

# Immigrant entrepreneurship contextualised

## Becoming a female migrant entrepreneur in rural Norway

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper aims to address the rural and gender gaps in the immigrant entrepreneurship literature by exploring the start-up stories of 18 female immigrants who currently run a business in northernmost Norway.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The paper is based on a qualitative fieldwork including business visits and in-depth interviews. The transcripts from the interviews were analysed using a constructivist grounded theory (CGT) approach.

**Findings** – Four modes of entry to entrepreneurship were identified: entrepreneurship as a way out of unemployment; entrepreneurship as a means to avoid underemployment, entrepreneurship as a means to live in a region of perceived attraction; and entrepreneurship as a preferred choice for women in satisfactory wage labour. In addition, the paper reveals the importance of family support and of spatial embeddedness among immigrant entrepreneurs living in a rural context.

**Practical implications** – This study notes that the modes of entry to rural immigrant entrepreneurship are diverse, but that they are often partly related to the pursuit of an initial feeling of belonging in the new region of settlement. Hence, developing the knowledge of how to not only attract but also retain and increase the feeling of local belonging of immigrants may be important for many rural regions in the Western world. This is because rural immigrants not only represent a much needed in-flow of younger people in a typically decreasing and ageing population but also entail cultural variation and job creation, thus contributing to place development.

**Social implications** – The paper argues for the importance of considering immigrant entrepreneurs as significant actors of rural development.

**Originality/value** – While immigrant entrepreneurship has emerged as an important field of study, it has been criticised for focusing predominantly on men and for neglecting contextual variations in the analysis. The rural context especially has been largely omitted. By focusing on female immigrants having established



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a business in a rural context, the paper adds to the literature, firstly, by highlighting the experiences of female immigrant entrepreneurs. Secondly, it reveals that rural immigrant entrepreneurship cannot be conceived in terms of “ethnic resources” or “enclave economy” that are often central explanatory dimensions in megacity studies. Thirdly, it argues for the importance of considering both the spatial as well as the family contexts in the author’s theoretical conceptualizations of the (immigrant) entrepreneurial start-up phase.

**Keywords** Female entrepreneurship, Migrant entrepreneurship, Female immigrant entrepreneurship, Modes of entry, Rural immigrant entrepreneurship

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

In Europe, businesses run by immigrants have always been present (Volery, 2007; Ram, 1997). Currently, however, an increasing number of immigrant women are starting businesses not only in urban but also in rural areas of the Western world. This is first and foremost because of the growth and feminization of rural immigration (Simard and Jentch, 2009). Secondly, it is because of the increase of (immigrant) women entering the labour market, some of them as business owners (Pio, 2007; Collins and Low, 2010; Ramadani *et al.*, 2015; Ramadani, 2015). Thirdly, it is because of a gradually more favourable opportunity structure for ethnic micro, small and medium-sized businesses in various geographical spaces (Volery, 2007, p. 30).

But what are the stories of immigrant female entrepreneurs in rural areas? What makes them starting a business, and what shapes their experiences? Factors influencing the establishment of an ethnic enterprise are multilayered and include a number of aspects related to the immigrants themselves such as education, generation, migration background, social capital as personal aspirations, as well as aspects related to the host context such as the economic situation, immigrant and labour market policies and spatial characteristics (Dana and Morris, 2007; Welter, 2011; Kloosterman and Rath, 2001). Immigrant entrepreneurship has been developed as a field of study over a long period of time (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990; Portes and Jensen, 1989; Kloosterman and Rath, 2001; Jones *et al.*, 2010; Dana and Morris, 2007), and has in recent years also been widely discussed in *Journal of Enterprising Communities* (Knight, 2015; Stephens, 2013; Evans, 2012; Kyoung-Ho, 2014; Turkina and Thai, 2013; Crockett, 2013). However, we still know little about female immigrant entrepreneurs as argued by Pettersson and Hedberg (2013), Collins and Low (2010) and Essers *et al.* (2010), and even less about rural immigrant entrepreneurship, a few exceptions apart (Kalantaridis, 2010; Zarrugh, 2007; Steinberg *et al.*, 2010; Stone and Stubbs, 2007).

This paper attempts to address the rural and gender gaps in our understanding of immigrant entrepreneurship as a contextualised process. Drawing on the literature on modes of entry to (immigrant) entrepreneurship, I examine the stories of female immigrants who have started and currently run a business in Finnmark, northernmost Norway. More specifically, I explore the start-up phase with a focus on their reasons for becoming self-employed. In particular, four modes of entry to entrepreneurship are identified:

- (1) entrepreneurship as a way out of unemployment;
- (2) entrepreneurship as a means to avoid underemployment;
- (3) entrepreneurship as a means to live in a region of perceived attraction; and
- (4) entrepreneurship as a preferred choice for women in satisfactory wage labour.

Thereafter, I analyse how the experiences of the participants of this study, no matter their mode of entry to entrepreneurship, are inherently shaped by the family and spatial contexts in which they are embedded. Hence, the paper adds to the literature, firstly, by highlighting

the experiences of *female* immigrant entrepreneurs. Secondly, it adds to our understanding by revealing that immigrant entrepreneurship can not necessarily be conceived in terms of “ethnic resources” or “enclave economy” that may be of great significance in megacity contexts, as proposed by (Portes and Jensen, 1989; Waldinger, 1994; Lee, 1999). Thirdly, the paper will explicate the difficulty of truly understanding entrepreneurial processes outside an analytical framework that simultaneously engages race, gender, education/class, the household situation and the spatial context. The participants selected for this study are 18 first-generation female immigrants. The study is based on fieldwork and in-depth interviews done by the author in 2012.

