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Diversity as Social Utopia

By Özkan Ezli and Gisela Staupe
Translated by Jillian Saucier



Occasion for the Book: The Exhibition

Why is the German Hygiene Museum showing a large special exhibition with the title “Das neue Deutschland. Von Migration und Vielfalt” (The New Germany: On Migration and Diversity)? Varying forms of migration—immigration and emigration, asylum and expulsion, migrant and domestic, permanent and temporary—were not and are not anomalies. One can almost say that man has been on the move ever since his fall from paradise. To be human is to be in transit. In other words, migration is not an exceptional circumstance, but the normal human condition. This applies to those who migrate and those to whom migrants come, in the same way. And that is the theme for an exhibition hall that has made its name as a “museum of mankind.”

Perhaps, however, there have never been so many people in transit as there are today—or, at least, these movements have never been so scrutinized and problematized. Another new phenomena, ever since the emergence of nation states in the nineteenth century, is the increasing attempt to tax and control migration movements through national instruments. The perennial ethical question of global justice gets raised between the provisions for preventing and for facilitating migration: Who is allowed to cross a border for what reason, and who is not?

Aspects of migration today are mostly negative omens in the headlines. Migration is viewed here as a problem area, which hosts debates about integration deficits and

refusals, about honor killings and forced marriages, about criminality, violence and parallel societies. Deep-rooted fears are articulated in these often fierce and emotionally driven discussions, and the idea that homogenous cultures are locked in battle with each other comes to mind. Intentionally, our exhibition does not showcase such negatively connoted discourse, but focuses instead on phenomena that concern everyone. It poses questions to a society that, through immigration and emigration, has become a ‘new Germany’ and in which the life of the individual in a community has long since been transformed.

Despite all the controversy, there is widespread consensus today that Germany is and will remain a country of immigration. The future challenge will arise from recognizing diversity as valuable in itself. The sociologist and cultural theorist Volker Heins asks, in his entry for this book, “Where can the social utopia of diversity be found? Not in a society of enduring conflict between entrenched cultural groups, but in enabling social relationships between individuals and groups that won’t be distorted by the intervention of such abstractions as nation, race or culture.”¹ To recognize “diversity as a value” requires a discourse that presupposes critical and sophisticated knowledge. For this reason, the German Hygiene Museum connects to one of its most distinguished traditions with this exhibition, namely that of providing objective, enlightening education. In the center of that work, the question remains: How do we want to live in the diversity of this society of immigration?



¹ Volker Heins, “Vielfalt,” in *Das neue Deutschland. Von Migration und Vielfalt*, ed. Özkan Ezli and Gisela Staupe (Konstanz: Konstanz University Press, 2014).

Concept of the Exhibition

The scenographic and curatorial theme of the exhibition is the “city.” According to a hypothesis of the British-Canadian author Doug Saunders, the city is a place of arrival, which functions as a contact zone between mobile and permanent populations. Its topographical, structural, social, political and cultural “porousness” would decide whether and how the society “of tomorrow” succeeds.² In this sense, the city will be used in our exhibition as a metaphor for society as a whole, in that visitors move through a progression of isolated abstract themes, introducing such topographies as the street, parliament, marketplace, house of worship or museum. These are all public urban settings that reflect the transformations occurring in society, and where visitors can experience the negotiation process around the rules of living together. Society is presented through the ephemeral exhibit architecture neither as an origin point nor as a goal, but more as a process- and perspective-dependent dimension, which is contradictorily and heterogeneously structured.

Our exhibit is, we hope, a cause for conversation between curious people looking for information, knowledge and communication about the realities of their lives. The exhibition and the book seem important to us in order to centralize, reassess and advance beyond all the pro and con arguments about aspects of living together, diversity, and above all the necessary ways of speaking about these topics.



² The exhibition decides consciously against the apocalyptic urban scenario clearly outlined by Mike Davis (*Planet of Slums*, 2006) without overlooking the distortions he depicts.

