers chose to conduct interviews rather than surveys for two reasons. First, interviews allow for better data collection from a population that is unfamiliar with survey research or has limited language skills, which is the case of Syrians in Rio de Janeiro. Second, through interviews, researchers were able to build rapport with interviewees, establishing a positive environment of trust.

A semi-structured interview protocol was created based on other studies examining immigrant entrepreneurship (Masurel et al., 2002 and Zhou & Cho, 2010). The first part of the interview gathered demographic information on the entrepreneurs including age, work experience prior to business ownership, educational background, marital status, and neighborhood where they lived. Eploratory questions focused on four main blocks of subjects, namely (i) their perceptions of Brazil, (ii) the difficulties faced by the immigrants and their route, (iii) the entrepreneurial process and support networks and their (iv) future plans. All these subjects were useful to deepening the understanding of subjects and approaching the research questions regarding the influence of human capital in the success of new business ventures of Syrians in Rio and how ethnic networks support and influence new business creation of Syrians in Rio.

In-depth interviews were based on McCracken's (1988) interview method to access the personal, private or intimate side of the memory of immigrant entrepreneurs. During the prolonged span of time of immersion with participants and their entrepreneurship environment, the team was able to get closer to the immigrants´ universe, gaining insights and perspectives that would have otherwise been difficult to achieve through a less extensive involvement.

During data-collection fieldwork, researchers required at first some time for the establishing a relationship of trust between the interviewers and interviewees, during the conversation. That could be explained by interviewees' suspicion, due to their vulnerability and trauma. Some even mentioned that they were highly sought after; others agreed to be interviewed without recording or refused to be interviewed. Table 1 shows the socio-demographic profiles of interviewees, selected for the analysis.

Table 1: Socio-demographic profile of interviewees

Interviewee	**Age**	**Housing Neighbourhood**	**Business Neighbourhood**	**City**	**Gender**	**Time in Brazil**	**Previous Experience**
1	32	Downtown Niterói with cousin	Kiosk on Niterói Shopping	Niterói	Male	9 months	Mechanical Engineer in Syria
2	22	Tijuca with uncles	Carioca Metro station	Rio de Janeiro	Male	1 year and 4 months	Worked in restaurant in Syria
3	26	Tomás Coelho with two friends	Cinelândia Metro station	Rio de Janeiro	Male	4 months	Not mentioned
4	23	Cosme Velho with father and brothers	Praça XV	Rio de Janeiro	Male	3 years	Student in Syria
5	23	Cosme Velho with father and brothers	Praça XV	Rio de Janeiro	Male	2 years and 5 months	Blacksmith in Syria

6	27	Lapa with parents and brothers	Opposite to Botafogo Praia Shopping	Rio de Janeiro	Male	4 years	Tourism industry worker in Syria
7	22	Andaraí with friends	Rua Mena Barreto, Botafogo	Rio de Janeiro	Male	9 months	Mathematics student in Syria
8	27	Botafogo Parish with brother	Rua Mena Barreto, Botafogo	Rio de Janeiro	Male	2 years and 6 months	Translator Arabic English and restaurant owner in Syria
9	25	Botafogo Parish with husband and three children	Next to the parish	Rio de Janeiro	Female	1 year	Aesthetic clinic employee in Syria
10	32	Botafogo Parish with wife and three children	Next to the parish	Rio de Janeiro	Male	1 year	Restaurant and sales director in Syria
11	25	Cantagalo, lives alone	Av. Nossa Sra. Copababana	Rio de Janeiro	Male	7 months	Engineer and store owner in Syria
12	29	Copacabana, lives alone	Av. Nossa Sra. Copababana	Rio de Janeiro	Male	7 months	Ship designer and translator in Syria
13	21	Tijuca, with uncle	Av. Nossa Sra. Copababana	Rio de Janeiro	Male	8 months	Arabic student in Syria
14	46	Lapa with son, aunt and cousins	Largo do Machado	Rio de Janeiro	Male	10 months	Driver and street vendor in Syria

