

The Polyphonic Voices of Postmigration

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Abstract:

Postmigration has become a prominent concept within the Humanities. *Postmigration: Art, Culture, and Politics in Contemporary Europe* clarifies many questions circulating around the source of its ideas. The authors portray different approaches and lay out a chronology of the term's multifaced interpretations. Elaborating its actual qualities along artistic objects and cultural spaces, the contributions of the volume provide a notion of postmigration that effectively negotiates complexities of the contemporary.

Die polyphonen Stimmen der Postmigration

German Abstract:

Postmigration ist zu einem wichtigen Begriff in den Geisteswissenschaften geworden. *Postmigration: Art, Culture, and Politics in Contemporary Europe* klärt viele Fragen, die um den Ursprung des Begriffs kreisen. Die Autor_innen schildern unterschiedliche Ansätze und legen eine Chronologie der vielfältigen Interpretationen des Begriffs dar. Indem sie seine tatsächlichen Qualitäten entlang künstlerischer Objekte und kultureller Räume herausarbeiten, liefern die Beiträge des Bandes einen Begriff von Postmigration, der die Komplexität der Gegenwart effektiv verhandelt.

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Gaonkar, Anna Meera, Astrid Sophie Øst Hansen, Hans Christian Post, and Moritz Schramm (eds.). *Postmigration: Art, Culture, and Politics in Contemporary Europe*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2021. 348 pages, 40,00 EUR. ISBN: 978-3-8376-4840-9.

Postmigration: Art, Culture, and Politics in Contemporary Europe edited by Anna Meera Gaonkar, Astrid Sophie Øst Hansen, Hans Christian Post, and Moritz Schramm acknowledges the versatility of the concept of postmigration in European academia above all. Emphasizing the multitude of concepts and interpretations across the continent, the editors seek to (re)introduce postmigration as a contemporary concept of peculiarity. Apparently superseding migration studies as a concept of a “dynamic and conflictual state of negotiation” (p. 33), postmigration studies have become an outstanding research field.

Giving the floor to different voices on postmigration, the editors foster a dialogical juxtaposition of theories and point out that “the multiplicity of usages of the concept is a methodological and empirical strength, rather than a disadvantage” in their view (p. 13). Moving away from the predominant reading of the concept’s sources within the German theatre scene in Berlin from 2004 to 2008, the introduction proposes to look back in time to find ideas of postmigration related to postcolonial, race and ethnicity studies of the UK in the 1990s. According to the editors, influential scholars such as Stuart Hall later influenced scholars like Gerd Baumann, Thijl Sunier, and Tariq Modood in their concepts of postmigration, expanding the postcolonial discourse beyond “national identities and ideas of stable cultures and ethnicities” (p. 13). The authors pinpoint three major conceptualizations of the postmigration discourse: a “postmigrant generation,” a “postmigrant society” and “postmigration as an analytical perspective” (p. 19–23). Furthermore, the volume addresses critical views and outlooks on the concept of postmigration and introduces arguments that subvert several claims.

“Part I: Discourses and Interventions” examines the concept of postmigration within contemporary research. Regina Römhild accounts for a postcolonial European “mostly invisible,

long-term presence of migration” (p. 45), and focuses on addressing the conflict that arises from migration studies as a field that creates a notion of “migrantology” by means of othering (p. 46). Römhild proposes a methodology that “analyses society as a whole from the perspective of migration,” proclaiming a “demigrantisation” of the research field (ibid.). Historian Kijan Espahangizi negotiates the development of guest worker and colonial immigration since World War I in Germany and Switzerland, scrutinizing the relationship between migration and integration, and the role that anti-immigrant discourses play in this context, noting that various discourses oscillate between an “integral” and simultaneously “foreign” view towards migrants (p. 68). Integration as a substantial element in orchestrating a crisis of migration is taken up by Juliane Karakayalı and Paul Mecheril. In their take on German socio-politics, they characterize “postimmigration societies” as polarizing and antagonistic “migration regimes” (p. 82), where “only those who are labelled as migrants has [sic!] to make efforts to adapt” (p. 80). Lizzie Stewart introduces provoking reflections on the postmigration concept as a source for cultural capital before part one ends with Marc Hill and Erol Yildiz’s chapter on a discussion of Christoph Schlingensief’s performance piece at Wiener Festwochen (Vienna Festival) in 2000: *Ausländer raus! Schlingensief’s Container* [*Foreigners out! Schlingensief’s Container*], which staged a participatory selection of twelve alleged asylum seekers for deportation in a container. The authors define the postmigrant perspective as a “transformed way of seeing,” where “entrenched established views and concepts of order are deconstructed” (p. 113) and acknowledge Schlingensief’s infiltration of a hegemonial ‘dispositif’ in the wake of Michel Foucault.

