

Introduction**Writing Migration: Points of Departure and Arrival in History and Reason**

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Writing Migration

“Writing migration”: a mixture of heterogeneous terms, like a mixed metaphor, our title, insofar as movement of peoples seems so concrete, as movement of living, breathing subjective spirits, while writing remains abstract; the former so alive, the latter—the letter—so dead. Or so we usually think, even without having to think it. We know that migration experiences can be written down, but we think of the migration and the writing as two fundamentally different types of experiences, two quite different types of thing. Writing, we know, is something intellectual, civilized, related to the mind, an educated person’s activity, only 5000 years old. Migration is a thing of reality, going back to the origins of humanity--as far as, and far beyond, what the eye can see. Migration is historical and primary, but writing theoretical and secondary (and therefore rational in both the negative and the positive senses of the term).

Our point of departure in the organization of this special issue was—in contrast to these overly simple conventions—a curiosity about the ways in which the two structurally intersect: writing migrates, and migration writes. The opposites—present experience and representation—interact—such is the hypothesis—in something like a dialectical pattern, which is not necessarily as easy as one might think to keep track of. *Writing migrates*: it moves because it leaves its origin in mind and speech and drifts materially, through the world, as well as mentally, in the minds of its readers, who rewrite it inevitably anew, such that the writing departs from itself and returns to itself, differently, in the moment of being reinscribed, even if the reinscription occurs just in someone’s head. In turn, *migration writes*: it leaves traces of its passage—people and peoples leave traces wherever they go, leave impressions, expressions, interventions, innovations, complaint, praise, displacements and renewals wherever they sojourn. And sometimes they even write down their own impressions, adding “literal” writing to the “figurative” writing of their existences.

Given these preliminary reflections, we were interested in hearing from multiple scholars about this force-field of the interrelations between the writing of migration and the migration of writing, the traces of human movement and the movement of human traces, that constitute “writing migration.” The topic already implicitly engaged the question of the relationship between the rational and the real—on the one hand, the rational and theoretical, abstract and yet material dimension of writing, and on the other hand the real and historical, concrete and yet spiritual dimension of migration, as the lived experiences of people and peoples in movement across borders of various kinds (above all national-political, cultural, and linguistic ones). It is thus not surprising and in no way trivial that the essays we received turned out to invoke the tensions and complications in the relationship between the rational and the historical from the first to the last, in a widely divergent set of contexts and modes. By means of this through line, the essays in concert urge us to reflect on the opposition of reason and history (and its many displaced avatars or translations) intensively as we work with the cultural-historical phenomena of migration, and of its writing, that are so critically, ethico-politically important in our day.

Europeans on the Edges of Europe:

from Counter-enlightenment to Dialectical Materialism

We begin with two articles dealing with important moments and monuments in German cultural history that loom in different ways in the *background* of contemporary migration phenomena in the German-language worlds. One of these moments left traces, in the form of the work of Johann Gottfried Herder, in the disciplinary realm of the philosophy of history (which it helped to constitute); the other, in the form of Bertolt Brecht’s work, affected forever modern drama. The first played out the historicist critique of Enlightenment universalism; the second mobilized a version of materialist historicism that expressed, through the portrayal of cynicism, the longing for a more rational world, a longing enunciated during World War II, itself inaugurated by a paranoid paroxysm of Aryanist xenophobia vis-à-vis wandering “non-Europeans” in Europe. The play of the tensions between the discourses of history and reason, Counter-enlightenment and Enlightenment, extends down to our own day, well beyond the specific limits of eighteenth-century ideology and also beyond the limits of the Marxist-Leninist vs.

capitalist Cold War polarization (even as both of these historical moments remain alive within, and haunt, our present). Across these tensions, each discourse has something to say to the other, and from *within* the other, as the essays below that deal with post-World War II and contemporary situations illustrate in various ways.

