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## **Ethnic Entrepreneurship in Australia**

This paper explores the historical and contemporary dimensions of immigrant self-employment and entrepreneurship in Australia. In doing so it draws on the growing literature on immigrant entrepreneurship in Australia and the literature on the impact of globalisation on western economies. The paper presents a brief history of the important role of immigrant entrepreneurship and self-employment in Australia before presenting 1996 census data on rates of immigrant self-employment by gender and by generation. The paper then summarizes the key findings of the Australian research into immigrant self-employment, with a particular emphasis on the ways that the immigrant self-employed in Australia draw on class resources and ethnic resources. It ends by arguing that theories of immigrant self-employment must focus on two key, interrelated, aspects. First, the ways that ethnicity, gender and social class interact through a complex, uneven and changing lens of racialisation. Second, the important role of the way in which the processes of globalisation and the state responses to it shapes different patterns of the embeddedness of immigrants and, in turn, their opportunities as entrepreneurs and wage labourers.

Keywords: ethnic entrepreneurship, social class, gender, racialisation, globalisation, Australia

## **1. Introduction**

Despite the predictions by social theorists from Marx to Weber to Schumpeter (Light and Rosenstein 1995), the rate of self-employment is now growing in number and in economic importance in almost all capitalist societies (Sengenberger, Loveman and Piore 1990). Australia is no exception. A study of self-employment in the OECD countries found that Australia experienced the largest growth in self-employment of all the OECD countries, with self-employment in the non-agricultural sector increasing by a third in the fifteen year period from 1969 (9.3 per cent) to 1984 (12.4 per cent) (OECD 1985: 44). The OECD calculated that most (87 per cent) of this increase in self-employment resulted from an increase in what it calls 'own account' workers, that is, the self-employed who do not have paid employees (OECD 1985: 58).

In 1989-90 there were 692,700 non-rural small businesses that provided 48 per cent of the private sector employment and gave jobs to over two million people in 1989-90 (Revesz and Lattimore 1997). By 1994-95, there were 887,000 non-rural small businesses and 1,252,100 small business operators in Australia. These small businesses employed 2.9 million people or just over half (51 per cent) of all the private sector employees and created about a third of Australia's gross domestic product (Small Business Deregulation Task Force 1996: 151, 153). There were also 428,000 non-employing business operators in Australia at the time (Small Business Deregulation Task Force 1996: 13). Over the period 1985-96, employment in Australian small business grew at an annual rate of 3.6 per cent. This figure contrasts sharply with the slow employment growth – 0.7 per cent per annum over the same period – in Australia's big business sector (Burton, Ryall and Todd 1995).

An increasing number of these new small businesses in Australia (Roofey et al. 1996), as in many other Western countries (Allen and Trueman 1993), are owned by women. At present, about one in three small business entrepreneurs in Australia are female. It is estimated that female entrepreneurs in small businesses contribute ten to fifteen per cent of the Australian non-government output and contribute twenty per cent of the private sector net employment in Australia (Small Business Deregulation Task Force 1996: 13). Moreover, small businesses owned by female entrepreneurs have experienced the fastest growth rate in Australia in the 1990s (Roofey et al., 1996).

One of the key factors in the apparent revival of self-employment is the important role that immigrants and immigration have played in this renaissance. This is evident in the Australian case, as the remainder of this paper demonstrates. Australian society has been shaped more by immigration and immigrants than most countries in the world today. Australia has the greatest proportion of permanent immigrants of all contemporary western societies. In 1995, 22.7 per cent of Australia's population were first generation immigrants (that is, were born overseas). This exceeds that immigrant presence in Switzerland (18.1%) and Canada (15.6%) and greatly exceeds the immigrant presence in Germany (8.5%) USA (7.9%) France (6.3%) and the United Kingdom (3.5%) (OECD 1995: 27). Since white settlement immigration has been a major source of labour force and population growth. In the post-1945 period alone, some 5.6 million immigrants have arrived in Australia. Today nearly one in four of the Australian population of 18.5 million people were born overseas (DIMA 1998). These first generation immigrants, together with their Australian-born children – the second generation – comprise over half of

the population of Australia's largest cities of Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth (Collins 1991, Collins 2000a).

This paper explores the historical and contemporary dimensions of immigrant self-employment and entrepreneurship in Australia. In doing so it draws on the growing literature on immigrant entrepreneurship in Australia (Collins et al. 1995a; Lever-Tracey et al. 1991; Stromback and Williams 1988; Collins et al. 1997; Stromback and Malhotra 1994; Lampugnani and Holton 1989; and Kermond et al. 1991) and in other western countries (Waldinger et al. 1990; Light and Rosenstein 1995; Light and Gold 2000; Rath 2001; Rath and Kloosterman 2000). It also draws on the literature of globalisation and the way this has impacted on immigrants in western economies (Castells 1996; Held et al. 1999) and in Australia (Fagan and Webber, 1994; Probert 1996; Collins 2000c).

But first some definitional and conceptual matters require attention. In the US and other countries, self-employment refers to sole operators or own-account employees as well as enterprises with employees. In Australia the census uses the categories *self-employed* and *employers*. Self-employed are defined as those in independent or own-account employment without any workers, while small business is defined as all those non-agricultural employers with 20 or less workers except in the manufacturing industry, where firms with 100 or less employees are described as small. Hence the Australian category of self-employed *plus* employers is the same as the North American category of self-employment, the subject of this paper. Another concept to be clarified is that of entrepreneurship. While some view entrepreneurship as the preserve of a few inspirational, innovative visionaries, I take the view

(argued by Light and Rosenstein, 1995) that all self-employed are entrepreneurs of some form.

