



# *Qualitative Sociology Review*

Volume IV, Issue 2 – August 2008

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.4.2.01>

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## Integration – An Outline from the Perspective of the Sociology of Knowledge

### **Abstract**

In this conceptual essay we argue that the study of migration can substantially benefit from an interactionist notion of integration. Basing our considerations on Berger's and Luckmann's sociology of knowledge, we develop a differentiated understanding of integration as an ongoing process which comes to be institutionalized in characteristic forms. With regard to these forms of institutionalization, we focus our attention on the relatively stable spheres of social action characterized by Anselm Strauss as social worlds, structures that are continuously produced anew and altered through processes of segmentation, intersection and legitimation. Furthermore, we propose five ideal types of social worlds reflecting the perspective of migrants. In addition, we indicate the transnational scope of social worlds and the importance of personal coping strategies. We emphasize the significance of the conflicts occurring in and between social worlds as part of processes of integration and highlight a number of strategies that make symbolic integration within the public sphere possible. Furthermore, we list central institutionalized cultural forms and social modes which have a decisive impact on interaction between migrants and the autochthonous population: categorization, stereotyping and drawing boundaries, negotiating, conflict and permanent reflection. Finally, we explain the specific contribution our approach offers to the current theoretical discussion in the field of migration studies and close with a summary of our arguments.

### **Keywords**

Sociology of knowledge; Migration; Integration; Social worlds; Arena; Conflict

To date, there has been little exchange between the sociology of knowledge and research on social integration. Neither have sociologists who adopt a knowledge-based perspective taken a great deal of notice of the issue of migration, nor have migration researchers made use of findings from the former field in their work. This state of affairs is remarkable, for each of these research areas stands to benefit from perspectives and thematic issues offered by the other. It is even more astonishing, considering that in perhaps the most well-known theoretical contribution to the sociology of knowledge by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, "The

Social Construction of Knowledge”, (“required reading” for students of sociology), the topic of integration is accorded a central role both conceptually and empirically.

Contemporary theoretical discussions within the field of migration research (Hirschman, Kasinitz and DeWind 1999; International Migration Review Special Issue 2004 38 (3)) have given little attention to interactionist approaches, that is, those which focus on interpersonal relationships. Although it is recognized that the interactionists of the *Chicago School* were the first to deal systematically with the consequences of migration in the “host country”, their analytical perspective is currently largely ignored. One of the reasons for this limited reception may be seen in the persistent recurrence of a certain “micro-sociological naiveté”, which maintains that the analysis of everyday processes of interaction and communication, primary concerns of studies within the sociology of knowledge, do not permit conclusions to be drawn regarding socio-structural phenomena, the reason that such approaches should supposedly be relegated to the domain of “micro-sociology”. The sociology of knowledge itself has contributed to this misrepresentation by limiting its focus to issues of “intercultural communication”.

We will argue instead that an approach to the topic of migration from the said perspective must by no means be restricted to „micro-research”. On the contrary, it offers a useful perspective for reconstructing socio-structural phenomena, as it has the capacity to reveal processes of social institutionalization. Veritably, we find the distinctions drawn between micro and macro, structure and interaction, as well as culture and society, which are still common in numerous debates in the social sciences, to be hardly productive.

In the following, adopting perspectives from the sociology of knowledge, we will explore theoretical and conceptual options for a concept of social integration that can be applied to the conditions of modern pluralized societies. To do so, we begin by recalling some of the initial considerations of the sociology of knowledge (1). Taking our initial cues from the work of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, we develop a differentiated understanding of integration as a continual process, which, moreover, is subject to characteristic forms of institutionalization. In our understanding of institutionalization processes we include the relatively stable spheres of action, which we conceptualize, drawing on the work of Anselm Strauss, as social worlds. These worlds are constantly reproduced and changed by processes of legitimation, segmentation and intersection (2). We propose five ideal types of social worlds as they are constituted from the perspective of migrants (2.1). Furthermore, (2.2) we draw attention to the transnational scope of social worlds as well as personal coping strategies. We stress the significance of conflicts as they are carried out in and between social worlds (2.3) and proceed to highlight some strategies of public symbolic integration and problems they contain (2.4). We enumerate central institutional cultural forms and social modes which play a decisive part in the life-world processes of interaction between migrants and the autochthonous population: categorization, stereotyping, stylization and drawing boundaries, negotiation, conflict and permanent reflection. Finally, (3) we elucidate what we see as the specific contribution of our approach to the current theoretical debate in migration research and summarize our arguments.

## **Knowledge, society and integration**

In their “Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge” Berger and Luckmann framed their new formulation of the sociology of knowledge as a form of general sociology by

taking up the complementary perspectives of Max Weber and Emile Durkheim: “How is it possible”, they asked, “that subjective meanings *become* objective facticities? Or, in [Weber’s and Durkheim’s] terms [...]: How is it possible that human activity (*Handeln*) should produce a world of things (*choses*)?” (Berger and Th. Luckmann 1966: 18; emphasis in the original). In the eyes of Berger and Luckmann, the answer to this question was to be found in the “Social Construction of Reality”.

Both the means and content of this construction process consist of *knowledge*. Because human beings are equipped with few inherent instincts, they must design devices to control their own behavior and create an order of their own. For this purpose, they draw on collective stocks of knowledge, which are produced and reproduced in interaction. Individuals acquire and incorporate knowledge – and therewith society – in the course of socialization, during which the personal identities of individuals are created. Hence, Alfred Schütz saw fit to distinguish between subjective and social stock of knowledge (see Schütz and Th. Luckmann 1973).