“Part II: Cultural Representations” exemplifies postmigration along artistic case studies in literature and film. Roger Bromley emphasizes the importance of “breaking up ascribed identities” to rehabilitate Paul Gilroy’s idea of ‘conviviality’ (p. 133). Presenting “split subjectivities” as inherent to postmigrant belonging (ibid.), Bromley establishes a differentiation between an urban but globally infused, “post-ethnic convergence” (p. 136) that fosters “horizontal affiliation” (p. 138), and the notion of a performative ‘migrancy’ that exemplifies ascriptions as ‘Other’ in two British postmigrant novels (p. 141). Anja Tröger takes up Romley’s notion of ‘split subjectivities,’ arguing for memory as a crucial element for postmigrant belonging. Tröger traces non-linear “affective resonances between past and present” (p. 146), linking a space-time-complex to the concept of ‘affective spaces’ by Frederik

Tygstrup, that she develops into “mnemonic affective spaces” (p. 148). Maïmouna Jagne-Soreau contributes a critical overview on “racializing structures” (p. 161) in the terminology of the Nordic literary world and Eszter Pabis and Markus Hallensleben each highlight the so-called ‘Eastern turn’ in contemporary European literature, arguing for an “ethics of memory” that integrates the “migratory nature of culture” (p. 192) and the postmigrant as an “active part in a plural society” (p. 213). Part two of the contributions concludes with reflections on the documentary film *We Are Here* (2019) by filmmaker Hans Christian Post, who describes the challenge of working on the film and the concept of postmigration that describes a “transitory phase in society” (p. 223). Focusing on theatre artists engaging with the postmigrant condition in Denmark and Germany, the film also features contributions by scholars from the field including Shermin Langhoff and Naika Foroutan.

In “Part III: Postmigrant Spaces” Anne Ring Petersen discusses the award-winning public park *Superkilen (The Super Wedge)* by the Danish artist group Superflex, which embraces the involvement of local citizens, and postmigrant transformations (p. 248), and the public sculpture *I Am Queen Mary* (2018), which embodies a hybrid collaboration by artists Jeanette Ehlers and La Vaughn Belle recoding the “dominant narrative of Danish history” (p. 247). Álvaro Luna-Dubois reflects on 1960 and 1970 Parisian shantytown history, which has largely disappeared from French collective memory. Luna-Dubois’ discusses Marc Augé’s related concept of the ‘non-place’ in Laurent Maffre’s novel *Demain, Demain* (2012) which portrays intercultural ties in a plural society. Discussing Edward Said’s concept of the ‘contrapuntal,’ Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld, Amr Hatem and Abbas Mroueh recount their artistic video installation *Zamakan (TimeSpace)* (2019). They exemplify the encounter with a sweet instead of a familiar salty yogurt by the protagonist Aymen. This contrapuntal image, which is affective, creates “the possibility of different times coexisting within the same moment, what we call affects time” (p. 287) and speaks to Said’s notion of the contrapuntal as an “awareness of the plurality of vision” (p. 285). Elisabeth Kirndörfer and Madlen Pilz talk about the challenges of ‘migrantization’ in organizations that aim to support women with migration backgrounds in postmigrant societies, before Claudia Böhme, Marc Hill, Caroline Schmitt and Anett Schmitz close with the last chapter. They advocate for redirecting the public attention towards living conditions in refugee camps which have worsened since the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, by

deconstructing the “binary construction of ‘victim’ and ‘helpers’” (p. 329) and including innovative models of global refugee accommodation (p. 333).

Not only does this rich volume encompass a variety of different and sometimes dissenting approaches to the concept of postmigration, but it manages to juxtapose them in a publication that fosters a dialogue as the editors have claimed, at times even in direct reference. The volume calls for further conceptualizations, apparently negotiated along the areas of postmigrant generations, societies, and analytical perspectives, which have displayed an intriguing glimpse at what the concept of postmigration can offer for future research in an increasingly polyphonic world.