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# Negotiating Italianità: Ethnicity and Peer-Group Formation among Transnational Second- Generation Italians in Switzerland

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## Abstract

It is common for the descendants of migrants to go through phases of contrasting feelings of belonging during adolescence, negotiating their affiliations to their co-ethnics, the majority society and migrants of other origins. Many studies focusing on the second generation have looked at how migrant youth create new spaces of belonging, shaped by the plural social systems in which they grow up. Drawing on research on second-generation Italians in Switzerland, this paper analyses such processes of negotiation and discusses the importance of peer groups. It looks at the various positionalities developed by members of the second generation and demonstrates that rather than solely motivated by ethnicity and shared culture, these are also shaped by factors such as shared interests with peers. By moving away from a primary focus on ethnicity, which dominates research on migrant youth, the paper shows why members of the second generation consciously or unconsciously reify or disregard their migrant backgrounds.

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## Introduction

At the end of the day, your whole life is about Italy, whether you want it to be or not. At home you speak Italian, you eat Italian, but you have to be at work punctually anyway, you are surrounded by Swiss, and that's good, that's what makes it all perfect, ..., you just take the best of both worlds .... But still, you'll have difficulties classifying yourself, because you are not Swiss, you are not Italian, you are something in between, and it's still cool to, well it's like a trademark, ..., With an Armani T-shirt you show what exactly you represent, and with an 'Italia' T-shirt, I also want to show 'hey, look, THIS is who I am, this is my background, and I am here anyway.

Pasquale is a second-generation Italian DJ. He is part of an association called *Gentediaare*<sup>1</sup>, a group of five second-generation Italians who live in the same region in Switzerland, close to the river Aare, which gives the organisation its name: 'people from the Aare'. *Gentediaare* maintain a web-page, and regularly organises cultural events such as concerts or club nights with Italian and other DJs. Although the members do not explicitly address their activities to an Italian audience, events are promoted with a specifically Italian flavour, their web-page is in both Italian and German, and there are

various Italian 'ethnic markers'. For example, each member of the team presents himself on an Italian Vespa (scooter), some of the names of the parties are in Italian (e.g. *Ritmo Mediterraneo*) and the entries in the guestbook where party-goers and friends write short notices are in *Italiondo*, a mix of Italian and Swiss German. *Gentediaare* is one of a number of second-generation Italian associations in Switzerland that celebrate their Italian background, especially in the realm of house music and party culture.

This phenomenon of 'making culture' among migrant youth has been observed in a number of contexts, including among South Asians and Latin Americans in North America (Itzigsohn 2000; Purkayastha 2005), and Sikhs and Caribbeans in Britain (Alexander 1992; Hall 2002). These studies criticise the equation of community, culture and ethnic identity in multiculturalist discourses, which described ethnicity as a 'fact of life' and as a natural distinction that explains cultural difference. Ethnicity has been de-essentialised in a large body of anthropological and sociological literature, showing that migrants and their descendants are not fixed in their ethnic identity, but that they are constantly negotiating and making sense of the cross-cutting cleavages of plural social systems (Baumann 1996; Baumann/Sunier 1995; Eriksen 2002; Hall 1995). Studies have shown, for example, the situational and creative nature of 'making culture', especially among migrant youth (Alexander

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1 [www.gentediaare.ch](http://www.gentediaare.ch).

1992; Hall 2002; Alund 1991), and how diasporic people create new identities and cultural forms, known for example as 'creolised', 'syncretic', 'alternate' or 'hybrid' (Hall 1990; Rutherford 1990; Vertovec/Cohen 1999; Werbner/Modood 1997).

To describe such diverse forms of social and cultural affiliations and identifications, Anthias (2002) proposes the concept of 'multiple positionalities' to understand identity as process rather than possessive property, taking into account structural factors as well as agency and practice.

This paper looks at such multiple positionalities, conceptualising 'positionality' as the way in which individuals position themselves in relation to peers of various cultural backgrounds, co-ethnics and kin. Positionalities are shaped by the institutional surroundings in which individuals grow up as well as by structural factors, and they can change according to situation and during the life-course.