3.2.Analysis of interviews

Interviews were fully recorded on interviewers' mobiles, which took notes during the interviews. All interviews were subsequently transcribed and translated into English, within one week after being conducted. The data analysis method was inductive in nature, which is usually focused on exploring new phenomena or looking at previously researched phenomena from a different perspective to generate new knowledge emerging from the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). While immigrant entrepreneurship is already an over-researched subject of investigation, the context of this study—an emerging economy—remains understudied. Therefore, the researchers felt that a qualitative approach would allow for unique emerging issues as opposed to using a deductive approach rooted in available knowledge.
The method of analysis of the interviews followed Bardin´s (1977) protocol. The analysis was divided into three phases: (i) Pre-analysis; (ii) Exploitation of the material; (iii) Treatment of results, inference and interpretation, which provided subsidies for a qualitative analysis. A triangulation with newspapers and local media reports was conducted to corroborate and bring additional insights to the interviews.

4. Presentation of observed cases and the context of Syrians in Rio de Janeiro

The recent Syrian refugee flow to Brazil generated specific ethnic businesses related to their traditional food, namely kibbeh, falafel and sfihas. These delicacies have been sold in food stalls scattered around the city, especially located near transportation hubs (e.g. metro stations, ferry stations), as well as busy shopping areas where street vendors share their space. The main necessity addressed by their businesses are on the go hungry passers-by, which encounter good value for money in Arabic snacks and soft drinks combos, sold in glass and steel kiosks with visual merchandising. One asset of the entrepreneurs are the expertise to prepare these foods. It is worth of note that all the ingredients are easily accessible in Brazil, therefore they are not dependent on any special spice or imported ethnic ingredient, which is a facilitator. The vendors follow traditional recipes, found originally in Syria and Lebanon. The value offer is comprised of fast snack, cheap, relatively healthy and with take away packaging (if necessary). Their costs include the rental and assembly of the kiosk, the purchase of ingredients, beverages and packaging. In some cases, the vendors purchase kibbeh and sfihas directly from a supplier who produces them in factory located in the North Zone of the city.

Table 2 shows the four themes included in the semi-structured interview protocol, authors' perceptions and some quote examples of the interviews. The table includes the immigrant path and the entrepreneurial process: (i) the themes perceptions of Brazil; (ii) the difficulties of immigration and its route; (iii) the entrepreneurial process and support networks; (iv) their future plans.

Table 2: Themes, authors' perceptions and some quote examples

Themes	**Reseachers' perceptions**	**Quote examples**
The Syrians' perceptions of Brazil	In general, the interviewees had a positive perception of Brazil and the Brazilian people. However, a few reported incidents of violence in daily life in the city.	I think Brazil has a bright future, because it is a big country, very rich in oil, gas, national visions, so beautiful country ... (Int. 1, 32 years old)
		I like Brazilian culture. Beautiful. Little thief. Tomás Coelho Saturday a lot of war. Fear also. Syria a lot of war. Here Brazil a little. (Int. 3, 26 years old)
The difficulties of immigration and its route	The greatest difficulties encompassed the local language, high expenses with their families; difficulties to issue documents, diploma validation, insecurity and violence in Rio de Janeiro, as well as the excess of bureaucracy to legalize their food stalls and to rent an apartment were also highlighted.	I was in Lebanon, I asked for asylum at the embassy, I got a tourist visa and I arrived in São Paulo, I and my brother Ibrahim, then we turned to Brasilia, I made a document, then I came to Rio de Janeiro to work. (Int. 8, 27 years old)
The entrepreneurial process and support networks	Networks comprised between family and other immigrants, in addition to the priests and the Charitas Diocesana institution (Catholic Church), configured shelter and emotional support. When asked if other Syrians helped with anything, they generally say yes. Housing and cooking are the main forms of aid quoted.	I got here and went to Charitas. I said "you help me to get a hostel, which I pay for little to be able to survive, I'll get two Styrofoam and some water bottles." They said, "There's a church you don't need to pay lodging." Then I arrived and the priest hosted me speaking Arabic. He showed me where to sleep. I woke up the next day looking for a job and the priest said, "wait a week for you to relax," I said, "I

