

Editors' Introduction

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Abstract

This thematic module of *German History Intersections* begins around 1500 and continues to the present day with an open end, because migrations do not end. The characteristics of migrations have changed over the centuries, and our selection of sources reflects both the various reasons and conditions for migration and the different social and political reactions to it over a period covering more than 500 years of German history. Our module pays special attention to the diverse experiences of migrants and their cultural expressions.

I. Migrations, 1500 to the Present^[1]

Overview

This thematic module of *German History Intersections* begins around 1500 and continues to the present day with an open end, because migrations do not end.

The characteristics of migrations have changed over the centuries, and this section presents data and sources for the following – sometimes overlapping – periods:

Migrations from 1500 to the eighteenth century,

early, multidirectional emigration from the 1680s to the 1820s

Flight and migration triggered by revolution and war, 1789-1815

Emigration, return, internal migration and immigration throughout what might be termed the “delayed” nineteenth century (1815-1914), as well as transit migration from the East to the emigration ports of Bremen and Hamburg in the decades of industrialization and colonialism until 1914

Migration and flight during the First World War, in the interwar period, and due to fascism, The Second World War, Holocaust and resettlement in the immediate postwar period

the change from emigration, forced migration and flight to immigration after 1945/55

Immigration and debates about Germany as a “country of immigration” instead of a *Leitkultur* since the 1990s.

Migrant experiences: concepts and categories

Migration is not only physical movement in geographical space, e.g. by Tyrolean traders to Braunschweig and by southwest German rural families to Danube settlements, from Hamburg to New York, from Galicia to Eastern Albania, from Milan to Munich or Vietnam to Berlin. Potential migrants live in a specific source culture, a micro-region, where they assess their options for earning a living: whether to remain settled locally, to travel

inexpensively to a nearby area (mesoregion) or to a distant macro-region, such as “America” or “Australia.” From their specific source culture, migrants gather precise information about a micro-target region. Thus people from southern Sweden came to the Baltic Sea region of Germany, people from northern Italy to southern Germany, and people from the Netherlands came to work in northern German moor drainage projects. Since the eighteenth century, many German-speaking migrants saw “America” as an option, while contemporary speakers of other languages viewed “Germany” in much the same way. Millions of men and women, most of whom were young, decided for themselves to emigrate from the German-speaking territories, which were fragmented among ruling families. Similarly, the rural population also decided to migrate from the countryside to nearby cities from the early modern period to the time of the Weimar Republic.

Many factors had to be considered when making these life decisions. Migration researchers try to summarize the diversity of factors in understandable categories. These include – and are detailed as far as possible in the sources presented here:

emotional, family and neighborhood aspects, from childhood socialization to young people's efforts to gain independence and start their own families;

life-cycle developments that are different for men and women according to social norms or role assignments: Gender is part of all decision-making, whether to stay in place or to seek a better one.

War and persecution, systemic unemployment and the exclusion of minorities play a role in the decision to migrate.

Cultural background includes school and education, religion and rituals, language and literature; frameworks are set by migration regimes, citizenship and civil rights, labor skills and labor markets, monocultural institutions or multicultural representations. Boundaries are also drawn by racism and xenophobia as well as by restrictive asylum policies.

Against this background, commercial and labor migrants consciously prepared for their journeys. For local migration from the countryside to the cities, farmers' wives and village craftsmen who sold their products at neighboring markets knew about job opportunities. Letters from “America” relayed information to young migrants just as text messages do today; help was provided by refugee networks and aid organizations or, after 1918 and 1945, by government agencies. So-called “chain migration” was also important for those who have already arrived, because migrants can only develop their individual skills into “social capital” if a community develops.

On the other hand, those displaced by wars or regimes cannot prepare themselves, but often have to reconstruct their family or deal with the trauma of the death of their loved ones. Finding a way, reorientation and integration are much more difficult without preparation. Migrants often hope to return home – should better conditions make it possible. Also, for many people who decide to leave or emigrate, decisions are not “free,” but are governed by economic constraints. When work and land “at home” are lacking, the “supernumerary” population is forced to emigrate. Thus, the Germans going to America were economic refugees. Some went “to earn bread” for their hungry stomachs, others, who had a livelihood but few options, went to seek greater opportunities, still others, whose culture and lives were endangered, sought safety. The goal was never “unlimited opportunity” – as an advertising slogan put it – but to leave behind known impossibilities, as the historian Walter Nugent put it.

Until modern times, living conditions in cities were so catastrophic in terms of hygiene that without immigrants

their population would have shrunk dramatically. In the countryside during the second half of the nineteenth century, the parental farm offered hardly any income, but in the “founding years” after 1880, industry and mines did offer work. During these decades, more than 50% of the inhabitants of all large and many medium-sized towns were born elsewhere. In contemporary polemical debates it was often claimed that “they” were Germans and not Anatolians, Nigerians or Asians. The newcomers, however, who spoke different dialects and dressed like farmers, were considered foreign and “peasants,” a threat to urban “civilized” people. As early as the Middle Ages, anyone who appeared “foreign” rather than different because of their clothing and accent was marginalized. As in the aftermath of the religious and world wars, the arrival of refugees from the war-torn regions of Afghanistan, Syria and elsewhere has been the subject of intense and controversial debate since 2015.

Migrants and the shift from state to nation state

Migrants cross borders, internally between country and city or between dialect zones, but they are usually (both historically and presently) only counted at international borders. In historical memory this has led to internal migrants often being overlooked and forgotten. Yet, more important than geographical, international borders were internal social and cultural borders, which also have gender-specific effects. For example, a young woman from a rural environment who was looking for housework in early modern or industrial cities crossed three borders: between village and urban lifestyles, between agricultural and middle-class households, and between rural and urban speech patterns. She had to adapt immediately, was housed in the employer's apartment, and had no private space to which she could retreat. Her brothers, who also migrated to the city, found work in “outbuildings” such as stables and gardens where they too were housed – even if the accommodations were bad, at least they were not under direct supervision and had some space to themselves. Later, factory quarters were added for men and women, usually with supervision.

In addition, there were other internal borders or front lines: non-traditional craftsmen labelled as “troublemakers” in the early modern period, “the Silesians” in Berlin, “the Jews” in general, among others. On the other hand, “useful” foreigners were incorporated as economic citizens, like the Jews once were in Eastern Europe or the Huguenots and Mennonites in Prussia and elsewhere, and –workers with “green or blue cards” today. Racist border regimes discriminate against immigrants of “undesirable” skin color; for example cultural hierarchies have discriminated against “foreign workers” in Germany since the 1880s (renamed “guest laborers” after 1955). They are forced to rotate and leave the country after a fixed period of time.

Entry and residence regulations have changed over the centuries, forcing newcomers to interface with institutions in their new place of residence. In the Middle Ages, popes and rulers demanded protection money from Muslims and Jews. In the Early Modern period, merchants and traders had to negotiate where and for how long they could sell which goods; similarly, they sometimes had to offer them for sale when passing through (“stacking right”). In the Wilhelmine Empire, Eastern European seasonal agricultural laborers had to carry an identification card with them. In contrast, on arrival in the USA before 1914/17, only good health and a (relatively small) minimum fee was required on entry - legitimizing documents were not necessary, a mere entry in the “passenger lists” (after 1892 at the most important immigration station, Ellis Island, New York) sufficed. Religion, since the Reformation (1517) has lost importance as a criterion for emigration and admission since the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; in the present day, fundamentalist young men who are prepared to use violence have again pushed the issue to the fore. For centuries, societies were pluralistic and economic subjects, i.e. tax or fee payers were desired.

Plural coexistence – side by side and with each other

In the past, diversity was considered modern: “pluralism,” meant coexistence regulated by habit, less often integrated cooperation, and occasionally conflict-laden competition. For centuries, families speaking German

dialects migrated to rural areas in Baltic and Balkan regions, where mercantilistically minded rulers had invited these foreigners. Not homogeneity, but multi-cultural coexistence was the rule.

