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## From Emigration to (Non-)Immigration to Postmigration? The Migrant Other and the Constructedness of National Identity in the GDR and Reunified Germany

### Keywords

Guest Worker, Migration, German Reunification, Orientalism, Necropolitics, Postcolonialism, GDR

### Abstract

The essay traces the legal, representative, and societal status of migrant Others in the “closed society” of the GDR (German Democratic Republic or East Germany) as an example of how Germany has been profiting from labor migration on both sides of the Wall. It outlines how, from German reunification to the present day, migration has been presented as a sudden and temporary problem that obscures a colonial and racist past and necropolitical present. The essay examines the process of social de-differentiation in the “state-domineered society” of the GDR and how social techniques of othering and ethnicization in the form of laws for foreigners fostered discrimination and racism against the “stranger” (Georg Simmel), especially the guest worker. Looking at the process of a “double transformation” in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent reunification, the essay examines how overlapping processes of othering as the modern equivalent of the term “Orientalism” (Edward Said) have shaped and continue to shape reunified Germany. The process of “catching up with modernization” affects not only former migrants, second-generation descendants, refugees, and racialized citizens, but also the social group of East Germans who stood outside a Western-coded paradigm of normalcy. It asks to what extent the Federal Republic of Germany aimed at the integration of majority white East Germans during the reunification process to the detriment of migrant Others and how reunified Germany still fosters integration for the benefit of national economic interests and at the cost of migrant Others in Germany today. The essay reflects on the complicated transition from the notion of an ethnically homogeneous German nation, postulated since 1871 and long prevalent in terms of the

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principle of descent, to the contested self-image of reunified Germany as a country of immigration and its transformation into a post-migration society.

## Od emigracije do (ne)imigracije do postmigracije? Migrantski drugi in konstruiranost nacionalne identitete v Nemški demokratični republiki in združeni Nemčiji

### Ključne besede

gastarbajter, migracije, združitev Nemčije, orientalizem, nekropolitika, postkolonializem, NDR

### Povzetek

Esej poskuša izslediti pravni, reprezentativni in družbeni status migrantskih Drugih v »zaprti družbi« Nemške demokratične republike ali Vzhodne Nemčije (NDR) kot primer, kako je Nemčija imela dobiček od delovnih migracij na obeh straneh zidu. Opisuje, kako so bile od ponovne združitve Nemčije do danes migracije predstavljene kot nenadna in začasna težava, kar zakriva kolonialno in rasistično preteklost ter nekropolitico sedanjost. Esej preučuje proces družbene dediferenciacije v družbi, ki jo obvladuje država NDR, in kako so družbene tehnike ustvarjanja drugosti in etnizacije v obliki zakonov za tujce spodbujale diskriminacijo in rasizem proti »tujcu« (Simmel), zlasti gastarbajterem. Ob pogledu na proces »dvojne transformacije« po padcu berlinskega zidu in poznejši ponovni združitvi esej preučuje, kako so prekrivajoči se procesi ustvarjanja drugosti kot sodobnega ekvivalenta izraza »orientalizem« (Edward Said) oblikovali in še naprej oblikujejo ponovno združeno Nemčijo.



“Where do you come from?” is a recurring question in Germany that at first might occur more curious than accusatory—only to start over again when having to prove the German compatibility of another facet of one’s otherness.<sup>1</sup> In her book *Undeutsch* (2016), Fatima El-Tayeb describes a suspicion in Germany that is less about the failure of those who have always been made foreign than about the refusal of the majority society to separate itself from the dominant white, Christian, and German image: an image into which “people like me will

<sup>1</sup> Fatima El-Tayeb, *Undeutsch* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2016), 9.

never be able to assimilate, no matter how German we are and no matter how ‘post-migrant’ the society now postures itself to be,”<sup>2</sup> as El-Tayeb puts it. This self-observation demonstrates how fragile a non-biological understanding of Germanness shaped by the principle of descent still is 33 years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall and reunification: when the Westphalian sovereignty model disintegrated while new states rapidly increased in the post-Cold War era.<sup>3</sup>

