

Comment by Rainer Ohliger on Antoine Pécoud: Self-employment and Immigrants' Incorporation

„Does self-employment contribute to immigrants' ,integration‘?“ is the first sentence and the central question of Antoine Pécoud's paper „Self-employment and Immigrants' Incorporation“. Full incorporation (whatever this term might stand for and indicate) into the receiving country's labor market is usually seen as crucial step toward the integration of labor migrants. However, scholars disagree as to whether this incorporation should rather occur by way of entering and penetrating the structures of the receiving society or by way of establishing independent structures within it, i.e. the emergence of an ethnic economy and ethnic entrepreneurs. Two camps of scholars offer diametrically opposed arguments. Optimists see ethnic entrepreneurship as economically and culturally beneficial, while pessimists claim that it is detrimental for immigrant incorporation. The following matrix illustrates these positions graphically (thus summarizing Antoine's outline):

	optimists	pessimists
soci-economically	ethnic businesses have positive outcome on insertion in host society by way of offering economic perspectives for immigrants	ethnic businesses jeopardize migrants' position on the labor market by leaving them in marginal positions
culturally	ethnic businesses indicate willingness to establish oneself in the receiving country	ethnic businesses lead to the establishment of ethnic ghettos and thus isolate immigrants from the receiving society

The author applies an anthropological approach to shed new light on the question and thus shake up the binary and dichotomous perception prevailing in the literature. He draws upon the case of labor immigrants from Turkey in (West) Germany to discuss the underlying questions and provides us with some ethnographical insights drawn from his field of investigation. His argument runs that neither the optimistic view (epitomized, for instance, by the German-Turkish scholar Faruk Sen) nor the pessimistic interpretation (uphold by the Turkish scholar Nermin Abadan-Unat)

captures the ambiguity that is associated with ethnic entrepreneurship. The author points to the (limited) role of markets play in establishing intercultural, inter-social and interethnic relations and makes the argument that markets as well as trade can be an insufficient or at least ambiguous indicator for immigrant incorporation: „Trade can only serve as the lowest common denominator between these groups and the links it fosters are quite limited.“ This argument actually challenges longstanding beliefs and convictions on ethnic entrepreneurship and ethnic business or economic incorporation of labor migrants. If the argument holds true, researchers of ethnic entrepreneurship might be well advised to portray their future findings in a more modest light when talking about such big concepts as integration and be rather careful when giving advice to policy makers (the latter might especially be true for economists). Actually, the establishment of ethnic businesses (as the author argues) can lead to variable outcomes: it can support or undermine integration or be of little consequence. This, however, leads to a rather obvious question: which are the factors that determine particular outcomes? In this paper the author still leaves us without a clear answer to it.

When reading the paper a couple of other questions popped-up; these may be worth discussing at the conference:

Firstly, I was wondering how the work of an anthropologist is greeted by the ruling class of economists who usually jealously exercise hegemony over the field of economic research and do not seem to be particularly keen on listening to neighboring disciplines (do they actually know that there is such a thing as social and cultural anthropology?).

Secondly, I was wondering about the concept of ETHNIC business as a category of analysis. What is it actually that makes businesses ethnic? Antoine deconstructs the notion himself when arguing that market shares of ethnic businesses reach out into mainstream society thus, cutting cross ethnic groups. Maybe it would be a step forward to bring the work of scholars of ethnicity and nationalism together with those who analyse ethnic entrepreneurship within migration studies to further weaken or specify the ethnic notion in this field of research.

Thirdly, building upon my second question, I was wondering if ethnicity is a useful category of analysis at all when analyzing economic activities of labor immigrants. One could argue, that scholars walk on very thin ice when lumping together entrepreneurs just on the basis of their shared ethnicity. To illustrate this with an example: What does Vural Öger, the successful Turkish-German entrepreneur in the domain of mass tourism have in common with the owner of my favorite Döner shop at Bahnhof-Friedrichstrasse just 'round the corner from my Berlin office? Or to ask this question in a more systematic way: How does class and social stratification within immigrant communities and among ethnic entrepreneurs come into the picture when analyzing economic activities and ethnically segmented labor markets? Does ethnicity really help to explain anything? Or does it only camouflage things?

Fourthly, I liked the author's careful arguments about historical and social contingencies and contextuality when pointing to the fact that there is not one answer (or model) to all questions regardless of time and place. Applying theories and methodologies which were (mostly) developed within American research contexts might not always be a legitimate and useful transfer of ideas to European cases. As Antoine emphasizes, the French model of immigrant incorporation might work completely differently as a consequence of France's love affair with state intervention into market processes and state-run entrepreneurship. This argument could probably also be further spelled out for the particular case the author is referring to, that is economic (non-)integration of labor migrants from Turkey into the German economy. One wonders whether the lack of state intervention in the field of immigrant incorporation had an impact in the otherwise rather interventionist and *étatiste* German economy.

Fifthly, this raises the normative question regarding which role states SHOULD (or should not) play when aiming at integrating migrant populations into their national economies. It is a question which is actually implicitly raised by Antoine in the very last sentence of his conclusion when he states that „the impact of self-employment on immigrants' incorporation would be at best neutral and other solutions should then be envisaged to reduce the gap between immigrants and the native population.“ The question of what kind of solutions ought to be considered in both scholarly and

political terms opens up yet another can of worms – albeit an important an interesting one.