DOES MATERNAL ETHNIC IDENTITY AFFECT THE EDUCATIONAL TRAJECTORIES OF IMMIGRANT DESCENDANTS?

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1. Introduction

According to the framework provided by Akerlof and Kranton (2000), ethnic identity is a self-concept defined as both the affiliation to the host country and to the background culture. The concept of ethnic identity is widely used in economic literature. However, to our knowledge, few studies consider the effect of ethnic identity on educational trajectories among immigrant descendants (e.g. Nekby, Rödin and Özcan 2009; Shuller 2015) and it still represents an under-researched topic. Even fewer studies use an intergenerational approach (Shuller 2015; Cambpell et al. 2019).

Our contribution is to investigate the relationship between maternal ethnic identity and the educational trajectories of immigrant descendants in Italy. We do not look at individual (self-defined) ethnic identity mechanisms but, indeed, we look at a more specific topic related to the potential intergenerational transmissions of ethnic identity between mothers and their children.

We use the survey-data on "Social Condition and Integration of Foreign citizens" (SCIF), that aims at providing information on behaviours, characteristics, attitudes and opinions of foreign residents in Italy including migratory background, family composition, education, migratory path, and employment status.

Italy represents an important case of study because the increasing number of family reunifications produced a growing presence of young second-generation in the last decade and an increasing number of students with migratory background enrolled in the Italian school system (Buonomo, Strozza and Gabrielli 2018).

Generally speaking, children of immigrants suffer from a number of negatives when compared to their native peers and experience difficult integration paths. At school, these signs include more frequent school dropouts, less effective performances, more frequent school retreats, and higher concentration in vocational and technical high schools, in order to achieve low-skilled jobs (Strozza 2015; Strozza et al. 2018; Gabrielli and Di Bartolomeo 2019).

According to Eurostat (European Commission 2014, 2016), Italy has one of highest quota in Europe of immigrant youths (aged 18-24) with at most a compulsory

level of education, who left school before they have finished their course and have not attended any other course in the last four weeks.

After a short presentation of the international literature on ethnic identity (section 2), we will introduce the survey and the method of analysis adopted (section 3). The maternal ethnic identity of children (aged 14-24) will be presented in section 4 and in the following one (section 5) the determinant of educational trajectories will be discussed with special attention to the role of maternal ethnic identity. In the final section, the main results will be synthetized and the possible political implications will be highlighted.

2. Theoretical framework on ethnic identity

According to the general literature, "ethnic identity" is here considered a self-definition within the largest concept of "social identity" (Phinney and Ong 2007). According to it, each individual determines his own ethnic identity and can have more than one (self-determined) ethnic identity: migrants can strongly identify themselves with the destination country, the country of origin, or a combination of the two (Phinney et al., 2001).

The interest among scholars of different disciplines on ethnic identity and on its high explanatory potential is growing over time. For example, economic literature showed that ethnic identity plays an important role in economic outcomes. Immigrants who develop a strong ethnical identity towards the destination country have better economic outcomes, compared to those who have no ethnic identity, or have only a strong minority ethnic identity (Pendakur and Pendakur 2005; Constant and Zimmermann 2008; Nekby and Rodin 2010). Constant and Zimmermann (2009) observed that women who exhibit both host and minority identities are more likely to work than women who have only host identity. Pendakur and Pendakur (2005) affirmed that ethnic minority identity is positively associated with the propensity to use informal methods to find jobs and with lower occupational prestige.

Akerlof and Kranton (2000) provided a comprehensive theoretical framework to consider how self-determined ethnic identity affect individuals' human capital.

Also, economic literature considered this issue and the transgenerational aspect. Among the others, Chiswick (2009) found a possible parental adverse effect. If there is a cultural tension between minority and majority culture, parents who have a strong minority ethnic identity could have negative effects on the human capital of their children.

Zimmermann and co-authors (2008) proved that minority and host ethnic identity are not mutually exclusive. In other words, they are not competitive concept, so it is

possible that both of them play a positive, or negative, role in individuals' human capital.

Focusing on the relation between ethnic identity and education trajectories, Nekby and co-authors (2009), found that men affiliated with both the host and minority culture have higher probabilities of completing tertiary education than men who identify only with one or neither of the two. Moreover, Shuller (2015), by using an intergenerational approach, proved that immigrant children in Germany are more likely to be placed in the middle or upper tier of secondary education if their father reports a strong minority identity, or if their mother reports a strong host country's identity. In the end, a recent study (Cambpell et al. 2019) found, by using cognitive test scores, a negative association between minority ethnic identity and academic performances.

However, the authors themselves warned of being cautious in the interpretation of their results since their analysis is very explorative and need being deepened in terms of causal mechanisms.