Another clarification is required at both ends of the spectrum of self-employment. First, as Li (1993: 243) has argued, the discussion of immigrant self-employment precludes transnational capital establishment of large corporations that may be owned by immigrants. The literature discusses small business and the *petit-bourgeoisie*, but not large corporations and their (often immigrant) owners. Of course, the numbers of immigrant entrepreneurs involved in this regard are numerically small, though in dollar terms very significant indeed. At the other end off the spectrum, globalisation has been accompanied by a reduction in the number of manufacturing jobs in Australia and a deregulation of the Australian labour market (Collins 2000c: 20-24). One consequence has been a transformation of large numbers of wage labour in the manufacturing, transport and building and construction industries in particular into (marginal) sub-contractors and/or self-employed. The dramatic growth of *outwork* in the Australian clothing and textiles industry – mirroring developments across the western world (Rath (ed.) 2002) is the clearest expression of this change (Alcorso 2000). While immigrant women outworkers swell the ranks of the Australian self-employed, they are really increasingly marginal and disadvantaged wage-labourers disguised as entrepreneurs. In addition, Venezuela (2001) has even argued that day labourers in LA are in fact self-employed and thus entrepreneurs. The key point here is that care must be taken in distinguishing between different types of emergent self-employment in Australia today.

In this paper I first give a brief history of the important role of immigrant entrepreneurship and self-employment in Australia before presenting 1996 census data – the latest available – on rates of immigrant self-employment by gender and by generation. The paper then summarizes the key findings of the Australian research into immigrant self-employment, with a particular emphasis on the ways that the immigrant self-employed in Australia draw on class resources and ethnic resources. It ends by arguing that theories of immigrant self-employment must focus on the one hand on the ways that ethnicity, gender and social class interact through a complex, uneven and changing lens of racialisation and, on the other, the important role of the way in which the processes of globalisation and the state responses to it shapes different patterns of the embeddedness of immigrants and, in turn, their opportunities as entrepreneurs and wage labourers.

## **2. Immigrant self-employment in Australia: a brief history**

Reviewing the US experience, Portes and Rumbaut (1990: 21) argue that ‘entrepreneurial minorities are the exception in both turn-of-the-century and contemporary migrations’. If that is the case, ethnic business played a more significant role in the early years of Australian immigration than in other countries. Ethnic business has a long history in Australia. From the earliest days of the 19th century, immigrants of non-English speaking background moved into entrepreneurship. This is particularly true of immigrants from China (Choi 1975; Wang 1988; Yuan 1988), Greece (Price 1963), Italy (Pascoe 1988, Pascoe 1990; Collins 1992) and Lebanon (McKay and Batrouney 1988), and Jewish immigrants also exhibited high rates of entrepreneurship (Rutland 1988; Rubenstein 1988;

Glezer 1988). These are the immigrant entrepreneurs who settled earlier in Australia. For example, it is estimated that a century ago, eighty-five per cent of the first-generation Greeks in Sydney owned or worked in cafes, milk bars, fish and chip shops and other small businesses (Wilton and Bosworth 1984: 102).

Immediately before the mass post-war immigration program, these and other ethnic groups were more likely to be classified as entrepreneurs than as wage-labourers. By 1947 more than half the immigrants born in Greece, Poland and Italy, and more than a third of those born in Germany, Malta and the former Yugoslavia, were self-employed or employers, compared to only a fifth of the Australian-born (Collins 1991: 89-90).

In the post-war period, the rate of immigrant entrepreneurship fell, with most immigrants taking up wage-labour. But immigrant entrepreneurship remained very significant. Today about a quarter of Australia's small businesses are owned and operated by first-generation immigrant men and women. In 1991, 88,363 first-generation immigrant males were employers, comprising 25.3 per cent of all the male employers in Australia. In addition 141,257 first-generation immigrant males were self-employed, accounting for 27.8 per cent of the self-employed males (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996). Similarly, in 1991 38,662 first-generation immigrant women comprised a quarter (25 per cent) of the female employers in Australia and 65,673 were self employed, 26.5 per cent of the Australian total (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996). These figures do not include second-generation immigrants in small business, so they underestimate the full extent of immigrant entrepreneurship in Australia.

The ethnic diversity of Australian society is reflected in the ethnic diversity of Australian entrepreneurship. Census data from 1991 and 1996 show that some immigrant groups, such as the Koreans, Taiwanese, Greeks, Italians, Dutch and Germans have at least a fifty per cent higher presence as entrepreneurs compared to the Australian-born. The Korean-born have the highest rate of entrepreneurship, with nearly double the Australian-born rate (Collins et al. 1995a: 84-90). A similar pattern emerges among female entrepreneurs in Australia. Immigrant women born in Korea, Greece, Italy, German, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Taiwan demonstrate the highest rate of female entrepreneurship in Australia. Korean-born women exhibit a presence among the female self-employed that is almost three times that of Australian-born women.

But other groups of immigrants those born in China, Singapore, Malaysia, Egypt, Lebanon, Poland, Ukraine and the former Yugoslavia, have similar rates of entrepreneurship compared to the Australian average. Moreover, immigrants from Japan, India, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Indonesia and Turkey have lower than average rates of entrepreneurship. ESB immigrant groups, such as those born in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Canada and the US, also have rates of entrepreneurship very similar to the Australian-born. Ethnicity overrides gender in this respect, with similar rates of entrepreneurship for males and females from the same country.