For practical reasons, immigrants usually settled and still settle close to each other. In this way they can form networks. Ethnic-cultural neighborhoods are social communities with shops for familiar food, with mutual aid societies and with meeting rooms for religious practice. They enable a “soft landing” – preserving the valued aspects of one’s original culture while at the same time discarding its hated aspects such as class barriers, political muzzles, and forced subservience. Desired coexistence was also part of the way of life for migrant workers during the industrialization phase: In Berlin, people from Silesia settled at Schlesisches Tor, in New York, Northern Germans settled in Little Germany. Immigrants came with the willingness to adapt enough to find work immediately, because they did not and do not have savings. They adapt to new things in small steps in order to achieve their goals: sufficient language skills for a job, school attendance of the children, contact with neighbors speaking a different language. Their goal was and is to be able to stand on their own two feet and make decisions. Modern welfare state assistance facilitates these steps.

For historical memory as well as for current policy-making, the analysis of the processes is central, as well as precise terminology. “Migrations” or “migratory processes” are open in time: temporary, regularly seasonal, one-time permanent emigration and immigration with settlement at the destination (immigration and emigration), stage migration from one place to the next, for one phase of life or for an entire life. Whoever returns after many years is returning with new experiences. If the direction of migration is reversed after generations, it is reverse migration: the descendants of former migrants do not return to their original society, but move into a society that is suddenly foreign to them. This was the case with the resettlement of the descendants of German-speaking migrants from “the East” under German fascism, it was also the case with the late resettlement of the so-called “Russlanddeutschen” [ethnic remigrants from Russia]. In the Federal Republic of Germany an “immigration law” was debated in 2015 in view of the many war refugees: however, some of the immigrants want to continue their migration, they quickly or after a few years become emigrants; German citizens emigrate, EU citizens immigrate. What is needed is a legal regulation of immigration and emigration, a migration framework.

Early Modern migrations

Migrations in the early modern period (about 1500 to 1800) include

itinerant craftsmen during their journeyman years

Migrations of miners

emigration into mercenary service, army platoons and building earthworks, such as the construction of city walls and other fortifications, often for seasonal summer and autumn wars or warfare lasting several years

migrations of traders and merchants, including carters and other transport workers

Elite migrations: Marriage migration, diplomatic missions, educational trips (“grand tour”); mobility in connection with rule and administration (diplomatic and rule migration, court and marriage migration)

academic migrations of scholars and students

religious refugee migrations

Pilgrimage, exile, etc.

Rural migrations: Migrations to rural regions and to cities changed the demographic composition continuously. Rural societies were perceived or constructed as stable: farmers rooted in the soil, simple “folk” with their customs, stories and rituals. This image had and has no relation to actual rural life. If all agriculturally usable land was populated in a micro-region and the land of one family could only feed one couple, no more than two children could remain. Moreover, after the colonization of cultivable regions, which required children to work, the population often grew faster than the cultivated areas, and at the same time young men and women developed expectations beyond the constraints of village life. They generally migrated near market towns, cities and metropolitan areas. This required decision-making in family contexts, in which fathers held more power than mothers and children. It also reflects economic constraints, burdens imposed by feudal lords, including monasteries, or citizens who acquired farms to consolidate them on a large scale. Inheritance patterns also determined migration patterns. If the first son inherited and the first daughter received a dowry, all other siblings had to migrate either with a part of the inheritance or only with their labor and skills. In most southwest German states and in the Eifel region, where all children inherited equally, small farms were divided up in the nineteenth century to such an extent that all children had to provide for themselves at least seasonally by earning additional wages far away. Already in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, in Germany, as in France and England, one third to one half of all people migrated at least once in their lives.

Urban migration and interurban mobility: Cities and municipalities needed constant immigration in order to even maintain population levels, as mortality rates were very high due to poor sanitary conditions. The apt but abstract concept of “urban growth” masks the high level of mobility. Frankfurt am Main, for example, grew from 11,500 to 20,000 inhabitants between 1500 and 1600, decreased by more than 3,000 by 1650, and reached 27,500 by 1700. During these two centuries, the natural population increase – births – contributed to population growth only in two decades. In 1600, several thousand itinerant journeymen, 3,000 Dutch Protestant immigrants from the middle class and 2,500 Jews from all walks of life made up more than forty percent of the population. Immigrant women working as domestic workers in middle-class households are not even included in these figures. Around the middle of the eighteenth century, only 15 percent of the journeymen in the town were born there, most of them came from the surrounding area (32 percent) and from southern German principalities or Austria (24 percent).

Travelling journeymen: Craftsmen spent several years as journeymen (as prescribed by their guilds) and could settle down permanently by taking over a business or marrying in a distant town. The high level of training in the guilds led to demand for journeymen in distant regions without their own apprenticeship system. Thus, the journeymen developed routes far beyond the German-speaking countries.

Migrations of miners: Another group of highly skilled workers were miners. They travelled on their own to newly discovered ore deposits and to expanding mines or were recruited. Training in the Harz Mountains, the Ore Mountains or in alpine mining provided these young men with skills that were widely known and appreciated. When mine operators sent for them from afar, they often emigrated with their families.

Merchants operating in trans-European – and transatlantic – networks could decide to settle down. Nuremberg merchants settled in Poznan and in Krakow, while northern Italian merchants founded a community in Cologne.

Wherever a community, sometimes called a “colony,” was formed, shopkeepers and innkeepers, workers and craftsmen followed. Some moved back and forth between their Italian or Polish and German homelands, for example, others returned permanently after years of absence, while others married local women and raised children together: they began a process of acculturation from immigrants to natives. Merchant families developed contacts with faraway places through family relationships: Young men worked as clerks and representatives in distant correspondence firms; daughters and sons connected their families by marriage over large, even transatlantic distances. The transport of goods required mobile personnel who communicated with local staff while staying at accommodations abroad. All these migrants moved within a single occupational group and within their economic sector. Their enclaves in foreign-language cultures could be maintained for a long time; meanwhile returnees passed on information about options abroad to locals.

Rulers and clergy: At the level of the political and church elites, every media representation, especially portraits of apparently territorially fixed ruling families, provides information on migration: Portraited sons roamed the country as military men while daughters married into other courts. In order to maintain their familiar culture, they would take an entourage – a kind of community – with them. This was part of the trans-European aristocratic culture, yet some of those speaking a foreign language were excluded due to factional divisions within the court. With the beginning of the slave trade, educated Africans were considered valuable since they were “exotic,” and some appear as pages in portraits of nobility. Only a few, like Anton Wilhelm Amo (European name) from Guinea, who had been taken to Halle, were able to educate themselves. Portraits of clergymen show a highly mobile group, who depending on the staffing needs of the church, were either dispatched to a parish or given a lucrative “benefice.” In absolute numbers, courtly and episcopal migrations constituted relatively few, but these migrants were the majority in their professional groups.

Military and army migration: portraits of rulers often show them with their armies consisting of hired, mobile mercenaries. Labor migrants were recruited for military service wherever they could earn wages. If they were unemployed, they roamed the country as marauders, and the “Landsknecht” (lansquenet) as bogeyman emerged in oral accounts and printed media. Many were Swiss farmers' sons for whom there was no land in the narrow Alpine valleys. For specific tasks – archers or agile horsemen – “Greeks” or “Serbs” were hired according to their (presumed) region of origin. While this did not refer to actual national identities, in the phase of nationalism they could be quickly projected onto the totality of a cultural group. If mercenaries were demobilized without repatriation, some settled locally – thus travelers became settlers. Since the armies were often accompanied by women and children, the so-called retinue, part of this mobility was family, partnership or sex-work migration.