Here, the dominant historical image of Germany as a unity, whose division is considered unnatural and therefore inevitably temporary, aimed at constructing a “European sovereignty”<sup>4</sup> out of decades of an East-West antagonism. Chancellor Helmut Kohl’s 1989 government declaration is symptomatic of this: “We are not an immigration country, and we cannot become one.”<sup>5</sup> What was repressed here is that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries hardly any country “produced” as many “immigrants” as Germany, which included colonial migration and its promise of surplus value. Consequently, in the wake of reunification, the dogma of Germany as a “non-immigration country” and the revision of German asylum law in 1993 (*Asylkompromiss*) not only denied a history of migration; it actively “de-remembered” the colonial, anti-Semitic, and racist past, contributing to the rise in discussions about asylum seekers, migration, as well as radical right-wing violence. Moreover, it serves as a protectionist strategy to defend and propagate Germany’s national self-understanding when proving itself in Europe’s necrocapitalism<sup>6</sup> of today. Still, the legitimate belonging of newly migrated people and people with attributed migration histories who have lived in Germany for decades is not self-evident what makes Hito Steyerl’s provocative question “Can the Subaltern speak German?” more pressing than ever.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> El-Tayeb, 9; my translation.

<sup>3</sup> See Marina Gržinić, ed., *Border Thinking: Disassembling Histories of Racialized Violence* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2018), 17.

<sup>4</sup> Emmanuel Macron, “Sorbonne Speech of Emmanuel Macron,” *Ouest France*, international blog, September 29, 2017, <https://international.blogs.ouest-france.fr/archive/2017/09/29/macron-sorbonne-verbatim-europe-18583.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Horst Möller, “Helmut Kohl,” Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Geschichte der CDU, November 17, 2022, <https://www.kas.de/de/web/geschichte-der-cdu/personen/biogramm-detail/-/content/helmut-kohl-v2>.

<sup>6</sup> Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 3.

<sup>7</sup> See Hito Steyerl, “Can the Subaltern Speak German? Postcolonial Critique,” trans. Aileen Derieg, [translate.eipcp.net](http://translate.eipcp.net), May 1, 2002, <http://translate.eipcp.net/strands/03/steyerl->

One reason for this is the fact that both West and East Germany have been shaped by different “immigration cultures” that nonetheless both depend on exploiting the migrant Other. In the following, I will trace how the GDR and reunified Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall have repeatedly questioned the permanent belonging and equal participation of the migrant Other, both socially and politically. What transition did the guest worker, but also the former GDR citizens undergo who turned into “East Germans” in the course of the transformation process of reunification—where former guest workers, Germans with migration backgrounds, asylum seekers, refugees and East Germans faced each other as “strangers” without actually encountering each other?<sup>8</sup>

### The Stranger and the (Migrant) Other in the Closed Society

Simmel already described the precarious role of the “stranger,” which consists of a “synthesis of nearness and remoteness.”<sup>9</sup> In this process, “the one who comes today and stays tomorrow”<sup>10</sup> sparked a broad debate that asks about the social consequences of difference in modern society. For historical research on the GDR, it is not only the supposed “strangeness”<sup>11</sup> that requires examination, but whoever wants to understand the stranger as a stranger must ask about the conditions under which the GDR society considered social structures and processes as familiar.<sup>12</sup>

The “closed society,”<sup>13</sup> as Karl Popper once defined the GDR, implied the linking of social and geographical dimensions of a closed space and zonification with the aim to create a new, politically controlled society—a society in which common differentiations would be abolished, principles of new equality would be

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strands01en.html.

<sup>8</sup> Naika Foroutan and Jana Hensel, *Die Gesellschaft der Anderen* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 2020), 237.

<sup>9</sup> Georg Simmel, “The Stranger,” trans. Donald N. Levine, in *On Individuality and Social Forms*, ed. Donald N. Levine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 145.

<sup>10</sup> Simmel, 145.

<sup>11</sup> Simmel, 148.

<sup>12</sup> Jan C. Behrends, Thomas Lindenberger, and Patrice G. Poutrus, introduction to *Fremde und Fremd-Sein in der DDR: Zu historischen Ursachen der Fremdenfeindlichkeit in Ostdeutschland* (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2003), 9–21.