The structure of this paper is as follows: Section 2 provides a short overview of immigration and entrepreneurship in Finnmark, and presents the context for the study. Section 3 provides a discussion of relevant literature and the methodology used. Section 4 presents empirical findings about female immigrants’ experiences with business start-up. The last section contains conclusions and discusses further implications.

## 2. Background and context

The literature reveals that the spatial context has consequences for entrepreneurial processes (Welter, 2011; Berg, 1997; Hanson, 2009; Anderson, 2000; McKeever *et al.*, 2015). Norway is a new immigration country with few immigrants up to the late 1960s. Fifty years later, however, by 2013, there were more than 593,000[1] first-generation immigrants in the country (11.7 per cent of the population). In Norway, in general, immigration is a *recent* phenomenon, whereas in Finnmark, northernmost Norway, this is not the case to the same degree. Bordering to Finland and Russia in the east, the area has for centuries hosted minority groups from the neighbouring countries in addition to the indigenous Sami and the Norwegian majority population (Olsen, 2008).

The surface area of Finnmark is 48,637 square kilometres, but in spite of the size, only 75,000 people[2] live there, so the region is very sparsely populated. In addition, the area has for decades suffered from a small but steady population decline (Statistics Finnmark[3]). Since 2007, however, the trend has changed, and the population rates have marginally grown because of immigration. The total number of immigrants living in Finnmark in 2012 was 6,773. This constitutes 9.2 per cent of the total population in the county. In terms of numbers, the immigrants originate primarily from Russia and Finland; secondly from Poland, Lithuania and Sweden; and thirdly from Thailand, Afghanistan and Somalia. As is common for many rural areas, Finnmark hence has relatively small numbers of immigrants coming from many different countries. Mixed marriages are common, in Finnmark usually, between minority woman and majority man (Flemmen and Lotherington, 2008).

Finnmark stretches between 70 and 71 degrees north. This far north, the winters are dark blue and the sun is below the horizon for two months. During summertime, on the other hand, the midnight sun brings light to the inhabitants and attracts tourists to the region. The landscape is open and quite stony with wild mountains, vast plateaus and naked shores surrounded by the sea. Because of the Gulf Stream, the climate is relatively mild compared to places at similar altitudes. Finnmark has a long coastline, and the majority of the population lives relatively clustered along the coast, in fishing villages and small towns. Fisheries have played and still play a crucial role (Gerrard, 2013) earlier often in combination with small-scale peasant farming, and more recently combined with fish farming, small-scale nature-based tourism, different kinds of skilled employment related to the public welfare sector and industrial mega projects based on extraction of natural resources such as gas and minerals. The self-employment rates in Finnmark are relatively low (around 4 per cent). Among immigrants, the rates are lower: According to special tables from Statistics Norway,

there were around 170 immigrant entrepreneurs in Finnmark in 2010. This represents around 3.2 per cent of the immigrant population aged 18-65[4] years.

### 3. Understanding motivations for (women's) immigrant business start-up in a rural context

Two models have predominated our understanding of immigrant business start-up:

- (1) a model emphasising that certain immigrant groups have an entrepreneurial culture that is reproduced in the hosting context, a view explored in [Teixeira \(1998\)](#), [Werbner \(1999\)](#) and [Katila \(2010\)](#); and
- (2) a model emphasising structural constraints and opportunities available to immigrants in the hosting context, a perspective developed in [Shinnar and Young \(2008\)](#) and [Phizacklea and Ram \(1996\)](#).

The first model is often criticised for viewing culture as a fixed, static entity and is less in use today ([Kontos, 2003](#)). The second model suggests, on one side, that immigrants are *pushed into* self-employment as a result of discrimination that blocks other alternatives or as a result of limited language skills (the disadvantage hypothesis). On the other hand, it suggests that immigrants are *pulled into* entrepreneurship because of the structure of the host economy using explanatory terms such as “enclave economy”, “ethnic niches” and “occupational niches”. For an elaboration of these perspectives, see [Vinogradov \(2008\)](#), [Brettell and Alstatt \(2007\)](#) and [Volery \(2007\)](#). Another way to categorise the theorising of immigrant business start-ups, is to distinguish between models focusing on the self (perceiving immigrant entrepreneurship as personally determined behaviour); models focusing on the ethnocultural milieu (culturally influenced behaviour); models focusing on the host society (compensatory response behaviour); and interactive models ([Dana, 1997](#)).

Much of the theoretical understandings implied in models referred to above have been integrated into the *mixed embeddedness approach*[5] developed by [Kloosterman and Rath \(2001\)](#). Within this approach, *opportunity structure* is a central concept. It points to the fact that the kind of business an immigrant starts is not just determined by the financial, social and other resources the aspiring entrepreneur can mobilise. Equally important is the time- and place-specific opportunity structure in the host context including dimensions such as policy, institutional regulations and the national and local labour market structures ([Kloosterman, 2010](#), pp. 28-29). According to [Volery \(2007, p. 35\)](#), the mixed embeddedness model is based on three assumptions:

- (1) that opportunities “must not be blocked by too high barriers of entry”;
- (2) that the opportunity shaped by the nascent immigrant entrepreneur should provide “sufficient returns”; and
- (3) that a nascent immigrant entrepreneur should be able to act on a recognised, or shaped, opportunity in a “tangible way”.

Although mixed embeddedness has advanced the theorising of immigrant entrepreneurship in important ways, it has not sufficiently grasped agency in terms of individual interests and aspirations, as argued by [Brettell and Alstatt, 2007](#); [Essers et al., 2010](#); [Khosravi, 1999](#). Moreover, it has not developed a sufficiently adequate understanding of gendered- and family-related aspects of entrepreneurial processes and activities ([Collins and Low 2010](#)).

