



## **Migration and situated contexts: natives and Maghrebian habitants of San Marcellino (South Italy)**

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### **Abstract**

Literatures on ethnic identity and acculturation strategies - integration, assimilation, separation or marginalization (Berry, 1997) - have shown how host populations perceive migrants and that migrant populations may be viewed very differently by the majority group or the larger society. We could understand the complex interaction between individual factors, the individual's belonging to a group, the intragroup and intergroup dynamics, while bearing in mind that at the same time the dimensions we have mentioned interact reciprocally within the group and with external groups.

For this reason, we have conducted semi-structured interviews with inhabitants – natives and Maghrebian – in an area in the territory surrounding Naples where there is a Mosque and which has a high density of various kinds of migrants. This self-descriptive tool of the interview aims at collecting information ranging from a description of oneself to a description of others and of the context.

With relation to the aforementioned objectives, the participants were selected on the basis of a theoretical sampling: natives and Maghrebian migrants with various characteristics and social roles, with and without reciprocal contacts.

The interviews and the textual materials gathered were audio-recorded. They were transcribed and underwent qualitative analysis by means of the methodology of grounded theory. This is a “substantive theory”, which is derived via an inductive method from the study of a phenomenon, an explanation, an interpretation of a specific phenomenon which is particular because it is built by means of a theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

This study thus intends to identify classification systems which support the representation of the self and of others in terms of belonging or extraneousness in relation to contexts which imply various levels of sharing, participation and trust in order to promote forms of interconnection and planning involving the different cultures simultaneously present in a given territorial community.

In this regard, recognising the reciprocal classifications enables us to investigate the elements which are supposed to be the basis of processes of integration.

**Keywords:** Qualitative Research, acculturation, Contact hypothesis, Intergroup relations, social categorization.

Literature on ethnic identity and inter group relations focuses on integration as the best strategy of acculturation in terms of well-being in the process of migrants' adjustment to a new context. It increases social cohesion; avoids the development of racist attitudes in the receiving population; promotes symmetrical intergroup relationships (Berry, 1997).

We have learned that the perception of acceptance that migrants have of the hosting community is among the factors that promote the processes of integration (Berry, 1997). A further factor consists in the realistic expectations that favor integration, differently from excessive expectations, which generate an adaptation that is not adequate. Finally,

the social support received is of fundamental importance.

The peculiarity of this approach is that it takes the hosting community into account in terms of reception and support, but it does not take into account the dimensions of reciprocity between natives and migrants and considers the latter to be figures who need help and not people able to offer knowledge and resources.

We could, in fact, understand the complex interaction among individual factors, the individual's belonging to a group and the intragroup and intergroup dynamics, while bearing in mind at the same time that these dimensions interact reciprocally within the group and with external groups. We have thus further developed Berry's acculturation model in the perspective of the mutual dynamic process between two groups, the foreigner and the host, considering the interpersonal and intergroup relations according to the model developed in the investigations by Bourhis R.Y., Moïse L.C., & Perrault S. (1997), Barrette & Bourhis, (2004).

The Dovidio, Gaertner and Saguy presentation and discussion of investigations of the Common Ingroup Identity Model show us the evolving nature of intergroup bias, illustrating the complexity of "We" in social attitudes and social changes (2008).

Within this frame of reference, recognising the reciprocal classifications enables us to investigate the elements which are supposed to be the basis of integration and difference.

In these pathways the feeling of collective identity favors the building of a system of feelings of rapport which are functional in the sharing of a common situation and in a common opportunity for change.

Migration is conceptualized as an ecological transition that involves vast changes in contexts of interaction, in both values and social rules. This also has an effect on the status and social relations between natives and newcomers (Martinez, Garcia-Ramirez & Maya, 2002).