		cannot accept that". (Int. 8, 27 years old)
		With housing, some kind of help ... Yes, my friends. They help me with the kitchen, cooking. They prepare the products. (Int. 7, 22 years old)
Future plans	Regarding their plans, refugees report several possibilities: to find regular job, to buy a house in Syria, to play soccer professionally or to keep running their businesses.	I like football a lot. I played football in Syria too. My dream is to be a soccer player. (Int. 4, 23 years old).
		In two years, I hope to be fluent in Portuguese, to learn to read and write in Portuguese and to do a college here in Brazil, but I have not yet chosen a course yet. (Int. 13, 21 years old)
		I want to get permanent citizenship, to remain here in the future. Why not? A peaceful country, wonderful people and weather. I have a future here. As a refugee, after 4, 5 years you can apply for citizenship. (Int. 6, 27 years old)

Some refugees were very communicative and described their whole trajectory from Syria to neighboring countries (e.g. Lebanon, Turkey, Dubai) or Europe, before arriving in Brazil. They related difficulties regarding work permits in other countries (European nations and USA), which forced them to choose Brazil as destination. Other Syrian immigrants come directly to Brazil. The reports show different immigration paths:

> I came from Syria for Lebanon, Dubai, Brazil, Rio (Int. 3, 26 years old)

The Syrians who pass through Turkey can only work illegally, as reported:

> First, the Syrians have to run in one or two countries, and then focus on one country. He was working in Turkey, a year and a month, because in Turkey he does not have a work permit, for example, he has no rights, documentation, so it affects his future because you stay on the black market. The reality is that there the government exists, but inside the country, the mafia is the one who commands the most. People do not even know how it's there. I know many people there, Syrians, who have disappeared. It almost happened to me, they robbed me with guns, and I worked as illegal around 18 hours a day. (Int. 8, 27 years old)

In addition to the ease of obtaining the visa, they mentioned choosing Brazil because the Brazilians have less prejudice against the Arabs, according to interviewees, possibly due to

the history of Arab immigration. They generally have a positive view about the country, as some of the interviewees mention:

> People are cool. The future is bright because it is a big country, very rich in oil, gas, (…) so beautiful country. So many different cultures in Brazil. Everyone respects other people. I like everything here. Everyone respects other people. This is very important. (…) in my country, there are some kind of people who destroyed it (…).We like living. (Int. 1, 32 years old)

> There are good and bad people everywhere, just like in Syria. I ignore bad people. (Int. 2, 22 years old)

> In my country, Syria, everyone loves Brazil because the Brazilian team is the best. So everyone likes that. (…) A hundred years ago they all came here, there are many Syrians in Brazil. So, we really know everything about Brazil. When I arrived here, I found more or less the way I imagined it to be, it is a life of God. (Int.12, 29 years old)

> Brazilian culture is wonderful, mixed, open to everyone (...) the best thing about Brazil is that it's mixed, but not the US way, (…) totally the opposite. If you see racism here, that is so rare. (…) Also Brazilian woman is good. (Int. 8, 27 years old)

5. Discussion

5.1 The entrepreneurial process and support networks

The perceptions of some kind of aid or assistance are mainly linked to the networks established between family and other immigrants, in addition to the priests and the Caritas Diocesana institution, as mentioned by the interviewees.

> We lived there in the church in Botafogo. Now, it's okay. Now we are in Ladeira dos Guararapes, in Cosme Velho. (Int. 4, 23 years old)

While some wish to remain in Brazil, others want to return to Syria. According to the perception of one interviewee who did not identify himself, other immigrants help newcomers only when they need to share an apartment rent. Others report living with relatives, or decided to come to Brazil by influence of a relative.