Different frameworks are suggested in the literature to even better conceptualise why and how people engage in self-employment. One example is the “5M framework” developed by [Brush et al. \(2009\)](#). The 5M framework extends the existing 3M framework ([Bates et al., 2007](#)),

implying that an entrepreneur, to start and develop a business, needs access to a market, money and management in the sense of human capital (Bates *et al.*, 2007, p. 9). In the 5M framework, “motherhood” and the “meso/macro environment” are added. The motherhood metaphor refers to the household or family context and implies recognition of the fact that entrepreneurial processes are interconnected to gender and household dynamics. The meso/macro environment, on the other hand, includes considerations outside the market, such as cultural norms and policies, legislation and, let me add, spatial factors related to, for example, rurality and urbanity that may also impact entrepreneurial motivations, access to resources and realisation of capabilities (Brush *et al.*, 2009). This paper, focusing on female immigrants’ stories of their entrepreneurial start-up phase, will in particular highlight the significance of the two last Ms: motherhood that I prefer to call *family embeddedness*; and meso/macro environment that I in the further elaboration will narrow down to *spatial*, in this case, *rural context*. The intertwining of place, gender and entrepreneurship has been touched upon in the literature before, indicating, on the one side, that women are using entrepreneurship to change their lives and, in the process, are changing the places where they live (Hanson 2009, 245); on the other side, place makes a difference to how gender and entrepreneurship are practiced (Berg, 1997, p. 259).

To sum up, this study draws on literature on immigrant entrepreneurship and female entrepreneurship, and makes use of the “5M framework” developed by Brush *et al.* (2009) to understand processes that shape the entrepreneurial start-up experiences of female immigrants in a rural context.

#### 4. Methodology

A qualitative, interpretative approach was thought to be most appropriate for this study to provide a better theoretical and empirical *understanding* of various dimensions influencing the establishment of an ethnic enterprise (Gartner, 2007; Charmaz, 1995, 2005). Narratives are frequently used with interpretative methodologies to explore how individuals comprehend their everyday life situations because telling their stories enables individuals to draw on memory and current experience and to bridge the past and the present (Cullum, 2003; Cohen and Rapport, 1995; Andrews *et al.*, 2013). A growing body of qualitative entrepreneurship research reveals the rich understanding that may be reached through interpretative approaches (McKeever *et al.*, 2015; Essers *et al.*, 2010; Jones *et al.*, 2014; Miera, 2008).

Fieldwork was done during spring and autumn 2012 in Finnmark, involving business visits, informal conversations and semi-structured in-depth interviews with 29 entrepreneurs, 20 women and 9 men. The informants were selected via a strategy designed to include immigrant entrepreneurs active in different businesses and coming from different countries. I used personal networks when searching for informants, and in addition contacted consultants such as local leaders of business associations and advisors in the municipal administration working with entrepreneurship in the four selected municipalities. Moreover, social media (Facebook) was used. A list of potential participants was obtained, and I contacted some of them based on my wish for diversity in gender, nationalities, migration backgrounds and types of firms. All participants gave their informed consent[6]. The research project is approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services[7].

The key topics in the interviews with the entrepreneurs were as follows:

- their background in terms of childhood, education, previous work experience, their story about migrating to Finnmark and their new everyday life in the north; and
- their experiences with starting and running a business including motivations, financing, network, market, start-up phase, development of business, employees and plans for the future.

The interviews were done in Norwegian, as most of the participants spoke very well the Norwegian language, and only a couple of the interviews were done partly in English. All interviews lasted from 35 to 130 minutes, with an average of 75-80 minutes. They were accomplished and transcribed by myself. Quotes have been translated to English for the purpose of this paper.

During the interviews, it was revealed that two of the 20 female interviewees had come to Norway not independently, but as the minor daughters of their love migrant mothers. These interviewees were thus excluded from the data material analysed for this specific paper focusing on female *first-generation* immigrant entrepreneurs' experiences with becoming self-employed in a rural context. Hence, the paper explores the stories of 18 female immigrant entrepreneurs.

#### *4.1 Data analysis by use of constructivist grounded theory*

The transcripts were thematically analysed using a constructivist grounded theory (CGT) approach. Historically, grounded theory was established through a collaboration between Glaser and Strauss (1967) as a response to the devaluation of qualitative methodologies in social science research. Despite their focus on context and interpretation of meaning, mainstream grounded theory has an objectivist positioning. This implies the view that categories exist in the data independent of the interests and focus of the researcher. In reaction to this, Charmaz (1995, 2005) developed a constructivist version of CGT. According to Charmaz (2005, p. 509), CGT takes a reflexive stance, searches for multiple perspectives, assumes that the researcher constructs analytical categories and aims for *understanding through interpretation*.

CGT provides the researcher with precise procedures for how to conduct the analysis of the empirical data. Analysing data requires a focus on the meanings, intentions, experiences and actions in the stories told by the respondents to establish codes for data content (Charmaz 1995, p. 32). Charmaz (1995, 2005) recommends two phases of coding. The first is an introductory line-by-line coding (naming each line of the data material). This helps in taking an analytic stand towards the interview material while remaining close to the data. The initial line-by-line coding was done partly during the data collection period. This helped me to direct my focus in the next interviews. The second phase consists of focused coding that aims to establish and try out categories for capturing the data in relation to various research questions (Charmaz 1995, p. 40). The focused coding has been completed anew for each paper written from the data material. In the second round of coding for this paper, I conducted a systematic analysis to identify statements about *why* and *how* the female participants decided to settle and start their own business in northernmost Norway.