The Book on the Exhibition: A Reader for the Words, Images, Memories, and Concepts of Migration

“Germany is a little America,”³ muses the protagonist of German-Turkish author Aras Ören’s *Was will Niyazi in der Naunynstraße?* (What’s Niyazi doing on Naunyn Street) (1974).⁴ “And only when you live like an American can you say you’ve lived.”⁵ The American dream of a better life, dreamed by many migrants from southern Europe, attracted Europeans to cinemas in the 1960s and 70s. It was less about any projection of American identity, more about seeming banalities: “finally drinking a whiskey, instead of seeing it on the screen in black and white.”⁶ It was more about being able to “fling yourself on your bed while still wearing your shoes at every opportunity.” The films told stories “that like all stories that are told, made them believe, that there was another world than the one in which they lived, a world which felt differently than the one they knew.”⁷ The beginning of migration, whether out of political or economic reasons, poverty or oppression, is commonly marked by the desire to live differently and better.

At a German Islam conference on the history of migration in 2009 the then Secretary of the Interior Wolfgang Schäuble clung to the Germany-centric position: “The voicelessness and distance which long persisted in our country between the native population and the so-called guest workers and their German-born children, has been overcome. Their parents mostly came in overcrowded trains from their homes to Germany here. Today [...] we can say: you are with us, you have arrived in our midst. In a new homeland. And belong here.”⁸ With the combination of migration history, culture, speech and venue, Schäuble presents a path that must have been very difficult in the beginning, but seems to have traveled through the middle of German society. It also means, whether you share Schäuble’s perspective or not, that the themes of migration and diversity have arrived in the center of politics and intellectualism, and are understood to be the central challenges of a modern society.

The new German society of migration begins by perceiving diversity as normal. But then, as now, the conclusion that “The new Germany has long been a reality,” as it underlies the exhibition in the German Hygiene Museum, stands in a stimulating relation to the beginnings of this new society and to the increasingly charged atmosphere of integration debates.⁹ These debates, which Germany sees between successful integration on the one hand and a threat to society on the other, concern not only the biographies of people with a so-called migrant background. They also convey a nostalgic concept of the “nation,” which has not only been shattered by the reality of immigration history in the Federal Republic of Germany since the 1950s,

³ Aras Ören, *Was will Niyazi in der Naunynstraße?*, trans. Achmed Schmiede and Johannes Schenk in collaboration with the author (Berlin: Rotbuch, 1973), 25.

⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Selim Özdoğan, “Filme,” in *Das neue Deutschland*.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Wolfgang Schäuble, Convocation Speech for the 4th Plenary Session of the German Islam Conference (DIK) on June 25, 2009: http://www.deutsche-islam-konferenz.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DIK/DE/Downloads/Sonstiges/schaeuble-plenum4.pdf?__blob=publicationFile

⁹ Among others, see Özkan Ezli and Andreas Langenohl, *Die Integrationsdebatte zwischen Assimilation und Diversität. Grenzziehungen in Theorie, Kunst und Gesellschaft* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013), 9-19.

but also by German-German relations and movement between East and West Germany.

In the beginning, unlike at the present, seemingly banal material needs, rather than culture or identity, were at play: “we all want to live like Americans.” These banal material needs occurred again in the migration theories of the 1960s and ‘70s. Nation of origin and religion were subordinated variables in these theories, and they proceeded from the assumption that such conditioning would dissolve through education and work over the course of multiple generations.¹⁰ Integration into the workforce and the assumption of a homogenous majority society represented the primary methods of integration. In this way, social theories used the factor of time to a high degree in their calculations.