Refugee migrations: Armies devastate regions and war campaigns precipitate refugee movements. In the Wars of Religion era, especially during the first Pan-European “Thirty Years' War,” 1618-1648, the devastation affected people in the Central European region; in the period of the second Pan-European War, 1789-1815, with its anti-revolutionary, revolutionary, Napoleonic-imperial and restorative phases, the concomitant refugee movements affected people throughout Europe. Religious fundamentalists, often together with ruling families, marginalized dissenters as “heretics” and forced them to flee. Balkan Bogomils, Albigenses (“Cathars”) from southern France, Waldensers, and Dutch Protestants, came to the German-speaking countries. In spite of the Augsburg Religious Peace, confessional dogmatists continued to turn people into religious refugees: the “Bohemian Brethren” fled to Berlin together with their sisters and families from recatholicization by the Habsburgs; Huguenots fled from France, Mennonites from Westphalia and the Netherlands. After a third of those living in 1618 had perished during the Thirty Years' War, depopulated and devastated areas had to be repopulated. Those survivors in newly depopulated places had to migrate to still existing communities in order to rebuild basic social structures. Migration due to war and its consequences would be repeated: during the attack on France in

1871, the First World War and third Pan-European War, the Second World War, the Vietnam War, the Yugoslav War, and the wars in Syria and Afghanistan.

Migrant recruitment, human capital: Some rulers invited refugees. They courted human capital, usually assisted with settlement and reckoned – correctly – that the newcomers would contribute to the economic strength of the state and pay taxes. In the 13th century, Polish and Lithuanian princes invited “the Jews,” who had been expelled from almost all smaller and larger German states. Protestant Prussia welcomed those expelled from Catholic dominions. They were all regarded as enrichment, as assets. The recruitment of people with human capital is still common in the present.

Expulsion of “the Jews,” economic downturn: Expulsions of “the Jews” beginning in the 13th century affected people of German-speaking Yiddish dialect; nationalists called them “foreign-born” in the late nineteenth century. They acculturated and formed the German-Polish/Russian Jewish culture of the Ashkenazim. Around 1500 people of Jewish – as well as Muslim – faith were expelled from Iberian-Catholic cultures, they spoke a dialect or sociolect of Spanish and developed Sephardic culture. Some of them settled in the Netherlands and migrated from Amsterdam to Glückstadt and Altona on the Elbe (then Danish). Their communities existed until the late nineteenth century. Ashkenazim, persecuted by pogroms and nationalization in tsarist Russia in the last third of the nineteenth century, migrated to the USA or, if they lacked the resources, to Berlin, Paris and London.

Beginnings of emigration: Danube region, Southern Russia, Pennsylvania, Latin America

The way in which migration is usually remembered not only excludes internal mobility, but in terms of nineteenth-century “emigration,” it is also limited to the topos “to America.” However, in Europe, rural people without land or prospects had colonized wet lowlands or wrested their livelihoods from mountainous regions. From the southwest, families had been moving down the Danube into southern Russian regions since the 1760s. Others chose William Penn's forests, Pennsylvania. They all remembered the rural poverty and misery they had left behind and hardly ever a romanticized “home.” They looked ahead and were enterprising.

Colonizing far-flung deserted areas: Reports of “uncharted territory” on the other side of the Atlantic first aroused the interest of financiers and military adventurers and later that of settlers as well. Under Emperor Charles V (r. 1519-1556), migration to Spanish and Portuguese America began. To cover the costs, he granted the Welser family business in Augsburg a monopoly to exploit Venezuela, including its copper ore. The financiers sent German-speaking miners and African slaves to the region from 1528 onwards. The large-scale settlement project quickly failed due to the rapacity of the men. Other military adventurers crossed the South Atlantic to Brazil and traveled into the delta of the Río de la Plata (today Argentina). A few of them left accounts of their experiences, which were printed and distributed and thus influenced the perception of the region, the local “Indians,” and – much later – led to emigration.

Migration to North America, i.e. initially especially to Anglophone Pennsylvania, which offered religious refuge, began in the 1680s from southwest Germany, the German-Swiss cantons and Alsace. The first arrivals were farming families who had sold their property in order to settle on more fertile land under better conditions. These first arrivals were soon followed by poor men and women that also hoped to improve their lot, but as they could not pay for their passage, they had to sell their labor to a ship's captain and were auctioned off as indentured servants upon their arrival. They earned their freedom after seven years of forced labor (redemptioners). About two thirds of the approximately 75,000 to 100,000 migrants worked under these conditions from the seventeenth century until the end of the regime in the 1820s. When the British government annexed the Catholic-French Acadia and renamed it Nova Scotia in the 1750s, it recruited about 1,500 “foreign Protestants” from its possessions in

Brunswick-Lüneburg and later also from Swiss cantons. During the American War of Independence, the British colonizers bought thousands of soldiers from Hessian princes. Of those who survived, some deserted and settled, the others returned to Hesse, including recruited freed slaves.

Within Europe, the Hohenzollern, Habsburg, and tsarist governments recruited rural families to settle certain regions as part of their mercantilist military policy. This so-called “German settlement in the East” needs to be contextualized, because the regions were actually already settled. In the north, it was an expansion into Polish-Lithuanian and Baltic regions, in the south this settlement was a consequences of the Habsburg campaigns against the Ottomans in which tens of thousands of Austrians, Bavarians, Brandenburg-Prussians, Saxons, Swabians, Rhinelanders and Brunswick-Lüneburgers had fought. They expelled the Muslim subjects of the Ottomans and some settled and had their families join them. The German language served as the administrative *lingua franca*, the Germanization of remaining resident elites was forced in the late eighteenth century. Along the Danube, Swabian and Saxon, but also Serbian and Romanian peasant families settled and expropriated the local population. Tsarina Catherine II, herself an immigrant from the Principality of Anhalt-Zerbst, opened the southern Russian plains for settlement. Her decree of 1763 offered free land, interest-free loans for the purchase of tools, self-administration and religious freedom. In the “New Russia” along the Volga, German-, Yiddish-German- and Swedish-speaking settlers formed compact colonies with special rights, with the German-speaking population rigorously divided into Protestants, Catholics and Mennonites.

Migrations: trans-European and global in the nineteenth century

In the decades from 1815 to the 1880s, an increasing number of rural people migrated from regions where they had no options (and in the second half of the century also from cities). Within Europe, for example, peasant families in Tyrol and Vorarlberg sent the children that they could not feed to southern Germany every spring as shepherd boys or housemaids (“Schwabenkinder”). Young men migrated seasonally following the rhythm of harvest work. The overwhelming majority migrated to North America –and about 18 percent of them returned, far fewer went to South America. The latter settled, as in Russia, in compact colonies without need or willingness for acculturation. Of the European migrants to the USA, only about a third moved to rural regions in the 1840s, while two-thirds moved to the rapidly growing cities. In the 1890s, 95% of all immigrants moved to the cities. The majority of individual immigrants were young, the men often left shortly before being called up for military service. The young men and women migrated separately to places with the appropriate job opportunities, about which they had been informed by earlier migrants.

North America: Of the approximately 7 million men, women and children who left the many German dialect regions during the period from 1815-1914, about 90 percent chose the USA as their destination, while about 2 percent chose Canada. They arrived initially from the southwest, then from Hesse and the Rhineland, later from northern Germany and finally from the eastern regions, including the bilingual areas of Poland that had been annexed since the 1790s. Until the middle of the nineteenth century (longer in Eastern Albania), potential migrants required the consent of an authority or the landowner. However, they often moved away without notice and were the “illegals” of the time. They thus fled unbearable feudal conditions as “economic refugees.”

The journey was comprised of three stages: Journey to the port of departure in the Netherlands (and, since the 1830s, Bremen and Hamburg), which often took several weeks); Atlantic crossing (in the sailing season six to twelve weeks or longer); finally, voyage to one’s ultimate destination. Since the 1870s, steamships shortened the sea voyage to twelve days and around 1900 the voyage was cut further to seven days. Emigration from the territories of the (later) German Empire peaked with more than one million migrants in each year between 1846-1857, then again between 1864-1873, before finally reaching 1.8 million between 1880 and 1893. From 1893

onwards, however, the industry that had developed in the German Empire offered sufficient jobs, so that by 1914 only 20-40,000 people emigrated annually. About 10-15,000 emigrated back per year, as they had been “guest workers.” Since the 1880s, agriculture and industry in the Reich had already been forced to recruit men and women from Poland, Ruthenia and Italy.