#### *4.2 Background information about the participants*

Thirteen of the interviewees in this paper can be categorised as love migrants. Their main motivation for settling in Finnmark was that they had met their future husband who happened to live there. Rather than moving to the rural north as a place of particular appeal, the female love migrants chose to settle down with a man. Most of the love migrants "entered the home" upon arrival. They got pregnant, and several of them spent some years with domestic tasks and duties before they started the process of entering the labour market. Most of them obtained paid employment when they started to apply for jobs, but not always as interesting as they had hoped nor in accordance with formal and informal qualifications from their country of origin. The participants in this study are to a large degree highly skilled, but we know from the literature that when education and work experience are gained in another country, issues related to qualification recognition may complicate the entrance of immigrants in the local labour market (Collins and Low, 2010). For a more elaborate analysis

of the challenges highly skilled immigrants may face when trying to enter the local labour market in the rural north, see Aure (2012).

The five last participants in this study can be categorised as lifestyle migrants. They have settled in northernmost Norway for slightly different reasons, but all of them tell stories about being attracted to the Arctic, and that they came to live in Finnmark to experience something “different” and “exotic”. Jentch and Simard (2009, p. 2) define lifestyle migration as follows:

[...] the spatial mobility of relatively affluent individuals of all ages, moving either part-time or full-time to places that are meaningful because, for various reasons, they offer the potential for a better quality of life.

Some of the lifestyle migrants started their business upon arrival, whereas others started as employees and later chose to start a business.

Regarding the household situation, only one of the female immigrant entrepreneurs was single at the time of the interview. The rest co-habited with a partner: the love migrants (except one) lived in partnership with an ethnic Norwegian man, while the lifestyle migrants (also except one) lived with a spouse from their country of origin. Of the 18 participant households, 14 had children aged 17 years or below at the time of business start-up. Table I gives an overview over all the participants:

## 5. Empirical findings and analysis

### 5.1 Modes of entry to entrepreneurship

As indicated in Table I, the female immigrant entrepreneurs are active across a variety of businesses including grocery shops and restaurants, a bride salon, shops selling clothes and lingerie, an architects’ firm, a culture school offering classes in dance and drama, a painting and surface treatment company, a tourism business and firms providing personal services such as beauty treatments and massage therapies. Some of them started their business years ago and have a lot of experience, whereas others started more recently. But, why did the different interviewees choose to start a business in the first place? The thematic analysis reveals four main modes of entry to entrepreneurship among the participants in this study:

- (1) entrepreneurship as a way out of unemployment;
- (2) entrepreneurship as a means to avoid underemployment;
- (3) entrepreneurship as a means to live in a region of perceived attraction; and
- (4) entrepreneurship as a favoured choice for women being employed in jobs corresponding to their qualifications, but having a preference for starting their own business for different reasons related to “status”, “independence”, “doing something meaningful”, etc.

In the following, I will present examples of each of these four modes of entry, and thereafter discuss how the experiences of the participants are inherently embedded in the family and in rural context they live in. But first, a table giving an overview of the interviewees and their mode of entry to entrepreneurship (Table II).

*5.1.1 Entrepreneurship as a way out of unemployment.* The literature points out that many immigrants are pushed into entrepreneurship because of discrimination that blocks other options, or as an outcome of limited language skills that makes it more difficult to enter the local labour market (Brettell and Alstatt, 2007; Collins and Low, 2010). This phenomenon is often called the disadvantage hypothesis (Min, 1984). Although not the main explanation of business start-up in this study, we do find examples of participants who explain that they started a business to escape unemployment. In fact, 3 of the 18 female entrepreneurs were

Name and age (apprx)	Migration background + region of origin	Trade, year of start-up and novice/serial	Marital status	Family dependents	Education
Chen, 40	Love migrant, Asia	Clothes shop, 2011 (novice)	Norw spouse	1 child, kindergarten	University degree
Anan, 35	Love migrant, Asia	Food store, 2010 (novice)	Norw spouse	1 child, baby	Unskilled
Mariam, 30	Love migrant, Russia	Selling leisure products, 2011 (novice)	Single	–	University degree
Natalia, 40	Love migrant, Russia	Beauty salon, 1998 (novice)	Norw spouse	2 children, school age	University degree
Larisa, 45	Love migrant, Russia	Boutique, lingerie, 2012 (novice)	Norw spouse	Adult child	University degree
Oлга, 45	Love migrant, Russia	Clothes shop, 2011 (serial)	Norw partner	1 child, school age	Craft certificate + courses at university level
Anastasija, 50	Love migrant, Russia	Bride salon, 2000 (serial)	Norw spouse	1 child, high school	University degree
Layla, 35	Love migrant, Russia	Audio services, 2007 (novice)	Norw spouse	1 child, kindergarten	University degree
Tiina, 35	Love migrant, Eastern Europe	Culture school, dance and theatre, 2005 (serial)	Norw spouse	1 child, school age	University degree
Marja, 60	Love migrant, Western Europe	Tourism business, 2001 (novice)	Norw spouse	Adult children	University degree
Sabina, 45	Love migrant, Africa	Café and food store, 2006 (serial)	Spouse from her country	Children aged 12 and above	Unskilled
Chotima, 40	Love migrant, Asia	Food store, fast food and catering, 2011 (novice)	Norw spouse	2 children, kindergarten and high school	Unskilled
Valery, 50	Love migrant, Russia	Café, 2006 (serial)	Norw spouse	Adult child	2 craft certificates
Viktoría, 50	Lifestyle migrant, Western Europe	Art studio, 1997 (serial)	Spouse from her country	–	Craft certificate
Eeva, 30	Lifestyle migrant, Western Europe	Paint and surface decoration firm, 2007 (novice)	Norw spouse	2 children, school age	Craft certificate
Jing, 45	Lifestyle migrant, Asia	Asian restaurant, 2010 (serial)	Spouse from her country	1 child, kindergarten	University degree
Hilda, 55	Lifestyle migrant, Western Europe	Restaurant, 2010 (serial)	Spouse from her country	Adult children	University degree
Vibeke, 35	Lifestyle migrant, Western Europe	Architecture firm, 2008 (novice)	Spouse from her country	2 children, kindergarten	University degree