The subjective stock of knowledge “presents solutions to problems of my previous experience and acts” (Schütz and Th. Luckmann *ibidem*: 9). As such, it is oriented on the past. Yet I make continual use of its resources when confronted with new experiences, and this strategy works as long as new experiences range within the realm of my previous experiences. Knowledge is applicable to future situations when it is present in typified forms, i.e. it is detached from the original contexts in which it was created and applied. I acquire new knowledge as soon as I perceive that I am no longer able to deal with a new situation. Thus I do not acquire knowledge in an arbitrary manner, but pragmatically, i.e. only insofar as it is relevant to my orientation and actions. Life-world-specific knowledge is not necessarily optimal. It is, however, satisfactory as long as it presents an adequate basis for problem-solving. Moreover, knowledge in and of the life-world is not free of contradictions. Because pragmatically acquired knowledge stems from different areas of experience and is applied only within these limited areas, a collision between contradictory cognitive elements is prevented.

Although my knowledge is very much my own and thus subjective, to the same extent it is also influenced by the knowledge of others. To find solutions to problems I can draw on preexisting patterns of action developed by others before me which are deposited and available in the social stock of knowledge. This cognitive reservoir is divided into general knowledge, that which is relevant and accessible to all, and in special knowledge only important to certain “social types”. When the social distribution of knowledge exists on a simple level, there are no institutional barriers prohibiting access to stores of special knowledge. Moreover, knowing that specific forms of knowledge exist is itself a component of general knowledge. “Thus, in simple social distributions, reality and above all the social world still remain relatively surveyable by ‘everyone’” (Schütz and Th. Luckmann *ibidem*: 312). As the social distribution of knowledge grows in complexity, the situation changes. First, due to a greater differentiation and specialization of specific knowledge, it becomes impossible for an individual to maintain an overview of, let alone acquire, this knowledge in its entirety. “The fact that there are different provinces of special knowledge is a part of general knowledge. The factual social distribution of special knowledge is no longer a part of the supply of “equally” distributed general knowledge. Furthermore, in general, even the knowledge of the outlines of the structure of the special knowledge and its basic content becomes more indistinct” (Schütz and Th. Luckmann *ibidem*: 315). Second, general knowledge becomes differentiated into different “versions” (see Schütz and Luckmann *ibidem*: 318).

Berger and Luckmann incorporated the distinction between subjective and social stock of knowledge into their theory of action and process. According to the authors, in the process of externalizing meaning, the social stock of knowledge can be solidified and reproduced as well as changed through subjective individual action. Objectified social knowledge emerges through the successive processes of habitualization, institutionalization and finally the legitimation of actions, imbuing the world with meaning and becoming the shared reality of a society's members. With regard to social reality, this means that the form and perception of the social structure too must be comprehended as objectified knowledge. The construction of groups, social strata, positions and types of individual behavior (roles) is likewise based on preexisting knowledge. For their part, these constructions are simultaneously fundamental components of a society's knowledge about itself. Conversely, different social segments have their own, typical forms of knowledge. In the process of (primary and secondary) socialization, these collective bodies of knowledge are internalized by individuals, i.e. incorporated into subjective stocks of knowledge utilized for coming to terms with individual experiences. Because, therefore, the construction and reproduction of reality emanates from the individual efforts of all participants who bring their situative interests and needs into the picture, this process may also be understood as a conflict over which perceptions of reality will dominate. In other words: the institutionalization of knowledge also involves the institutionalization of power relations, which as soon as they attain validity, are inherited by the next generation through the process of legitimation.

*Integration*, generally understood as participation in "society" and adaptation to societal orders, is a constitutive part of the human condition. According to Berger and Luckmann, integration must be comprehended as an overarching social phenomenon. It in no way represents a passive internalization of given structures (norms, values, etc.); rather it is carried out within the dual process of externalization and internalization of knowledge epi-processually with the construction of reality. With that, our definition of integration reframes Georg Simmel's concept of *Vergesellschaftung* (sociation) ([1908] 1971: 24) from a knowledge-based sociological perspective<sup>1</sup>. Participation in a society is not the result of a process, but a process in itself. Following Berger and Luckmann, we define two levels of integration. *Integration in and within the everyday world* is achieved constantly in action: (1) Personal integration is achieved when individuals find solutions for their problems in the inventory of social knowledge and introduce their knowledge into that larger inventory. (2) Positional integration takes place when persons take on social roles provided by society. (3) Social integration occurs when individual action is coordinated with the action of others using shared knowledge."

*Symbolic integration*, on the other hand, lies largely beyond the sphere or scope of individual action. Symbolic knowledge serves to explain and justify the institutional social order and exists in differing degrees of abstraction and scopes. On a basic level it is found in "theoretical propositions in a rudimentary form", for instance in proverbs, legends, and folk tales (Berger and Th. Luckmann 1966: 94). Situated above it are explicit theories of legitimation, comprising a larger section of the institutional order. On that plane, special expert groups are established to formulate such theories and independent institutions emerge encharged with administering and transmitting this knowledge. From the previous levels we may distinguish the level of

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<sup>1</sup> We find sociation to be the most fitting translation of *Vergesellschaftung* (Wolff 1950: lxiii; see Berking 2003). The frequently used translations "socialization" as well as "associative relationships" (Weber [1921] 1968: 40) are both misleading.

symbolic universes. A symbolic universe unites the different spheres of meaning and reinforces the institutional order as a “symbolic totality” (Berger and Th. Luckmann *ibidem*: 95). Symbolic integration organizes events in the lives of individuals as well as social facts into an overarching order: (1) the integration of my biography, my symbolic universe, allows my life to appear meaningful, from my participation in various divergent activities to the gaps in my biographical history. (2) The integration of society as a whole in a comprehensive system of meaning legitimates social differences and disparities between different social groups including the existence of specialized bodies of knowledge and institutionalized forms of limiting access to the latter.<sup>2</sup>

Central institutions of symbolic integration include politics (Zifonun 2004b), religion and the (mass) media, each with their own integrational modes. They all contain an integrative “surplus” compared to the level of everyday integration. In addition to their ability to resolve everyday problems on a “higher” plane, they construct or perpetuate problems that do not (really) exist in everyday life and provide definitions of reality that cannot (really) be used, but which nonetheless have an effect on that reality. As a general rule: the further these constructions are from the world of the everyday, i.e. as their interactive intensity decreases, the more their corresponding visions gain in an absolutist character.