> The Brazilian government helped me a lot. They treat myself as a human being, because of the situation. They give me work. Syrians can prepare business; sell something like food and drink. The Brazilian people are very good. They like me as a foreigner. (Int. 10, 32 years old)

> I still did not need help. Everyone works, thank God. He has a friend working in Laranjeiras, he works with my brother, and I think he still needs help. But, Charitas helped me (Int. 5, 23 years old)

Somehow, the choice of venturing in the catering sector is partly necessity-driven and partly opportunity-driven. Many report the fact they know how to cook Arabic specialties, however most of them reported not working previously in the catering sector, but rather in other activities.

The city hall of Rio de Janeiro, in 2016, authorized the work of refugees as street vendors. The Syrians encountered a local supplier of kibbeh and sfihas or decided to make their own. The Arabic food stalls of Rio became an ever-growing business. According to one of the informants, the factory helps approximately one hundred families (Bartonelli, 2017). Sfihas and kibbehs are sold for R$1 per unit and boxes with ten small units are sold for R$5. Some Syrian refugees interviewees mentioned that their profit is around R$75 to R$100 a day.

In addition to the product supply networks, there is the hosting network. Both in Rio de Janeiro and in other cities of Brazil, such as Belo Horizonte and Sao Paulo, there are priests who speak Arabic and promote, with the support of Charitas Diocesana, shelters for refugees in properties attached to the churches. The support network is crucial for immigrants who do not speak the local language. Establishing not only local suppliers but else, spiritual and psychological support is key to refugees and immigrants. This phenomenon is seen is various immigrant communities in the world (e.g. Martes & Rodriguez, 2004). This work of Charitas, in turn, has the support of UNHCR and the National Committee for Refugees (Conare), a body linked to the Brazilian Ministry of Justice.

Figure 2: Father Alex e the refugee hostel adjoined to the parish of Botafogo, Rio de Janeiro (Photos: Káthia Mello/G1)

According to Father Alex, from the parish of Botafogo, Rio de Janeiro: "the Arabs live harmoniously in the same space with a Ukrainian and a Nigerian family. All receive housing and food for a period of three months" (Mello, 2015). On his return from Syria, he offered to host refugees in his parish with the support of Charitas.

Although refugees have support from the Catholic Church (shelter) or the local government (work permit), they also suffer prejudice from local street vendors, as shown in the episode that happened in Copacabana in 2017. According to the news report (Viana, 2017) there was a fight between a local street vendor and a Syrian merchant in Copacabana. In the footage and pictures the local was carrying two pieces of wood on his hands shouting, "Get out of my

country! I am Brazilian and I see my country being invaded by these bombers who killed children and teenagers…This land here is ours. He will not take our place". More than one local merchant brought down the goods of the Syrian vendor - Mohamed - on the floor, who did not understand the reason for the aggression. He only understood that the merchants were shouting things related to "Muslims invading the country and talking about suicide bombers". Mohamed mentions that he "did not expect this could happen to me. I came to Brazil because the war made me come here. I came with love, because friends always said that Brazil accepts many other cultures and religions, and people are kind and all refugees seek peace. I'm not a terrorist, if I were, I would not be here, I'd be there".

It was observed that the social condition of the refugee exposes them to precarious work positions, where they are exploited and cannot access their rights as formal workers in Brazil. In this sense, undertaking goes beyond income generation, allowing an emotionally safer job and money remittances to their families. Finally, it is interesting that although there is a disarticulation between them for the formation of a support network, in the sense of welcoming and establishing businesses, there is no estrangement from the local culture.