**Table I.**  
Overview of informants



Mode of entry to entrepreneurship	Name/age/region of origin
Entrepreneurship as a way out of unemployment	Chen (40), Asia Anan (35), Asia Jing (40), Asia
Entrepreneurship as a means to avoid underemployment	Mariam (30), Russia Natalia (40), Russia Larisa (45), Russia
Entrepreneurship as a means to live in a region of perceived attraction	Hilda (55), Western Europe Olga, 45 (Russia)
Entrepreneurship as a preferred choice for women in satisfactory wage labour	Anastasiya, 50 (Russia) Layla, 35 (Russia) Tiina, 35 (Eastern Europe) Marja, 60 (Western Europe) Chotima, 40 (Asia) Valery, 50 (Russia) Viktoria, 50 (Western Europe) Eeva, 30 (Western Europe) Vibeke, 35 (Western Europe) Sabina (45), Africa

**Table II.**

Overview of the participants and the mode of entry to entrepreneurship

outside the labour market when they decided to become self-employed. This is the case for the Jing, Chen and Anan who are all love migrants from Asia. Jing and Chen have university degrees, whereas Anan is unskilled. Anan currently runs an Asian retail store. She got a short-term engagement as a cleaner in the municipality upon arrival to Finnmark, but the job contract was not renewed. She tried to get another job, but didn't succeed. However, she tells me that during her first months in Finnmark, she had noticed that it was difficult, if not impossible, to find good quality food from Asia. Hence, to target this vacant niche and simultaneously get an income, Anan together with her Norwegian husband soon decided to start importing Asian commodities with the purpose of selling it to friends and others. As this idea turned out to be successful, they soon needed more storage space. They, therefore, decided to start a retail store. At the time of the interview, Anan and her husband are *copreneurs*, owning and running the business together (for more on the concept of copreneurs, see [De Bruin and Lewis, 2004](#)). They have employed one full-time assistant and are about to enlarge their business to start catering as well. Anan, who loves to cook, is looking very much forward to get her new industrial kitchen up and going.

Jing is an example of an entrepreneur who was pushed into entrepreneurship in another way. She used to run a restaurant together with her co-ethnic husband, but they had closed it down some years ago because of fatigue. During this break, Jing and her husband were outside the labour market. They applied for some jobs, but didn't get the kind of employment they were interested in. In fact, they are both highly educated from their country of origin, and therefore "did not want assistant work", as Jing says. Hence, after a while, they rather decided to start a new restaurant together, but a bigger one, more professionalised and with more employees this time. Jing says:

In the beginning, the motivation to start a new business what not strong ... But, we felt that we had lost our value or that we had lost our identity after closing the restaurant, you see? So we found out we had to do something. Instead of taking on employment as assistants somewhere, we found out we rather wanted to run something ourselves again. That's what we knew how to do. And since my

husband truly is a very good chef, it would be good for him to make use of that competency. So all in all, starting a new restaurant was the best choice for us.

*5.1.2 Entrepreneurship as a means to avoid underemployment.* The literature indicates that underemployment, in the sense of only getting jobs well below one's formal qualifications, is common among highly skilled immigrants (Pettersson and Hedberg, 2013; Aure, 2012; Collins and Low, 2010). In my study, three participants, Natalia, Larisa and Mariam, reported that they were underemployed before their entrepreneurial start-up explicating that they only got "boring jobs" in the local labour market in Finnmark. All of them are highly educated, and two of them in addition spoke very well the Norwegian language at the time of their business start-up. Mariam, for instance, had been employed ever since she finished her degree in Norway, but only in low-skill jobs. She says that for a long time, she applied for "hundreds of jobs" without even being invited to a job interview. Her main problem, she reflects, was probably her lack of professional networks in Finnmark combined with the fact that, although highly educated, she was so young that she had no relevant work experience either from Norway or from her country of origin. She ended up being frustrated. Hence, after a couple of years, she decided to start her own business to hopefully "earn more money, get a higher status and last, but not least, do something meaningful". She established an internet-based shop selling specialised leisure equipment.

Larisa has a related story: she had a context-specific higher degree from her country of origin and was not able to convert this competency to relevant positions in the labour market in Finnmark. She, therefore, worked as an assistant in different shops, but got bored. The boredom combined with the lack of alternative opportunities in the local labour market made her consider the possibilities for starting her own shop, an option she thought would be more interesting, challenging and meaningful for her. Also, after a short period of preparations, she started a boutique selling underwear for women.