Immigrant entrepreneurs in Australia are distributed across all the industries, with a particular presence in the retail industry where ethnic niches have emerged. These niche markets derive from specific culinary traditions, specialist trade skills, or by chance (Collins et al. 1995a: 44-

46). Data for the largest Australian State, New South Wales, show that half the entrepreneurs in the 'fish shop, take away food', 'food stores, grocers' and 'fruit, vegetable' sections of the retail industry are first-generation immigrants. Other parts of the retail industry such as clothing and footwear shops, service stations, watchmakers and jewellers, and bread and cake shops also have a relatively high immigrant presence. Immigrant entrepreneurs are least represented in general stores, tyre and battery stores, milk and bread vendors, news agents and booksellers and pharmacies (Collins et al. 1995a: 76-83).

The most prominent immigrant entrepreneurs in the retail industry are those born in Greece, Lebanon, Italy, the United Kingdom and Ireland, the Middle East, China and Hong Kong. Italian immigrants have an ethnic niche as owners of fruit and vegetable stores. While they comprise less than two per cent of the total population, the Italian-born comprise 22.2 per cent of the total employers and 18 per cent of the self-employed in fruit and vegetable shops in NSW. Greeks alone account for one in five of the entrepreneurs in the 'fish shops and take-away food and milk bars' industry. Immigrant entrepreneurs from Lebanon are prominent in the service station industry, and entrepreneurs born in Vietnam, China and Hong Kong as well as Italy and the United Kingdom are prominent in the retail clothing industry. In the smash repair industry many entrepreneurs were born in Italy, the United Kingdom and Ireland, the Middle East, Lebanon and New Zealand.

Finally, many immigrant entrepreneurs have restaurants in Australian cities and towns (Collins and Castillo 1998). By the mid-1980s, Chinese restaurants and cafés were a feature of the Australian suburban and country town landscape (Chin 1988) and most suburbs and

towns had a Greek milk bar to sell sweets, drinks and meals (Collins et al. 1995a: 61-65). These ethnic entrepreneurs were the vanguard of cultural diversity in Australian suburbs and country towns. Today most Australian suburbs and country towns have 'ethnic' restaurants, the most visible feature of Australian cosmopolitanism. Most immigrant groups have a presence in the restaurant sector, with the Italian, Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese, Japanese and French cuisines being very popular.

### **3. Globalisation, the state and self-employment trends in Australia**

#### *Overall Trends*

In the first three post-war decades, the Australian immigration net was mainly thrown over the UK and Ireland, as well as Eastern, Northern and Southern Europe. The high-water mark of post-war Australian immigration was in the late 1960s, when some 180,000 immigrants entered Australia each year (Collins 1991: 20-32). In the past three decades, Australian immigration has changed in terms of numbers and ethnic composition. With the formal end of the White Australia policy in the early 1970s, the Australian immigration net was cast over Asian countries for the first time in nearly 100 years. Since then, Asian countries have been very prominent among the 'top ten' Australian immigration countries (Inglis et al. 1992; Collins 1995a; Coughlan and McNamara 1997). Net annual permanent immigration to Australia declined in these decades, averaging 110,000 in the 1980s and 92,000 in the 1990s (Castles, Foster, Iredale and Withers 1998: 6).

The characteristics of Australia's permanent immigrants are changing. People with low formal education and poor English language skills, who dominated the immigration intakes into Australia in the first three decades after the Second World War, are now missing out on immigration selection. In recent decades, immigration flows have increasingly comprised of highly educated and qualified people with good English language skills, many of whom come from Asian countries. Australia can pick and choose: like Canada, Australia uses a floating points system to cream off the 'best' until the quotas are filled. In this way, Australia today selects 85 000 or so non-refugee immigrants out of more than 1 million people each year who inquire about emigrating to Australia.

Of course, it helps if you are rich. Australia competes with Canada and the United States for millionaire business migrants who go to the top of the immigration queue. The newest type of immigrant entrepreneur in Australia is the business migrant. The Australian business migration scheme dates back to the early 1980s. Over the period from 1982 to 1990, the major source countries for new business migrants were Hong Kong (32 per cent), Taiwan (15 per cent), Malaysia (12 per cent), the United Kingdom (8 per cent), Indonesia (6 per cent) and Singapore (5 per cent) (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia 1991: 30). By 1996-97, the business skills intake increased to 5,600, or 8.4 per cent of the total for all the immigration categories (Castles et al. 1998: 11).

In August 1991 a report found that 45 per cent of the business migrants had established businesses within one year after their arrival and that 61 per cent had done so after two years, with less than a third of these businesses claiming to be export-oriented. The average employment

generated was six persons per business, while half the businesses were in the services industry (DILGEA 1991a, b).

In one of the few Australian studies of Asian business migrants, Pe-Pua, Mitchell, Iredale and Castles (1996) studied the ethnic Chinese from Hong Kong. They are termed *astronauts* because they spend so much time in the air flying from Australia (and Canada) to Hong Kong and back (Chan 1990). Their children are called *parachute children* because they often spend time alone in Australia as their parents commute to Australia and Asia (Mak and Chan 1995). The study observes that these Hong Kong business migrants mainly operate businesses in the import-export trade. For example, one Hong Kong astronaut exports seafood to Hong Kong, and others import garments, textiles and toys made in China. Other Hong Kong astronauts run retail outlets, restaurants, manufacturing firms (textiles, clothing, leather, jewellery, toys, electronic parts, electrical appliances) and travel agencies. All of these business migrants continue to run their business activities in Hong Kong, China and Taiwan. Most return to Hong Kong to run their businesses (Pe-Pua et al. 1996: 43, 47).