Participating in the institutional order of a society not only means that individuals adopt patterns of action and interpretation and participate in institutionalized role play; they also take part in the society’s „affective household”. From this perspective, efforts aiming at integration are never-ending. This is because, for one, the individual is never completely absorbed by society – a difference will always remain between individual and society, between subjective and social stocks of knowledge (Berger and Th. Luckmann *ibidem*: 133f.). Secondly, symbolic universes always contain conflicting elements. Structural contradictions may experience a symbolic harmonization, but are not “eliminated” (Soeffner 1997). Thus, the tension between integration and disintegration is indicative of human coexistence. To speak of an “integrated society” is an impermissible reification of inherently dynamic processes of classification, and ultimately serves to abscond this tension.

## **Social worlds and processes of integration**

The division made between everyday life and symbolic worlds of meaning, it must be emphasized, is an analytical one. The effective experience of human reality transpires within the “life-world”, taken as “the totality of universes of meaning” (Honer 1999: 64). The life-world is never grasped by the individual in its entirety. Instead people conduct their lives in different „social worlds” (Anselm Strauss) or “small life-worlds” (B. Luckmann 1978: 282), in figurations of the everyday world and symbolic universes of meaning. It is this ensemble of figurations which is effectively experienced as reality. When speaking of social worlds (Strauss 1978; Strauss 1993: 215ff.) we refer to “relatively permanent, ‘institutionalized’ spaces of perception and action, secured by relatively stable routines and a distribution of labor” (Soeffner 1991: 363), which manifest themselves as comparatively self-sufficient fields of

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<sup>2</sup> The differentiation between everyday and symbolic integration is a reformulation of the functionalist differentiation between social and system integration taken from the perspective of a theory of action. For a critique of functionalism, see e.g. Berger and Th. Luckmann *ibidem*: 63ff.

specialized knowledge. Social worlds are not necessarily subject to a territorial organization, but can display a high degree of „geographical dispersion“. Decisive for their constitution is the participation of their members in a shared context of interaction, not the strict determination of territorial boundaries.

The Straussean concept of social worlds exhibits some overlap with the notion of milieu as the latter is used in phenomenological discussions (see Gurwitsch 1979; Grathoff 1989).<sup>3</sup> From a phenomenological perspective, a social milieu is characterized essentially by a common stock of shared knowledge, routines and patterns of interaction, or in other words an agreement as to what is seen as “normal”. The actions of social actors in the milieu are founded on mutually held assumptions regarding normalcy. These common assumptions are based on reciprocal expectations regarding behavior that serve to reinforce characteristic patterns of action in the milieu, and which direct the action of both ego and alter. Integration in a milieu, i.e. the creation of shared, binding perceptions of rules and the world, constitutes a task with which the members of the larger milieu are continually faced. Milieu boundaries run along lines where common assumptions as to shared repertoires of cognition and action no longer hold, where typified behavioral expectations are not mutually fulfilled. Milieu borders can thus be empirically localized at the crossover between the “foreign” and “familiar”.<sup>4</sup>

The members of – largely bygone – “simple” societies (conceived in terms of ideal types) resided in a single “social world”, with a common frame of reference and stock of knowledge. Modern societies, however, are composed of a multitude of social worlds<sup>5</sup>, at the core of which usually lies an activity or a social role. “Instead of being a full-time member of one „total and whole” society, modern man [sic] is a part-time citizen in a variety of part-time societies. Instead of living within one meaningful world system to which he owes complete loyalty he now lives in many differently structured „worlds” to each of which he owes only partly allegiance” (B. Luckmann 1978: 282). Individuals usually opt for one social world as the “nucleus around which his other life-worlds can be arranged” (B. Luckmann ibidem: 285).

Hence integration is first of all a matter of being integrated *in and into* a social world, for instance the world of sports. Integration e.g. *through* sports, that is integration in the greater society by means of participation in the sports milieu, in contrast, is a highly demanding matter. It is only possible to the extent that the world of sports itself is integrated in the society as a whole and depends on the status of sports in the greater social structure. In highly differentiated societies with loosely coupled social subworlds, each with their own inherent logic, integration through sports is highly difficult to conceive.

Alfred Schütz proceeded from four basic assumptions generally guiding human coexistence: that everything will remain as it is; that we can rely on the knowledge passed down to us; that it is sufficient to possess knowledge of general types of events; and finally that there is a generally shared knowledge which incorporates the three previous assumptions (Schütz [1944] 1964: 96). Schütz viewed the position of the “stranger” defined by the condition that these four fundamental principles do not retain validity for that individual. Modern “intercultural” societies, however, appear to break with Schütz’s concept, being characterized precisely by an explicit “generalization of the status of stranger” (Hahn 2000: 20). The stock of common

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<sup>3</sup> We use the terms “social world” and “milieu” synonymously, while we do prefer “social world” and adopt the associated conceptual distinctions set forth by Strauss (“subworld”, “arena”, etc.).

<sup>4</sup> For a milieu concept with a different weighting in the field of social structure analysis, see e.g. Hradil 1992, Matthiesen 1998.