*5.1.3 Entrepreneurship as a means to live in a region of perceived attraction.* Although some of the participants in this study somehow were "pushed" into self-employment, for most of the interviewees, this was not the case. For Hilda, entrepreneurship was a choice that allowed her and her husband Hans to live in a region they really wanted to live in. Hilda and Hans came to Finnmark as lifestyle migrants from Europe. They both hold a university degree and started a rustic restaurant together directly after they settled in the rural north. In fact, before migration, they had spent several summers in northern Norway as tourists and had long dreamt of living there. They tried to apply for jobs while living in their country of origin, but did not succeed. But, as they already ran a small consultancy business together in their country of origin, and enjoyed being self-employed, they after a while started to think of self-employment as a strategy that would allow them to move to Finnmark and make a living there. In addition, as Hilda was "good at talking with people" and also had some experience from working in cafes, and because her partner Hans was "good at cooking", they decided that running a small restaurant together as copreneurs was the option they would go for. One day, they found the perfect restaurant premises for rent at the internet. They responded to the advertisement, got the contract and did all the paper work regarding the business start-up before relocating to Finnmark a few months later. Hilda explains:

We decided already in 2007 that we wanted to live in Norway. Until then we had been a lot in Northern Norway on vacation, particularly in Lofoten and Vesterålen. In fact, for many years I felt that I *had to* travel to the north of Norway during the summer holidays. If a year for some reason I couldn't go, my heart really hurt! So, in 2007 we decided that we wanted to live in Norway [...] We searched for jobs at the internet, we applied for jobs, but we didn't get any. It didn't work out until 2010, when we found the café for rent here in [Finnmark]. When we found the advertisement, we immediately decided that running this café could be our opportunity to live in the north [...]

*5.1.4 Entrepreneurship as a preferred choice for participants with satisfactory wage labour.* The fourth and last mode of entry identified in this study is entrepreneurship as a preferred choice for participants with satisfactory wage labour. This means that the interviewees report that they had interesting jobs that corresponded well to their formal and practical qualifications, but that they, for different reasons, preferred to start their own business. The main motivations cited were that self-employment would give them a certain “independence” or “flexibility”, and that as self-employed, they would enjoy a “higher social status”.

*5.1.5 Independence.* In the literature, the idea of being one’s own boss to obtain independence is often cited as an important motivation to become self-employed (Zarrugh, 2007; Brettell and Alstatt, 2007; Baycan-Levent *et al.*, 2003; Ramadani, 2015). In the study of Hilbrecht and Lero (2014), for instance, most participants reported of independence as a significant motivational factor for business start-up, and several of the self-employed participants talked about experiencing a “temporal flexibility”, allowing them to organise their days in a way that permitted them to meet different needs (for further elaboration of this theme, see Hilbrecht and Lero, 2014, p. 31). This is also the case in this study: several of the interviewees tell me that they chose to start a business to be their own boss and hence enjoy a certain “freedom”, “flexibility” or “independence”[8]. They emphasise that running their own business was a better option than being hired because, as they explicated, as self-employed they could decide their working hours and holidays, they could decide when and how often they wanted to have a break, they could decide to take some hours off if they had to follow-up on children and their activities, etc. Natalia, a love migrant who runs a beauty treatment salon, for instance, says:

The best thing about running my own business is that nobody tells me what to do (laughter). Or, I do have an accountant calling me to ask “where are the accounts?” But, other than that I am my own boss. I do not depend on anyone. If I want to travel, I travel. If I want to attend a trade fair, I go. Nobody tells me that I can’t do it.

*5.1.6 Status.* Another theme often cited by the interviewees who were formerly employed in relatively well-paid jobs is related to social status. Several of the participants, such as Olga, Chotima, Jing, Valery, Layla, Larisa, Natalia and Mariam, talk about being motivated by the idea of enjoying a higher status as self-employed than what they felt they had as “ordinary workers” in the local labour market. Chotima, for instance, is an unskilled love migrant from Asia. She arrived in Finnmark more than ten years ago, and she has worked since her arrival as an assistant in a grocery shop, an elderly home as well as in a kindergarten. But, even though she liked her jobs, she always wanted to do something else. She says: “I always dreamt of running something of my own”. She explains that as she has no formal education, entering self-employment was her only option if she wanted to escape the “lower status” of assistant work. She is, therefore, proud to run her own retail store with catering now, even though it entails a lot of work.

Olga from Russia also talks about having chosen self-employment as a way to obtain a higher social status. After having taken courses at different schools and levels upon arrival in Finnmark, she worked some years in what she terms “a well-paid secretary job” in a company. However, even though the job was fine, she says that she always dreamt of being her own boss. When I ask her to explain a little more about why she decided to start her own business when already being employed in a good job, she says:

I think it’s related to what kind of person you are. I am quite ambitious. So I couldn’t imagine remaining in a job with a lower status, if you know what I mean. For me, it’s natural to always try to improve my situation. So that’s why I took this choice [to start my own business].

Although entrepreneurship as a means to avoid unemployment and underemployment are quite well-known from the literature, the third mode of entry of immigrant entrepreneurship identified in this study is certainly not: immigrant entrepreneurship as a lifestyle-related choice to live in a geographical rural space of attraction is only superficially debated in research so far (except Stone and Stubbs, 2007). Entrepreneurship as a means to obtain flexibility or independence, on the other hand, has been more widely discussed, e.g. in the interesting monography about the rising entrepreneurial class in Barbados (Freeman, 2014; see also McGowan *et al.*, 2012; Smith, 2000; Phizacklea and Ram, 1996; Baycan-Levent *et al.*, 2003; Brettell and Alstatt, 2007). Viewed together, the negotiations among the participants to pursue economic independence and new modes of self-making in a (for some of them) particularly attractive rural space may indicate the making of a new immigrant middle class in rural parts of northernmost Norway.