The aim of this paper is not only to focus on how migrant youth 'make culture' and create new cultural forms and identities, but also to show how and why some members of the second generation consciously distance themselves from co-ethnics. The reasons underlying such different positionalities are closely related to association with specific peer groups. These peer groups are partly based on shared cultural backgrounds, but are also motivated by factors unrelated to ethnic origin such as class, common interests, consumer culture or political orientation.

Some studies of migrant youth tend to picture minority youths' positionalities primarily as reaction to racial and ethnic ascriptions by others (e.g. Anthias 2002). Despite the importance of race and experiences of discrimination, this focus reduces migrants to racial and ethnic categories and 'results from the researcher's choice of boundaries and of what he or she is prepared to take notice of' (Baumann 1999:153). Furthermore, it carries the danger of hiding other ways of

belonging and affiliations that have nothing to do with regional or ethnic origin. If we want to de-essentialise identity and ethnicity, we need to look at factors that cut across the boundaries of classical social categories such as ethnicity, race, religion and national origin. Hence, rather than limiting our studies to factors which lead to the reification of ethnicity, we should try to understand why some individuals of the same national origin or religious orientation do *not* reify this same background. Baumann (1996), for example observes what he calls 'cultures of commitment', groups that cross-cut national, religious and ethnic identifications, such as socialist or feminist groups, gays and lesbians, or environmental activists. By studying sites where people come together because of common interests, rather than their ethnic background, he tackles the reifying discourses of culture, community or ethnicity. The research presented in this paper shows that not only 'cultures of commitment', but also peer group associations play crucial roles in the positionalities and ways of belonging of migrant youth.

Another way of de-essentialising ethnicity is to look at differences within groups and analyse why, when and how individuals of the same ethnic origin and with comparable migration histories 'make culture', or do not care about it. The combination of Baumann's suggestions that we look at specific sites of both ethnic reification and cross-cutting ties, and an attempt to look at differences within one group, helps to explain why and how migrant youth develop diverse ways of belonging, defined locally in specific places such as the home, public space, schools and other institutions, as well as transnationally and ethnically within families and with other co-ethnics, and in the context of transnational ties to country of origin. Thus, we can tackle the question of why for some people, ethnic reification becomes important during specific phases of their lives, while for others it does not. Thereby, notions of the 'second generation' as being 'between two cultures' (Hämmig 2000) can be questioned, showing how

members of the second generation form new identities and spaces of belonging that are strongly shaped by informal peer group associations.<sup>2</sup> These new spaces and associations may be reactions to constraints within the family, or counter-discourses against the majority population. They are created in the context of structural and socio-cultural dynamics within the state and the ethnic social arenas, but also as conscious choices of belonging to specific groups, be they ethnic, religious or related to shared interests, political orientation or consumer culture. Sometimes, these belongings are expressed through the celebration of cultural difference and pride in acting as 'cultural broker'; at other times, migrant background plays no role in the formation of such affiliations.

The findings presented in this paper draw on qualitative ethnographic research carried out in the German part of Switzerland as well as in southern Italy during a one-year period between 2004 and 2005. Along with participant observation, 58 life-history interviews were carried out with descendants of Italian post-war labour migrants aged between 25 and 40 years old. Twenty-three of the interviewees had migrated to their parents' village of origin in southern Italy (see Wessendorf 2007). In contrast to a lot of research on the second generation, which focuses on adolescents, the interviewees for this research are adults reflecting back on their childhood and adolescence, and the choices they have made. The research focused on the reasons for different patterns of social affiliation and belonging, and the interrelationships of integration and transnationalism among second-generation Italians of the same socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The idea of the second-generation growing up 'between two cultures' originated in the 1970s (Watson 1977) and has been criticised for its focus on the problems rather than the possible advantages of being of migrant origin.

<sup>3</sup> There is no general agreement on how to define the 'second generation'. Here, I use the term to describe the children of migrants in a host country, as well as those who came to the host country during early childhood and attended school there.