<sup>5</sup> In Schütz’s work, “the social world” remains in the singular.

knowledge utilized for routine interaction becomes increasingly precarious for all society members; „asymmetries of knowledge” occur with a greater frequency and present greater challenges (Günthner and Th. Luckmann 2001); the zones of my „unknowing” expand, while I am presented all the while with practically (or at least potentially) diverse contingencies and complex relationships; my individual endeavors to scour the social stock of knowledge for solutions to my problems are met with decreased success, often turning out contradictory solutions. All in all, it becomes increasingly unclear what "my society" actually is and “normalcy” is found in a state of crisis. The segmentation of the social world into social subworlds and the emergence of multi-faceted everyday and symbolic patterns of social order as well as personal coping strategies within and at the margins of social worlds can be understood as a reaction to these experiences of disintegration triggered by modernization processes. Social worlds of modern societies each resolve – with varying degrees of openness and closure – the problem of integration in their own way.

In the following we propose to draw from the considerations and assumptions outlined above for the analysis of migration processes by distinguishing five ideal types of social worlds, as they present themselves from the perspective of migrants. We interpret these social worlds as typical institutionalized patterns of the integration processes, i.e. as social “solutions” to the problem of integration as it confronts migrants in the modern era (2.1). In a further step, we highlight the transnational scope of social worlds and the importance of personal coping strategies (2.2) and emphasize the significance of conflict for the continuing process of integration both within and between social worlds (2.3). Finally (2.4), we point out a number of attempts to achieve an overall integration at the symbolic level and the problems related to these attempts.

### ***Types of migrational social worlds***

The construction of ideal types such as those we propose in the following is a methodological prerequisite for the empirical reconstruction of social worlds processes, which Strauss (1993: 215ff.) identifies primarily as segmentation (in subworlds), intersection (of different social worlds) and legitimation (of social worlds with respect to their members and their environment). Existing typologies, e.g. by Castles (2000: 134ff.), Esser (2004: 1128) or Portes and Rumbaut (2001: 52), are problematic to the extent that they present static real types or models instead of ideal types. The latter are solely analytic constructions which, by virtue of the distance they maintain to empirical reality, allow the latter to stand out more clearly.<sup>6</sup> Case studies represent an ideal possibility for the reconstruction of everyday constructs (Schütz [1953] 1962), since they use distinctions made by actors concerning social worlds to allow different forms of everyday (personal, positional, social) and symbolic participation in their perceived life-worlds to come to the fore. In our methodological framework, individual cases thus serve not only to illustrate the validity of analytical distinctions gained through deduction; they are themselves a central instrument for generating knowledge.

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<sup>6</sup> See Weber [1904] 1949 for a discussion of the use of ideal types in sociology.

### *Migrant milieu*

When migration occurs on a mass scale from the same region, and not individually, migrant milieus often function as a core world. They provide their residents with a means to cope with their situation and its implications for their lives. Therefore, migrant milieus differ in their structure both from the migrants' society of origin as well as from all other social worlds constituting the surrounding society. In such relatively closed milieus traditional cultural patterns are transformed and adapted; newly acquired knowledge is reformed and adjusted. In these milieus migrants create new institutions; innate patterns of economic and social reproduction emerge, along with internal social distinctions with their own definitions of status and position, all of which act to stabilize these social worlds. Nonetheless, subsequent generations must decide if these transitional milieus are adequate to confront the new problems with which they are faced.<sup>7</sup> Like all social worlds, migrant milieus possess a frame of reference that extends beyond their own borders (Soeffner 1991: 364f.). Their participants are simultaneously members of other social worlds to which they also hold allegiance and for whose benefit they may decide to reduce or even end their milieu-specific activities. Through such exchange agents moving between different worlds, migrant milieus are constantly supplied with new knowledge. Social worlds can incorporate the dynamics inherent in the multiple affiliations of their members and act to induce change (ultimately transcending their own boundaries) or they can respond to those centrifugal forces by social closure.

### *Segregational milieu*

When relationships and interdependencies arise between members of different groups, a minimum amount of knowledge must exist to coordinate these relationships. As such, migrants are, like Georg Simmel's stranger, "an element of the group itself" (Simmel ([1908] 1950: 402), that is, not merely abstract figures. The autochthonous and migrant populations do however become "estranged" when they cease to be relevant for one another, i.e. if socio-structural differentiation has progressed to the point that no relationships are formed between the two sides. This extreme state could develop through a gradual process; however, it is in fact highly improbable. In reference to migrant groups, segregational processes tend to occur when the resolutely autonomous organization of migrant groups closes these groups from the outside world. Ethnic segregation is especially likely when „ethnicity“ and class membership go hand in hand and the group differs from the surrounding society both in terms of „ethnicity“ and its position in the larger social structure.<sup>8</sup> The group's attempt to anchor itself in such a social world consumed by sealing itself off from external influences can capsize into a search for an all-encompassing universe of meaning, resulting in the emergence of "ethnic minorities" (Castles and Miller 2003: 32f.) or "parallel societies".

### *Assimilatory milieu*

In contrast to migrant and segregational milieus, actors in assimilatory milieus do not occupy themselves primarily with coping with the consequences of migration.

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<sup>7</sup> Particularly the exposure to other social worlds within the recipient society (school, work, etc.) may cause such a shift.

<sup>8</sup> Hartmut Esser has repeatedly referred to the – empirically founded – fact that permanent ethnic differentiation is regularly linked to ethnic stratification, which can only be avoided through "structural assimilation" (see Esser 2000: 292-306).