But first, to be more specific about the two background-providing essays: Amadou Oury Ba opens this special issue with an essay that shows how Herder's historicizing critique of (Enlightenment) "reason" in principle inaugurates the possibility of a modern Western openness to non-Western cultures, a possibility that has perhaps not yet, even now, been realized as the predominant norm. To reveal the implications of Herder's critique of Enlightenment for the question of the value and sense of non-European cultures, Ba focuses on Herder's *Ideas for a Philosophy of Human History* (1794-1791), more narrowly on the chapter concerning the "Organization of the African Peoples," and contrasts Herder's views in particular with those of Immanuel Kant. Ba emphasizes several important aspects of Herder's position, including: the rejection of color-based racism; the general notion that all cultures have to be understood on their own terms (so that each culture is to be considered as substantial within itself); and the acknowledgement that Western knowledge and understanding of non-Western cultures is sorely lacking in Herder's day. With reference to these particular elements of Herder's text, Ba shows how Herder reveals and opposes the devastating violence of false, premature (i.e. surreptitiously particularist) universality. Ba's argument, further, is that Herder *deconstructs* Enlightenment—an argument that implies an innovative conception of Counter-enlightenment, as not merely opposed, in a binary fashion, to Enlightenment discourse, but rather as opposing (and exposing) the latter to the other that it carries within itself. The historicist critique of formalist Enlightenment tendencies remains an important element of progressive cultural studies today, even as the scholarly discussion of the debates between these two moments in late eighteenth century thought remains lively and complex. And it is a certainty that, if the contemporary Western response to migration were predominantly guided by the historicist and culturally relativist aspects of Herder's discourse, rejectionist and xenophobic tendencies would be notably less prominent in the West than they are.

Our next piece that deals with important backgrounds to recent and current refugee and migration phenomena and their cultural manifestations is the essay, co-authored by Dorothee Ostmeier and Michael Malek Najjar, on Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*, and on the interpretation of the play that guided the production directed by Najjar at the University of Oregon. As the authors highlight, Brecht wrote the play when he was a writer in exile during World War II, and it features a migrating, homeless protagonist who serves armies during the Thirty Years War (arguably the unofficially first "World War"). Among other things, then, *Mother Courage* is a displaced self-reflection of Brecht himself. In political-philosophical terms, Brecht's position—Marxian theory—represents a kind of uneasy synthesis of historicism with Enlightenment values, i.e. the materialist version of the Hegelian reconciliation of history with reason. In addition to the autobiographical, mimetic dimension—whereby Brecht is both representing in a displaced way and meditating on his own experience of exile and displacement in the midst of world conflagration—the authors also discuss the manner in which Brecht's text itself is subject to displacement and exile, specifically on the levels of translation as well as performance. Beyond this, homing in on the narrative's meaning and furthering its migration (as any readers must), the authors argue that Brecht is demystifying the sometimes-idealized experience of exile. He shows, in *Mother Courage*, that the nomadic existence, which exile (e.g. as caused by war) inevitably inaugurates, is immersed fundamentally in the hard realities of the struggle to survive, and thus difficult—to say the least—to idealize. In *Mother Courage's* story of migration, Ostmeier and Najjar argue, there is no arrival at a safe place of domicile. She never gets home.

Migration Writing Today

Against the background of these first two articles—through which Herder's optimistic opening of the modern anthropological tradition is juxtaposed with Brecht's somewhat bitter portrait of the essential human being as a helplessly cynical petit-bourgeois, trying to save her family yet victimized by forces beyond her control—we turn to the contemporary situation.

Sabine Scholl—an accomplished (and peripatetic, and hence poly-culturally imbued) contemporary Austrian novelist in her own right—opens the section of this

special issue focused on contemporary literature (and film) with a selective panorama of recent and contemporary literature of migration in the German-language world, as well as contemporary social and cultural trends associated with recent and current immigrant flows in Germany. Her report—an insider’s view of contemporary German-language fiction—touches upon German- and multi-lingual writing emerging from (and often reflecting in thematic and formal ways) the diverse migration-experiences of people from the former Eastern bloc countries, Turkey, the Middle East, Central Asia, and elsewhere. Along the way, she provides our readers with a brief introduction to a number of important younger writers and publications largely unknown in the US, even amongst many German Studies professionals here. Throughout, while she does not deny injustices, difficulties, and suffering, she emphasizes both the creative cultural energy that immigration has brought to the German-speaking world, and the creative impulses it has evoked in those already in Germany (especially in the writing community, and especially amongst women writers) who have responded ethically to welcome these new perspectives and experiences. She shows how, through this response, they have affirmed both the fluidity of and the fixity of identities, appreciating both as elements to be reckoned with in our age of cultural globalization. The German contemporary scene, then, in which a reactionary variant of Counter-enlightenment (i.e. right-wing populism) is arrayed against a progressive, Enlightenment tradition of “tolerance” (which to be sure has sometimes hypo-critically allied itself, across history, with racism, nationalism, and white identity-politics), introduces new variations on the theme of the complex relationship between history and reason.