## **Post-war Italian labour migration to Switzerland and the second generation**

Post-war Italian labour migration to Switzerland was part of European labour migration with tens of thousands of southern and south-eastern Europeans moving to Western Europe to help build the post-war economy. By 1970, more than half a million Italians lived in Switzerland. Due to return migration, numbers had declined to approximately 300,000 by 2001 (Niederberger 2003). For a country of seven million inhabitants in total, these numbers were considerable and Italians still form the largest migrant group in Switzerland.

The majority of Italian migrants were unskilled, landless farmers from rural areas in the south who migrated to industrial cities in the German and French speaking parts of Switzerland. Their settlement process was economically and politically rather unstable, and most migrants dreamed of returning to Italy as soon as their finances would allow it. Swiss immigration policies aimed for the temporary residency of labour migrants. Under the *Gastarbeiter* scheme, facilities such as Italian kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, and the teaching of the mother-tongue for Italian children were designed to facilitate their return. However, the majority of Italian children went to Swiss schools though they attended the weekly two-hour Italian language classes. Those Italian children who did attend all-Italian schools grew up in particularly strong Italian social networks, speaking Italian in school, with friends during spare time and, along with the majority of Italian children, at home. Many of these children maintained their predominantly Italian social networks during adolescence and adulthood.

Despite economic hardship and uncertain residency status, about two-thirds of Italian migrants ended up staying in Switzerland because of jobs, their children's education and better health care facilities (Bolzman et al. 1997). However, they continued to dream of returning to Italy. Because of this dream, they travelled back and forth between Italy and Switzerland several times

a year together with their children and the summer holidays were usually spent in the village of origin in Italy. These yearly holidays played an integral part in Italian children's upbringing and strongly influenced their identity formation and integration in Switzerland. The majority of second-generation Italians have positive memories of these holidays. They enjoyed spending time by the sea, being outdoors and promenading in the *piazza*, and their families in Italy did their best to please their relatives from Switzerland. The summer holidays, around which the whole year was organised, and the presence of the homeland in both discourse and practice among Italians in Switzerland, was an important part of Italian children's lives. These 'transnational social fields' (Levitt/Glick Schiller 2004) were similar for the majority of Italian children in Switzerland.<sup>4</sup> At home, they spoke Italian or a regional dialect, and weekends in Switzerland were characterised by outings with Italian friends or relatives, going to Italian Mass and having extended Sunday meals.

However, many second-generation Italians' upbringing differed in terms of the institutional arrangement in the neighbourhoods, for example regarding the numbers of other Italian children in the Swiss schools. In most schools, migrant children were a minority and Italian children developed friendships and networks with children of Swiss and other national origins. But in some urban areas, classes were dominated by Italian children. Similarly, the ethnic composition of the neighbourhood played an important role in the development of children's social networks, although importantly, the social networks during childhood often changed as the children grew older.

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<sup>4</sup> Basch et al. (1994) draw on Bourdieu's notion of 'social fields', defining them as 'a set of multiple, interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized and transformed'. A transnational social field connects actors across borders and includes those who do not move (Levitt 2004: 1009).

All in all, despite the difficult economic, social and political circumstances in which second-generation Italians grew up, they have integrated rather well into Swiss society in terms of upward mobility, thanks to the availability of apprenticeships and jobs, the strong support of their families, and their parents' emphasis on education and socio-economic achievement (Bolzman et al. 2003, Juhasz/Mey 2003). Despite discrimination against Italians during the early years of migration, today, they are seen as an established and integrated migrant minority (Wimmer 2004). While they had earlier been accused of being loud, criminal, dirty and thieves of Swiss women, they have risen to the top of the hierarchy of popularity in the Swiss discourse on different migrant groups (Hoffmann-Nowotny et al. 1997). The Swiss now sees them as 'part of us', even though many first and second-generation Italians' social networks are primarily Italian.