Many stories of migration and integration certainly did not proceed as linearly as in theory. More often they were broader, and were linked with infrastructural and socio-political changes in the target and origin societies, which led to complex and multifaceted ways of self-identification on biographical, institutional and social levels. Amalgamation as “a corollary of mobility” resulted “not only in homogenization, but also [the] amplification of differences.”¹¹

There are reasons for that. They range from the decline in strength of western advertising and integration, to the transformation of the labor market through the change from industrial to service societies, as most guest workers who were recruited between the ‘50s and ‘70s for industrial positions had to adapt. This process was accompanied by a change in communications media, which facilitated mobility between origin and target societies, and the increasing importance of the politicizing and ethnicizing category of “identity” beginning in the ‘80s.

Aside from economic and infrastructural changes, “in many industrial societies a new disposition toward historicity [for the nation itself]” spread.¹² In the Federal Republic of Germany since the end of the ‘70s, one recurring central theme from education to political debate had been the “treatment of the German question, of national solidarity and reunification.”¹³ The minorities who had been recruited for the labor market were not included in these reflections. Consequently, the guest workers who had been recruited between 1955 and 1973 were no longer guest workers, but foreigners. Even after 15 to 25 years of working and living in the Federal Republic of Germany, migrant workers were not treated as immigrants, but as Turkish, Italian or Yugoslavian.¹⁴

This bias toward the history of one’s own nation extended to migrants themselves. It was no longer a matter of an assimilation process, or how to live like an American

¹⁰ See Hartmut Esser, *Aspekte der Wanderungssoziologie. Assimilation und Integration von Wanderern, ethnischen Gruppen und Minderheiten. Eine handlungstheoretische Analyse* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1980), 221, 231. See also Petrus Han, *Soziologie der Migration. Erklärungsmodelle, Fakten, politische Konsequenzen, Perspektiven* (Stuttgart: Lucius & Lucius 2009), 36–46.

¹¹ Volker Heins, *Skandal der Vielfalt. Geschichte und Konzepte des Multikulturalismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2013), 23.

¹² Edgar Wolfrum, *Die geglickte Demokratie. Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland von ihren Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: Klett-Cotta, 2007), 395.

¹³ Ibid. 393. In the same year, immigration agent Heinz Kühn’s memorandum, “Status and Further Development of the Integration of Foreign Workers in the Federal Republic of Germany,” which championed social and political equality for second-generation immigrants, was rejected. See: http://www.migration-online.de/data/khnmemorandum_1.pdf.

¹⁴ Cf. Irmgard Ackermann, ed., *Türken deutscher Sprache: Berichte, Erzählungen, Gedichte* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984).

in “Little America,” but rather a matter of demarcating the borders between nations, a matter of identification with one’s origin, and not a matter of a possible arrival. These were the politics of conserving a homogenous national identity, and not creating an openness to new self and social identities. Comparable national politics of identity also reigned in the countries of emigration: foreign exchange with countries of origin was desirable, yet the mobile players were supposed to remain Italian, Turkish or Greek in order to maintain a sustainable flow of goods and money.¹⁵ This phenomenon was similarly observable in migrant families, as *ZEIT* editors Khuê Pham, Özlem Topçu and Alice Bota confirmed in their autobiographical sketches: “Our parents wanted us to become like them, and stay like them, except with good jobs and perfect pronunciation.”¹⁶

From the early ‘80s through the end of the ‘90s, the political rhetoric that Germany was not a country of immigration added to the bias, even though returning to the countries of their heritage was no longer an option for many second-generation immigrants. In the debates and literature of the 80s, this awkward transnational status was described as life between two stools. This imprecise metaphor is a clear indication of how language failed to adequately convey the already multifaceted German and transnational reality of daily life.¹⁷ Since the ‘90s, integration has been understood, in public and in parts of the social sciences, as a reciprocal process whose movements even the host society had to change with and adapt to.¹⁸

Today, 20 years later, much has changed yet again. German reunification is history, and Germany even describes itself politically as a country of immigration, which it put into practice, somewhat, in new citizenship laws in 2000 and immigrations statutes in 2005. At the same time, the world has become politically, economically, and technically more interdependent, for better and worse. Migration from southern Europe and mobility among Germans have led to complex social processes and changes, which requires a different and defused language that manifests the complexity of the debates about a society of immigrants in its successful and less successful aspects.