These changes to group characteristics of Australian immigration intakes are a consequence of the desire of the Australian government to more finely tune immigration policy to the perceived needs of a deregulated, globalised economy. One consequence of globalisation has been the enthusiastic response to it by the Australian state. Financial and exchange rate deregulation, labour market deregulation, industrial relations 'reform' and a reduction of tariff barriers have been undertaken by both Labor and Conservative governments. The most dramatic decline in levels of protection has been in the manufacturing sector in general, resulting in a dramatic decline in the proportion of the workforce

employed from 25 per cent in the late 1960s to about 13 per cent and declining today. Because NESB immigrants were over-concentrated in the manufacturing sector, this has meant higher levels of unemployment for unskilled and semi skilled immigrant workers. As a consequence, rates of unemployment for Vietnamese, Turkish and Lebanese born immigrants, for example, are at levels three to four times the national average (Collins 2000a). Hence globalisation is fundamentally restructuring the Australian economy, thus affecting the opportunity structures for new immigrants in the economy.

The clothing, footwear and textiles sector of the manufacturing industry has been hit hardest by these changes. The result is that many clothing factories have closed down in Australia, just as they have in many other countries (Rath (ed.) 2002). The result is that the NESB immigrant women who mostly worked in the clothing industry as wage labourers have either had to accept clothing outwork or become unemployed (Alcorso 2000). As a consequence, it was estimated in the late-1990s that only one in fourteen – as a best estimate – or one in twenty workers in the Australian clothing industry worked in factories (Mayhew and Quinlan 1998). These outworkers are considered contractors and thus self-employed rather than the increasingly marginal and precarious wage labour that they really are. They are as different from the business migrant entrepreneurs that could be possibly imagined, though both – and all those in between these ends of the spectrum – fall under the self-employment category.

*Diverse paths to immigrant self-employment in Australia*

One key fact that emerges from the Australian experience is the increasing diversity of the paths to immigrant entrepreneurship. Some immigrants arrive in Australia as successful business migrants with ample start-up capital. Immigrants with professional skills move into professional businesses, and others tread the 'traditional' path from low-wage jobs to entrepreneurship. Finally, some immigrants see entrepreneurship as an alternative to unemployment, with some unemployed immigrants taking part in the federal government's New Enterprise Incentive Scheme which encourages the unemployed to establish business enterprises (Department of Employment, Education and Training and Youth Affairs 1995). There is also a great diversity of education levels (Collins et al. 1997) and class backgrounds among the immigrant entrepreneurs in Australia (Collins 2000b). Theories of immigrant entrepreneurship need to explain these diverse, uneven and changing patterns of immigrant entrepreneurship such as the ones that are evident in Australia.

Despite this diversity in class and ethnic resources (Light and Rosenstein 1995) exhibited by Australia's immigrant entrepreneurs, Australia's NESB immigrant entrepreneurs do have something in common: they are part of a racialised 'other'. Collins et al. reject the argument that one of the main reasons for the relatively high rates of entrepreneurship among some NESB immigrant groups is the immigrant cultural tendency towards entrepreneurship. They argue that many, though not all NESB immigrants move into entrepreneurship in Australia because racialisation blocks the path to success as wage-labourers in Australia (Collins et al. 1995a: 39-50). This explains the high entrepreneurship rate of immigrants born in countries like Greece, Italy, Hungary, Taiwan or

Korea. The explanation of the low entrepreneurship rates of NESB immigrants from India, Malaysia or Singapore, also racialised immigrant minorities, is explained by their access to primary labour market jobs, in other words the declining impediments to mobility for recent professional and highly educated Asian immigrants. Other NESB immigrant groups with low entrepreneurship rates are from Vietnam, Indonesia or Turkey. They are racialised immigrant minorities, still suffering from blocked mobility in the form of high unemployment rates and concentration in the lowest paid jobs of the male and female segments of the labour market. The impact of globalisation on the Australian economy has harmed their economic position by destroying or marginalising these manual manufacturing jobs (Collins 2000c). As the opportunity structures for these NESB immigrants deteriorated, they have found it much harder to earn sufficient start-up capital at manual manufacturing jobs to move into entrepreneurship.

#### **4. Theoretical approaches to immigrant self-employment**

Most studies of immigrant/ethnic entrepreneurship focus on entrepreneurs only and are mainly interested in explaining the proclivity of certain groups toward entrepreneurship and their paths to entrepreneurial success.<sup>1</sup> Scholars studying these questions have developed several theoretical approaches, ranging from those emphasizing the cultural endowments of immigrants (i.e., certain groups are culturally inclined towards risk-taking behavior; see Light 1972; Metcalf, Modood and Virdee n.d.), to others that highlight racist exclusion and blocked mobility

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<sup>1</sup> The literature is inconclusive as to the use of concepts such as immigrant entrepreneurship and ethnic entrepreneurship (cf. Introduction in Rath 2001).

in the regular labor market (i.e., marginalized individuals are driven towards entrepreneurialism as a means of escaping unwelcoming labor markets; see Barrett, Jones and McEvoy 1996; Ram 1993; Saxenian 1999).