More recently, Mantovani has emphasized (2008) that the study of reciprocal representations within a context, if it is carried out while maintaining the differentiated perspective (the "we's" and the "they's") necessarily leads to bringing elements of differentiation into focus. The research must thus be rooted in a common dimension to which the interviewed subjects can make reference and in which they can recognize themselves. In this direction studying migrant and native experiences in a shared

and situated context becomes relevant. Furthermore, within an ecological approach, we need to define research criteria and procedures which take into account the dimensions of relationship and of interaction among people who share the same community, and which consider the bureaucratic and material dimensions that have great relevance in the processes of acculturation.

In this sense the process of integration into the local community is also the result of the influence of the context, of the social networks and of personal and group characteristics, in addition to the real relational and material resources which can be utilized by people who are part of a community (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005).

Our research goals also included the exploration of the ways in which these dimensions influence the processes of acculturation in a specific context. In particular, attention was placed on communication interactions among various actors of the same context for a mutual recognition and to create common spaces in order to identify strategies of integration.

We then investigated intercultural experience in relation to Italian and migrant contexts at micro meso macro levels (Prilleltensky, 2008), namely:

- Context characteristics
- Interactions
- Neighborhooding
- Joint group
- Shared events
- Shared value actions

Using this perspective we have carried out a study directed towards understanding the dynamics of reciprocal recognition between residents and migrants on the northern shore of the Mediterranean, within a community in an area in which there is the presence of migrants and of associative contexts within which interaction is possible between natives and foreigners.

In order to understand the orientation towards reciprocal recognition and thus integrative action, this work has thus examined the aspects that contribute to perpetuating the difficulties and the dimensions that in specific contexts of social and political life are obstacles or resources in the process of interaction between Italians and migrants.

### Objectives

The project deals with the predictive factors of social cohesion in multicultural contexts and the factors that

promote the integration of newcomers into the community.

This study thus intends to identify classification systems which support the representation of the self and of others in terms of belonging or extraneousness in relation to contexts which imply various levels of sharing, participation and trust, in order to single out forms of interconnection and planning involving the different cultures simultaneously present in the given territorial community.

In this regard, recognising the reciprocal classifications enables us to investigate the elements which are supposed to be the basis of pathways of integration and difference.

In these pathways the feeling of collective identity favors the building of a system of feelings of rapport which are functional in the sharing of a common situation and in a common opportunity for change.

#### **Context: San Marcellino**

For the research we chose a context where we had previous significant contacts with people strongly involved in the local context and where there are associations that intend to use the results of our investigation. In San Marcellino the research team have contacts, connections and interaction with key people of the area, Associations, Schools, and the local Mosque active in the area. San Marcellino is a municipality of about 11,000 inhabitants situated in an area that was originally dedicated to agricultural activities (strawberry, peach, and tomato crops), and today it is engaged in expansion of its service industries and the development of small businesses, in a territory that is difficult because of the presence of organized crime in control of the markets of labor and of contracts, as local newspaper reports demonstrate. It is an area that has a low cost of living: rents and the prices of consumer goods are lower than in the neighboring towns (Errichiello, 2007).

#### **Participants**

With relation to the aforementioned objectives, the participants were selected on the basis of a theoretical (intentional) sampling (Corbin, Strauss, 2008). As we were looking at an urban context, we followed Martini and Sequi's model (1988) to identify the key people to interview. In fact, we paid particular attention to the choice of people to involve in the research process and to the specific citizens to contact. Such criteria (Arcidiacono, Procentese 2008) allowed us to take into account the participation of citizens who, due to their variety of interests, were representative of the social actors in the local context.

They were first of all chosen among the leaders of the so-called in community: politicians who manage power and representatives of social or cultural services, business and commerce; and from among the out community, such as powerless social minorities, people who offer assistance in informal ways, and minority or opposition politicians.

The issue is then to purposefully select information-rich participants (Patton, 2002).

The specific participants were the following:

13 key people in the context: 2 parish priests, the mayor, 2 key people in the Islamic community (the Imam and a labor consultant), 1 general practitioner, 2 school teachers, 1 psychologist from the social and health family center, 2 cultural mediators, 1 volunteer from the local parish and 2 volunteers from the associations.