Among the Swiss urban middle-classes in particular, attributes of what they see as an Italian life-style, such as good food and fashion, have become symbols of good life (Wimmer 2004). Thanks to increasing Swiss tourism to Italy from the 1970s, the positive images of Italy and the structural integration of the majority of Italian migrants, most Swiss do not perceive their social (and sometimes cultural) non-integration as problematic. This stands in contrast to their attitudes towards other migrants such as the Turks. For example, while in public forums such as newspapers and television, Muslim migrants are repeatedly criticised for their rigid gender relations and the restrictions imposed on their daughters, the numerous Italian daughters who are now in their thirties, and who grew up in similarly patriarchal and restrictive families, seem to have been forgotten. However, while gender-related conflicts also took place within Italian families, the sanctions against the breaking of gender-related rules were usually confined to the families themselves. They were therefore not discussed publicly, even if physical violence was sometimes involved. The same holds true for conflicts within

Swiss families, where instances of domestic violence against women are often left uncovered.

This example shows that perceptions of integration and cultural difference within mainstream society must be treated carefully. Second-generation Italians were lucky in that they grew up in the context of the post-war economic boom, a time when integration into the labour market was easier than for the second generation today, and when their country of origin evolved into a holiday destination and therefore became somewhat idealised. Hence, second-generation Italians did not experience the same extent of discrimination that other youth of migrant background experience today, particularly in education and access to the labour market.

Nevertheless, many of them went through negotiations of belonging during adolescence or in their early twenties, and they repositioned themselves in relation to the majority society, their co-ethnics and their regions of origin. The people they met at particular points in time, or, in other words, the formation of peer groups, shaped these evolving positionalities. For example, some second-generation Italians spent their childhood primarily with other Italian children, but extended their social networks to peers of other national origins during adolescence through common interests such as sports and other hobbies. In contrast, some children who had few Italian friends during primary school related to Italian peers during adolescence. Thus, ethnic affiliations can change during the course of life and can sometimes become more or less important during adolescence. In the following section, I discuss the reasons underlying these processes, using two life-history examples of second-generation Italians.

#### **Differing positionalities: the family, the peer group and the country of origin**

##### *Luca: Belonging to a big family*

Luca was born in Switzerland in 1972. His parents are Sicilian and migrated to

Switzerland in the early 1960s. They both worked in low-skilled jobs, while Luca's grandmother, who also lived in Switzerland, looked after him and several of his cousins. Luca spent his first three years of school in an Italian primary school because his parents planned to return to Sicily. When they reevaluated the possibilities of returning home and decided to stay longer in Switzerland, they sent him to a Swiss school. He integrated quickly into the new school and found a new circle of friends of Italian origin. In his spare time, he played football with second-generation Italian and some Swiss children in the neighbourhood, but spent most of his time with his cousins at his grandmother's place in another part of town. The time he spent with his extended family is one of Luca's happiest childhood memories, and contact with his relatives of the same age has remained important all through his adolescence and adult life.

During his early teenage years, Luca got into difficulties at school. He had managed to get into the highest level of secondary school, but could not cope with the requirements, partly because he received no support at home, because his parents were going through a marital crisis at the time. During this period, his parents did not allow him to go out much, and he strongly felt what he calls 'the rigorous hand' of Italian education. When he was 17, he was finally given more freedom and started going out more often, especially with his cousins and other Italians from the same part of town. He describes this period of his life and the friendships he developed during this time as crucial for his later life:

'We were always a gang of about 12 or 13, and we went to town together to get our respect and ... to mark our territory. ... And then we formed a group, the 'Latinos', with other Italians and Spanish guys, we were about 30, and then the Turks started coming to town and we got into trouble with them because they provoked us ... I went out nearly every night to hang out with friends. ... Well, this time was quite important for me ... and I also got into

the party scene. ... We went to Raves and Techno Parties every Saturday. The people there were all *secondos*<sup>5</sup>, mainly Spanish and Italian.'

Luca was strongly integrated into this group of young people with Italian and Spanish backgrounds who shared interests in consumer culture (cars, designer clothes) and music. Their being together was motivated by several factors. It was based on shared experiences of southern Europeanness within their families and in the transnational social fields in which they grew up, the negotiation of the lived Italianness at home, and the Swissness outside the home, for example at work. Furthermore, the group's identity was shaped by the conscious segregation from other migrant youth, such as the Turks, on the grounds of 'turf-wars' in inner-city public space, a phenomenon that has been observed in other contexts, too (Alexander 2000). The strengthening and performance of male group-identity in such conflicts was particularly important, the 'Latinos' being a male-only group.