<sup>13</sup> Karl Popper, *Die offene Gesellschaft und ihre Feinde: Band 1, Der Zauber Platons* (München: Francke Verlag, 1957).



realized, and new kinds of structures, above all, the socialist system would be established. In other words, “a new society with new people.”<sup>14</sup> This new *Menschengemeinschaft* also implied, in part, totalitarian claims to power by the GDR leadership and even sovereignty that extended into the everyday lives of GDR citizens, with social changes being centrally controlled, i.e., not co-determined by civil society. This sort of “domineered society” (*Durchherrschte Gesellschaft*)<sup>15</sup> as Alf Lüdtke defines it, left no social space unaffected with the aim to prevent the emergence of oppositional centers. In the GDR, therefore, a process of social de-differentiation took place, which deprived the economic, scientific, legal, or cultural subsystems of their autonomy and suspended their specific criteria of rationality or superimposed them politically and ideologically. In this case, it was not the state that perished in the course of the Party’s decades-long rule, but rather a process of a “perishing of society.”<sup>16</sup>

The political attempt to achieve a comprehensive social homogenization, which was primarily intended to stabilize the regime of the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (SED) in the long term, ultimately led to a disintegration of the GDR’s society. At the same time, the practice of governance and the practice of resistance were always interrelated and mutually dependent. Consequently, a permanent field of tension existed in the GDR between politics and the population, which remained invisible due to the lack of an uncensored public discourse, leading to permanent contradictions, “fault lines,” and a split between an official political leading culture and an unofficial marginal culture.<sup>17</sup> The sociopolitical parameters in the GDR ensured that there were practically no possibilities for any kind of institutionalization of “abnormal” belief systems or forms of life practices. Instead, the description of the “Other” as set out by Gayatri C. Spivak took place in the service of the state’s own supremacy.<sup>18</sup> However, those who were categorized and then perceived as strangers, the Other, in the GDR were not

<sup>14</sup> Jürgen Kocka, “Eine durchherrschte Gesellschaft,” in *Sozialgeschichte der DDR*, ed. Hartmut Kaelble, Jürgen Kocka, and Hartmut Zwahr (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1994), 547–53.

<sup>15</sup> Alf Lüdtke, “Die DDR als Geschichte: Zur Geschichtsschreibung über die DDR,” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 36 (1998): 3–16.

<sup>16</sup> Sigrid Meuschel, *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft in der DDR* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1992), 10.

<sup>17</sup> Detlef Pollack, “Die Konstitutive Widersprüchlichkeit Der DDR: Oder, War Die DDR-Gesellschaft Homogen?,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 24, no. 1 (1998): 110–31.

<sup>18</sup> See Gayatri C. Spivak, “The Rani of Simur,” in *Europe and its Others: Vol. 1*, ed. Francis Barker et al. (Colchester: University of Sussex, 1985), 128–51.

exclusively guided by racist preconceptions. The image of the “class enemy,” for example, was not purely a racist construction, but a potentially flexible mechanism for exclusion.<sup>19</sup> The authoritarian impact of a prevailing homogeneous and constant societal system as well as the successful colonization of discourse, excluded the realm of the Other even in the lifeworld of the GDR population: from the realm of the “normal,” “rational,” legitimately sayable and thinkable.

Here in the course of “scandalization” procedures, the GDR used tried-and-tested images of the enemy to distinguish the East German society from the West. In addition to people stigmatized as criminals, prostitutes, drug abusers, or with national-socialist sentiment, these included foremost “foreigners,” homosexuals, and maladjusted youths under “decadent” musical or fashion influences, who were accused of “antisocial behavior” in legal discourse—all linked in a variety of ways and located mostly in the “West” of the class enemy. A not insignificant aspect with regard to the massive policy of closure against the Other was certainly also the fact that there was no public devaluation of nationalism in the self-defined “anti-fascist peace state.” Rather, in the GDR, the German nation remained a central mental reference point for the regime and the population and tended to be imagined as a closed community to whose resources Others (“class enemies,” including “foreigners”) should not have access. Thus, the rituals of friendship orchestrated by the SED were in stark contrast to the population’s most diverse experiences of Otherness. Conflicts between Germans and “strangers” were made taboo, and conflict culture and the development of tolerance were not particularly encouraged. Rather, the SED tried to minimize contacts by quartering Others, in particular migrant Others and non-citizens (e.g. political refugees). This serves an exemplary indication of Spivak’s finding that without the exclusion, stigmatization, and marginalization of the subaltern from the field of the discursive and the performative, the hegemonic project of a dominating group would not be feasible.<sup>20</sup> Through the marking of marginality, the position of the center as a producer of truth and reality can be imagined and constituted. In this context, the state and social techniques of Othering in the form of laws on foreigners and asylum seekers, but also in the form of ethnicization in the discourse on multicultur-