In this milieu, assimilation occurs in the sense that migrants adopt the existing stock of knowledge of the social majority, while their knowledge does not enter or intermingle with that cognitive body. For assimilatory milieus to be established, the number of migrants who are permitted access must remain relatively small and effective defense and control mechanisms must be set up to prevent “foreign knowledge” from seeping into the general stock of knowledge. Even so, the stock of knowledge changes, since it must include the information on the forms of foreign knowledge and which migrants can be assimilated (e.g. “they are fundamentalists”, etc.). To participate in an assimilatory milieu, migrants must first shed everyday practices that are “ethnically” or “culturally” coded while at once being willing to adopt the cultural stereotypes held by the social majority.

#### *Marginalization milieu*

The marginalization milieu stands in contrast not only to the migrant milieu, but also to the assimilatory milieu. Like the segregation milieu, it is decidedly particularistic. In this case, however, segregational efforts proceed from the social majority. The milieu is shaped as to allow the autochthonous population to institutionalize migrants’ “ethnicity” as an indisputable deviant “master status” (Hughes [1945] 1971; Becker 1966: 32f.). In consequence, even when migrants are culturally assimilated they remain shut out from central points in the system of available positions in a society. Thus, cultural assimilation does not lead to structural assimilation, but to ethnic stratification. In contrast, in the case of assimilatory milieus, for migrants who have adopted the culture of the social majority the possibility of structural assimilation also arises, i.e. moving into higher positions and functions in the social hierarchy. Whereas migrant milieus and segregational milieus attempt to come to terms with migration and assimilatory milieus strive to minimize cultural differences, marginalization milieus are decidedly geared toward maintaining cultural patterns that are coded as belonging to the “social majority”. Hence they remain relatively closed to migrants.

#### *Intercultural milieu*

An additional possibility is the emergence of an “interculture” in more precise terms. We refer to the development of an “interculture” when cultural syncretism results in an equal distribution of social practices and cultural meanings among the members of a given milieu. Moreover, there are no enduring, long-term attributions of “ethnic” difference among members or social inequality traceable along “ethnic” categories. In other words, “ethnicity” holds no relevance in the milieu. This kind of cultural syncretism, however, is not only a result of migration, but a consequence of overall global cultural contact. Local appropriations of globally available styles and goods play a prominent part in this process. We will only begin to discern the extent to which the economic migration of the past fifty years will have lasting effects on the underlying institutional structures of social knowledge<sup>9</sup> in host countries within another two decades at the earliest.

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<sup>9</sup> This could be the case when hybrid linguistic constructions find their way into the everyday vocabulary and official language use.

## ***Transnational and individual responses***

Social worlds, and especially those which we have discussed as migrant milieus, are not necessarily part of a larger society (a state or nation). Instead, *transnational social worlds* participate in various societies transcending the territorial borders of nations.<sup>10</sup> In addition to regular travel between the regions involved by members of such social worlds, the use of interactive media and mass media play a formative role. “Whereas the ‘old ethnicity’ was a ‘community of the ground’, a „place-defined group” linked by recurrent interaction, “new ethnicity” is based on different kinds of communication networks. Communication through different interactive media, such as the telephone or the use of mass media (television, radio, newspaper) makes it possible to contextualize ethnicity as a “community of the mind” (Knoblauch 2001: 27) (see additionally Appadurai 1996; Portes et al. 1999: 229). While, together with media in national languages, above all newspapers and the novel (Anderson 1983), institutions such as schools and armies were essential for the emergence of a national consciousness, as regards transnational consciousness, the weight has clearly shifted toward anonymous or indirect communication.

*Personal models of integration* can generate *individualistic hybrid identities* that “mirror” the large-scale model of cultural hybridization. The latter are not so much specific forms of new “patchwork identities” (*Bastelexistenzen*) (Hitzler and Honer 1994), which consist of the attempt to integrate and reconcile membership in divergent social worlds into a coherent personal biography (B. Luckmann 1978: 285), but rather a phenomenon that Georg Simmel considered to be characteristic of modern, pluralistic societies: the overlapping of different “social circles” of individual participation within the individual (see Simmel [1908] 1955). It is precisely this multiplication of internalized social worlds, which – in an apparent paradox – places the coherency of personal identity in doubt and triggers processes of individualization in response to this apparent “crisis” (Th. Luckmann 1979). Differently as the cliché would have it, children of migrants are not stranded between two cultures, but often (independently from their social status) cultivate an „ethnicized individualism”. Their experience of not completely being subsumed under one (national) culture feeds their distanced relationship to collective identities and can even initiate social processes of self-charmatization in which the subjective perception and the accentuation of extraordinary personal qualities and achievements play a central role.

Stylization must be cited as a further mode of constructing social order (Zifonun 2008). Modern lifestyles are expressive forms of self-presentation which individuals use to communicate their perspectives towards life and to demonstrate their social standing. They are not primarily employed as a vehicle for demonstrating membership in a “community”. Instead they are forms of individual ascription and distinction which individuals use to demonstrate an affiliation with or distance from certain social styles while simultaneously displaying their individual position within or attitude toward their own “group” (Soeffner 2005b: 20). Thus ethnic lifestyles are an expression of “symbolic ethnicity” (Gans 1979). They act as mechanisms of individual ascription and distinction, which can be tried on, discarded and replaced, and not as expressions of collective identity and “primordial” ethnicity.

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<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the related concepts of transnational social spaces and transnational social fields, see Roudometof 2005: 119f.

## **Conflict and arenas**

The typology presented above (2.1) might give the impression that social worlds create relatively frictionless responses to the cultural dynamics of a globalizing world. Yet in fact social processes in and between social worlds can be highly laden with conflict:

While direct distributional struggles typical of traditional modernity lose their significance [...], in many places, complex, indirect and unregulated struggles of various types are being fought over material goods, ideologies, collective identities, living arrangements and quality, social spaces, time and resources, opportunities, fundamental and specific questions [...]. I.e. that which is regarded as normal in a society is comprised of [...] a multitude of small, yet quasi permanent disputes, quarrels and compromises taking place in daily interaction, which inevitably arise from the meeting and confrontation of culturally diverse orientations and individual hierarchies of relevance. (Hitzler 1999: 479f.)