Around a decade ago, Waldinger and his associates (1990) developed a composite theory that brought together these views, based on the principle that entrepreneurship is the product of the interaction between group characteristics and the opportunity structure. As such their *interactive model* combines ethno-cultural and socio-cultural factors (agency) with politico-economic factors (structure). According to the Waldinger et al. (1990), the latter entail market conditions (particularly access to ethnic/non-ethnic consumer markets) and access to ownership (in the form of business vacancies, competition for vacancies, and government policies). This interactive model has been appreciated as an important step towards a more comprehensive theoretical approach, even though it is more of a classification than an explanatory model. However, it has also been subjected to criticism. Its shortcomings included the methodology (Light and Rosenstein 1995), the lack of attention devoted to issues of class and gender (Collins et al. 1995a; Morokvasic 1993), the insufficient emphasis of processes of racialization of immigrants (Collins et al. 1995a), the *a priori* categorization of immigrants as ethnic groups and the concomitant assumption that immigrants as ethnic entrepreneurs act differently than mainstream entrepreneurs (Collins et al. 1995a; Rath and Kloosterman 2000), and the narrow and static way economic and politico-regulatory factors are dealt with (Bonacich 1993; Rath (ed.) 2000). As regards the latter, the authors conceive market conditions in terms of the ethnicization or de-ethnicization of consumer markets, and

confine politico-regulatory factors to a short list of laws and regulations that specifically apply to immigrants.

Theoretical development has continued and oddly enough this has, led to a convergence of approaches to issues of *social embeddedness*, that is, the assumption that individual entrepreneurs participate in ethnically-specific economic networks that facilitate their business operations (especially in acquiring knowledge, distributing information, recruiting capital and labor, and establishing strong relations with clients and suppliers). Social embeddedness enables these entrepreneurs to reduce their transaction costs by eliminating formal contracts, giving privileged access to economic resources, and providing reliable expectations as to the effects of malfeasance. Particularly in cases where the entrepreneurs' primary input is cheap and flexible labor, as is true of some parts of the tourist industry, the reduction of transaction costs by mobilizing social networks for labor recruitment seems key. Many of students of immigrant entrepreneurship, especially in the U.S., are indeed fervent adherents to a version of economic sociological thought that focuses on the entrepreneurs' social networks and impact on entrepreneurship (see for example Zhou 1992). Taking advantage of social embeddedness is a complex and dynamic process, and is evidently connected to cultural, human and financial capital (Light and Gold 2000), contingent on the goals pursued and the political and economic forces at work (Granovetter 1995) and the product of the interaction of structural factors such as migration history and processes of social, economic and political incorporation in the mainstream as well as their spatial variations. These intricacies, however, have not always been adequately addressed.

In recent years, continental European researchers have argued that these theories of immigrant entrepreneurialism conceptualized the opportunity structure assuming an unregulated and undifferentiated economy. Scant attention has been paid to the array of regulatory structures that promote certain economic activities while inhibiting others. For example, in France, non-citizens are excluded from most jobs in the public sector (meaning that approximately 7 million jobs are out of their reach – see Ma Mung 2001). In contrast, Canada has adopted affirmative action hiring rules in the federal civil service in an effort to attract non-European minorities, and does not differentiate between landed immigrants and citizens. Another example: while virtually anyone can establish a private business in the United States, in Germany and even more so in Austria individuals must apply for special licenses even to sell flowers in restaurants and bars, and they need the approval of a particular organization to engage in most forms of production or service (see for instance Haberfellner 2001). Apart from these highly relevant forms of regulation, it is important to fully appreciate the economic dynamics of a market. It does not require much sociological imagination to see that designers of virtual tourist guides, street-traders of pencils or take-out restaurateurs operate in entirely different markets. Different markets offer entrepreneurs different opportunities and obstacles, demand different skills, and lead to different outcomes in terms of business success or – at a higher level of agglomeration – a different ethnic division of labor. Acknowledging the salience of regulation as well as market dynamics, researchers have proposed a *mixed embeddedness* approach to immigrant entrepreneurship (Kloosterman, van der Leun and Rath 1998; Kloosterman and Rath 2001). The approach is considered to be more

appropriate, since it relates social relations and transactions to wider political and economic structures. This concept acknowledges the significance of immigrants' concrete embeddedness in social networks, and conceives that their relations and transactions are embedded in a more abstract way in wider economic and politico-institutional structures.

Another yet closely related source of theoretical inspiration is the work by Light & Rosenstein (1995). These authors position entrepreneurs in a fictitious market, comparable to the labor market, where opportunities for business ventures are the product of demand and supply: entrepreneurs supply goods and services and, in so doing, meet the demand of consumers. This entrepreneurial market is dynamic and full of contingencies. A multitude of factors and processes of a structural and contingent kind are at play and, consequently, demand and supply are never in equilibrium. First, the opportunity structure is continuously undergoing slow and sudden changes of various kinds, due to the disappearance of old consumers and competitors and the emergence of new ones, the development of new products, the establishment of new commercial sites, the revision of relevant rules and regulations and so forth. Secondly, entrepreneurs have agency. They are not just passive actors, the plaything of an abstract opportunity structure, but are able to create their own opportunities or at least make an impact on the wider opportunity structure. Finally, the dynamism of the entrepreneurial market is contingent on a set of intervening variables that influence and shape the interaction between entrepreneurs and the opportunity structure. It is the dynamic interaction between entrepreneurs and their social, political and economic environment that largely produces entrepreneurial behavior and business success.

