

Jan A. Fuhse

*Ethnizität, Akkulturation und persönliche Netzwerke*

*von italienischen Migranten,*

Leverkusen, Barbara Budrich-Verlag 2008.

## **English Summary**

### **Ethnicity, Acculturation, and Personal Networks of Italian Migrants**

The study applies an interactionist theoretical perspective to the case of migrant cultures and tests it with data from a survey of Italian migrants in Stuttgart, Germany.

The first part reconstructs the interactionist perspective in sociology. Arguments from Symbolic Interactionism and the Chicago School, from Norbert Elias's Figural Sociology, and from the theory of social networks of Harrison White and others are drawn together and condensed to an interactionist view of collective identities. According to this perspective, social structure is shaped in the interplay of interaction structures and symbolic patterns and categories. This relational and phenomenological understanding of social structure is related to the new discourse on social inequalities by reformulating the concepts of life-style, milieu, and subculture. The fundamental conjectures are:

1. Meaning is anchored in social networks and structures these.
2. Network contexts differ in their cultural imprint. These different socio-cultural contexts can be termed 'milieus'.
3. Social categories are an important aspect of the level of meaning in networks. They map networks and structure them in return. Subcultures feature strong and salient categories as boundaries between themselves and their social environments.

These conjectures are applied to the case of migrant cultures in the second part. Ethnicity is viewed as a social category along criteria of descent, differentiating ethnic groups from one another. Migrant cultures are a special instance of subcultures because of their origins in migration processes. Cultural difference is thus imported into the receiving contexts. Migrant cultures center on the tension between sending and receiving context. The personal contacts of migrants are a crucial factor for the ways in which they cope with this tension. Migrants with many personal relationships to members of the receiving context (high social assimilation) are expected to show more acculturation and less salience of the ethnic identity.

This interactionist perspective is contrasted with the economic perspective on migrant cultures as developed by Hartmut Esser. Esser starts from the assumption that socio-economic attainment is the decisive dimension of the assimilation process. These two alternative perspectives on migrant cultures are condensed into competing hypotheses which are tested with data from a survey on Italian migrants in Stuttgart, Germany.

The hypotheses are tested in multivariate statistical procedures (such as partial correlations, OLS- and Logit-regressions), controlling for sex, migrant generation and the educational level in Italy. Social assimilation is measured as the proportion of non-Italian alteri named as important by the respondents, socio-economic assimilation as the cultural and economic capital available in the receiving context (education in Germany and income). The most important results of the empirical analysis are:

1. Acculturation (measured as the respondents' religiosity and their tolerance for divorce, abortion and homosexuality) chiefly depends on social assimilation. Socio-economic attainment only influences tolerance (not religiosity) and less so than ethnic contacts.
2. The salience of ethnic identity is analyzed on two dimensions: the subjective placement between sending and receiving context, and the more concrete alienation from the sending context. Alienation primarily depends on the social assimilation and not on socio-economic attainment. The subjective placement, in contrast, is mostly independent of both dimensions and seems to be represent a merely symbolic ethnicity.
3. Linguistic practice and social assimilation are strongly coupled. A direct influence from socio-economic to social assimilation (as suggested by Esser) is hardly identifiable. Rather, an indirect influence through the linguistic practices exists. Language works as 'practical ethnicity' in the migrant culture studied. The boundary between the migrant culture and the receiving context is drawn on the basis of language.

Overall, the empirical results support the interactionist perspective on migrant cultures. The hypotheses from the economic perspective, in contrast, are mostly falsified. The successful integration of migrants thus depends chiefly on the establishment of personal relationships to members of the receiving context, and on the learning and practicing of their language.