<sup>19</sup> Patrice G. Poutrus, “Fremd Im Bruderland: Vertragsarbeit und das Ende des Goldbroilers,” in *Erinnern stören: Der Mauerfall aus migrantischer und jüdischer Perspektive*, ed. Lydia Lierke and Massimo Perinelli (Berlin: Verbrecher Verlag, 2020), 277–98.

<sup>20</sup> See Gayatri C. Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press), 287.

alism and interculturalism played a crucial role as an example of a successfully marginalized heterodoxy in the society of the GDR.

### Migration in the Emigration Country

While the GDR's migration policy was generally shaped by the communist state party's ideas of homogeneity, the worsening of the supply crisis from the late 1980s onward and the accompanying misguided economic development in real-existing state socialism also defined the way migrants were "managed" and treated. However, until the fall of the Berlin Wall, the GDR held a special position in the German-German comparison since the GDR was basically an "emigration country" and not an "immigration country"<sup>21</sup>: a concept that in the case of the FRG was often used as a "societal admission" in the course of acknowledging the immigration of about 14 million "guest workers" who came to Germany until the recruitment stop in 1973 and some of whom stayed.

In addition to guest workers as the largest number of immigrants, the SED government "welcomed" a small amount of political exiles, and academic students which served as representatives for international reputation and diplomatic recognition. Yet, precisely this instrumental relationship had been the reason why the political immigrants could only be integrated into GDR society to a limited extent and thus were not equal members of a socialist society, but only tolerated guests of a transnationally defined community.

Furthermore, there were migrants from the Federal Republic, who wanted to naturalize in the GDR for filial, love-related, and economic reasons or because the right to work was enshrined in the GDR constitution, or even because of their own political convictions. However, these migrants were not always welcomed in one of the reception camps, especially from 1979 onwards in the secret Central Reception Center Röntgental. Instead, the migrants had to surrender most of their foreign currency to the GDR authorities upon arrival, which meant that the GDR's treasury took almost 7.5 million Deutsche Mark between 1981 and

<sup>21</sup> Klaus J. Bade, *Europa in Bewegung: Migration vom späten 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart* (München: C. H. Beck, 2002), 304.

1985.<sup>22</sup> In the process, the targeted “x-ray examination,” interrogation, and wire-tapping of migrants by the People’s Police and State Security, as well as weeks and months spent in isolation on the grounds, became a test of stamina. Many suffered from camp fever; some took their own lives.<sup>23</sup>

### **Colonial Capitalist Differentiation in Real-Existing Socialism: Migrant Work and Surplus Value**

Here, aspects of what Tony Cliff calls bureaucratic “state capitalism,”<sup>24</sup> coupled with an increasing industrial production for export or armaments against the Marxist postulate “accumulation for accumulation’s sake,”<sup>25</sup> induced a segregation process between the stranger as the migrant Other and the citizen. Thus, this social, political, and economic process collapsed ownership into citizenship and disenfranchisement into foreignness. Here one could say that the stranger was subjected to a process of colonial and capitalist differentiation in “real existing socialism” in the GDR. These processes ultimately resulted in a societal segregation between first-class citizens (heteronormative citizens considered “German” by descent), second-class citizens (e.g. racialized citizens, LG-BTQI+), and non-citizens (migrant Others). The GDR government attempted to minimize the fields of contact with GDR citizens by locking away non-citizens, which included “class enemies” and “foreigners” in particular. The concept of “imperial difference” was decisive in this process, as Miriam Friz Trzeciak and Manuel Peters have applied it to the GDR, with regard to its management of non-citizens. Following Madina Tlostanova’s concept of “imperial difference,” Trzeciak and Peters conclude that imperial aspirations and the “coloniality of power” shaped both capitalist and (real) socialist social-forms. They further argue that the GDR both continued and countered colonial power relations at the socio-economic and symbolic levels.<sup>26</sup> Here colonial and racist thought patterns