At some point, the entrepreneurial activity presents itself as a solution for income generation and integration of these people in Brazil. However, there is, in some aspects, the absence of a solid support network that allows the psychological, emotional and physical support of these people. On the other hand, the business network, represented by all the autonomous entrepreneurs and the Arabic specialties factory, offers the possibility of an almost immediate implementation of new ventures to sell ethnic products. Once the barrier to accumulate a small initial capital (to set up its structure) and the choice of a location, the immigrant can start his business without the necessity of investing in an industrial kitchen. The alternative would be for them to produce their own ethnic products. Although they are buying from a third party, the Brazilians already have a perception of quality linked to the Syrian stereotype offering this kind of ethnic product. This means that being linked to the factory in some way reduces the entry barriers to set up the business and promotes the guarantee of goods supply.

Wilson (1998) posits that the strength of social ties end up determining the choice of many refugees. However, what we identified was a formal and institutional support network carried out by host organizations and government, being either the Catholic Church, Charitas or the State, and little articulation between them, except in the case of networks of their relatives. As also pointed out by Wilson (1998), and observed in the context of Syrian refugees in Brazil, their networks are multi-local, covering multiple geographic destinations. Syrians are getting established nowadays especially in major cities such as Belo Horizonte, Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, as opposed to their forefathers that came to Brazil at the end of the XIX century and beginning of the XX century (Cabreira, 2001; Waniez & Brustlein, 2001), some of those working as peddlers, traveling to the hinterlands of Brazil. Second, anchorage points in any geographical location are the workplaces where immigrants find employment, which was also evidenced in the Syrian context. Moreover, new geographical locations were accessed through the "weak bond" strength, namely the priest and the sfiha and kibbeh local supplier. Nevertheless, the network was not considered to be dense, but rather diffuse, while Syrians were dispersed in different neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro, not configuring a proper ethnic enclave or ethnic district. Somehow, Syrians were dependent to their ethnic communities, especially regarding their connections with local suppliers and customers (Spears, Doosje, & Ellemers, 1997) or with Church organizations when seeking for shelter.

5.2 Human capital – barriers and advantages

The reality of the Syrian entrepreneurs in Rio de Janeiro is depicted as follow. The human capital in Syrian immigrants is relatively high. Most of the refugees had their own businesses or worked in privileged positions back in Syria. However, they face language barriers while seeking for jobs and sometimes "cultural prejudice", evidenced by news reports where locals accused Syrian immigrants of being terrorists. In one hand, social capital (Portes & Zhou, 1992; Achidi Ndofor & Priem, 2011) is crucial for the configuration of refugees' networks, especially upon arrival, for finding shelter and looking for a job. Although the media reported incidents of prejudice, tent owners reported no prejudice at all, but rather having problems validating their university diploma.

> Here [in Brazil] the Arab has a long time history, so people don´t see us as "bomber thing", terrorist… (int. 8)

On the other hand, due to these cultural barriers self-employment (Fairlie & Meyer, 1996) is key for their survival in the host country. When dealing from the perspective of the immigrant, in general terms, professional qualification tends to protect them from externalities related to the migratory process (Gang, Bauer, & Epstein, 2002). However, when looking at the specificities and the conditions of those who seek refuge, the condition of extreme vulnerability causes that the formation or the professional qualification does not exercise this "protection". This ends up being an important aspect in the decision to undertake or to maintain a business of its own, since many of the interviewees were not interested in changing their enterprises for another work activity. In addition, difficulties related to language and cultural barriers might include the major problems faced by Syrians in Rio de Janeiro. Therefore, employers who do not recognize their experiences or degrees (Lee & Westwood, 1996) might discriminate against even those who have college degrees, broad work experience, or entrepreneurial background.

Many of the interviewees mentioned that they were taught from a young age how to cook Arabic food. Therefore, this constitutes one of their main human capital advantages, especially for Syrian entrepreneurs selling food. They mention:

> It is part of our culture. Most of us know how to cook; this is kind of basic to us. Here in Brazil "this thing" is very famous, it draws attention, by the way, we tried and it worked, so we kept on doing it. (int. 6)

> Syrian food? I do, cousin does, everyone knows does. Is not difficult. Working with food here is good. (int. 11).