3. Data and methods

We use data coming from the multipurpose survey on "Social Condition and Integration of Foreign citizens (SCIF)" conducted by Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) in 2011-12. It collects nationally representative information on around 12,000 households with at least one foreign citizen. This survey allows capturing school-aged foreigners not enrolled at school. Moreover, it allows exploring less studied fields such as the probability of not being enrolled and future aspirations of individuals in secondary education. It represents an important advantage given that the large majority of datasets exploring educational trajectories of immigrants children are specifically collected at school, thus not considering studying a major phenomenon, that is why immigrants' children are more at risk of not continuing studying. Another important advantage of this source of data is that it contains many variables on migration background which are here used and that may allow for capturing some specificities linked to the process of migration itself, which are well known being important predictors of migrant behaviours. Moreover, the data set allows to merge information of mothers and their children (if they are co-residents). Apart from maternal ethnic identity, we included in our analyses a number of individuals and their mother characteristics as control variables.

Two are the main limits of SCIF data in our study. On one hand, it provide few info on individuals who are not co-residents. The majority of questions are indeed directed to people who co-reside in the same house. As a matter of fact, our population of interest is a positively selected – more stable – population especially

in terms of migration strategies and migration plans. On the other hand, this survey has a cross-sectional asset.

We included in our next analyses individuals aged 14-24 years old who co-reside with born abroad mothers, not naturalized. We had to exclude mothers with Italian citizenship as for them the survey do not provide information on ethnic identity (our key variable). We excluded also children of transnational couples (mixed couples) since it is well known that they are a specific category with peculiar characteristics that make this population largely different in terms of performances, outputs, aspirations and school dropout, from that of pure immigrants. Our final sample includes 1,898 unweighted cases of which 47% are women and 43% are individuals aged 14-17 (table 1).

Table 1 – *Unweighted distribution by age groups and gender.*

Age groups	Males	Females	Total
14-17	437	385	822
18-24	571	505	1,076
Total	1,008	890	1,898

Source: our calculations on SCIF data.

In order to estimate the role of maternal ethnic identity on immigrant children's educational trajectories we applied a multivariate analysis that includes a set of logistic models in order to control for compositional effects and to analyse the main determinants of not leaving education and training. Specifically, the dependent variable is equal to 0 for individuals not attending education or training, or that have not completed secondary school (we borrowed Eurostat definition of Early leavers from education and training, but we extended it to individuals aged 14-24 instead of 18-24). It is equal to 1 for individuals enrolled at school or in training, or that have completed secondary school (they are defined as not-ELET).

Two target covariates refer to maternal ethnic identity. According to Akerlof and Kranton (2000), we consider a double perspective, the ethnic identity (of mothers) with respect to both their country of origin (minority ethnic identity) and the country of destination (Italian ethnic identity). Specifically, we identified strong "minority ethnic identity" (dummy variable) when mothers are very proud of being foreigners and, at the same time, miss their country of origin or keep up to date with origin country's political facts. Similarly, we identified strong "Italian ethnic identity" (dummy variable) when mothers fell right at home in Italy and, at the same time, like being in Italy or keep up to date with Italian political facts. We chose these different variables and restrictive criteria as we aimed at capturing a very strong ethnic identity.

We estimate four different logistic models in order to analyse the determinants of being not-ELET. In Model 1, only the two ethnic identity dummies are included. In

Model 2, we add mother's characteristics (level of education, labour force status, language abilities) as control variables. Conversely, we control for individual characteristics only in Model 3 (sex, age group, migratory generation). Finally, all the variables (two ethnic identity dummies, mother's and individual's characteristics) are jointly included in Model 4.

4. Maternal ethnic identity: an overview

Table 2 describes maternal minority and Italian ethnic identity by the main individual characteristics. Our data are representative of a population of almost 370,000 individuals (weighted cases). Maternal minority ethnic identity do not show particular gender differences. Both men and women have mothers with strong minority ethnic identity in about 25% of cases. More differences emerge when considering age groups. Individuals aged 18-24 have 4 percentage points higher than those aged 14-17 of mothers with strong minority ethnic identity (respectively, 27% and 23%). The difference increases to 6 percentage points when we consider the migratory generation (respectively 30% for generation 2 and 1.75; 24% for the counterpart).

Table 2 – *Maternal ethnic identity by sex, age groups and migratory generation. Italy, 2011-12. Percentage of weighted cases.*

Modalities	% strong minority identity	% strong Italian identity
Males	25.1	37.2
Females	25.9	39.1
Individuals aged 14-17	23.1	40.6
Individuals aged 18-24	27.3	36.1
Generation 1.5; 1.25; 1	23.7	34.6
Generation 1.75; 2	30.4	47.9
Total	25.4	38.0

Source: our calculations on SCIF data.

Even larger differences emerge when mothers' Italian ethnic identity is taken into account. In relative terms, mothers with strong Italian ethnic identity are more frequents than those with minority ethnic identity do. The national average value is respectively equal to 38% and 25%. Considering individual variables, females have largest quota of mothers with strong Italian ethnic identity compared to males (+2 percentage points). The difference is even greater for migratory generation: +13 percentage points in favour of generation 2 and 1.75 compared to their counterpart. Finally, unlike how as described in the case of strong mothers' minority ethnic identity, individuals aged 14-17 have the highest percentage of mothers with strong Italian identity with 4.5 percentage points more than for the counterpart.