What might at first appear to be a tendency toward anomy, an apparently irreversible loss of social order, proves under closer inspection to be the initial formative phases of new orders, including new orders of conflict. The latter are not arbitrary and random, but emerge in areas of specific collisions of interest where participants are seeking solutions to these conflicts.

Problems related to action and meaning occurring at the intersecting interfaces of social (sub)worlds lead to the formation of what Anselm Strauss termed *arenas* (Strauss 1993: 225ff), spaces for addressing conflict. Such conflicts are often sparked in classic social world such as schools, workplaces or residential neighborhoods. They become the zones of contact where juxtaposing social worlds struggle to define their boundaries. Participants in these conflicts must permanently find new answers to the questions "Who am I?" and "Who are we?" At the same time, the presence of conflicts indicates the development of new forms of integration processes. They are an expression of the mutual relevance of the actors for one another. What is more: Norbert Elias pointed out that shifts in power relations between groups which benefit outsiders can generate conflict, but also new models of social order (Elias and Scotson 1994). Typical for such situations is, among other patterns, that the usual forms of ethnic categorization (Pierik 2004) and stereotyping (Allport [1954] 1979) are relinquished in favor of "stereotypes of interculturality" (Zifonun 2007). In contrast to the traditional "established vs. outsiders figuration", in which the former remain largely unchallenged in expressing their stereotypes and the latter relatively voiceless (at least publicly); in the constellation described above, *mutual* stereotyping occurs. Furthermore, the stereotypes employed here constitute a *difference* between the interactive partners; yet they do not call into question the fundamental *equality* of interacting parties. They do not aim at the "categorical exclusion" (Sutterlüty and Neckel 2006) of the other groups. In order to take the last edge off these stereotypes, however, other prerequisites must be present: "Only when there is contact between persons of the same status in situations that are problematic for both sides and when these become a lasting experience of cooperative problem-solving do the (negative) stereotypes dissolve and make way for a new set of feelings of mutual friendship" (Esser 2000: 298f.).

## ***Symbolic integration in the broader public sphere***

In the broader public sphere, in the arenas that transcend the borders of individual social worlds, where conflicts over the validity of competing problem definitions are carried out and solutions for collective problems are negotiated, the characteristic traits of modern societies shaped by immigration become especially apparent. (Medialized) debates over the distribution of scarce resources, access to public positions, participatory rights and opportunities rarely approximate rational ideals for reaching consensus, e.g. those put forth by Habermasian discourse ethics (Habermas 1990). Instead they take the shape of (irresolvable) conflicts over symbols (e.g. „headscarf debates” in Germany and France), emotionalized “foreigner debates” or (academic) „discourses of identity” (including unavoidable accusations of racism), thereby confirming their character as tokens of a garrulous culture of quasi-theatrical public enactment, which modern societies use to cope with the dubious, unfinished and broadly ambivalent nature of their models of social order and forms of social integration. These conflicts have often been idealized as forms of “resistance” by scholars in cultural studies and as “reflexive modernity” by sociologists. Little attention, however, has been given to the fact that these conflicts are highly structured and played out along largely predetermined paths. In other words, these collective forms of permanent reflection (*Dauerreflexion*) have experienced a veritable institutionalization (Schelsky [1957] 1965), lending a new form of security and order to society. However, in this type of public dispute, fundamental questions of the (re)distribution or safeguarding of power are transferred to the „cultural” sphere and thus rendered invisible.

Moreover, these novel (medialized) ritualizations and structures of public exchange cannot obscure the fundamental difficulties of symbolic integration in highly modern societies: “It goes without saying that this multiplication of perspectives greatly increases the problem of establishing a stable symbolic canopy for the entire society” (Berger and Th. Luckmann 1966: 86). Nevertheless, attempts to create an overarching symbolic integration do exist; four of them should be named at this juncture.

The “imagined commonality or community” (M. Weber) of the nation was a product of the capitalist and bourgeois revolutions in Europe. Just as the nation state initially had to overcome widespread resistance (in particular on the part of local and religious centers of power and the „transnational” aristocracy), the binding capacity of national integration is today once again subject to question. The consequences of transnational migration aside, it cannot be denied that present day society is structured according to lifestyle milieus that are no longer able to agree upon a single “collective identity” to which they might lay claim as a group. This condition becomes particularly apparent through the *attempt to construct “national consciousness” with reference to history* which presently enjoys popularity worldwide (Levy and Sznajder 2002). Current politics of memory stand in marked contrast to those of the past. Triumphant heroic narratives have been replaced by admission of nations’ historic guilt. Discourses of guilt can play a role in constructing identities, as they enable nations to acquire an image of moral integrity and wisdom by displaying an awareness of their guilt on the international stage. National auto-stigmatization – often paired with discourses portraying the nation as a victim – can accordingly be interpreted *firstly*, as an attempt at *neo-national closure through politics of memory* (Soeffner 2005a; Zifonun 2004a). This reactive pattern appears capable of bringing about integration. We can, *secondly*, interpret *radical religious acts and ideologies* in a similar manner, which are by no means an expression of the further existence of

traditional forms of faith. Instead, religious fundamentalism combines totalitarian religious claims with political claims to authority and with specific forms of social modernity, particularly in regard to the use of media, state organization and social structure (Kurzman 2002).