Once unsuccessful, trying to earn a living in some unskilled jobs outside your field of training - such as pharmacy and florist clerk, cook and street vendor - are some episodes started for entrepreneurship:

> So I started cooking the sfihas (…) I was 1 to 1 and a half months in Brazil, I paid rent and I got nothing. Slowly until the Brazilian gets more confidence with food, they tried my food, and call friends to try. (int. 7).

Moreover, the presence of an Arabic food factory in Rio de Janeiro contributed to the establishment of the Syrian entrepreneurs in the catering business, especially to those who cannot prepare their own food to sell - for the most diverse reasons, such as not having the

expertise, not having the appropriate equipment or lack of time. On the other hand, when they cook and sell their own produce, Syrians are able to introduce differentiated products on the market, using their own unique seasoning and spices. In addition, they enjoy a higher profit margin, as one of the interviewees mentions:

> Syrians can only work with food stalls or fruit stalls, but stalls give more money (int. 14).

While choosing the product to be sold, Syrians faced a familiarity of Brazilians with Arabic food, due to their ancestor immigrants historical settlement (Cabreira, 2001; Waniez & Brustlein, 2001), which was pushed by the ethnic knowledge of locals. The interviewees explained that the option of working with Arab food is a question of practicality too, because they have learned to cook even boys and it is common in Syrian culture.

Another aspect in favor of the interviewed immigrants is the level of education. Many of the respondents were in or completing higher education and had good positions in their professional careers, such as director, engineer and entrepreneur (see table 1). Some of them also highlighted their knowledge of English and other languages. Moreover, the adaptation to the Brazilian society and culture was relatively natural for the interviewees. Although the language barrier appeared in almost every interview, some entrepreneurs mentioned similarities between Brazil and Syria, such as sympathy of the people, the architectural aspects of town and the warm climate, as mentioned:

> I did not feel much difference to our culture. There are many similar things. Just in a little different clothes, but it makes no difference. (int. 5)

> Brazil wonderful people. There is good people and bad people. As it is in Syria, God's people and evil people. The people in Germany are very cold. (…) And in Brazil people smile, people are happy. Very, very, very similar in my city. Houses, streets. (int. 1).

Brazilian violence and bureaucracy were also prominent in the speeches, characterizing themselves as a barrier to well-being in search of employment and entrepreneurial activity:

> I was robbed twice. (...) I needed help to make another document. This was four months ago. When the thief robbed me, he took my wallet, took my original document, I had a photocopy. It was very difficult to make new papers in the Federal Police (int. 5)

> In Tomas Coelho Saturday, war. (...) A lot of war. I fear too. Syria a lot of war, and here Brazil a little (int. 3).

Regarding bureaucracy, respondents have difficulty using street vendors, difficulty in renting a property, high fines for breaking the rental agreement, difficulty in getting duplicate documents and difficulty in validating their university diplomas.

The data collected in this research can identify most of the episodes in Brazil that are being performed by necessity. When asked why they are working with food stalls, Syrians gave answers such as:

> Because there is nothing else to work for (int. 4)

> I need to learn Portuguese first and I need to make money" (int. 1)
>
> I have friends who do this. I'm good at working on it. I'm not good at working on something else because I don't speak much in Portuguese. (int. 5).

Only one interviewee identified an opportunity and demonstrated the desire to continue as an entrepreneur in Brazil:

> Now I want to raise money, open a diner, so far you have not, diner is different from Arab restaurant. Very nice, very healthy Arab diner, more than other diners that have here, not so expensive, fair to the customer and the owner, but requires investment, pizza oven, not this industrial oven not, this stone oven, needs or machinery, so the investment is a little expensive, but the moment you open it, it will pump, it will pump for sure. I need a little time to do this, a year or two, who knows (int. 8).