9 Italian residents of the town and its surroundings with and without contact with migrants, aged between 23 and 57 years, differentiated with respect to educational level, profession, and political and social participation. Among those: 1 tobacconist, 2 shop assistants, 2 bartenders, and 4 people with no contact with migrants living in San Marcellino.

8 migrants, with and without stay permits, who have migrated recently and not recently (at least 5 years), males and females of various ages (range from 21-55), various conditions of marital status, of schooling and number of children; involved in associations, in Mosque activity, and with no social activity.

#### **Strategies of contact**

The first phase of the participative research project was the contact between the researchers, natives and migrants, a significant opportunity for the establishment of the co-constructed research environment. Through listening and mutual knowledge, a relationship of mutual trust was built among the participants in the research project. In this sense, preliminary meetings took place through intermediary figures that enjoy the trust of the host community. These figures prepared the terrain for the preliminary meetings with other people known to be the most authoritative in the research context. The literature (Hanlin, Bess, Conway, Evans, Cown et al., 2008; Nelson & Prillentsky, 2005) shows the need for prolonged preliminary contact, but if strong contact already exists with the key people in the territory, it may not be necessary to spend long periods of time in the research context. In our experience, the presence of bridging figures between the group of researchers and the area or context

investigated, was a preliminary aim, almost a prerequisite. This was accompanied by the search for experts, scholars and researchers who in various capacities were familiar with the territory studied and with the topic being investigated. Thus, in building up the research team we preferred people involved in the local context, i.e., local researchers. In order to introduce the university team into San Marcellino we invited the Imam to the University and all the university researchers joined in the cultural parties and training initiatives in the local context.

### **Instruments**

A Socio demographic form and semi-structured interviews (Legewie, 2006).

In that research, the narrators were invited to explicitly reconstruct the situation and the experience as they saw them in the moment. For Schütze (1983), the interview begins with narration as the starting point, and only following this are explanatory questions relating to that narrative asked. For Legewie, Schütze's contributions are important, but it is of greater necessity for the interview to respond to the criteria of the communicative act set out by Habermas (1981). The interview must be the expression of reciprocal consensus between the parties, and it must occur by virtue of an agreement of cooperation between the interviewer and the interviewee; for its success, the motivation and the cooperation of both are essential. Therefore, for the success of the interview, the structural and personal preconditions that make mutual understanding possible are important. This self-descriptive tool of the interview aims at collecting information ranging from a description of oneself to a description of others and of the context.

In order to learn about the different identities and the intergroup relations within a multicultural society, and in order to find out key factors of the process of integration of migrants and natives from a participative and situated perspective, the methodology of research explored the following particular processes:

For the Italians: the presence of migrants in the town (origin and characteristics), contact (occasional, cohabitation, work, school), the forms of interaction of the Italians with the migrants (laws, norms and local customs) and of the migrants with the Italians (adaptation, interaction, integration), reciprocal representations, common and/or shared experiences.

For the migrants: the process of migration: the arrival in Italy and the reason for coming, the processes and

the experiences of arrival; the present situation; the contacts and the forms of interaction with the place, the institutions, the inhabitants; sharing of contexts and their perception; reciprocal representations, common and/or shared experiences in associations, with neighbours, in the workplace.

For both groups, in the interviews drafted after the discussion and coding of the first interviews gathered, the focus was placed on the characteristics and particularities of San Marcellino, on the modalities of life of its inhabitants and on the future prospects for individuals and for the community.

The interviews and the textual materials gathered were audio-recorded, transcribed and underwent a qualitative analysis by means of the methodology of grounded theory. This is a theory which is set up by the researchers in the course of field research and on the basis of elements emerging during the carrying out of qualitative analysis. When we talk about theory we do not intend formal theories but a "substantive theory", a theory which is derived via an inductive method from the study of a phenomenon, an explanation, an interpretation of a specific phenomenon which is particular because it is built by means of a theory.