Our book on the exhibit “The New Germany” encompasses the necessary building stones and tools for such a language. It is conceived as a reader on the words, images and ideas of migration, which shape these public debates. These words will be analyzed, interrogated and considered from different scientific and also very subjective perspectives. The book offers diverse views on a complex theme, and naturally not all of the entries reflect the opinion of the editors.

The book will handle integral but also seemingly peripheral, themes from the current debates in the sciences, politics and human environments, discussing them as well as illuminating them in their historical contexts. From “Ankommen” (Arrival),

¹⁵ Cf. Karin Hunn, “Nächstes Jahr kehren wir zurück”. *Die Geschichte der türkischen “Gastarbeiter” in der Bundesrepublik* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2005), 176f.

¹⁶ Özlem Topçu, Alice Bota, and Khuê Pham, *Wir neuen Deutschen. Wer wir sind, was wir wollen* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2012), 102.

¹⁷ Özkan Ezli, “Von der interkulturellen zur kulturellen Kompetenz,” in *Wider den Kulturenzwang. Migration, Kulturalisierung und Weltliteratur*, ed. Özkan Ezli, Dorothee Kimmich, and Annette Werberger, 207–230 (Bielefeld: Transcript 2009), 210f.

¹⁸ This perspective found scholarly expression primarily in post-colonial and transnational approaches. See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Thomas Faist, “Jenseits von Nation und Postnation. Eine neue Perspektive für die Integrationsforschung,” in *Transstaatliche Räume. Politik, Wirtschaft und Kultur zwischen Deutschland und der Türkei*, 339–94 (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2000).

“Ähnlichkeit” (Similarity), “Ausländer” (Foreigners), through “(Schul-)Bildung” (Education), “Zugehörigkeit (Affiliation), “Assimilation” (Assimilation), “Diversität” (Diversity), “Erfolg” (Success), “Filme” (Films), “Gepäck” (Baggage), “Religion” (Religion), “Statistik” (Statistics), to “Zukunft” (Future), the chapters in this book address ideas and words with different scopes, ranging from needs and ways of behaving toward difference to questions of categorizing heterogeneous societies. It has to do with the history of these words’ and ideas’ reception and their projected futures, in which we will negotiate the problem scenarios, consequences, and possibilities of migration.

One perspective on migration, as simple as it is notable, can be found in the entry for the definition of “Erfolg” (Success) by Feridun Zaimoğlu, who described himself in the ‘90s as a “Kanake”:¹⁹ and as someone who had simply come late to being German.²⁰ In *Neue Deutsche*, the *ZEIT* journalists previously mentioned maintain that they currently—in contrast to the ‘80s and ‘90s—cannot ignore their Polish, Vietnamese or Turkish heritage, that they need it in order to understand themselves as new Germans.²¹ If otherness had previously appeared to be flawed, inappropriate, and out of place in the national narrative, it now seems to have become an obstinate attribute of individual and social self-identification. The dream of “wanting to live like an American” has died. In its place arrive “new Germans” and “German Muslims”.

Such displacements indicate that the consequences of migration, mobility, coexistence, identity, and the categorization of diversity are affected by interactions and processes that cannot be wholly encompassed either by theory or by politics. It is more worthwhile to dedicate ourselves to the images, words, and concepts of migration, since they are the foundations of our stories about ourselves and about others—about hybridity, nationhood, and society. Access to words, images and concepts will perhaps allow the reality of this society of immigrants to be grasped above individual and collective human needs, debates, and transformations. And it will also allow the normality of differences to be accommodated in non-polemic language.

¹⁹ Translator’s Note: A German-language slur for a Turkish person.

²⁰ Feridun Zaimoğlu, “Erfolg,” in *Das neue Deutschland*.

²¹ Özlem Topçu, Alice Bota, and Khuê Pham, “Neue Deutsche,” in *Das neue Deutschland*.