Notwithstanding, as observed by Sanders and Nee (1996), a particular mix of social and human capital resources affected their self-employment. A good educational level of entrepreneurs and previous experiences pushed them to venture in a new context. Syrians who succeeded were more connected and entrepreneurial, corroborating with Burt (2000). Therefore, Church, local suppliers and local government support, supplemented the absence of a strong network support (Brass, 1992) and organizations (Podolny & Page, 1998), achieving higher rates of business success, as suggested by Martes and Rodriguez, Light (1972), Light and Bonacich (1988) and Putnam (1993). Therefore, these contingency factors are what Burt (2000) proposes, that social capital is more a function of brokerage across structural holes rather than closure within a network.

6. Final Considerations

The paper shows the articulation of Syrian immigration and venturing paths of Syrian immigrants in Rio de Janeiro. Immigrant entrepreneurship is a poorly studied context within Brazilian entrepreneurship scholar community. Moreover, recent Syrian refugee entrepreneurs are also a poorly studied context. Other theoretical contributions encompass unveiling push and pull factors regarding social and human capital of immigrants, as well as contributing to the study of immigrant entrepreneurship in the Brazilian context.

The current policy implemented by the former mayor of Rio de Janeiro - Eduardo Paes, enabled refugees to generate their own income and jobs showing possible paths while thinking of effective integrative public policies. These policies embraced immigrants of entrepreneurial profile – namely Arabic – resembling a selective immigration policy, although focusing on self-employment generation. The article also evidences the urge for implementing more progressive public policies that promote less bureaucracy to start up a firm in Rio de Janeiro, foster Portuguese language teaching for refugees and facilitate diploma validation or proficiency check. These are all examples of managerial implications of the current research. An overall contribution of the article includes showing new immigrants that there is a possibility of success while venturing in difficult Brazilian contexts. Describing examples that demonstrate the paths taken and established networks can serve as benchmarking for other peoples.

All the interviewees mentioned the difficulty with the Portuguese language as the main barrier to be overcome upon arrival in Brazil. Although many respondents speak English, most Brazilians do not know the language. Familiarity with the language would allow refugees to

solve problems more easily, such as shopping, going to the doctor, studying and getting a job. The results of the research indicate that the Syrians are not entrepreneurs by choice but rather by necessity.

The results of the research reinforced the importance of the entrepreneurial activity of immigrants in the generation of income, especially in businesses related to their cultural origin. The articulation of a family network (as shown on table 1), are present in most of the interviews. The evidences include the creation of jobs among relatives, as well as the money remittance to their families that remained in their countries of origin. Therefore, self-employment is an alternative to precarious job offers normally accessed by refugees. On the other hand, it was not possible to identify the establishment of an ethnic support network, which stimulates the creation and expansion of new businesses and the identification of opportunities, as presented in the literature. Nevertheless, the Arabic specialties factory acts as a facilitator for new business establishment. That relationship between the Syrian vendors and the supplier build trust because of their common background – including the language (Portes & Zhou, 1992).

In addition, it was possible to identify a network with formal hosting organizations represented by religious institutions or representatives of the State, reinforcing what is presented in the literature as the ‘places of support’.

Limitations of the present research include the number of interviewees, as well as the limitations of the qualitative method, which does not allow generalizations.

For future research, we suggest a more in-depth analysis of the relationship between immigrant entrepreneurs, and more specifically refugees, with these host organizations, evidencing the role of that relationship in establishing (or not) an ethnic network among entrepreneurs. In addition, it is important to follow up the interviewees to understand if there is a relationship between some dimensions, such as time in the city, new business opportunities and socialization, with the role of these individuals to establish a network. Moreover, exploring the institutional theory (Tolbert & Zucker, 1999), rather than social or human capital theory (Bourdieu, 2011) might a promising path for future analysis. Another avenue for future research is to conduct a periodic census with all Syrian refugees, in order to track their immigration paths and work situations.

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