The German-speaking population in North America also included those who had emigrated from Austria and Switzerland, although most of them formed their own cultural associations. Until the 1870s, between 150,000 and 180,000 people of Jewish faith migrated from Central Europe to the USA, but hardly any of them from Germany due to their civic integration there. In the 1880s, as a result of pogroms, the mass emigration of Yiddish-speaking Jews from the Tsarist Empire began. Like the Irish, the Germans formed two separate groups in North America, divided into Catholic and Protestant denominations. Mennonites and Amish settled separately, especially in Pennsylvania, Ontario and Manitoba.

Population growth, food, and inflation crises as well as inadequate industrial labor markets applied continuous pressure to emigrate. Informed by contemporary telecommunications, letters and return migration, the men and women of a micro-region migrated to an equally small urban or rural neighborhood of acquaintances, where they could settle most easily. Potential migrants informed themselves in detail about the conditions of their potential destination: recessions were followed by a decline in immigration. In their letters they emphasized that in North America there was no church tithing, taxes were lower, farmland was cheaper, labor markets were better, and local officials were elected rather than appointed from above: Emigration was thus also a [political project](#). Although a sequence of positive images of America emerged in the German-speaking world (a republican-democratic state, abundant and cheap land, dynamic economic development, for example) the decision to emigrate was never based on a vague image of America.

Women created their own networks, worked as maids, seamstresses or in factories. A position as a maid in an American family enabled quick acculturation and saved on rent and food. Despite the very low wages, so many young women were able to save money, and they emphasized in their letters that marriage without a dowry was common in America. Their better position in the American legal system and in socially defined gender roles was also reflected in the lower rates of return migration compared to men.

The end of mass migration in 1893, with the simultaneous socialization of children in American schools, meant a reduction in contact with families and friends in the initial micro-region (“home”). At the same time, there was an awareness that commitment in the new society was necessary to achieve one’s life goals. Up until the 1890s, the German-American communities, Protestant and Catholic, showed great dynamism and flexibility with highly developed newspapers, social aid, and cultural associations. With the decrease in new immigration, a consolidation phase began, and by 1910 integration, i.e. Americanization was well advanced. The destruction of this group by repression during the First World War as claimed in nationalistic German memory is nonsense. Stagnating institutions collapsed and the descendants of the immigrants had – with some exceptions – no interest in representing Wilhelmine militarism.

Emigration to Central and South America began after the Napoleonic occupation of Spain had weakened Spanish colonial rule and societies from Mexico to Argentina were able to fight for their independence. The approximately 400,000 people (about 5 percent of all emigrants) migrated in phases. After 1816/17 they migrated for a decade especially to Brazil, and then again for a decade following the European agricultural crisis of 1846/47. Only in a third phase, from 1866 to 1900, did up to 17,000 people arrive annually. As in the case of migration to Eastern Europe, staggered immigration to Central and South America meant that each newly arriving cohort left a

socio-economically and culturally different Germany and came with its own profile. Moreover, in the two major destination countries, Brazil and Argentina, the cohorts settled in different regions. The geographical (self-)isolation of many agricultural colonies made them islands of German culture, which, frozen in time, also meant a separation from the modernization of Germany. Urban immigration included merchants, bankers and entrepreneurs, but also engineers, officers and scientists – they formed a small group with great economic influence and often moved within the framework of traditional economic relations.

Emigration to Australia and New Zealand remained low. As within Europe, individual experts, e.g. land surveyors and astronomers, initially migrated as government employees, explorers and missionaries, members of an Old Lutheran congregation who wanted to escape the Brandenburg state. The first agricultural settlers were recruited for their expertise: winegrowers as pioneers of viticulture in New South Wales and South Australia. In the course of class-specific, internationalist mobility, cigar workers arrived who only had to extend their route Hamburg/Bremen-Cuba-Manila (Philippines) slightly.

1880s – 1914: Nationalisms, colonies, transit migration

Since the 1870s and 1880s, the states of the North Atlantic world and Eastern Europe began a phase of intense nationalist discourse and policies in which migrants, as well as long-established residents of the new national cultures, were increasingly marginalized as “minorities” and often forced to emigrate. Men and women had to make decisions about life goals and migration according to these changed ideological and nation-state legal guidelines. Racial ideologies, supported by pseudo-scientific publications, sought to exclude those they considered “un-German” or “of a foreign race.” Race ideologists in the USA also saw “Germans” as “unassimilable. According to nationalist ideology, emigrants from the German Reich were considered “Germans abroad” and immigrants “foreign workers.”

But in the Hohenzollern Empire – as in the Habsburg Empire – industrialization and large-scale agriculture required the import of labor from “foreign-cultural” neighboring areas. In 1885, as a result of a new chauvinism, Prussia expelled migrant workers of Polish culture who were citizens of the neighboring Russian or Habsburg empires: The German Reich introduced restrictions while the USA was only beginning to discuss them. “Foreign workers” had to leave the country in the winter according to the principle of rotation, both so that they could not acculturate themselves and because large-scale agriculture did not need workers and did not want to pay wages. Since workers in industry and mining had to be trained, entrepreneurs negotiated a right of permanent residence for “their” workers, referred to as “Ruhr Poles.” Just under 4 percent of the total population of 64.9 million in the German Reich (1910) were Polish-speaking.

Workers also came from other neighboring countries: According to the 1907 census, 340,000 German, Polish and Ruthenian-speaking people from Austria-Hungary, 201,000 Russians, Baltic Germans, Poles and Lithuanians from the Tsarist Empire, 126,000 Italians, 52,000 Dutch, 27,000 Swiss, about 10,000 Danes and 10,000 French as well as a smaller number from other states. In the national-dynastic multi-ethnic empires, those once recruited (or annexed) as “useful” lost the opportunity to practice their own language and religion. From a country of emigration (with simultaneous immigration), the empire became a labor-importing country. In the decades from the 1870s to 1914, due to the ruling bureaucrats' growing concern about a self-confident proletariat, both homegrown and foreign, states began to impose political surveillance and immigration restrictions or exclusionary measures.

Parallel to these migratory developments, the German Empire – just 10 years old at this point – strove for a position as a colonial power and annexed African societies both in agreement and in competition with the other

colonial powers. Politically, emigration to the colonies was supposed to be directed, as German settlement nuclei were to take charge of local people and ensure economic exploitation. But few followed the call “to German Southwest Africa” or “to German East Africa.” There was little trust in government propaganda, and the majority continued to embark on the familiar routes “to America.” In the colonies, German military units carried out extensive forced migrations.

1914/18-1945/50-55: The World Wars – interwar period – war and the Holocaust – displaced persons and refugees

With the declarations of war in 1914, Europe became the largest refugee-generating region in the world for half a century. At the same time, almost all states in the Atlantic region introduced rigorous immigration restrictions and controls: visa requirements, passport requirements – and expulsions. Border and citizenship bureaucracies emerged as part of national(ist) states.

At the beginning of the First World War, the 1.3 million foreign workers in the German Reich became forced laborers as a result of a ban on leaving the country. During and after 1914-1918, prisoners of war and forced laborers, displaced by armies, moved or were displaced. By the end of the war, the number of foreigners held as forced laborers in the German Reich, including prisoners of war and the “Russian Germans” that happened to be present at the beginning of the war, rose to 2.5 million. Forced laborers made up one seventh of all workers: internationalized workers for the national-imperial war. After 1918 they had to migrate back to their families – if they survived the war. Mass recruitment in the Second German Reich was a “learning process” for the labor force administrators who would organize the “deployment of foreigners” during the next World War in the Third German Reich (Ulrich Herbert).

In Versailles in 1918/19, border and population planners redrew borders, displacing people who had been resident in the same place for generations. Border lines that would have clearly separated cultural groups were impossible to draw, given the centuries of migration and culturally mixed settlements. Throughout Europe, some 5 to 10 million people involuntarily crossed the new borders that suddenly excluded the “nationality” attributed to them. For example, the Polish-speaking citizens of the Reich in the Ruhr region, immigrated to France, where discrimination was less severe. About one million Germans were involved in mass emigration up to 1923: 150,000 from Alsace-Lorraine, about 850,000 from the new Polish state. These so-called “displaced persons from borderlands” [*Grenzlandvertriebene*] were accommodated in “returnee” camps [*Heimkehrlager*]. Another 16,000 came from the former colonies.

