Postmigration/Migration

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'Migration' is an umbrella term that spans multiple forms of human mobility. It is often used as a general term referring to the movement of people away from their usual residence, either within a nation-state or across a national border, i.e. international migration. Sometimes, migration is referred to in a broad sense which includes both 'forced' and 'voluntary' movements, but the term can also be used about population movements that are considered to be essentially voluntary. For cross-border or internal movements where the element of compulsion predominates over choice (for instance, due to persecution, war, conflict, violence or disaster), UNHCR recommends using the term 'displacement' rather than 'migration', especially when designating cross-border movements with a refugee character ('Migration', in UNHCR 2021).

In migration studies, human mobility is generally understood to be inextricably linked to globalisation. Studies such as *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (Haas, Castles, and Miller 2020) argue that migration has become globalised in the sense that more and more countries are significantly affected by international migration, and long-distance migration between major regions of the world has grown considerably. As a result, immigration countries tend to receive migrants and displaced people from an increasingly diverse range of countries, so that they have entrants from a broad array of economic, social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Haas, Castles, and Miller 2020, 9), leading to what Stephen Vertovec has termed 'super-diversity' (Vertovec 2007). This development is key to understanding 'postmigration' (of which, more below).

Whatever form migration takes, it involves processes of connection and disconnection. Friction and alienation are as integral to the act and experience of migration as enmeshment and hybridisation. Visible borders as well as invisible boundaries are crossed under different kinds of pressure, constriction and inequality. Attachments to the environment and community left behind are severed; yet, acts of migration also open possibilities of forging new connections and a new sense of belonging to the place of resettlement. Oftentimes, the prospect of reconnecting with the place and community of origin can also be upheld in migration. Even when return is not an option, digital technologies may provide opportunities for long-distance communication and virtual presence. Thus, migration supports the observation in the introduction to this volume that 'dis:connective phenomena should not be understood and studied as the opposite of interconnectedness, but as integral components of it' (→ **Introduction**).

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With an estimated 281 million international migrants (IOM 2023) and 108.4 million refugees (UNHCR 2023), it is no surprise that artists from across the world have engaged with the 'global' topics and challenges of migration and displacement. Important examples include Palestinian artist Mona Hatoum's video work *Measures of Distance* (1988), created when the Lebanese Civil War prevented the artist from returning from London to her family in Beirut. Letters written by Hatoum's mother in Arabic text are superimposed over images of her mother in the shower. The images are accompanied by taped conversations in Arabic between the two women and the artist's own voice reading the letters in English. In *Measures of Distance,* dis:connectivity is discernible on multiple levels: material (image/audio), linguistic (Arabic/English), geographical (Beirut/London) and socio-cultural (Middle-Eastern/European, private/public, everyday life/artistic practice).[1] A more recent example is Chinese artist Ai Weiwei's documentary *Human Flow* (2017).[2] Captured in refugee camps in twenty-three countries including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, France, Greece, Germany, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Kenya, Mexico and Turkey, this montage elucidates the staggering scale of forced displacement and bears witness to its profoundly human impact on individuals and their search for safety, shelter, justice and an unknown future. Ai's visceral global montage is a powerful reminder that contemporary migration is not synonymous with the unhindered mass movement of people or peaceful 'human flow', but increasingly about its blockages and disruptions: the fortification of borders, uncertain (im)mobility and indefinite detention which force many displaced people to spend years and, in some cases, decades detained in one of the world's numerous refugee camps.

Flight, exile and migration always involve dis:connectivity, but artists often experience this particularly acutely. Because artists are so dependent on professional networks it has taken years if not decades to build, migratory and displaced artists often live precarious lives. On the one hand, migration enables them to extend their network and reach; on the other, they risk severing the ties to the networks they have previously depended on for career opportunities and their livelihood. Displaced artists often struggle to overcome barriers in the arts industries they seek to access. Not only do they lack 'local knowledge' (and networks), they are also affected by the general marginalisation of people with a so-called migration

1 Mona Hatoum's video work is on YouTube. See: https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&sca_esv=573190987&sxsrf=AM9HkKm6oR54hqPyJf3GBXpGlYN8ERHmng:1697206260222&q=Mona+Hatoum+%2B+Measures+of+Distance&tbm=vid&source=lnms&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj_3ICCmvOBAxW2RvEDHbB4AuEQ0pQJegQIDBAB&biw=1134&bih=715&dpr=1.33#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:ace08992,vid:eKGPefM-Uf8,st:0. Accessed 27 February 2024.

2 For the trailer for *Human Flow* and further information, see the film's official website http://www.humanflow.com/. Accessed 27 February 2024.

background (including descendants of immigrants). As we shall see, such experiences of marginalisation can also fuel self-empowering forms of critique.