However, it was not only the 'Latinos' who provided Luca with a strong sense of belonging, but also his wider network of kin, in both Switzerland and Sicily. Luca and his family went to Sicily for holidays every summer. He describes these holidays as wonderful times of being together in big, lively groups of relatives. But after a few weeks, he usually longed to go back to Switzerland to see his friends.

Today, Luca works for an insurance company and has a successful professional career. His partner is a second-generation Sicilian and they visit Sicily every year. Up until today, the majority of his friends are of Italian or Italian-Swiss origin. He explains that his social networks had always been with other people of migrant (primarily Italian) background

'...because they had the same way of thinking as me. ... It's the mentality, the

mentality is really different, especially at the time [in his youth]; now of course, you grow, you get more mature and you communicate with other people, too. But at the time, it was the communication .... I just WANTED to be with immigrants, and the Swiss were a bit colder and you related less to them. I think it's simply the interests you had, the common interests, you are *secondo*, you are an immigrant, and you seek contacts with the same people.'

This search for people of the same background is also motivated by experiences of exclusion in Switzerland. Although not all second-generation Italians had such experiences, Luca was called names by other children because of his migrant background, which contributed to his feeling of being different. Luca's life and his positionalities are characterised by a continuity of strong Italian kin and peer networks. His extended family provides him with a feeling of embeddedness in a transnational social field, and he emphasises that such deep and sustained family connections distinguish Italians from the Swiss. Luca's way of 'doing family' (Purkayastha 2005) as a means of asserting his ethnicity is characteristic of many second-generation Italians.

Within the Italian peer group, he finds ways to negotiate both the strict Italian ways of his parents at home, and what he perceives as the cold mentality of the Swiss. He resolves the feeling of 'being in-between' by socialising with other adolescents of similar backgrounds and by creating a new ethnic repertoire, the 'Latino' group, that is different from that of their parents, the Swiss majority society and other migrants such as the Turks. The Latinos emphasise a more spontaneous Latin art of improvisation as counter-discourse against what they see as 'petit-bourgeois' Swiss majority society, characterised by cleanliness and order, a phenomenon that has also been observed by Wimmer (2004). Furthermore, Luca's integration into the second-generation peer group was motivated by the realisation of a lack of essential ties with Sicily because during his

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<sup>5</sup> The term '*secondo*' is used both in public discourse and among descendants of migrants to describe members of the second generation of all backgrounds.

holidays, he felt the cultural difference between himself and Sicilians who had never emigrated.

Most importantly, Luca not only shares his experiences of growing up in a transnational social field with his peers, but also his interest in consumer culture and leisure activities such as football and clubbing. Sharing such interests is crucial for sustaining social networks with other members of the second generation and the assertion of their ethnicity. Other second-generation Italians such as Pasquale (the House-DJ cited in the introduction of this paper) confirm this. Although many Swiss are just as interested in House music and consumer culture, second-generation Italians have developed their own specific ways of 'doing ethnicity' by adding an Italian flair to mainstream culture. They publicly assert their Italianness through the consumption of Italian products such as Italian fashion (Giorgio Armani, 'Italia' T-Shirts, etc.), cars (Fiat, Alfa Romeo) and motorcycles (Ciao, Vespa).<sup>6</sup>

However, not all descendants of Italian migrants who associate with other second-generation Italians do so through consumption and common sets of publicly visible signifiers. Sandro, for example, is a member of the Italian community of Jehovah's Witnesses in Switzerland. He explains that in addition to the cultural links and the shared experiences, his connections to people of Italian background have been strengthened by shared religion. He emphasises that 'just being Italian' is not enough, but that you need a 'double-tie', a common interest in addition to the common ethnic background.