Germans, whether they had agreed with the war or not, were faced with the ruins of their society in 1918. The Emperor and his family left the country, and in 1923, renewed emigration with simultaneous hyperinflation reached its peak. It came to an end with the world economic crisis and the National Socialist seizure of power. Around 420,000 people left the republic, including only 7,000 Jews. The population remained multicultural: according to the 1925 census, there were 700,000 Polish, 63,000 Masurian, 71,200 Wendish, 19,000 Czech, 7,100 Danish and 4,000 Lithuanian speakers.

Revolutionary and civil war refugees from the former tsarist empire reached the Weimar Republic. In 1922/23, about 600,000 mostly of wealthy and educated origin (elite exodus), lived in the Reich. Berlin became their center for a short time, but the majority, 500,000, moved on, chiefly to Paris. They did so because the Weimar government pursued an extremely restrictive immigration and integration policy, while the French government pursued an open policy to compensate for population losses caused by the war. These migrants were asylum seekers.

In the 1920s, tens of thousands more “ethnic Germans,” including many Mennonites, left the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary and the Balkan states. In 1930, the German government imposed an immigration stop on “Russian Germans” and only allowed them passage through Germany as transit migrants to Canada and South America. Those who remained in the new states were renamed “Volksdeutsche” [members of the German people] by the Reich in order to substantiate claims to “Volksboden” [national territory]. Those who emigrated from the Reich chose many destinations: young women went to the Netherlands as maidservants; between 1928 and 1931 probably a few tens of thousands of men went to the Soviet Union, which recruited internationally skilled workers for industrialization; about 6,000 to 8,000 unemployed Ruhr miners moved to the Donetsk Basin after 1929. In Weimar-Germany, the employment of foreigners declined sharply compared to the prewar period. The trade unions also pursued a labor market policy that prioritized domestic workers. This also affected the “ethnic Germans”: the legal equality of “ethnic Germans of foreign nationality” with “Reich Germans” was not desired.

Under German fascism

people of Jewish faith and those who were politically persecuted fled

the importing of foreign workers was considered racially undesirable, but was nonetheless encouraged at the beginning of armament

after 1939, millions were deported from the occupied territories to labor camps and women and schoolgirls were forced to do housework

Jews, resistance fighters, Sinti and Roma, homosexuals and people “unworthy of life” were deported to extermination camps

people of Slavic culture were deported eastward in “resettlement programs” in order to create space for “ethnic Germans” who had been deported from settlements further east.

In addition, tens of millions of refugees fled from the fascist armies on the Eastern, Western and African fronts.

Since the division of German-speaking Central Europe between the Hohenzollern and Habsburg empires, emigration took place separately. But the “Anschluss” of Austria in 1938 forced a renewed sense of community. Under pressure and coercion, about half a million Germans and 150,000 Austrians left the Third German Reich by 1939, including about 280,000 German and 130,000 Austrian Jews. The annexation of the Saarland in 1935 and the annexation of the Sudeten regions in 1938 triggered the flight of democratically-minded people. But refugees were not welcome anywhere, and the 1938 refugee conference in Evian merely demanded the possibility of “orderly” flight with the right to transfer property. The refugee-generating fascist states were surrounded by a ring of democratic, refugee-rejecting states (Michael Marrus).

German and Austrian society, like Russia after 1917, lost a large part of their intellectual, artistic, academic and democratic political elites. Only a few turned to the USSR – the Stalinist persecutions of “deviants” were too well known; instead, France, Switzerland, Sweden and Czechoslovakia, Great Britain and North America became the most important destinations. Politicians in exile hoped to work from these countries for a democratic Germany, while fleeing artists and cultural workers could find no means of expression abroad. Jews fled through the Soviet Union as far as Harbin and Shanghai, others fled to Arab-populated Palestine, which was under a British mandate.

After 1938, Great Britain took in 9,400 unaccompanied children of persecuted persons; Canada refused to take in any refugees; the quota for Germans allowed about 120,000 people to enter the United States; only Cuba and the South American states offered refuge. With the advance of the fascist armies, transportation to the industrially organized extermination camps began with the meticulously planned train sequences of the Reichsbahn.

Under Weimar's anti-foreign worker policy, the number of foreign workers had dropped to about 100,000, but in the course of armament, recruitment began again and in 1938/39, 436,000 were counted. As in World War I, the military goal was the conquest of an eastern reservoir of workers that considered racially inferior and the occupation of "living space" for forcibly resettled German peasant populations. After the occupation of Poland, deportations of people to forced labor camps began: according to a popular German cliché, "gypsies" robbed children; in fact, the Aryan-German occupiers robbed millions of men, women, and children in the East and hundreds of thousands in the West. Starting in 1942, the "General Plenipotentiary for Labor Deployment" organized the robbery centrally. In 1944, the approximately 12 to 12.5 million civilian workers and prisoners of war made up a quarter of all those employed in the economy.

At the same time, those in charge began an ethnic resettlement policy [*Volkstumspolitik*], that deported "foreigners" from the "Old Reich" and the Polish occupied territories and, within the framework of an agreement with the Soviet Union, and imported "settlers who had proven themselves in the *Volkstumskampf*" back to the Greater German Reich. Some of the latter came of their own free will, attracted by Nazi propaganda and driven by minority politics and material misery in the Soviet Union. Politics emptied the entire region from the Baltic States to Volhynia, Bessarabia and the Dobruja of "ethnic Germans." Nearly one million of them were given the property of displaced and murdered Poles and Jews, and at the end of the war many were still in the camps set up by the population planners. Starting in 1944, these people who had been displaced multiple times as well as other long-established "ethnic Germans" began their westward trek to reception camps. The Poles, who had been displaced to the east and who were again displaced in 1945, moved westward as their entire state was shifted westward.

At the time of German capitulation on May 8, 1945, there were 10-12 million surviving forced laborers in Germany, which were suddenly divided into four occupation zones, and about 10 million internal "evacuees" from the cities affected by area bombing. Just like "resettlement" and "transit passage," the term "evacuee" was another bureaucratic euphemism for involuntary migration. Of those involuntary migrants, 4 million were still living in emergency shelters in 1947. Outside the occupation zones, German prisoners of war were waiting to return home. Forced laborers, referred to as "displaced persons," sought to return "home" to their countries of birth, although many did not know whether their families had survived and whether their "home" still existed. A particular problem was the involuntary repatriation of Soviet prisoners of war, whose survival was interpreted as collaboration. Upon their return to the Soviet Union, many were punished with renewed imprisonment or even execution.

The International Refugee Organization, founded in 1947, was supposed to provide the remaining refugees with new prospects by means of a "resettlement program," but this humanitarian goal soon took a back seat to the labor market interests of the receiving countries. The USA, Canada, Australia, South Africa and some South American countries selected only healthy men and women who were able to work and often refused entry to their partners and children. Those selected were granted immigrant status upon arrival and were able to start a self-determined life once their work obligations had been fulfilled. To those that no country would admit, postwar Germany paid neither retroactive wages for their forced labor nor compensation for their suffering, but bureaucratically labeled them as "homeless foreigners" or "stateless" persons.

Like the DPs, German prisoners of war had to be repatriated. The Soviet Union, France and Belgium refused to allow some of them to return, using them as forced labor to repair the destruction caused by their fascist state. Of the men in the West, approximately 1.8 million in 1945, about one-fifth decided to remain in France when return became possible. They transformed their involuntary migration as soldiers into a voluntary decision to emigrate.

About 18 million “ethnic Germans” and “Reich Germans” lived in the severed eastern provinces of the Reich. 14 million fled westward. Hundreds of thousands were transported to labor camps by the Soviet government; what was suddenly called “abduction” in the German political parlance had been previously called “labor deployment,” i.e. the transport of Eastern European people by Germans. The integration of “refugees and displaced persons” (500,000 in Austria in 1950 and 12.5 million in the FRG and GDR combined), was slow, not least due to the construction of separate refugee quarters and separate social networks. The “Umsiedler” [resettlers] or “Neusiedler” [new settlers] (the West German and Soviet terms used) were granted citizenship and political rights – in contrast to the exclusion of the “homeless foreigners.” Despite the obvious problems, the “integration of refugees” in the FRG was officially and medially described as successfully completed by 1948/49. In the Soviet-occupied zone (SBZ, then GDR), integration was pursued through labor control, i.e., job allocation.