Together with national discourses of memory and religious proclamations of salvation, *thirdly*, the previously cited “*immigrant debates*” should be mentioned, which in their role as symbolic discourses of collective self-defense attempt to create unity and identity regardless of whether they do not (any longer) exist. The fictitious image of the “immigrant” thus facilitates the construction of a fictitious image of the “Nation”, on which the society otherwise, i.e. without “foreigners” would not be able to come to agreement. Medial reification (e.g. of Islam) creates a symbolic surplus of stereotypes, which can hardly be overcome, corrected or countered in daily interactions. We rely accordingly to a large extent on the symbolic knowledge about „foreign” groups provided to us by the mass media. *Fourthly*, complementary problems arise from humanistic ideals proclaiming the *general reconciliation of humanity* as their goal. Concepts such as a “humane society”, appeals for “tolerance and acceptance”, for “humane conduct” and “solidarity among all peoples” (see e.g. Küng and Kuschel 1993) suffer from an enormous degree of abstraction. It is highly improbable that these vague and lofty goals of love for the “human family” can ever be realized within the bounds of everyday social existence. The invisible hand of the market appears to be more successful in this respect: the transnational symbols of a mass consumer culture frame participation as a question of taste and above all money.<sup>11</sup>

### **Process, crisis of meaning, life-world: The contribution of the sociology of knowledge to migration studies**

The current theoretical debate in migration research is dominated by the theory of assimilation and the transnationalism thesis. Both schools argue in structuralist terms: concepts such as “ethnic community”, “ethclass” or “ethnic mobility trap”, just as “segmented assimilation” or “transnational social spaces” create relatively static images of social reality. In this image of society arranged with the aid of structuralist sociological concepts, society is portrayed as a clearly organized horizontal and vertical entity, in which groups, social strata or ethnicities are ordered alongside one another. Our approach takes a different perspective: instead of concentrating on changes in the social structure of the recipient society caused by migration thereby always proceeding from socio-structural phenomena, we propose the “life-world” perspective of active individuals as a basis for analysis. This would require an investigation of the structuring principles of integration processes in life-worlds which establish themselves as a consequence of migration. These processes include in particular the construction, maintenance and transformation of everyday cultural models and processes of ascription (classification, categorization, stereotyping, “othering”) as well as drawing symbolic boundaries during “intercultural” contact (e.g. through stylization). An interest in these processes and their structuring principles, however, is not solely theoretical. It is also oriented on the specific structural situation

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<sup>11</sup> It should have become clear at this point that the modes of symbolic integration discussed above – through their performative enactment – result in the very units and divisions of society which they then promise to integrate – be it the nation, the community of religious believers or the universal world society.

of modern societies in which social structures by no means enjoy the same stability, permanence and taken-for-grantedness as may have been the case in other societal forms. The modern “pluralization of social life-worlds” (Berger, Berger and Kellner 1973: 63ff.) and the concomitant “crisis of meaning” (Berger and Th. Luckmann 1995) – i.e. paradox and ambivalence experienced in the life-world – are countered by contemporary societies – both at the individual and the collective level – with an *intensification of negotiation processes* between separate and yet interdependent social spheres. Ultimately the diagnosis of social pluralization and its consequences led Max Weber and Georg Simmel to conceive of sociology as an analytical discipline concerned with social processes, observable in their preference for the term “sociation” (*Vergesellschaftung*) over “society” (*Gesellschaft*). The image of society ensuing from this perspective differs markedly from that suggested by traditional sociological terminology: society is not organized in clearly identifiable groups, social hierarchies, statuses, etc. Instead paradoxes and inconsistencies, multiple and contradictory loyalties, heterogeneity and contradiction become just as visible as do the everyday processes of construction and classification which we have discussed above.

In a recent study examining ethnicity and ethnic self-organization, Andreas Wimmer offered a striking presentation of the current explanatory problems faced by migration research (Wimmer 2004). Wimmer noted the highly controversial nature of ethnic membership as a seemingly “natural”, everyday category, along with the unresolved problem as to how and why everyday actors attribute any relevance to ethnicity at all as an act of symbolic ascription (see also Berking 2003).<sup>12</sup> From a methodological stance, Wimmer criticizes both the thesis of ethnification and studies in assimilation and transnationalism. The former holds that ethnicity is merely a secondary effect of public discourses and thus “non-authentic”. The latter two perspectives often take the relevance of ethnicity for granted in their research (Wimmer *ibidem*: 3, 29). For his own study of the relevance of ethnicity for processes of group formation, he undertook a neighborhood study using a “research design that does not assume the existence of ethnic groups” (Wimmer *ibidem*: 26). Wimmer provides an impressive description of the complexity of group formation processes, while recognizing the necessity of going beyond a purely descriptive approach. Together with Nina Glick Schiller, Wimmer also raised awareness as to implicit nationalistic methodologies which are not only characteristic of assimilation studies, but also their counterpart, transnationalism research. In its conceptualization of “transnational communities” the latter school of thought transfers the assumptions of a homogeneous and discretely bound community from the nation-state onto these communities (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003: esp. 598). Here too, the authors emphasize that: “Going beyond methodological nationalism requires analytical tools and concepts not colored by the self-evidence of a world ordered into nation-states” (Wimmer and Glick Schiller *ibidem*: 599). The concept of social worlds provides such an analytical framework. Completely in line with Wimmer’s terms, Anselm Strauss developed this concept in order to dispose of an instrument to analyze social processes without preassuming an “asserted or presumed dominance of social class, race, gender, and other social units” (Strauss 1993: 210). Nor would it be necessary to pack these differences into a preassumed structure of differentiation and

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<sup>12</sup> By distinguishing between ethnicity as a quasi “natural” category and an act of symbolic ascription, we refer to the distinction made above between everyday and symbolic integration. This analytical distinction is similar to the one made between the symbolic and social aspects of the lines drawn between ethnic groups. For recent discussions, see Lamont and Molnár 2002, Alba 2005: 22.

stratification on a national scale and without analytically privileging any level of sociation.<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile the debate between assimilation theory and transnationalism research seems to have run its course. Two major monographs have appeared (Alba and Nee 2003; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). The adversaries have integrated their opponents' arguments into their own concepts; others have formulated broader theoretical models (Esser 2004; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). Yet none of the parties involved have left behind the underlying structuralist consensus of the debate.