### *5.2 Family embeddedness and the rural context*

*5.2.1 Family embeddedness and the importance of spousal support.* Most of the female entrepreneurs interviewed in this study highlight the importance of spousal support as a motivational or even decisive factor during the start-up phase. This is the case whether the participants were pushed into entrepreneurship by unemployment or underemployment; attracted by the idea of living in the rural north; or motivated by ideas of independence, flexibility and status. Eeva may serve as an example: She is a lifestyle migrant who originally came to Finnmark to experience something different and exotic, and who later decided to stay after having met her future husband there. Her husband Leif ran a business himself for a period of time, but when he and Eeva met ten years ago, he had started to work as an employee in the construction business again. Eeva is a rare woman in that she holds a Master craftsman's certificate in painting and surface treatments. At arrival in Finnmark, she first worked in a company as an employee. But after she and her husband got two children, she started to think about the possibility of starting her own business:

I think that when you've got children, and you're through the baby period, you often feel that you need new challenges, you need to develop. And after the toddler period, you also know how strong you actually are. You know you can do it!

Eeva says that she has been thinking a lot about what actually made her want to start her own business: "It's is difficult to give a simple, straight answer", she says, and explains that a series of things just went her way: she was over the toddler period, she wanted to do something new, she thought about starting her own business [...] And at that very moment a local entrepreneur in the painting business closed down his firm leaving the niche vacant. She just decided to go for it:

It was a big jump into something I didn't know. I have no education in entrepreneurship or management, you know. But my husband had run a firm some years before, so he helped me a lot. He was a really god support for me all the time. Without him I couldn't have managed. [...] I think that when you start your own business, you need someone to support you, someone who believes in you, because you will necessarily feel insecurity at some point. You leave a steady job, a steady income, and suddenly you don't know of you have an income a few months ahead. So for sure, I wouldn't have started the business without the support from my husband.

Olga, who is a highly educated love migrant, is another interviewee who tells me that during the start-up phase, her husband was of great significance. She explains that her husband supported her business idea from day 1:

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He could have said “No, there are too many clothing shops in the town,” but he didn’t. He supported me all the way. He is such a positive person. He has been running his own company for many years, so he gave me advice. In addition, he is the one who does the accounts for me.

Chotima, who is an unskilled love migrant, tells another story that even more reveals the importance of spousal support in the start-up phase. Chotima’s situation is an exception compared to the other participants in this study. Although the others tell stories about moral support and instrumental assistance from their spouses, Chotima’s husband was for a long time very reluctant to her idea of starting her own business:

In the beginning he asked me questions all the time: Are you sure about this? Can you really do this? And is this really what you want? All the time questions. And I said “I can try” and “I can learn: If it doesn’t work for me, then we know that it doesn’t work. Then at least we have tried”. But he still wasn’t persuaded.

After quite some time, Chotima contacted the municipality herself and got assistance and advice there. She says that her husband finally decided to support her business idea after more than two years of discussions back and forth. Her husband’s consent was decisive for her business start-up, among other things, because she and her husband have a little child together that has to be taken care of in the afternoon after the opening hours of the kindergarten when Chotima has not yet finished work in her retail store. Hence, it is Chotima’s husband who picks up their son in the kindergarten every day. Sometimes, the father and the child go home to eat and rest, whereas other days, they come to the retail shop to eat in the cafeteria area, and thereafter, they go home together, all three of them.

In line with the findings above, recent scholarship indicates that many entrepreneurial decisions, processes and outcomes are influenced by the family (Jennings and Brush, 2013; Ramadani, 2015; Eddleston and Powell, 2012; De Bruin and Lewis, 2004). The family may, hence, play a key role in explaining entrepreneurial processes. In terms of the launch decision, several studies indicate that women are particularly motivated to start their own business to obtain a better balance between work and family (Jennings and Brush 2013). This wish is not always met, however. Sometimes, it is rather the other way around, that female entrepreneurs face difficulties in establishing a balance between family and work as found in Ramadani (2015, p. 215).

*5.2.2 The rural context.* The most common theme in the start-up stories, in addition to family embeddedness, relates to spatial embeddedness. For instance, some participants emphasised that they were motivated by the idea of contributing to place development in their new home region. This is in accordance with what is identified as a quite common motivational factor in the mainstream (as opposed to immigrant) rural entrepreneurship literature (Anderson, 2000; McKeever *et al.*, 2015; Borch and Førde, 2010). Layla, a love migrant from Russia, for instance, started a business selling cultural services together with her husband a few years ago. They do artist management, small-scale CD production and produce concerts and other cultural events for festivals, conferences, public and private customers including booking of artists and renting equipment for the sound and light settings. Layla stresses that she and her husband are very concerned about the fact that they are located *in* the multicultural Arctic, and most of all, they want to assist and promote artists *from* the Arctic and produce cultural events with an Arctic touch. Layla explicates:

We wanted to create values for ourselves, of course, but more importantly, we wanted to create values for the region we live in. Perhaps that will make our little child proud of us one day in the future? (laughter). No, but we wanted to do something significant and meaningful for peoples and cultures here, while at the same time being able to live out of it.

Marja is another example that highlights the importance of rural embeddedness as a motivational factor for entrepreneurial activities. Marja is a love migrant who is running a small nature-based tourism business together with her Norwegian husband. They are offering bed and breakfast accommodation in a guest house. Suggested activities for the tourists who are coming are mainly bird watching, river fishing, deep-sea fishing and hiking. In addition, they offer onsite experiences such as traditional sauna. The reason Marja and her husband entered entrepreneurship was not their own wish to become self-employed as such; rather, it was related to the fact that they wanted to contribute to place development in the village they live in. Particular circumstances explain their business entrance: Some years back, the localities of an earlier fish plant were put for sale in their village. The fish plant was beautifully located at the bank where the local Salmon River meets the fjord. Marja and her husband immediately saw opportunities to create a unique guest house with nature-based activities for tourists. They tried to motivate local youth, but no one was interested. When a heavy equipment contractor a little later showed interest in the localities to use them for storage of his big machineries and vehicles, the couple quickly decided to take action. They were able to buy the localities with the aim to renovate them. Their goal was partly that the old fish plant would be preserved for historical and community reasons, and partly to contribute to local place development through the establishment of accommodation for tourists, so that tourists would be able to visit the village, spend money and enjoy good experiences in the nature there.