Pasquale's and Sandro's analysis of their affiliations with co-ethnics is applicable to the majority of second-generation Italians. However, there is a difference in the way Sandro and Pasquale live their 'double-tie'. Sandro grew into the Italian group of

Jehovah's Witnesses because of his mother's faith and did not actively negotiate his belonging and association to the group. In contrast, Pasquale and Luca negotiated their belongings during specific periods of their lives, asserting their cultural origins and creating new cultural repertoires. Although their integration into Italian social networks and second-generation peer groups continued throughout their upbringing, they consciously 'made culture' during their adolescence and developed their own ways of dealing with being different from both the majority society and first-generation Italian migrants. Pasquale describes this process as follows:

'Somehow there was suddenly a shortcoming.... For me, it was suddenly not interesting anymore to eat with older Italians, and eating was about it. ... We wanted to create a meeting place outside the Italian Associations and the Italian Catholic Mission and the pork-fests, but with the aim of playing Italian music for Italians.'

Pasquale and his friends were very successful with their association and the events they organised, attracting many members of the second generation who similarly asserted their identities as descendants of Italian migrants.

The assertion of ethnic identity and the creation of such new patterns of belonging and cultural practices have often been interpreted as reactions to racism and discrimination. While for some second-generation Italians in Switzerland experiences of exclusion certainly played a role, other contextual factors should be borne in mind. As mentioned above, second-generation Italians did not suffer the same degree of discrimination and exclusion as other migrants in Switzerland. Today's positive view of Italianness and Italian life-styles certainly contributes to second-generation Italians' self-confident assertion of their ethnicity. Hence, today, the negotiation of belonging and identity among some of the descendants of Italian migrants takes place as a proud celebration of what the majority society has come to

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<sup>6</sup> For similar patterns of ethnic assertion through the consumption of 'cultural products' see Maira (2002) and Purkayastha (2005). For examples of Swiss-Italian style and fashion see [www.webdjsitalodisco.ch](http://www.webdjsitalodisco.ch); [www.gentediaare.ch](http://www.gentediaare.ch); [www.djlenoe.ch](http://www.djlenoe.ch)

appreciate as a more enjoyable and relaxed way of life.

But why do not all second-generation Italians celebrate their Italian background? In the following section, I show that cultural practices and expectations of co-ethnics can play a dominant role in the second generation's positionings.

*Anna: 'This is NOT what I wanted to be'*

Anna was born in Switzerland in 1974. She is the oldest of three sisters. Her parents migrated from Apulia in southern Italy in the 1960s. Her father worked in a factory, and her mother worked as a seamstress from home. Anna went to a Swiss kindergarten and a Swiss primary school. She did not know any German when she entered kindergarten because she had spent most of her time with Italian relatives and Italian children in the neighbourhood. However, she learnt German quickly when she started making Swiss friends at school. Her parents were very integrated in the Italian social networks in Switzerland and active in an Apulian association, where they regularly organised social and cultural activities. Anna enjoyed these activities as a child, but felt increasingly pushed into participation as she grew into adolescence. During this time, she joined a youth group related to the church in her neighbourhood and got to know many Swiss youngsters. She describes this period during her adolescence as very important:

A: You know, when it was about finding my identity, I mean, belonging - am I Swiss or Italian? - it was difficult, it was a phase that I guess every child of migrants goes through.

SW: How did you resolve it?

A: The youth group was very important. There were extremely creative and active people. With my Italian friends it was more like, listening to Eros [Eros Ramazzotti: a famous Italian pop star], ..., and make-up, it was somehow more superficial, I noticed that it wasn't about creating and developing but instead, about representing something. In the

youth group, it was more about what I really felt like doing and creating.'

Anna says that during this time she had two options. She had friendships with other Italians, but realised that she did not share their interests in consumer culture, Italian fashion, make-up and pop music. Through the youth group, she learned that other youngsters did things she was more interested in, and she describes how getting to know these youngsters was like discovering a new world. As a result, she spent more and more time with them, including in the evenings. The friendships with the young Swiss not only triggered her negotiations of belonging, but also led to major conflicts with her parents who did not understand why she wanted to spend so much time outside the home. The more they restricted her, the more she protested, until things came to a head and she moved out of her home at the age of 17. Although this clash was dramatic for the whole family, Anna says that this was the moment when they, she and her parents, learned to communicate better and talk about things within the family. Anna did not move back to her parents' home, but they managed to resolve the conflict and find ways to grow close to each other again.