Our approach emphasizes that the interactive character of society, which is continually produced by its members in processes of social construction, must remain part of the analysis. Our suggestion is that of a theory of everyday action, which takes the experience of everyday actors seriously instead of conceiving of the actors as bearers of social positions in a hyperstable "system".

In its original meaning, "integration" refers to the completion of an entirety, to recreating a whole through the insertion of its necessary parts. The term is used in this same sense by integration researchers; Hartmut Esser defines integration for example as "the relatively balanced coherence of the parts of a whole and its delimitation from unspecified surroundings" (Esser 2000: 285). Thus, in our theoretical considerations, if we propose to proceed neither from the society, nor from the isolated individual, this implies an inversion of the central question of integration research. This inversion enables us to depart from conceptualizing society as a totality and to ask instead in *which specific instances* of sociation the individual participates (at local, national or transnational levels, of temporary or enduring nature, etc.) and to conceive of this question as related to both the processes of sociation in life-worlds and integration mechanisms.<sup>14</sup> The concept of social worlds remains analytically open to all levels of sociation (Unruh 1980). Thus, it may also prove helpful in resolving some of the theoretical difficulties around concepts like globalization and localization (Roudometof 2005). By no means do we seek to discredit the relevance of the research questions and results of integration studies. For example, Hartmut Esser's structural analyses of ethnic inequality and ethnic differentiation (Esser 2004: 1147ff.) and his analytical distinctions and empirical findings are of great significance for a knowledge-based sociology of migration and should be integrated into a general account of social world processes. A life-world perspective on „integration“ can thus be seen as an analog to (quantitative) structural analyses of social integration – the two perspectives stand in a relationship of mutual complementarity.

Alfred Schütz and his students – despite their emphasis on the anonymization of social relations, the unequal social distribution of knowledge and the difficulties of symbolic integration – continue to work within the conceptual framework of the nation-state, thereby assuming an inherent "internal condition" of society, i.e. implying a discrete, contained social stock of knowledge. They do not question the validity of basic framework upon which they base their assumptions. However, once this foundation is placed in doubt, a different perspective opens up. One result is that

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<sup>13</sup> By restricting itself to a single level of sociation, transnationalism research merely reproduces the "monism" contained in methodological nationalism on a "higher" level. For an incisive exception, see Weiß 2005.

<sup>14</sup> For a lucid critique of "holism" see Appadurai 1986.

the extent of the problem clearly increases. At the same time, certain problems facing integration that Schütz noted disappear. The processes of transnational and local integration within social worlds fill the vacuum left behind as the nation ceases to be the ultimate point of reference for integration.

In summary, our outline offers a set of related “sensitizing concepts” that might “provide starting points for building analysis to produce a grounded theory” (Bowen 2006: 7), in our case: grounded theories of specific forms of immigrant incorporation. We have no intention to pinpoint a comprehensive, “definitive” framework for the study of the consequences of migration, since we do not believe that, at this point, this is feasible. However, as Herbert Blumer (1954: 8) put it: “Sensitizing concepts can be tested, improved and refined. Their validity can be assayed through careful study of empirical instances which they are presumed to cover. Relevant features of such instances, which one finds not to be covered adequately by what the concept asserts and implies, become the means of revising the concept”. In order to “test, improve and refine”, we argue that a student of *integration* should for a start choose a particular *social world* – by which we mean the issue-centered spheres of interaction the members of which more often than not have multiple, overlapping and changing memberships – he or she is interested in. In a second step, it might be useful to get a (intentionally static) descriptive understanding of the nature of the social world under scrutiny. In this, our *typology of social worlds* – migrant milieu, segregational milieu, assimilatory milieu, marginalization milieu, intercultural milieu – and the respective forms of *everyday-life* and *symbolic integration* of their members might be of some help. Thirdly, one can then move on to identifying the particularities of the processes of (internal) *segmentation* (into subworlds), *intersection* (with neighbouring social worlds) and *legitimation* (of both the social world’s existence and activities as well as its members’ attitudes and orientations) by which this social world is continuously reproduced and altered. This is where the cultural forms and social modes that we have identified come into play: An interest in the interaction between migrants and autochthonous populations will draw attention to the *arena-processes* of categorization, stereotyping, drawing of boundaries, negotiation, conflict and permanent reflection. These processes will regularly come into play where social worlds segment or intersect and their integrity is being questioned. An interest in the biographical ways by which migrants handle their ambivalent social position will benefit from examining personal coping strategies – here we have elaborated on *ethnic individualism* and *stylization*. Finally, an interest in the public representations of collective identity in (media) discourses will almost certainly direct ones attention to nationalism, religious fundamentalism, racism and humanism and the associated difficulties of the *symbolic construction of unity* in highly differentiated societies.

## Acknowledgements

Translated by Polly Kienle and Sarah Matthews



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### **Citation**

Soeffner, Hans-Georg and Dariuš Zifonun (2008) "Integration – An Outline from the Perspective of the Sociology of Knowledge." *Qualitative Sociology Review*, Vol. IV Issue 2. Retrieved Month, Year  
([http://www.qualitativesociologyreview.org/ENG/archive\\_eng.php](http://www.qualitativesociologyreview.org/ENG/archive_eng.php))