### **Data analysis**

The process of codification, as defined by Grounded Theory, is a cyclical process, in that in the open, axial codification phase the researcher reverts from the raw data back to the concepts, to return again to the data in the selective codification phase.

The coding is the core procedure of the group of researchers, who request discussion and share procedural decisions. As an example of a completed project, we cite the following procedural steps: first, three senior researchers and four junior researchers analyzed the textual material obtained from the individual interviews.

In this first phase of interpreting the textual material, after reading and codifying only a few interviews, every researcher formulated their own suggestion for codification in the form of a memo.

The first codifications thus obtained were discussed by the whole working group, which identified some shared codes to be attributed to all the textual material; the team then defined some theoretical macro-categories, concepts with which to analyze the general text.

### **Results**

In order to analyze the processes of inter-relationship between Italians and migrants and with the purpose of overcoming stereotypes and generalized representations, and of identifying shared processes and reciprocal inter-relationships, we chose as the context for inquiry a specific territory (the municipality of San Marcellino in the Agro Aversano area) and a community (the Maghreb Muslims) that has a Mosque in that territory. The Mosque is a center which delivers services (emergency reception at night, hairdresser/barber, sale of foodstuffs, labor consultant), a place for entertainment (hall with tables and a refrigerator for cold drinks; speaker systems for parties) and for study (classes with desks and blackboard). It thus constitutes a place of visibility, also for the hosting community, which has received the Mosque without any problems.

The whole research project, the modalities of construction of local relationships, the organization of the research and the description of the modalities of the work, as well as the vicissitudes that accompanied the activities have been described in conferences (Arcidiacono, Procentese, Bocchino 2008; Arcidiacono, Procentese Natale, Mahboubi, Canfora 2008) and are the object of an article that is in press (Arcidiacono, Procentese, 2009). In this paper we limit ourselves to the description of some initial considerations, beginning from the interviews and the contacts we initiated in order to make them.

### Expectations about Italy: the opportunity to work

From a first coding emerges, on the part of the migrants, a motivational dimension based on decisions that are not only individual but also family decisions, which induces one to think about the type of expectation of the migrants interviewed. In fact, they hope not only to be able to work and have better living conditions than those they had in their countries of origin, but they expect also to be able to support their families economically. As regards the territorial community in which they reside, the choice is linked to the presence of an informal organized network that favors the settling of new arrivals.

In the case of the town of San Marcellino, the community seems to have been chosen because it is perceived as being welcoming, similar to their culture, and because it offers opportunities to work. With regard to the ecological point of view, these expectations are a good beginning for assuming “non down” positions with respect to the local people. Even if there is a paradox given by the illegality in which the migrants live, since many do not have a

stay permit, and work without declaring it. This places them in a condition of asymmetry with respect to the local population and above all, they cannot make use of some rights, nor can they contribute to the improvement of social conditions.

*“It was a territory with almost no controls and with great tolerance and ignorance towards immigration, and then it became a place where it was easy to settle without any problems.” (the mayor of San Marcellino). In fact, the Imam states: “with every legal directive for regulating the black market workers there is a turnover of the people present: many move towards the North of Italy, which offers opportunities for legal work and thus the conditions to improve earnings and be able to have family members come to Italy”.*

### Attitude of the local people towards Maghrebian migrants

From the interviews emerges a general negative stereotype of migrants, which is inserted in a double representation of them that alternates between seeing them as a danger (*they get drunk, they steal, they are in organized crime*) and as a resource (*they are good workers and do the jobs that Italians don't want to do any more*). The negative attributes refer mainly to migrants from Eastern Europe. In the descriptions the Maghreb people do not have any particular attributes, and in the interviews of Italians they are perceived as serious workers, even if socially it is as if they were invisible.