This event also had an influence on her experiences in Italy. Anna had enjoyed the yearly holidays in Apulia during her childhood. However, when she grew older, she experienced the many visits to her extended family as stressful and never felt that she was part of the local community. She felt particularly exposed when walking through the village streets with her younger sisters and hearing the women whispering: 'Whose daughters are they? Where do they belong?' 'The village was like a stage', she recounts, 'but you had nothing to do with the stage, only with certain people, but you felt as if you were next to the stage, you were not really part of the piece.' Rather than feeling integrated in southern Italy, Anna felt that the atmosphere in public places was sometimes hostile and unwelcoming. Moving out of home did not make things easier, she knew that she was now the 'bad apple' in her family and that

everybody was talking about her. On the grounds of her experiences in the transnational social field, i.e. at home, with Italian peers in Switzerland, and in Italy, Anna distanced herself from other Italians in Switzerland and from Italy during her adolescence, and she knew that 'Italian' was *not* what she wanted to be. She felt integrated among the Swiss, and she felt that this was where she really belonged. The fact that she had not had any experiences of discrimination facilitated this affiliation. Distancing herself from people of Italian origin became less important with time and today, she no longer has such strong feelings about Italy and Italians in Switzerland, and neither does she emphasise her affiliation with the Swiss.

Anna's adolescence was characterised by both choice and restriction. The choices were experienced through her Swiss peers, with whom she could follow her own interests, while the restrictions were experienced through what she describes as her parents' 'Italian, more rigid way of education', the villagers in Italy, and her second-generation peers with what she perceived as their superficial interests. Importantly, Anna's 'ethnic choices' (Gans 1979; Waters 1990) were strongly influenced by the more traditional attitudes about gender relations among Italians in Switzerland, and her parents' fears of letting their daughter spend time with youngsters of the opposite sex, particularly in the evenings.

The arena of gender relations is one in which female descendants of Italian migrants most often disagree with their parents, and more traditional expectations of female gender roles can lead to conflict within families. At the time of Italian migration to Switzerland, southern Italian families were characterised by patriarchal family structures with strict gender roles, compulsory heterosexuality and a considerable responsibility for kin relations. Much of the anthropological research on Italian families at the time focused on what was defined as the 'honour and shame complex' described as a gender-based

division of labour and morality.<sup>7</sup> The categories of honour and shame have been criticised as essentialist cultural categories that serve the simplified homogenisation of the Mediterranean as 'cultural space'. However, even though family relations in both Italy and among Italian migrants in Switzerland have seen changes (King/Zontini 2000; Meyer-Sabino 2003), honour and shame continue to play an important role in southern Italian family relations and gender ideologies (Baldassar 1999; Kertzer 1991).

For Anna, gender relations were important not only in her negotiations with her nuclear family in Switzerland, but also during her holidays in Italy. Hence, Anna made her ethnic choices on several grounds. First, the cultural practices of her parents and other Italians which she experienced as restrictive; second, a lack of a 'double-tie' and shared interests with co-ethnic peers, and third, the possibilities offered to her by her Swiss peers with whom she shared many interests. Importantly, her association with Swiss peers cannot be described simply as a reaction to the cultural expectations of co-ethnics. Rather, the process of discovering her own interests and the wish to integrate into a particular peer group with a particular life-style is an integral part of every person's adolescence. Unlike Luca, Anna was not interested in 'doing ethnicity', because she did not share the interests of those who called themselves 'Latinos', and her experiences within this social field were not characterised by integration and belonging, but rather by the pressures and expectations to conform to specific cultural practices. Anna feels integrated into Swiss society, though the process of integration was characterised by disruption rather than continuity because it entailed conflicts within her family. Today, she realises that her parents were more flexible and less

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<sup>7</sup> In fact, the honour and shame complex has been described as one of the major analytic tools for the exoticisation of Mediterranean societies. See for example Driessen (2002), Greverus, *et al.* (2002). For a critical examination of the concept and a historical overview of anthropology's use of it, see Giordano (2002).

rigid than many of their migrant relatives and friends. They were open to change and to negotiations with their daughter, which Anna now greatly appreciates.