In addition to these inner-German and inner-European migrations in the postwar period, many Germans, even displaced persons, sought to emigrate to the USA and Canada by contacting family and friends. This was doubly difficult. First, their previous fascist regime had turned them into “unwanted foreigners” worldwide, and Germans were forbidden to emigrate until 1948 due to the assumption of collective responsibility for National Socialism, war and the Holocaust. Secondly, West German postwar policy constructed a “community of fate” [*Schicksalsgemeinschaft*] committed to collective reconstruction and introduced – as it had in the nineteenth century – an emigration permit procedure to prevent emigration of men capable of work and to rid itself of unmarried and widowed women (and farmers) who had fled the East. Thus, neither the “community of people” nor the “community of fate” included everyone.

In the postwar years until 1955, German, European and Atlantic migration patterns changed fundamentally. More than 180,000 Germans migrated within Europe, with France and Great Britain as their preferred destinations. 780,000 chose overseas countries, 50% of them the USA, 40% Canada, 10% Australia (data from 1961). De facto emigration ended in 1955, as reconstruction and the “economic miracle” – thanks to American credits and Cold War priorities – offered better opportunities in (West) Germany. At the same time, migrants from the Soviet Socialist Zone/GDR left – without permission – for the FRG until 1961 (when the Wall was built). In the “free West” this was seen as “voting with their feet.” Many of them were economic migrants, since the Germans in the western occupation zones received massive American Marshall Plan loans, those in the eastern zone had to work off a (small) part of the damage that the German military had caused in the Soviet Union through reparations.

German economic planners recognized as early as 1950 that the “labor pool” would be exhausted in the face of growth. Their ideas were based on gender discrimination: German women were to look after children, the kitchen and their husbands, foreign men were to be transported into the West German labor market for a limited period without a family. In 1955, the FRG once again became a labor importing country. The Italian government wanted to export workers, and a labor recruitment agreement – not a migration agreement – was signed.

II. Migration 1955-2018: Working Guests, Unwelcome Refugees, and the End of Migration

Why Migration?

Why does the German Historical Institute showcase a curated selection of documents on “Migration,” framed in a thematic triptych with “Germanness” and “Knowledge and Education” alongside the more traditional chronological presentation of Germany history in periods? Are we hereby suggesting that there can be no Germanness without knowledge of migration? Or maybe that there can be no education on national history without migration of knowledge? Is the website designed to demonstrate to the world that Germany, too, is a “[nation of immigrants](#),” after the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services in 2018 under the administration of President Donald J. Trump had changed its [mission statement](#) to eliminate a passage that describes the U.S. as “a nation of immigrants”? Clearly, national historiography as a unifying narrative of collective legitimization is in need of revision in an increasingly interconnected world. Migration cannot be regarded as a separate domain but needs to be included as intrinsic to narratives about national and global history.

The documents in this collection aim to illuminate blind spots in mainstream historiography and remind users of the integral part that migration has played in the formation of the nation. The goal, however, cannot be merely to showcase diversity aside from the core of German culture. Teachers and students using this material will need to approach it with critical eyes, drawing their own connections and comparisons, asking questions about the ways in which migration has been framed, staged, and enacted by governmental and non-governmental organizations and agents. How do migrants engage with social, cultural, and legal frameworks? What kinds of power dynamics are at play in the regimes regulating mobility and residency? Can we detect repeating patterns in mediated representations of migration? Which aspects have changed over time, and which have remained the same? What might be productive lenses and tools to transnationalize national history, collective memory, and sentiments of belonging?

Histories of Contact

Historians have made the case that various kinds of cross-border traffic have been the normality of “cultures in contact” (see Dirk Hoerder’s section of our introduction) all along rather than a state of exception.^[2] As the assembled documents from previous centuries demonstrate, movements into, out of, and traversing German-speaking lands have been a common occurrence throughout the course of history. Humans have moved in search of sustenance and better prospects, they have followed the pulls of industrialization and colonial expansion, they have fled wars and natural disasters, they have made homes and participated in new environments economically, politically and culturally, while also maintaining familial and professional ties to their places of departure, at times returning to those places, which in turn have not remained the same.

A comparative *longue durée* perspective on migration and its centrality to national and regional histories is an important corrective to the short-sightedness of current political debates, which tend to be fueled by crisis-ridden anxieties, resentful scapegoating, and protectionist desires for border control. Clearly, it is impossible to conceive of pure Germanness. Any notion of German society and culture as a cohesive *Volk*, exclusively grounded in a stable *Heimat* and immutable tradition, is rooted in myth rather than reality.

Ever since the first labor recruitment treaties in the 1950s, followed by various moratoriums and changing regulations for family unification, governmental policy regulating travel, migration, and residency has tended to be ruled by economic and political calculation, negation of permanence, and forgetfulness. Public opinion and lawmaking have evolved in cycles, responding to the latest crisis as a state of exception, oblivious of previous histories of interaction.^[3] The negation of permanent resident rights for migrants and the fiction of ethnocultural homogeneity grounded in territorial belonging have remained a centerpiece of debates on migration, revived in [debates on a German “guiding culture” \(*Leitkultur*\)](#).

Cold War Divisions and European Integration

Mobility in the era after the Second World War was shaped by Cold War division and European integration. Beginning in 1949, [the two](#) Germanies pursued different policies regarding international affiliation, travel, and migration, which culminated in the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961. Whether they were called “guest workers” or “socialist friends,” both systems relied on foreign labor conceived as temporary. Unification and consolidation into one nation-state in 1990 did not eliminate discrepancies of wealth, infrastructure, and mentality, particularly in attitudes towards migration. The phase of national consolidation that followed the fall of the Wall saw some of the most violent racist attacks in [East](#) and [West](#) Germany. Meanwhile, the process of German unification was not merely a national event, it occurred within the supranational framework of European integration following the end of the Cold War.

The European Economic Community, instituted with the Treaty of Rome in 1957, had paved the way for greater mobility of labor and goods. Since 1995, the European Union has regulated travel and migration in the Schengen area, focusing on securing its exterior borders under the auspices of the Frontex Agency. While EU-Citizens generally enjoy cross-border mobility within the Union, pandemic restrictions notwithstanding, non-EU citizens are subject to onerous visa regimes.

Contested Refuge

The refugee crisis of 2015, which brought one million refugees, mostly from the civil war in Syria, to Germany, pushed migration to the forefront of public consciousness on a global scale.[\[4\]](#)

Controversies on political asylum for refugees are by no means new. They have been replayed repeatedly over the decades since World War II.[\[5\]](#) The paragraph in the FRG constitution granting asylum to those who are persecuted due to their political convictions was designed to compensate for violence, extermination, and displacement inflicted by the Nazi regime. However, the constitutional right to asylum and its application have been disputed since 1949. The paragraph was amended in the [1993 compromise on asylum](#): “Foreigners traveling through an EU member state or another safe third country cannot invoke the right to asylum.” (Art. 16a Abs. 2 GG). In his speech on the occasion of the 65th anniversary of the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany at the German Bundestag on 23 May 2014, the writer [Navid Kermani](#) called this “mutilation,” effectively, the abolishment of the right to asylum: “Paradoxically, the Basic Law – a document in which Germany appeared to have enshrined its commitment to openness for all time to come – now closes its doors to those who rely most urgently on our openness, namely the politically persecuted.”

The Dublin Regulations have instituted a fingerprinting database for unauthorized entrants to the EU, designed to keep asylum seekers in their country of first entry and prevent them from travelling to wealthier member states. The [EU-Turkey deal of 2016](#) further barred refugees from entering EU-territory, comparable to the US government’s “[Remain in Mexico](#)” policy. [EU-level disputes in 2020 about refugee resettlement](#) from the Southern European border zones demonstrate the impasse between national and supranational interests regarding asylum policy.

