

Yvonne Rieker. *Ein Stück Heimat findet man ja immer: Die italienische Einwanderung in die Bundesrepublik.* Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2003. 203 S. (broschiert), ISBN 978-3-89861-191-6.



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Published on H-German (April, 2005)

Italian Immigration to the FRG Reconsidered

This book examines the immigration of former Italian guest workers to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Considering that much of the public, governmental, and scholarly treatment of immigration to the FRG has focused on Turks, the author's primary motivation was to reconsider the oft-neglected Italian case. As noted in the introduction, Italians were the first of the original guest workers and therefore provide a base of comparison to other groups. This reason, along with the fact that Italians still comprise one of the five largest immigrant groups in Germany and are now entering old age after decades of residing in the FRG, makes this both a timely and important piece.

Two overarching themes are considered: the political dynamics surrounding the creation and execution of Germany's guest worker program and more general immigration policy related specifically to Italian immigrants, and the real-life experiences of Italian guest workers who continue to reside in Germany several decades after their original recruitment. Following a short introduction and literature review, these two themes are given more in-depth treatment in the form of ten substantive chapters

covering the following topics: the political climate surrounding the signing of the bilateral recruitment treaty between Italy and the FRG in 1955; Italians' motivations for immigration; efforts by the FRG to control immigration across its borders; images of Italians and Germans from the other group; the recruitment policy used by the Third Reich and its importance for post-war immigration; the advisory function provided by a select group of German organizations (e.g. Caritas and labor unions); Italian immigrants in the context of the Cold War; particular difficulties experienced by Italian immigrants after their arrival; the social profile of Italian immigrants and, finally, aspects of immigrants' identity formation and acculturation. Together these chapters provide a thorough though by no means exhaustive look at Italian immigration to the FRG. Other topics, which the author might have covered or expanded upon to provide a more comprehensive treatment of Italian immigration, include the composition and functioning of Italian communities, participation in voluntary organizations, as well as aspects of Italians' political integration.

In covering these varied topics, the author draws on

a number of different materials, including a wealth of existing scholarly literature, government documents, along with thirty qualitative interviews conducted with first-generation Italians from the guest worker generation. Using these three primary data sources, the author is able to craft a narrative of both the political dynamics surrounding the recruitment of Italian guest workers, as well as the real-live experiences and feelings of the immigrants themselves. With very few omissions, the author cites the relevant literature even if she does not always engage it directly.

By far the single greatest contribution of this work, and one which sets it apart from other related texts, is its use of the qualitative interviews. In general, the author skillfully blends these data into the surrounding narrative, producing a rich storyline that brings to life the experiences of Italian guest workers in Germany. This is particularly well done in sections related to immigrants' difficulties with the German language (pp. 86-89) and the favorable work conditions found in Germany (pp. 90-95). Unfortunately, several shortcomings associated with the interviews diminish their overall value. First, as the author notes in the introduction, the interviewees are not wholly representative of typical guest workers from Italy. Although most interviewees come from small villages in impoverished southern Italy, the principle area of emigration, their views of life and work in the FRG tend to be significantly more positive than the typical guest worker. This fact, largely unavoidable considering the author's difficulty in soliciting other interviewees, nevertheless raises gnawing questions about the conclusions drawn from the interviews. For example, how much do these interviews tell us about the experiences of "ordinary" Italian guest workers? Likewise, would other Italian guest workers—those still in Germany, as well as those who have returned home—have responded differently to the same questions? Regrettably, there is little attempt on the part of the author to place the unique qualities of the interviews in the context of Italian guest workers in the FRG more generally. Instead of critically examining the content of the interviews, the author presents them at face value.

A second shortcoming in the book is the author's use of the interviews. Given the depth which they provide to the narrative, it is disappointing and not altogether understandable why the author includes them in only four of the ten substantive chapters. In my opinion, the real-life experiences depicted in the interviews would have greatly enhanced other topics, such as immigrants' experiences with Caritas, the Catholic relief organization that

provided moral and logistical support for new arrivals, or their relations with Germans. In cases where interviewees provided vague or incomplete answers to these and other related questions, the author might have drawn on the wealth of available immigrant literature from Italian authors in Germany as a possible alternative.

Although this work draws heavily from existing literature, making it undoubtedly one of the best overviews of Italian immigration to the FRG, it also introduces the reader to a number of novel facts and alternative interpretations, which challenge our conventional understanding of Italian immigration and possibly open up new lines of debate. Specifically, parts of chapter 2 ("Anfänge") documenting the struggle between pro-immigration business groups, supported by Economics Minister Erhard, and anti-immigration groups initially led by the labor unions, offers a unique look into the political struggle surrounding the formation of the FRG's recruitment program. Another example found in the third chapter ("Motivationen") documents the primary motivation for immigration as individuals' desire to escape southern Italy's rigid and hierarchical social structure and value system as opposed to the less influential role played by poverty. Similarly, the author reports in chapter 10 ("Sozialprofil") that Italians were in fact the least skilled among the groups of guest workers (p. 114) and that subsequent generations of school-aged Italians have the highest incidence of graduation from the Hauptschule without an apprenticeship (p. 116).[1]

Though the chapters follow a very logical sequence, making the text generally very accessible, the overall readability suffers somewhat due to the contrasting styles employed in alternating chapters. In contrast to the more analytical style developed in chapters without the interviews, the style found in chapters based largely on the interviews approaches oral history. To improve on the text's readability, the author might have considered combining individual chapters into two larger sections, the first using a more analytical style to document the political dynamics surrounding the Italian case and the second relying on the ethnographic data to tell the story of the interviewees.

Although clearly not the author's intention, it would have been interesting to conduct an even more rigorous and thorough comparative analysis between Italians and other immigrant groups, especially Turks. Relatively speaking, were the Italians successful in their integration? In what ways have their experiences living and working in Germany been unique because they are Ital-

ian, and in what ways do their experiences conform more to the guest worker norm?

Overall, this work succeeds in providing a relatively broad and systematic overview of Italian immigration to the FRG. Although there is plenty to be gained from this work, readers should nevertheless be cognizant of the noted shortcomings related to the interviews and keep in mind that the views expressed by the interviewees represent an incomplete and perhaps even one-sided view of the Italian immigrant experience in the FRG. Due to its

combination of unique insights, valuable ethnographic data and historical documentation, this work is recommended to readers interested specifically in the Italian case, as well as generalists interested in deepening their knowledge of immigration in the FRG.

Note

[1]. The *Hauptschule* is the lowest of Germany's three standard secondary school tracks and is designed primarily to provide theoretical and practical training for blue-collar laborers.

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Citation: Peter Doerschler. Review of Rieker, Yvonne, *Ein Stück Heimat findet man ja immer: Die italienische Einwanderung in die Bundesrepublik*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. April, 2005.

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