The difference between Anna's parents and some other first-generation migrants shows the diversity of how migrants deal with the socio-cultural surroundings they encounter. But despite these variations, there are certain cultural and social characteristics that migrants of the same ethnic and class backgrounds share, and specific ideas of gender relations is one of the most prevalent examples of them. All in all, parents' attitudes about gender relations play a crucial role for second-generation girls and women regarding the possibilities of developing mixed ethnic networks outside the home. Male descendants of Italian migrants are mostly not affected by such restrictions during their upbringing and can follow their interests in whichever peer group they prefer.

The research presented here shows that many of the conflicts within families occur between heterosexual daughters and their parents, and homosexual sons and daughters and their parents. Such conflicts are not specific to Italian families, but also take place in Swiss families and families of other backgrounds. However, the tightly-knit Italian social networks in Switzerland play an important role in ensuring compliance with cultural norms because of the public consequences that non-conformist behaviour can entail. In this context, 'family responsibilities take on an almost formal quality of rights and duties owed to one another by virtue of common membership in a reputation-bearing social unit' (Berkowitz 1984: 84). Thus, the concern for a family's honourable image is one of the main reasons why cultural norms, even if questioned and criticised on an individual level, are reproduced and sometimes reinforced within Italian families (Wessendorf 2008).

Negotiations of belonging in relation to co-ethnics are not always as dramatic as in Anna's case and they are not always characterised by disruption. Some

members of the second generation simply drift away from kin and Italian peers, whether because of the sites and social arenas in which they prefer to spend their time, or the ethnic composition of their neighbourhoods and the schools they attend.

## Conclusion

Anna's and Luca's trajectories through adolescence and their changing positionalities in relation to the transnational social field and the majority society are representative of many other second-generation Italians' experiences. Their trajectories could be interpreted as examples at opposing ends of a continuum of various patterns of belonging on which descendants of migrants position themselves. For example, some members of the second generation have social networks in Switzerland dominated by Italians, but do not go to Italy regularly because they lack ties to their southern Italian relatives, while others have mixed networks in Switzerland, but continue to go to Italy every year. Some had no Italian peers as children and entered Italian groups as adolescents; others, like Anna, entered other networks during this time. Hence, there are different positions on a spectrum of various second-generation identifications that are not parallel, but cross-cut by different degrees of transnational involvement. These patterns are characteristic for many second-generation Italians' lives. The microanalysis of their lives shows that, despite shared ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, there are specific socio-economic, cultural and gender specific reasons for each pattern, and that the family, immediate social and institutional surroundings and the transnational social field play crucial roles. These factors shape, for example, the establishment of a 'double-tie' to co-ethnics and the making of culture, or the disconnection from people of the same origin.

The cultural practices of migrant youth who grow up within multiple cultural fields are highly context dependent (Alexander 1992;

Vertovec/Cohen 1999). Kathleen Hall (1995), for example, shows how second-generation Sikhs in Britain negotiate their cultural practices according to various contexts such as the temple, home, market arcades, schools, and night-clubs, spaces which have also been called 'segmented cultural spaces' (Faist 2000). They consciously decide 'the time and space to act English or Sikh'. She emphasises that these youths' experiences cannot be explained by simply assessing them as bicultural, because 'this way of framing the issue only serves to reify the concept of culture'. Rather, their everyday practices are characterised by a fragmented consciousness (Hall 1995:254).

Similarly, second-generation Italians in Switzerland choose such identifications, be they Italian, Swiss or Latino, in certain contexts. These choices are shaped by experiences of difference, whether related to other migrants, the majority society, or to conflicting cultural expectations among co-ethnics. Thus, experiences of difference play an integral part in the course of most second-generation Italians' lives. This is especially prevalent during adolescence, a time when social affiliations and identifications are negotiated, and when a clear sense of belonging to a specific group becomes especially important. Even if reflections about belonging remain important as people grow older, the emphasis on affiliations to particular peer groups and the need to be recognised as a member of the group become weaker. As adults, the cultural and social arenas in which members of the second generation live, whether Latino and pan-ethnic, all Italian, or primarily Swiss, continue to play a role, but as facts of life rather than issue of negotiation and reification.

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