In the current world order, discussions on migration have thus shifted toward detention, entrapment, and barriers to mobility. Walls are erected, and borders are incessantly enacted in everyday settings. With increasing destabilization in large parts of the world and mounting travel restrictions, migration has become the political fulcrum for modern democracy and right-wing nationalism.

Working Guests

The selection of documents on migration to Germany covers cultural transformations in the wake of the recruitment of “guest workers” from Southern Europe and North Africa beginning with [the German-Italian bilateral recruitment agreement in 1955](#). Policy debates in this period have tended to [focus on questions of temporariness and return vs. settlement and integration](#). The nation-state has continued to play a key role as regulator of civic rights and benefits. Meeting the needs of a diversifying population for work, housing, and education has been a key challenge for modern societies. Discrimination on the basis of perceived differences remains a major force of inequity and conflict.

In 1973 over 2.5 million foreign workers were living in West Germany, and close to 300,000 Turks had been living there for at least four years. The latter group, in particular, was perceived as visibly distinct, and public resentment was on the rise. On 26 March 1973, the weekly magazine *Der Spiegel* ran the cover caption “Gettos in Deutschland: Eine Million Türken” and the eleven-page title story “Die Türken kommen – rette sich, wer kann” [The Turks are coming – run for your lives].^[6]

In August 1973, [Turkish workers at the Ford factory in Cologne engaged in a wildcat strike demanding equal pay](#). Their demands met with little solidarity on part of their German colleagues. Following an economic recession, the federal government [declared the official end of labor recruitment \(*Anwerbestop*\)](#) on 23 November 1973. However, subsequently migration from Turkey increased further, due to family unification visas. The publication of Aras Ören’s epic poem *Was will Niyazi in der Naunystraße* (1973) marked a milestone in raising awareness among a progressive, leftist German readership that this new resident population was composed of individuals rather than a threatening dark horde summoned in newspaper headlines.^[7] [Another volume by Ören, *Deutschland, ein türkisches Märchen* \(1978\)](#), highlights the fictional quality of national identifications and potential shifts in perspectives occurring with migration.

[R.W. Fassbinder’s classic melodrama *Angst essen Seele auf / Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* \(1974\)](#) resonates with such shifts in perception at work, at home and in the neighborhood. A close reading of the recurring staircase scenes in the film reveals the insidious power of the racializing, colonial and voyeuristic gaze – on screen and behind the camera – in native/migrant encounters.

In the face of rising unemployment and public resentment, [including among affluent, well-educated citizens](#) the West German government under Chancellor Helmut Kohl issued a new law for the promotion of voluntary return in 1983, *Gesetz zur Förderung der Rückkehrbereitschaft von Ausländern*. Approximately 250,000 labor migrants gave up their rights to residency, “killed their passport,”^[8] and returned to their countries of departure. Despite government efforts to define labor migration as a temporary state, many migrants have permanently settled in Germany.

The Hard Path to Citizenship

The United States and Germany feature different, at points interconnected, histories with regard to emigration and immigration, which have resulted in distinct foundational myths. Throughout much of the twentieth century, the United States was known as a classic country of immigration, celebrated in fables such as “dishwasher to millionaire” or melting pot to salad bowl. These foundational myths did not preclude the exclusion of particular groups, as evident, for example, in the Chinese Exclusion Act (in effect until 1965) or the lasting legacy of slavery and racial discrimination voiced in the Black Lives Matter protests today.

Post-World War II Germany, in contrast, took a long time to establish pathways to naturalization for its

immigrants: it recruited so-called “guest workers” and granted asylum to refugees but officially denied being “a country of immigration.” By and large, German citizenship legislation was based on descent. “Ethnic Germans” (*Aussiedler* and *Spätaussiedler*) moving to Germany from Eastern European states, for example, were granted citizenship even if they did not speak German, while immigrants who had lived and worked in Germany for decades and their children born in the country had no automatic right to citizenship.

The new citizenship law that took effect in 2000 paved the way to conditional naturalization. It granted citizenship to children born to foreigners in Germany, as long as one parent has been a legal resident for at least eight years. Children could also hold the nationality of their parents but were required to choose one citizenship by age 23. In 2005, the new Immigration Act (*Zuwanderungsgesetz*) took effect, officially recognizing Germany as an “immigration country.” In the same year, the census started registering “migration background” (*Migrationshintergrund*). In 2015, the percentages of foreign-born residents in Germany and the U.S. are at similar levels (in both countries above 14% of the population). Laws on residency, citizenship, and naturalization are comparable – a hybrid of descent-based (*ius sanguinis*) and territory-based (*ius soli*) legislation. However, studies by the polling institute Ipsos titled “The Perils of Perception” show that the majority population in Germany, as in many other countries, tends to overestimate the number of immigrants in the country. In 2018, respondents in 37 countries estimated that the population share of immigrants was 28%, when in reality the number averaged 12%. The proportion of the Muslim population was also greatly overestimated in almost all countries.[9] These figures make it clear that, beyond legal regulations on entry, residence and nationality, images of foreigners and enemies play an important role in demarcating national belonging.

2005 saw two prominent exhibitions showcasing Germany as a nation of immigration: *Projekt Migration*, collaboratively curated by a research team and [Dokumentationszentrum und Museum über die Migration in Deutschland e.V \(DOMiD\)](#) at Kölnischer Kunstverein in Cologne, and *Zuwanderungsland Deutschland: Migrationen 1500-2000* (Germany as a Country of Immigration: Migration from 1500-2000) at the German Historical Museum in Berlin.[10] The different approaches that both exhibitions took are indicative of the shortcomings of an exclusively historical approach to migration as *immigration history*. The Cologne exhibition, informed by critical migration studies, questioned official regimes of representation and rendered a more dynamic viewing experience, drawing on multiple archives of audiovisual media, everyday objects, and artistic interventions.

A postmigrant society?

In the wake of the publication of Thilo Sarrazin’s best-selling book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (Germany Abolishes Itself, 2010), debates on the risks of multiculturalism peaked. The former senator of finance for the State of Berlin and former member of the Executive Board of the Deutsche Bundesbank triggered a major national controversy by denouncing Germany’s postwar immigration policy and arguing that a declining birthrate, the expansion of an uneducated lower class and increase in the number of predominantly Muslim immigrants whom he deemed resistant to integration were leading to the demise of Germany.

On 16 October 2010, a few days before the 4th Integration Summit (Integrationsgipfel) was held in Berlin, Chancellor Angela Merkel spoke at the convention of youth organization of the CDU (Deutschland Tag der Jungen Union): “And we’re a country after all that brought guest workers to Germany in the 1960s. And now they live with us. For a while, we kidded ourselves, we said, they won’t stay long, eventually they’ll be leaving again. This has not been the reality. And, of course, the approach to say, now we’ll just practice multiculti, and just kind of live together, and are happy about each other, this model has failed. It has absolutely failed.”[11] Merkel called on immigrants to respect constitutional rights, while also acknowledging that Muslim immigrants have become part

of Germany. Merkel's statements about the failure of multiculturalism as a model for social coexistence was echoed by Prime Minister David Cameron at the Munich Security Conference in February 2011. A few days later, the French President Nicolas Sarkozy joined the chorus, declaring multiculturalism a failed experiment. Liberal nation-state multiculturalism has been criticized not only from the right but also from the left, primarily for its relativism that resulted in so-called parallel societies and culturalization of social inequities. The debate about the risks of parallel societies has focused on honor killings; a particularly prominent case was the murder of Hatun Sürücü by her brother in Berlin on February 7, 2005.[12] Yet it is often forgotten that violence against women is by no means confined to Muslim families.