Jocelyn Aksin examines Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s (1946-) play *Perikizi* in terms of the way in which it presents migration as an experience that can both traumatize and, at the same time, facilitate access to (and hence also inaugurate the working-through of) multigenerational family trauma that precedes it. While exploring these *thematic* and *historical* concerns, Aksin shows how they interact with the *formal* dimension. For example, as she demonstrates, in Özdamar’s play a theatricality that is not the simple opposite of reality structures both the repetition of trauma from one generation to the next (through passage of discourse from forebears to the descendents who speak their lines) and the social working-through of individual trauma that is broached in the dramatic

encounter between performers and audience. The movement of migration is here accompanied by forms of repetition that combine the element of return with new modes of departure. History appears here as (theatrical) repetition of trauma and as its (theatrical) working-through, while reason extends itself to accommodate the heteronomy of the subject as best it can.

If Aksin's article investigates a dimension of migration that could be said to constitute its *impossibility* (or one of its impossibilities) —that is, the ways in which one never leaves because one brings the traumas of past generations along on the journey— Mert Bahadır Reisoglu's text confronts us with the opposite aspect of migration, namely its *necessity*, in the sense of the impossibility of returning to the homeland (or, perhaps, of even managing not to continually leave it behind). He considers this aspect of impossible return, that is, in at least two senses: both in the sense that, when one leaves for a sufficient period of time, the homeland comes to seem strange, or foreign, and in the sense that, with modernity (according to some writers), a certain transcendental homelessness reveals itself to be the fundamental situation of the human. Reisoglu pursues the question of the (im)possibility of return from exile in the publications of Güney Dal (1944-), from interviews Dal conducted with other Turkish authors living in Germany in 1983, to his novelistic production, especially *The Hairless Ape* [*Der enthaarte Affe*] and *Gelibolu'ya Bisa Bir Yolculuk* [*A Short Trip to Gallipoli*, and in German, *Eine kurze Reise nach Gallipoli*] from the early 1990s. After relating the diverse positions on exile that Dal's interviews reveal, and then discussing critically a range of prominent contemporary theorists' interpretations of exile and diaspora (such as Svetlana Boym, Edward Said, Amir Mufti, Salman Rushdie), Reisoglu shows in detail how in this last novel (a kind of schizophrenic modernist text), Dal questions the distinctions between homeland and foreign country while nonetheless refusing to withdraw into the asocial and solitary subjectivity of the individualistic lone wolf. The tension between historicism and criticist rationalism returns in this essay as the tension between those who approach exile more historically and concretely, on the one hand, and the modernists who approach it more abstractly and tend to universalize it as a human condition, on the other.

Araceli Masterson-Algar addresses the dialectical tensions between departure and return from a different cultural-historical angle, that of Spanish migration to central

Europe—in this case, Switzerland—for work during the 1960s. Her primary artefactual focus here is the film, *Un Franco, 14 Pesetas* (2004), by Carlos Iglesias (1955-). In this film, the director fictionalizes his memories of his childhood experience of migration from Spain to Switzerland and back. In the resulting narrative, the most problematic, crucial moment is the moment of the young male adolescent's return to Spain, after he has spent most of his childhood in Switzerland, a return whose meaning for him—precisely, *exile*—divides the boy's experience from that of his parents. (This is one version of the moment of impossible return Güney Dal has worried through and examined for its implications, as Reisoglu showed.) The complexities of individual memory, collective-familial expectation, social contradictions, and the situatedness of migration in time and space make up the rich texture of the narrative Masterson-Algar explores. In addition, she reveals through detailed readings of individual scenes how these *thematic* elements are rendered through various cinematic *techniques* in Iglesias' film. History in migration is here discontinuous and layered, as for example the boy's home is foreign to his parents, while their home also remains his (alienated) own. And within this history, rationality presents itself, amongst other ways, as the problematic rationality of technological-industrial production under capitalism, with its attendant injustices and hidden irrationality.

In the next essay, we move from Spain to Sweden. Benjamin Mier-Cruz thematizes the painful and widespread phenomenon of the internalization of xenophobia (here particularized as Islamophobia), sexism, and racialized heteronormativity, as it appears in Jonas Hassen Khemiri's (1978-) novel, *Everything I Don't Remember*. Khemiri's story, whose narrator is a "hypermasculine Muslim immigrant who has secretly fallen in love with another Swedish Arab man," provides Mier-Cruz with the opportunity to use narratological analysis (Peter Brooks and others) to expose the narrator-of-color's internalized racism, sexism and heteronormativity. Combining this narratological analysis with historical contextualization, as well as postcolonial, black feminist, and critical race theory, Mier-Cruz shows how Khemiri renders in fiction the dangerous potential of the right-wing rhetoric of "tradition" in contemporary Sweden, as by extension elsewhere. By a kind of tragic irony of hegemonic mechanisms, being the *object* of exclusion here does not necessarily prevent one from finding oneself complicitous with the ideological *subject* of exclusion. It appears here that one can find oneself incapable of *arriving*, within a

process of migration, in part because one's very rejection has been installed in one's own subjectivity and habits of thought and action, ultimately through the threat of the violence the installation itself carries out.