As for the Arab women who are housewives, but university graduates, a strong prejudice emerges about them: *“When I talked with my neighbours, they used to say, ‘But did you go to school?’ And I said, ‘Excuse me, I'm a university graduate!’ ‘But why are you a university graduate? A graduate?’ They don't believe it, they find it strange, but why?”*

In coding the texts, the creation of categories seems to turn on the dimension of clean/dirty: *“They come to your house and look at how clean it is, how orderly it is, they understand that we are people, too.”* (Interview A 3a, a Muslim woman with a university degree in Italy for 9 years with three children).

*“There are so many differences: city, country, ... there is the difference between rich and poor ... if you put them together, they cannot get along ... they can never be friends ... They say that one is dirty, that other one steals, one of them says that the other one has ‘got money’.”* ... The category of clean as social desirability and of dirty as a negative attribute is

often mentioned in the interviews, and the cultural meanings attributed to this double characterization should be studied more in depth.

### Conditions of life and relationships

With respect to their cultures, both the migrants and the natives interviewed have strong cultural identities that are expressed through traditions and religion.

Certainly a characterizing aspect of the family organization, which becomes an indirectly relevant aspect in the modality with which the foreign women approach the natives, is the supremacy of male decision power.

With regard to the migrants, maintaining their culture of origin takes place through encounters with other fellow countrymen and above all through the mediation of the Mosque present in the town of San Marcellino.

Sometimes the Italians participate in the activities organized by the community of migrants, but they remain suspicious in the reception of food-related and other customs. Certainly the knowledge given by constant encounters with migrants favors a process of reciprocal knowledge and understanding even of respective customs.

### Isolation and closed minds

In general the relationships are characterized by reciprocal isolation (*Along the main street of San Marcellino, on Saturday Italians and Arabs go walking but do not say hello to each other and almost do not see each other*) and distrust: *"I would like to know them. But I think that they, too, are really afraid of us."* (male, 35 years old, aeronautics company, volunteer with Caritas, interview 11).

For the most part *"the only contacts that exist are imposed by circumstances"* (woman, Italian, inhabitant of a neighboring town).

### The asymmetry of relationships

From the interviews carried out with Italian social service workers emerges an attention on their part towards the migrants, oriented towards giving support in the areas of health, labor and bureaucracy. This on the one hand constitutes an important resource, but it seems to maintain a relationship of asymmetry between natives and migrants, as different groups in that no initiatives are thought of in which to favour reciprocal knowledge. As for the Italians, it is clear from the interviews that they have shown themselves to be receptive in a dimension of offering help to migrants, but they do not seem to be

interested in their culture. A first way that the migrants interviewed approach the natives is through the request for help; over time, through continuous contacts with some local people, relationships of reciprocal knowledge are created, which allows the migrants to make their culture known, as well.

### Reciprocity

In particular on the part of the migrant women, a meeting in the home is reported as the moment of reciprocal recognition.

For men, the bar is equally the place for meeting and the way of measuring interaction; being invited to drink coffee together is something which, when it occurs, is welcomed with great pleasure and which in the north happens much less often, and is given as an example of how relationships with local people are good and of why many migrants prefer to stay in San Marcellino rather than emigrate to northern Italy.

*"In this little town the relationship is one of esteem and respect. There is perfect integration, I repeat, also because the parish priest has known how to work with the Imam, establishing a relationship of perfect esteem. Just think, last year the priest had an accident and almost lost his life and the Imam together with a group of Muslim immigrants went to visit him. And they prayed for him on the day of Ramadan."* (int. 3, 1, woman who does volunteer work in the parish, member of the center-right wing party "polo della libert ")

### Insecurity, conflicts and negotiation

In the face of the stereotyped vision of migrants as carriers of social insecurity, the migrants describe their insecurity in the local situation, in particular when they go outside the circuits of separation and of work.

It emerges, for example, from the stories of Italians and migrants that it is dangerous to walk in the evening, because there is the risk of being beaten or hit by a car. One of our students explains, however, that walking is almost a factor which indicates social vulnerability; a person who can will use a car always and in any situation; for this reason the migrants on foot or on bicycles, risk being the object of "jokes" (of being bothered and/or beaten up).