More recent critical interventions have focused on structural discrimination alongside cultural representation. In 2006, the General Equal Treatment Act came into force and the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency was established. Discrimination in everyday situations, at work, when looking for housing, at the office or at school, has by no means been eliminated, however.[13]

The term "post-migrant" originated in the 1990s in performative interventions of the transethnic [Kanak Attak](#) movement. More recently, Shermin Langhoff and her team at Ballhaus Naunynstraße, and subsequently the Gorki Theater, in Berlin have deployed "post-migrant theater" to counter ostracism with an insistence on unquestioned belonging, especially on the part of descendants of immigrants born in Germany.[14]

The still from *Tschick*, Fatih Akin's cinematic adaptation of Wolfgang Herrndorf's novel about two teenagers from the outskirts of Berlin on the road, is emblematic in its portrayal of unsettling binary oppositions between "native" and "migrant." Critical migration studies and discussions on "post-migrant" societies have aimed to destabilize such oppositions in political debate and public perception. As the historical perspective exhibited on this website demonstrates, such categorizations are subject to change depending on time and place.

While descendants of immigrants are staking their claims in a postmigrant society, refusing to be asked where they come from, others drown at sea or find themselves trapped in detention centers and camps. If we are indeed experiencing the end of migration as we knew it, growing inequities in mobility and access remind us that the discussion of migration is far from over. As both the E.U. and nation-states are once again implementing policies to enforce borders and differentiate between "real" refugees and economic migrants, it is all the more important to keep rethinking assigned and assumed identities in terms of diversity, racism, and discrimination.

Documenting Germany in Transit

The collection of post-1955 documents on migration presented on this website grows out of almost twenty years of work in the context of the [Multicultural Germany Project](#), initiated by Anton Kaes and Deniz Göktürk at the Department of German at the University of California, Berkeley. Our initial team began to collaboratively assemble an archive of "multicultural Germany" in 2001. At that time, the United States was still known as the paradigmatic "nation of immigrants," and Germany was only reluctantly edging toward official acknowledgement of being *de facto* a country of immigration (*Einwanderungsland*). As our collection grew and was published as a book, first in 2007, presenting the documents in English translation as [Germany in Transit](#), then repatriating the archive to Germany in 2011 as [Transit Deutschland](#), no one could yet foresee the subsequent course of history.

Today, the United States has become a deportation nation,[15] deeply divided on questions of immigration and race. In Germany, the far-right political party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) with its [anti-immigrant agenda](#), founded in 2013, became the third largest parliamentary group in the Bundestag in the 2017 election with 12.6% of the vote. The vilification of migrants and minorities in light of border security and national unity have become key

topics of political agitation both in Europe and the United States in recent years.

Germany in Transit and *Transit Deutschland* presented a polyphonic history in documents, demonstrating that Germany itself was as much in transition as its migrants. We have continued the documentation effort beyond the two books by annually publishing a chronology in both English and German at <https://mgp.berkeley.edu/chronology/>. A selection from both volumes and the online chronology have been repurposed on the *German History Intersections* website, updated and expanded with further documents and pictures. We encourage users to visit the [Multicultural Germany Project](#) for further information and collaboration in expanding the archive.

How to read: migration history is media history

This online collection offers an open-ended history in documents, an assemblage of stories rather than one unified linear history, *Geschichten* rather than *Geschichte*. By way of montage, legal and policy documents can enter into contrastive constellations with voices from literature and popular culture. In the spirit of digital presentation (of a selection from the archives), readers can navigate the material by searching for tags and assemble documents according to their own interests. We invite readers to conceive of migration history as media history, always asking where, when and why certain acts become visible in analog and digital frames, how they circulate, and how audiences engage with them.

Major challenges in migrating material from print to the digital medium have surfaced in negotiating the linear logic of chronological historiography and aspiring to a conceptualization of spatial, temporal, and thematic links. The digital medium has the potential to visualize migration and identity formation as open ended, multidirectional, and relational processes. Design matters in creating new mental maps. Aspiring to complement chronological lists with non-linear presentations, we have aimed to enable different entry points and cross-links, opening up unforeseen connections and revealing patterns, correspondences and circular replays in the rhetoric on migration. Building a multimedia platform that will allow for knowledge productions through creative experimentation can only be a work in progress. Copyright restrictions for video and audio clips and ephemerality of transient archives on YouTube and other platforms pose serious limitations. The visualizations of linkages beyond already established lines of thought and historical narrative remains a stimulating challenge for a research imagination that aims to transcend methodological nationalism.

The reanimation of the [iconic figure of the millionth guest worker Armando Rodrigues de Sá](#) in *Almanya – Willkommen in Deutschland* (2011), a three-generation film comedy that hit German cinemas in the year of the 50th anniversary of the labor recruitment treaty with Turkey, is paradigmatic for a dynamic engagement with archives in transit. The sisters Yasemin and Nesrin Şamdereli counterpoint the official celebrations with family memory to tell their grandfather's story.

Users of this website will utilize the materials presented here in different ways – for teaching, learning or research. We would like to promote non-sequential readings of the assembled documents as an invitation to participate in the ongoing archive of migration, looking for resonances and connections across the entire website of German History Intersections and beyond: in news media, governmental and non-governmental websites, literature, cinema, popular culture. Neither migration nor national identification nor the archive presented on *German History Intersections* can be framed as a completed narrative but have to remain an open-ended investigation and negotiation.

Websites for further exploration

Multicultural Germany Project – Chronology

<https://mgp.berkeley.edu/chronology/>

Documentation Center and Museum of Migration in Germany – DOMiD

<https://domid.org/en/>

With Wings and Roots

<https://withwingsandroots.org/>

Notes

[1] This overview is based on Dirk Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millennium* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2002), and Dirk Hoerder, *Geschichte der deutschen Migration vom Mittelalter bis heute* (München: Beck, 2010).

[2] Dirk Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millennium* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002).

[3] For a documentation of cyclically recurring arguments in these debates see: Deniz Göktürk, David Gramling, Anton Kaes, eds. *Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration, 1955-2005* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Deniz Göktürk, David Gramling, Anton Kaes and Andreas Langenohl, eds. *Transit Deutschland: Debatten zu Nation und Migration* (Konstanz: Konstanz University Press, 2011).

[4] For a detailed chronology see: <https://mgp.berkeley.edu/chronology/2015-2/2015-the-refugee-crisis-2/> The trek across the Balkans is documented in Ai Weiwei's film *Human Flow* (2017).

[5] See Patrice G. Pouturus, *Umkämpftes Asyl. Vom Nachkriegsdeutschland bis in die Gegenwart* (Bonn: Links Verlag, 2020).

[6] *Der Spiegel*, Nr. 31/1973, cover and pp. 24-34.

<https://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/index-1973-31.html> and

<https://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-41955159.html>

[7] Rita Chin, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[8] Barbara Wolbert, *Der getötete Pass. Rückkehr in die Türkei* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1995).

[9] <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/perils-perception-2018>

[10] The catalogues of the two exhibitions were published as: *Zuwanderungsland Deutschland. Migrationen 1500-2005*, ed. Rosmarie Beier-de Haan for Deutsches Historisches Museum Berlin (Wolfratshausen: Edition Minerva, 2005); *Projekt Migration*, ed. Kölnischer Kunstverein, Dokumentationszentrum und Museum über die Migration in Deutschland e.V. (DOMiD), Institut für Kulturanthropologie der Universität Frankfurt/Main, Institut für Theorie der Gestaltung und Kunst HGK Zürich (Köln: DuMont Verlag, 2005).

[11]

https://www.welt.de/videos/politik_original/video10340788/Merkel-haelt-Multikulti-fuer-absolut-gescheitert.html. Source of translation: <https://mgp.berkeley.edu/chronology/2010-2014/>

[12] <https://www.spiegel.de/panorama/justiz/chronologie-der-mord-an-hatun-sueruecue-a-1149867.html>

[13]

https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/zehn-jahre-allgemeines-gleichbehandlungsgesetz.724.de.html?dram:article_id=363444

[14] See also the three-part study *Deutschland postmigrantisch*, published 2014–2016 by Naika Foroutan and her team at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin:

<<https://www.projekte.hu-berlin.de/de/junited/deutschland-postmigrantisch-1/>>,
<<https://www.projekte.hu-berlin.de/de/junited/deutschland-postmigrantisch-2-pdf>>, and
<https://www.stiftung-mercator.de/media/downloads/3_Publikationen/Deutschland_Postmigrantisch_3_Juni_2016.pdf>.

[15] Adam Goodman, *The Deportation Machine. America's Long History of Expelling Immigrants* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020).

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