A Theoretical Proposal—Philosophy of Movement

The series of main articles comprising this special issue concludes with a philosophical essay by Thomas Nail on migration in the context of a philosophy of movement that grows, rhizome-like, out of Lucretian, Bergsonian, and Deleuzian inspirations (among others). Nail's closeness to vitalist traditions links him back to the Herderian version of the vitalist critique of reason, whose anti-racist and culturally relativist force Ba's essay brings out. Nail would, indeed, be quite sympathetic to the intentions of a progressive critique of Enlightenment.

His main *historical* thesis in this essay links the expansion of Western civilization to the dynamic of an ongoing creation and expulsion of migrants through dispossession and exclusionary techniques, which extend from literal (walls) to juridical and economic mechanisms. According to Nail's historical thesis, the criminalization of immigrants in US right wing discourse is only the most recent manifestation of this process. In more purely *philosophical* terms, Nail's main claim is that the migrant *precedes* the native or the citizen (or whatever is conceptually placed over against the migrant as static resident). The basis of this claim is the principle that—in accordance with Nail's Bergsonian (and more broadly process-oriented) inspiration, and extending Bergson's critique of Zeno's paradoxes—movement is *prior* to stasis: the drawing of the line is prior to the existence of the line itself, in which the act of drawing has become absent or invisible. Concerning literary history, from this perspective, the literature of migration is implicitly (or always already) written within the literature of the nations whose existence is predicated on the exclusion and denial of the migrant. Migration leaves traces in what disavows it. Which does not mean that it does not need to be written more explicitly today, as well as visibly re-traced in the track of its past invisibility. More generally, and beyond or aside from the question of the literary, Nail proposes that we redesign political theory on the basis of the assumption that the migrant is ontologically prior to the citizen—a large and ambitious project, as he acknowledges. Going beyond this first philosophical claim about the

migrant's priority, moreover, Nail argues further (in a move that recalls the thought patterns of Derridian deconstruction) that, just as the migrant is prior to the citizen, so the border is prior to the entity around which it is drawn. A final further corollary he draws is that today's multiplication of migrants is an effect of the multiplication of (kinds of) borders. The development, explication, and justification of these main claims makes up, then, the body of Nail's innovative and provocative approach to the question of migrants (and writing) in our own times.

Border-theory in a Historicist, Realist Mode

The issue concludes with a review essay by Joscha Klueppel on the important recent book by Manlio Graziano, a geopolitics scholar, titled *What is a Border?* The review provides a glimpse into a more historical approach to borders, in contrast to the more philosophical approach taken by Nail, who in this respect appears in our context like a rationalist, despite his links to vitalist, Counter-enlightenment traditions. The review article explains Graziano's approach to borders as "political objects" situated in "overlapping zones of conflict," and provides a critical summary. Klueppel notes that the book provides a useful, condensed *history* of borders, as well as an interesting analysis of *two levels of borders* encountered by migrants—visible, state borders and visible, intra-state borders. He sketches further the *global scope* of the book, and its *critical* perspective, which questions the usefulness or meaningfulness of strengthening borders in our own times. This is no doubt a perspective Graziano shares with Nail, despite their differences in methodological or field orientation. Graziano's more historical approach to the topic of borders and migrants thus contrasts usefully with Nail's more speculatively conceptual approach, each shedding potentially clarifying light on the other no less through what it shares in common with the other than through what separates them.

Arrival Home: Point of Departure

Taken as a whole, the selection of essays here, on the topic of "writing migration" as it appears today, recalls and demonstrates the continuing and, indeed, pressing importance of both the tensions between, and the mutual intertwinements of, history and theory, tradition and reason, in their various transformations, for the cultural politics of

movements of people and peoples today, voluntary and/or involuntary, individual and/or collective, in the age of cultural globalization. Receptivity and spontaneity, passivity and activity, heteronomy and autonomy are equally in play, through shifting constellations, in the essays that follow, as in the human stories they retell and analyze.