## **5. Research into immigrant self-employment in Australia**

While Australian immigration has been subject to comprehensive research (Wooden et al. 1994), there was relatively little research on ethnic entrepreneurship in Australia (Stromback and Williams 1988) before the late 1980s. There have been a handful of major studies since then. Collins et al. (1995a) surveyed 280 immigrant entrepreneurs in Sydney in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and Collins et al. (1997) surveyed over 1,500 ethnic entrepreneurs in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth in 1996. The immigrant entrepreneurs surveyed in both surveys were from southern Europe, the Middle East, Asia, Latin America and the United Kingdom. In both cases, large numbers of female entrepreneurs and a large control group were included in the fieldwork. Lever-Tracy, Ip and Tracy (1991) surveyed 104 Chinese and 40 Indian entrepreneurs with retail businesses (including take-away food shops), restaurants, wholesale businesses, property and business services, and health in Brisbane and Sydney. Stromback and Malhotra (1994) surveyed 45 South Asians who were business-owners in the Western Australian capital city of Perth. Lampugnani and Holton (1989) surveyed 98 Italian entrepreneurs across a broad span of industry types in South Australia, and Kermond, Luscombe, Strahan and Williams (1988) investigated specific issues related to immigrant businesswomen in Australia, with an emphasis on finance and education.

While drawing on some of the useful research and conceptual framework of the major international study of ethnic entrepreneurs (Waldinger et al. 1990) Collins et al. 1995a also highlight the shortcomings of this study. They criticise it on a number of grounds. First, Waldinger et al. (ibid.) attempt to identify 'ethnic' business strategies or

dynamics without comparing them to the activities of 'non-ethnic' entrepreneurs. Second, they do not devote enough attention to explaining different rates of ethnic entrepreneurship. Third, female ethnic entrepreneurship and the gender dimensions of immigrant entrepreneurship are not given sufficient emphasis. Fourth, they do not sufficiently recognise the diversity of paths and experiences of immigrant entrepreneurship. And finally, Waldinger et al. (ibid.) fail to sufficiently emphasise how complex and changing patterns of globalisation and racialisation shape immigrant enterpreneurship and the dynamics and characteristics of immigrant entrepreneurs (Collins et al. 1995a: 34-38).

Lever-Tracy et al. (1991) also provide evidence to support the racialised blocked mobility theory. They report that the Chinese and Indian business-owners in the survey are faced with 'a residue of prejudice and discrimination and a battery of obstacles to the recognition of overseas qualifications' (ibid.: ix). The findings of Stromback and Malhotra (1994) also reinforce the 'blocked mobility' hypothesis, since many entrepreneurs report difficulties in having their qualifications recognised in Australia. They also reported problems in gaining access to professional bodies and 'more subtle influences' preventing them from fully utilising their skills in Australia: 'As a result of such problems many South Asians start their own businesses' (ibid.: x-xi).

### *Ethnic Resources*

Another theme in the international literature on ethnic entrepreneurship relates to the importance of the family and ethnic community as a source of financing and employment and a customer base and support for ethnic entrepreneurs (Waldinger et al. 1990). Light and Rosenstein (1995) refer

to the *ethnic resources* immigrant entrepreneurs can draw on. Australian research has supported this finding. Lever-Tracy et al (1991) note that 80 per cent of the Brisbane entrepreneurs they surveyed use family labour, including spouses, children and other extended family members. Family members are regarded as trustworthy and committed to the business. Stromback and Malhotra (1994: 13) also note the importance of 'a co-operative network of family and community', the importance of family labour, and the trustworthiness of family members for South Asian enterprises in Perth. Lampugnani and Holton (1989: 17) report that while most of the Italian entrepreneurs they surveyed rely on banks and not their families to finance their business, the family is described as 'the major cultural resource', providing partners and labour for the majority of the businesses surveyed.

Research by Collins et al. (1995a) in the late 1980s and early 1990s also underline the importance of family labour in immigrant enterprises and notes that immigrant entrepreneurs in Sydney rely heavily on the family for financing, employment and general business support. Similarly, the 1996 survey (Collins et al. 1997) notes that just over a third of the businesses run by NESB immigrant men and half of the businesses run by NESB women report that between 75 and 100 per cent of their staff are family members, 80 per cent of the businesses run by South American women and 60 per cent of the businesses owned by Asian women, report that family members fill between 75 and 100 per cent of all the jobs, as do half the South American male entrepreneurs.

However, the importance of family is not confined to ethnic entrepreneurs: the control sample of third or later generation Australian (non-immigrant) entrepreneurs shows they also rely heavily on family

resources, though to a lesser degree than immigrant entrepreneurs (Collins et al. 1997). Collins et al. argue that this demonstrates the importance of a control sample of non-immigrant entrepreneurs to help identify the extent to which these 'distinctive' traits of immigrant entrepreneurs are merely a generic characteristic of entrepreneurship as such irrespective of ethnic background.

Another dimension of ethnic resources relates to co-ethnic employment in immigrant enterprises. Williams (1992: 91) notes that in immigrant-owned firms, over 85 per cent of the workers are immigrants, yet immigrant workers comprise just over 20 per cent of the workers in small businesses owned by the Australian-born. This finding is confirmed by other Australian research. Stromback and Mahotra (1994: 14) note that South Asian entrepreneurs in Perth create an average of just over four jobs per business. Of these, relatives fill half the jobs and most of the other ones are filled by 'co-ethnics'. Similarly, Lever-Tracy et al. (1991) note that the family is a critical source of labour, with the Indian entrepreneurs in particular relying on tight-knit extended family solidarity. Many entrepreneurs report relying on community networks as an important business resource. Collins et al. (1997) inquire into the methods immigrant entrepreneurs use to recruit employees. They observe a strong trend for immigrant entrepreneurs to employ co-ethnics in their small businesses. Family and community networks account for half the employment recruitment among Middle Eastern, Asian and Latin American-born entrepreneurs.