5. The relationship between maternal ethnic identity and the educational trajectories

Table 3 shows logistic regression's odds ratio of ethnic identity by different groups.

If only ethnic identity variables are included in the model (Model 1), both minority and Italian ethnic identity contribute to positive educational trajectories of immigrant descendants. Moreover, the two ethnic identities are not mutually exclusive, since they both play a significant and positive role. In fact, we find a quite strong and highly significant positive association between maternal Italian ethnic identity and the probability of not being an ELET. At same time, maternal minority ethnic identity shows a less strong and significant (but) positive odds ratio.

Mothers' characteristics could play a confounding role. Thus, once controlling for these characteristics, ethnic identity effects may reduce and result even not significant. Conversely, the results in Model 2 show that the estimates described above of the two variables on ethnic identity do not change much once including these control variables. This evidence could indicate that mothers' ethnic identity is a robust variable in determining educational trajectories.

Further noteworthy results show that mothers' educational level and language abilities are positively associated to the probability that their children are not ELET. Conversely, the more recent the mother's year of arrival, the lower is the probability of not being an ELET. Finally, mothers' labour force status (employed versus not employed or inactive) does not seem to be significantly correlated with educational trajectories.

However, it is possible that the robustness of parental identity effects could be affected by individual characteristics. Therefore, in Model 3, we replace mothers' characteristics with those of individuals. Also using these control variables, the effects of minority and Italian mothers' ethnic identity are significant, and have similar and positive odds ratios compared to previous ones. Another time the results seem to confirm an important role played by mothers' ethnic identity in determining children's educational trajectories.

Further important results emerge from the analysis. Individuals born in Italy or arrived in Italy before the age of five, compared to their counterparts, have the highest chances of not being ELET.

Table 3 – *Determinants of educational trajectories of individual aged 14-24. Logistic regression models. Italy 2011-12.*

Modalities	Mod. 1		Mod. 2		Mod. 3		Mod.4	
	Od.R.	*p-val*	*Od.R.*	*p-val*	*Od.R.*	*p-val*	*Od.R.*	*p-val*
Mother minority identity (Ref. Weak or medium)								
Strong	1.395	**	1.255	***	1.403	**	1.290	*
Mother Italian Identity (Ref. Weak or medium)								
Strong	1.684	***	1.491	***	1.477	***	1.395	***
Mother educational level (Ref. Low)								
Medium			1.881	***			1.862	***
High			2.816	***			2.697	***
Mother year arrival (Ref. 1975-99)								
2000-12			0.710	***			0.874	
Mother professional condition (Ref. Employed)								
Unemployed or inactive			0.902				0.910	
Mother Italian proficiency level (Ref. Low or medium)								
High			1.352	**			1.241	*
Citizenship area (Ref. Europe Est-EU)								
Europe Est non-EU					1.166		1.185	
North Africa					0.557	***	0.743	
Other Africa					1.055		1.200	
Asia					0.554	***	0.698	*
Latin America					1.064		1.008	
Migratory generation (Ref. 1.5; 1.25; 1)								
1.75 and 2					1.570	***	1.516	**
Age groups (Ref. 14-17)								
18-24					0.449	***	0.432	**
Sex (Ref. Males)								
Females					1.712	***	1.678	***
Costant term	2.414	***	2.434	***	3.267	***	2.811	***
N	1,898		1,898		1,898		1,898	
R2	0.023		0.069		0.116		0.143	

Source: our calculations on SCIF data.

Also for women, the effect is significant and positive (men reference). Finally, the greater the age of individuals, the less likely it is to be not ELET.

In the end, Model 4 contains all the variables previously considered. This final model confirms the evidence highlighted above. The introduction of all covariates leaves the odds ratios almost equal to those observed in the Model 1, although with slightly lower effects. In particular, maternal minority ethnic identity remains significant, but less than in previous Models.

6. Conclusion and discussion

Consistently with Shuller's (2014) findings, our results show an intergenerational effect of maternal ethnic identity on educational trajectories of immigrant descendants. In particular, they support the view that both Italian and minority ethnic identity of mothers play a positive and significant role in educational trajectories of their children. We have not found any indication of a detrimental impact of immigrant mother preserving their original culture in educational trajectories of their children. Our results are also consistent with Zimmermann and co-authors (2008) because, both minority and Italian identity of mothers are potentially beneficial for the school career of immigrant descendants, net of mother's and individual's characteristics: their effects do not compete but rather complement each other; they do not compete but complement each other.

These results have some important political implication. In particular, according to our findings, politics that aim at losing immigrants' strong background identity are not only ineffective, but also deleterious for the national interest. According to our results, it would seem that the best political measures to achieve positive educational trajectories and integration would be those aimed at preserving the minority ethnic identity and encouraging them to acquire a strong Italian identity.

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