An important focal point in migration studies is 'migrant settlement' and questions of what is commonly termed 'integration' in political and media discourses. In Europe, for instance, integration is the dominant term in the discourses on migrant settlement and social adjustment. Although the EU definition states that integration is a two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents, policymakers often use the term to imply assimilation rather than a mutual process of adaptation (Council of the European Union 2004, 17; Grzymala-Kazlowska and Phillimore 2018, 181). Accordingly, Naika Foroutan and Frank Kalter suggest that the common understanding of 'integration' as a one-way process and primarily the responsibility of the 'newcomers' needs to updated with a postmigrant perspective (Foroutan and Kalter 2022).

'Postmigration' is about the ways in which past and present migrations have changed and are continuing to change societies. The concept belongs to – and challenges – the ever-growing cluster of concepts used to study the interaction and coexistence of different ethnic groups, including terms such as integration, multiculturalism, interculturalism, cultural diversity and super-diversity. In the words of Erol Yildiz, postmigration concerns 'the re-telling and reinterpretation of the phenomenon "migration" and its consequences' in societies with a history of postcolonial and so-called guest-worker immigration, as seen in many European countries (Yildiz 2013, 177). It should be stressed that the prefix 'post' does not designate an 'afterwards', as if the historical processes of migration had ended. The prefix implies, rather, a change of perspective on the overall narrative of the nation-state and its historical foundation and evolution. The 'post' in postmigration is thus akin to the 'post' in postcolonialism (Alkin and Geuer 2022). They are both critical terms, and the discourse on postmigration draws on the preceding discourse on postcolonialism, but it cannot be subsumed under it. As Yildiz contends, postmigration transforms the specific critical implications of postcolonialism into a 'positive' epistemology that brings to light differently situated perspectives and other possibilities (Yildiz 2022, 81, 93).

The term 'postmigrant' (*postmigrantisch*) was first developed into a critical term around 2004–2006, when it was employed in the cultural scene in Berlin, most notably in the performing arts where postmigrant theatre became a battle cry against the marginalisation of actors and cultural producers with minority ethnic backgrounds. They used the term as a tool for self-empowerment and for gaining control over how to identify and position oneself instead of being labelled by others (Stewart 2021; Sharifi 2011). In the late 2000s, the term was adopted by scholars in the humanities and social sciences in Germany who developed it into a theoretical concept of 'postmigration' (*das Postmigrantische*) which offered a critical perspec-

tive on what Naika Foroutan and others have theorised as 'postmigrant society' (*die postmigrantische Gesellschaft*) (Foroutan 2019a, 2019b; Espahangizi 2021; Schramm, Moslund, and Petersen 2019). In academia as well as the arts and culture sector, postmigrant perspectives have been harnessed to open up broad societal questions of equality and difference in new ways.[3] The focal point of postmigration studies is processes and conflicts internal to the receiving nation-states, especially the growth of diversity and the often conflictual renegotiation of identity, culture, history, community, belonging, privileges, barriers and racism/discrimination which migration-induced demographic change necessitate. However, postmigrant perspectives are fundamentally transnational and transcultural, as they highlight the fact that migrants usually maintain some kind of attachment to and contact with their country and culture of origin which is also passed on to their descendants.

Three different conceptualisations have informed the discourses on postmigration, in addition to the initial discourse on postmigrant theatre and postmigrant subjectivities. The first conceptualisation pivots on the notion of a 'postmigrant generation' of descendants of migrants and is closely related to the initial usage. The two other usages of the term postmigrant are interconnected, yet distinct. In the early 2010s, the term 'postmigrant society' was put into circulation as a descriptor for a plural democratic society. Concurrently, it became more and more common to use the adjective 'postmigrant' to refer to an analytical perspective. Thus, the second and third conceptualisations reflect a significant methodological shift away from singling out a social group and particular subjectivities to widening the analytical perspective to transformations throughout society (Petersen 2024, 44–45).

Although postmigration studies has now established itself as an academic subfield of migration studies in German-speaking countries, scholars of art history, museology and curatorial studies have been slow to adopt a postmigrant analytical perspective. In my understanding, a postmigrant methodology for cultural analysis examines long-contested issues of migration and culture in new ways by subjecting them to a postmigrant perspective that seeks – in the words of Regina Römhild – 'to "*demigrantise*" migration research while "*migrantising*" research into culture and society' (Römhild 2017, 70). In order to do so, it establishes a critical frame for understanding by adopting the theoretical framework of postmigrant thought, and by harnessing relevant analytical concepts from postcolonial studies, migration studies and the broader field of political, social and cultural theory, along with concepts used to study artistic practices, such as aesthetics, representation, performance, gaze, curating, institution, participation and public/public art. Where the migratory has been reduced to a negative marker of otherness and marginal-

3 For a definition of the 'arts and culture sector', see Essig 2015.

ity, a postmigrant methodology intervenes to question such stigmatising practices and discourses. In short, postmigrant thought prompts scholars to develop fresh approaches to enduring problems.