## 6. Discussion and conclusions

By perceiving women as “active agents” in their pursuit of entrepreneurship in a rural context (Brettell and Alstatt, 2007; Pettersson and Hedberg, 2013), this paper identifies four distinct modes of entry into entrepreneurship and shows that they are embedded in the family context and in the spatial (rural) context in which the participants live. Through an analysis of unique data from northernmost Norway, moreover, this study reveals the importance of including gendered, (classed), family as well as various spatial dimensions in the further development of frameworks of models for understanding immigrant entrepreneurship as a phenomenon.

In fact, whether the participants were pushed into entrepreneurship by unemployment or underemployment; whether they became entrepreneurs to be able to live in Finnmark; or whether they were employed in satisfactory jobs, but motivated and attracted by ideas of flexibility, independence or status, most of them told stories about being inherently embedded in family and in space. Regarding family embeddedness, the majority of the participants highlighted the importance of spousal support in the start-up phase. Actually, some of the female entrepreneurs in this study have husbands who decided to join them in the business start-up as joint partners (e.g. Chen, Anan, Vibeke, Jing, Marja, Layla and Hilda), whereas others have husbands who have kept their jobs, but who still have contributed massively to their wives’ start-up process by giving emotional and, in many cases, also instrumental support (for a theorising on emotional and instrumental support, see Eddleston and Powell, 2012). Chotima’s story illustrates this particularly well, indicating that as long as her husband was reluctant to her business idea, she was not able to start the business, and it was not until he gave his consent that she actually launched her retail store.

In addition, the start-up experiences of the interviewed immigrant women are shaped by the spatial context in which they live: Several of the participants of this study were motivated by the idea of contributing to local place development, such as in the cases of Marja and Layla discussed above. This is a theme that is rarely, if ever, discussed in the immigrant entrepreneurship literature, but that is rather found in the rural entrepreneurship literature,

whereas simultaneously, in the rural entrepreneurship literature, immigrants as entrepreneurial actors are rarely addressed (Borch and Førde, 2010; Spilling, 2011; Kilkenny *et al.*, 1999). My data suggest that these literature works would benefit from a dialogue, and that place embeddedness in terms of a wish to contribute to local place development may also be a relevant dimension in the conceptualisation of immigrant entrepreneurship. To conclude, this paper shows that, although the modes of entry to rural immigrant entrepreneurship are diverse, they are often related to the pursuit of an initial feeling of belonging in the new region of settlement. Hence, developing our knowledge of how to not only attract but also retain and increase the feeling of local belonging of immigrants may be important for many rural regions in the Western world. This is because rural immigrants not only represent a much-needed in-flow of younger people in a typically decreasing and ageing population. In addition, immigrants entail cultural variation and job creation and may contribute to rural development.

### Notes

1. [www.ssb.no/en/innvbfef](http://www.ssb.no/en/innvbfef)
2. In 2013, Statistics Norway: [www.ssb.no/befolkning/statistikker/folkendrkv/kvartal/2014-02-20?fane=tabell&sort=nummer&tabell=164147](http://www.ssb.no/befolkning/statistikker/folkendrkv/kvartal/2014-02-20?fane=tabell&sort=nummer&tabell=164147)
3. [Http://finnmarksanalyser.norut.no/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=124:befolkningsstruktur-finnmarksanalyse&catid=48:befolkning&Itemid=112](http://finnmarksanalyser.norut.no/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=124:befolkningsstruktur-finnmarksanalyse&catid=48:befolkning&Itemid=112)
4. Of these 170 immigrant entrepreneurs, 49 are women according to this special table. As 52 per cent of the immigrants in Finnmark are women, this means that the proportion of female immigrant entrepreneurs is even lower, around 2.2 per cent.
5. Building on the interactive model developed by Aldrich and Waldinger (1990).
6. They were informed about their rights to refuse participation, and to withdraw their statements at any time.
7. [www.nsd.no](http://www.nsd.no)
8. Anan, Chotima, Vibeke, Olga and Natalia talk quite much about this.

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#### About the author

Mai Camilla Munkejord holds an interdisciplinary PhD from 2009 in Social Anthropology/Rural Sociology/Human Geography/Gender Studies from the University of Tromsø, the Arctic University of Norway. The thesis was also published as an academic book in 2011 entitled *Hjemme i nord*. She has published papers in *European Urban and Regional Studies*, *Sociologia Ruralis*, *Sosiologisk tidsskrift*, *Norsk Antropologisk Tidsskrift* and *Tidsskrift for kulturforskning* and several book chapters. She currently does research on gender and immigrant entrepreneurship, as well as migrant on care workers in Finnmark, northernmost Norway. She has a double institutional affiliation being employed as Research Professor at Uni Research Rokkansenteret in Bergen and as a Professor in Social Sciences at the UiT The Arctic University of Norway, see: <http://uni.no/nb/staff/directory/mai-camilla-munkejord/>. She has also published in *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review*, *Work, Employment & Society*, *Journal of Population Ageing* and *Tidsskrift for omsorgsforskning*. Mai Camilla Munkejord can be contacted at: [mai.munkejord@uni.no](mailto:mai.munkejord@uni.no)