Another aspect of the ethnic resources of immigrant entrepreneurs in Australia relates to the nature of their customer base. Patterns of immigrant settlement are often linked to the growth of immigrant

entrepreneurship. Urban ethnic ghettos and enclaves are strongly associated with the emergence of ethnic enterprise in North America, with the Cubans in Miami an often-cited example (Wilson and Martin 1982; Portes and Rumbaut 1990). There does not appear to be a parallel in Australia. Diversity and geographic mobility are key features of immigrant settlement patterns in Australian cities (Burnley 1986; Burnley 1995; Burnley 2000). Many immigrant communities of diverse backgrounds share areas of high immigrant concentration, so no one ethnic group dominates. This finding is consistent with the conclusions of Jupp, McRobbie and York (1991), who argue that despite a century of immigration from non English-speaking countries, there are almost no significant ethnic ghettos in metropolitan Australia.

This is not to say more than a century of ethnic entrepreneurship has not left its mark on Australian cities like Sydney. Sydney's *Chinatown* (Collins and Castillo, 1998: 275-297), *Little Italy* in the suburb of Leichhardt (Collins and Castillo, 1998: 155-174), and *Little Korea* in the suburb of Campsie (Collins and Castillo, 1998: 347-359) have all developed their ethnic identity via the entrepreneurs who own the businesses in these suburbs. In Leichhardt, Norton Street is lined with Italian restaurants and cafes, but less than 10 per cent of the Leichhardt residents are Italian. Yet Norton Street in Leichhardt is where Sydney's Italian community gathers to celebrate World Cup soccer successes and the like. In the western Sydney suburb of Cabramatta, half the businesses in Cabramatta were owned by Indo-Chinese immigrants by 1985 (Burnley 1988: 952), a figure that is even higher today (Collins and Castillo 1998: 263-6), yet Cabramatta is also a very cosmopolitan area.

While there are no ethnic enclaves in Australian cities, there certainly are ethnic market niches. The survey by Collins et al. (1995a: 153-4) of immigrant entrepreneurs in Sydney notes that co-ethnic customers provide more than half the custom of one in three entrepreneurs. On the other hand, co-ethnics account for only a tenth of the custom for another one in three. Similarly, the survey by Lever-Tracy et al. (1991) observes that the extent of co-ethnic custom varies across the two cities and across the ethnic groups there. Lampugnani and Holton (1989) note in their survey of Italian entrepreneurs in South Australia that while 'a certain enclave sector still exists', most Italian businesses 'did not stay in the enclave or ghetto, but moved beyond it'. This suggests a diversity of experience among ethnic entrepreneurs in Australia in regard to the ethnic niche, with some entrepreneurs breaking-out of captive markets while others are still highly dependent on them. In some instances, the experiences of entrepreneurs from the same immigrant groups demonstrate both breakout and ethnic niche strategies. For example, many Chinese entrepreneurs in Sydney use Chinatown as their economic base, while others, particularly restaurant-owners were based for decades in surrounding Sydney suburbs and rural towns (Collins and Hiebert 2001).

The studies by Collins et al. (1997) and Lever-Tracy et al (1991: 113) also note the important role immigrant entrepreneurs play in the import and export trade. Lever-Tracy et al (1991: 113) conclude that Chinese and Indian immigrant enterprises are 'successful, innovative and export oriented'. Collins et al. (1997) find that Asian entrepreneurs report the highest rate of import and export trade of all those surveyed, including the control sample. Overseas networks of family and friends help develop

the trading links of ethnic entrepreneurs, and represent another dimension of the ethnic resources of immigrant entrepreneurs in Australia.

### *Class resources*

Another theme in the international literature relates to the importance of factors related to social class and *class resources* (Light and Rosenstein 1995; Light and Gold 2000) in understanding the rates of immigrant entrepreneurship. One dimension is the class background of immigrant entrepreneurs, and another is the education or human capital of immigrant entrepreneurs, which is highly correlated to their class background. Australian studies have investigated this aspect.

Lever-Tracy et al. (1991) note that class resources are an important part of the path to entrepreneurship. Many Chinese and Indian entrepreneurs in Brisbane and Sydney had prior business experience and came to Australia with substantial resources. Indeed, half had expected to set up a business when they arrived in Australia. Stromback and Malhotra (1994: 13) also note that many of the immigrant entrepreneurs they surveyed in Perth continued the business tradition they had in countries like Fiji, Malaysia and Singapore where they had experience as minority traders before migrating to Australia. On the other hand, Collins (2000a) argues that there is a great diversity in the class backgrounds of immigrant entrepreneurs in Australia, with only a minority of immigrant entrepreneurs coming from an entrepreneurial background. Just under half (47 per cent) of the immigrant entrepreneurs surveyed in Sydney in the late 1980s and early 1990s were from working class-families where the father was a blue-collar worker employed in the occupations of 'tradespersons',

'machine operator and driver' and 'labourer, unskilled' (Collins et al. 1995a). For these immigrant entrepreneurs, their move to entrepreneurship represents upward class mobility from the working class to the *petite bourgeoisie*. Similarly, data from the 1996 survey of immigrant and non-immigrant entrepreneurs in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth show that very few, generally less than 10 per cent, of the immigrant entrepreneurs surveyed said they had a family business background (Collins et al. 1997). This finding gives some qualified support to the argument of Bechhofer and Elliot (1981) that the *petite bourgeoisie* does not reproduce itself, though further research into second-generation immigrant entrepreneurs is required before firm conclusions can be made in this regard.