The term 'postmigrant' has three dimensions: empirical, analytical and normative. Empirically, it relates to the condition of postmigrancy, that is, to the fact of increasing societal heterogeneity. Analytically, it relates to the ways in which the term can be operationalised in different areas of study. As to postmigration's normative dimension, it is primarily associated with 'a normative-political idea of how we want to live together in societies marked by increasing heterogeneity' (Foroutan 2016, 248). However, art also harbours a normative dimension, especially public art and monuments as one of the most visible forms of historical storytelling and providers of collective keys to how societies understand their past, present and future. Recent years have seen new approaches to dis:connectivity in public art. A rush to topple statues from colonial times, to symbolically de-link from or 'cancel' a heritage of violence, racism, exploitation and injustice has coincided with powerful demands to have new monuments erected. Here the aim is not destruction but re-memorialisation: to recuperate what has been omitted in the past and to reconnect with what has been excluded or erased from public memory. Thus, art has a key role to play in plural democratic societies thanks to its capacity for memory management and democratic correction.

As Monica Juneja has observed, art can produce 'undisciplined' knowledge characterised by 'dynamics of dis-identification with disciplinary orthodoxies'. This capacity enables art to critically renegotiate inherited values and norms and to give 'the unthinkable a voice and the forgotten a shape' (Juneja 2019, 312–13). Art that grapples with postmigration may thus provide us with blueprints for the future, putting forward ideas of equality, multiple belonging and how to live together in diversity. An example is *Grundgesetz* (*'Basic law'*) created by the theatre director and singer Marta Górnicka in collaboration with the Maxim Gorki Theatre, a hub of 'postmigrant theatre'. Premiering in front of thousands of citizens assembled at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin on 3 October 2018 to celebrate the Day of German Unity, this chorus production had fifty professional and non-professional actors of different ages, genders and backgrounds subject the German Basic Law to a stress test. *Grundgesetz* asked on whose behalf the Constitution speaks and tested the limits of the legal text in the political context of German society (Décaillet 2021).[4] The multi-voiced performance uncovered the tension between the ideal of a unitary polit-

4 For the Maxim Gorki Theatre's trailer for *Grundgesetz*, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xlnj129F8O4. Further information is given on the Theatre's website, see: https://www.gorki.de/de/grundgesetz. Both websites accessed 27 February 2024.

ical community and its internal divisions, autonomy and co-dependence, thereby conjuring up a compelling vision of dis:connectivity as integral to postmigrant societies. *Grundgesetz* also showed that no matter whether a postmigrant perspective is analytically/diagnostically inflected or normative (or in this case, a combination), a postmigrant approach possesses a heightened sensitivity to conflict. This distinguishes it from concepts such as 'diversity' and 'multiculturalism' that can be more easily misused politically and commercially to propagate notions of vibrant multiculture and frictionless cohabitation.

This conflict sensitivity becomes most explicit when the postmigrant lens is applied to racialisation and racism as fundamental sources of friction and discrimination in postmigrant societies (Espahangizi et al. 2016). Here, art can serve as a critical instrument of dismantling ethnic stereotypes and racist imagery, as seen in the exhibition-based project *Edewa* (2012) by the Black feminist artist and scholar Natasha A. Kelly and a group of students at Berlin's Humboldt University.[5] The name is an acronym which twists the name of the German supermarket chain Edeka, which has a colonial past, as it was founded formally as a purchasing cooperative of grocers named 'Einkaufsgenossenschaft der Kolonialwarenhändler im Halleschen Torbezirk zu Berlin' (literally: 'Purchasing Cooperative of Colonial Goods Merchants in the Hallesches Tor District in Berlin'). 'Edewa' instead stands for *Einkaufsgenossenschaft antirassistischen Widerstandes* ('Purchasing Cooperative of the Anti-Racist Resistance'). The project launched a critique of the racist perceptions and exoticising imagery disseminated through the advertising images, product names and packing of what was historically known as 'colonial goods' such as coffee and cocoa. Due to the mass distribution of goods, this heritage of stereotypes has become deeply entrenched in consumer and everyday culture (Chametzky 2021, 163–66). By offering alternative packaging and presentation, *Edewa* challenged racism and sexism and spotlighted how histories of colonialism continue to contribute to shaping today's postmigrant societies.

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5 For the project's website, see http://www.edewa.info/ . Accessed 27 February 2024.

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