A young man 18 years old who was used to spending time with the local young people tells why the territory is not safe for migrants: *"You can never know what will happen. For example, one evening, during a walk with friends they say for fun: 'oh, shall we burn this one up?' And then they go and beat him*

*up. It has happened to me lots of times! I used to go out with Italians, they saw other Italians and said, 'Let's see if we can manage to beat them up'.*"

In another interview the Imam told about when the local boys used to throw rocks into the Mosque and the community photographed the guilty parties; later the parish priest contacted the families of the boys and without the intervention of the law (the police), the families of the local people went to the Mosque to apologize, thus putting into action inter-institutional strategies for overcoming local conflicts through the intervention of social mediation.

### Final remarks

The Muslim community presents itself as "low-key". Social invisibility as a group seems to be a strategy pursued with the local population. This could be considered as a strategy of integration, a sort of decategorization strategy for the reduction of inter-group bias, as some authors suggest (Dovidio et al., 2000,2005; Miller 2002). Such a style of relationship is adapted, in any case, to the lifestyle of the local context, which is very closed in private life, characterized by the saying repeated again and again: *Fatti i fatti tuoi e campi cent'anni*, "Mind your own business and you will live a hundred years".

For that matter, as has been asserted by Luque-Ribelles, Herrera, Garcia-Ramírez, Hernández-Plaza, Paloma et al, (2008), when migrants live in asymmetrical social conditions, separation is the acculturative strategy to achieve well-being. If separation is a defensive strategy in a territory that is considered hostile, in the Agro Aversano territory it could be said to be an element that migrants and natives have in common in their common perception of the local territory.

Finally, it is interesting to note that, when faced with the high level of interest of the national and local press in this time period in the events linked to crime in these territories because of the presence of groups involved in organized crime (the Casalesi clan), in our interviews of Italians and migrants, this subject is up to the present almost completely absent. Sometimes it is hinted at or referred to, because it is recognized as having a function in the supply of labor and in protection against petty crime. At the same time, the territory shows, instead, a strong social life: the mosque acts as a social center, there are volunteer associations with deep roots, and the inter-institutional relationships are very active. The Imam, the parish priest and the mayor act in synergy to solve problems; scholastic projects are realized within national projects that favor intercultural dialogue, the

parish and the mosque co-operate with the municipal government for the realization of the *Festa della Repubblica* (Republic Day) in an inter-ethnic dimension. Some strategies for resolution of conflicts already mentioned are emblematic as strategies of reconciliation put into action on a local level.

A common superordinated identity which could act as a unifying element, does not seem to emerge, and there is evidence of a common social context in which both migrants and local people interact, that is a social space in which the aggregations take place by virtue of shared values. The new parish priest asserts, *"I do not see racism towards the migrants, but I see instead forms of intolerance and lack of respect that are generalized in our context. The fact that San Marcellino is full of migrants means that the people are receptive and willing... in these three months that I have been here, I have noticed many problems, but certainly not because of the migrants or the Muslims!"*

From the analysis of the territory examined there seems to emerge in the context a multi-dimensional set of strategies for relating and acculturation: separation, social invisibility, mediation/negotiation, sharing of spaces and times (public holidays). From the interviews the activities of sharing are shown to be full of meaning in the politics of small daily events (coffee offered at the bar, the invitation to one's home, the common group of friends), more than in organized local events (encounters at school, public festivities). The strategies of social mediation show the immediate effects of inclusive policies put into action by the local key people; these seem to be the most fruitful in the creation of integration and good living conditions at a local level. To conclude with the words of the mayor: *"They tend to live all together. In this way they protect themselves from the outside world, which is us, because they have not been accepted yet. Thus, here it is: we have gone beyond tolerance, we are experiencing successful hosting; but integration is still to come. These are key passages in order to have what I believe to be the future which must inevitably belong to us."*

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