As Light and Rosenstein (1995) argue, education is one of the key markers of social class and the human and cultural capital acquired through education is one of the main class resources of immigrants. There has been some research into the adequacy of the educational background of immigrant entrepreneurs in Australia (Flatau and Hemmings 1991; Zinopoulos 1992; Collins et al. 1997). In one of the few Australian studies on female immigrant entrepreneurs, Kermond et al. (1991) argue that they do not have an adequate educational level to succeed as entrepreneurs. However, findings from the 1996 national survey of ethnic entrepreneurs do not support this conclusion. This study notes a great diversity of educational background: one in four had university degrees and another one in four did not finish secondary school (Collins et al. 1997). This finding clouds the relationship between the class resources of immigrants and their rates of entrepreneurship, suggesting that not all immigrant entrepreneurs take the same route to entrepreneurship. Collins et al. (1997) also argue that their research does not support the claim that

immigrant entrepreneurs have poorer educational qualifications than other entrepreneurs. The study notes that a much higher percentage of NESB male and female immigrant entrepreneurs have college and university degrees than Australian-born male and female entrepreneurs or ESB ethnic entrepreneurs.

The lesson from the Australian immigrant entrepreneur experience is that theories of ethnic entrepreneurship need to be able to account for diverse, changing paths to immigrant entrepreneurship. They need to reflect on how changing patterns of globalisation and racialisation are impacting the group characteristics of new immigrants and the opportunity structures they face in Australia. They need to investigate the complex and uneven patterns of class and ethnic resources among different immigrant groups and within specific ones. Theories of immigrant entrepreneurs and of immigrant self-employment also need to reflect on the growth of female entrepreneurship and the critical role of gender and the family in understanding the dynamics of immigrant entrepreneurship. At the same time, the Australian experience of immigrant self-employment supports the argument of Rath and Kloosterman that it is the dynamic interaction between entrepreneurs and their social, political and economic environment that largely produces entrepreneurial behavior and business success.

## **6. Immigrant self-employment down under**

Immigrant entrepreneurs have a long history in Australia and play a significant role in the contemporary economy and society there. Australian immigration has nevertheless been highly contested, with many

critics questioning its economic and social merits (Blainey 1984; Joske 1989; Rimmer 1991; One Nation 1998). A great deal of emphasis has been placed on the economic, social and environmental impact of immigration, yet the contribution and impact of immigrant entrepreneurs has generally been ignored or downplayed in these debates. This partly stems from the dominance of neo-classical economics, which deals very inadequately with cultural diversity, and of economic rationalist policy perspectives in the major Australian political parties. The rightwing opposes Asian immigration, and the Australian labour movement is also less than enthusiastic about immigration.

To date there has been little of policy development specifically addressing immigrant entrepreneurs in Australia (Holton 1988; Strahan and Luscombe 1991). No Australian federal or state government has developed policies specifically designed for immigrant entrepreneurs. However, as a result of some of the research cited in this paper, which clearly notes the significance of the economic and social contribution of immigrant entrepreneurs, Australian federal and state authorities are now making every effort to develop a policy response. It is too early to tell how effective these policy developments will be in facilitating the path to entrepreneurship easier for immigrants in Australia.

The Australian research highlights a number of issues relevant to the theory on immigrant or ethnic entrepreneurship. Theories like this not only need to explain why some immigrant groups are over-represented as entrepreneurs, they also should account for the under-representation of other immigrant groups. Claims about “ethnic business strategies” can only be made when comparing immigrant to non-immigrant entrepreneurs. Theories of immigrant or ethnic entrepreneurship should

investigate how the complex and changing dynamics of racialisation and globalisation shape the opportunity structures for immigrant minorities in Australia, blocking mobility into the mainstream labour market for some but allowing others to enter the primary labour market. The critical role of gender and the family in shaping the immigrant enterprise should also play a prominent role in these theories, particularly given the growth in female immigrant entrepreneurship and the key role of the family in enterprises owned by male immigrants. In addition, the diversity of paths to entrepreneurship – from the unemployed to the millionaires and the many positions between – should be centrally addressed in theories on ethnic or immigrant entrepreneurship.

The role of the state is also a critical factor to be considered in theories on ethnic or immigrant entrepreneurship. In Australia, the main models of immigrant incorporation have pertained to assimilation (up until the mid-1970s) and multiculturalism (from mid-1970s to the present). Both models are characterised by easy access to citizenship, making the path to immigrant entrepreneurship perhaps easier in a settler immigration country like Australia than in countries where citizenship rights are difficult to obtain or denied to most immigrants. The shift to multiculturalism was a shift in the philosophy or the place of immigrants in Australian society and the policy framework for immigrant settlement. Multiculturalism opens up the public space for immigrant minorities, their languages and cultures, in Australian life and has been accompanied by a range of programs and services introduced to reduce immigrant disadvantage regarding the labour market, education, welfare, housing and the law. This has been accompanied by Australian laws outlawing racial and gender discrimination. To the extent that the multiculturalism model

of immigrant inclusion has reduced formal and informal barriers to immigrant entrepreneurship, it has been effective in reducing immigrant disadvantage in Australia.

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