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<sup>22</sup> Tobias Wunschik, “Die Aufnahmelager für West-Ost-Migranten: Öffentliche Darstellung und heimliche Überwachung nach dem Mauerbau,” Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, March 7, 2013, <https://www.bpb.de/themen/deutschlandarchiv/wunschik20130802/>.

<sup>23</sup> Wunschik.

<sup>24</sup> Tony Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia* (London: Pluto Press, 1975).

<sup>25</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), 742.

<sup>26</sup> See Miriam Friz Trzeciak and Manuel Peters, “Urbane imperiale Differenz: Verflechtungen postkolonialer und post(real) sozialistischer Konfigurationen am Beispiel von Cottbus,”

shaped the proclaimed politics of anti-imperialism and anti-fascism in the GDR, which imagined itself as a homogeneous and white nation. Here the GDR, with its economically justified inclusion of migrant Others as workforce, took up a long-standing tradition in Germany under very different living conditions and political systems. While, for example, enslaved black people in the German colonies had to perform work under maximally unfree conditions and were forcibly deported in the course of enslavement,<sup>27</sup> Polish seasonal workers, for example, were used as “inferior” workers during the time of the German Empire, and people designated as “racially inferior” were exploited through forms of forced labor under National Socialism.

The GDR eventually continued this legacy and benefited from labor migration agreements to recruit “foreign workers” with postcolonial states such as Vietnam, Mozambique, or Angola, while considering itself more developed than other socialist states of the Global South. Thus, the doctrine of friendship among these nations was based on an idea of the GDR’s civilizational superiority.

### The Contract Worker as Stranger and Wanderer

Since the first recruitment agreement in 1955, the guest worker as a stranger embodied the figure of a potential wanderer, who circulated in the world of late industrial modernity to fill temporary gaps in the economic system of the socialist planned economy and in Western European capitalism. Nowhere is the guest worker at home; where he is, he is denied recognition as an equal (citizen) by pretending he is only a guest. Thus the guest worker can be seen today as “a sort of avant-garde figure that stood at the crossroads of the ideologically hybrid and shifting frontiers between capitalism and socialism.”<sup>28</sup> On the one hand, guest workers were needed to ensure that the “economic miracle” continued to flourish, while on the other hand, the building and further expansion of socialism

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<sup>27</sup> Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. Laurent Dubois (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 80.

<sup>28</sup> Boris Buden and Lina Dokuzović, *They’ll Never Walk Alone: The Life and Afterlife of Gastarbeiters* (Vienna: Transversal Texts, 2018), 11.

were to be realized, with guest workers serving as a kind of “fungible reserve army for both governments in East and West.”<sup>29</sup>

The central motivation of the SED government to recruit guest workers was a labor market necessity, just as in capitalist economies. In the GDR, however, as a country of emigration, recruitment was explicitly driven by the shortage of local labor forces. This distinction was mainly related to the fact that the “contract workers” (*Vertragsarbeiter*), as guest workers were officially and deliberately called in the GDR, granted only a short but labor-intensive stay under the ideological guise of “socialist reconstruction” without any possibility of contact with the rest of the population. After their work was done, they were unconditionally sent back to their home countries. In 1963, the GDR signed its first agreement with The Polish People’s Republic, and three years later, the two states regulated the use of Polish workers in the border area in the so-called “Commuter Agreement.”<sup>30</sup> A few years later, the GDR signed bilateral agreements with Algeria, Cuba, Mozambique, Vietnam, and Angola. China, Mongolia and North Korea also sent a small number of workers to the GDR.<sup>31</sup> There was no official data existing on the number of contract workers in the GDR. The first statistics were compiled in 1989, in which, however, specific groups of contract workers were not statistically recorded. For example, there were about 18,000 Algerian workers in the GDR at the end of the 1970s, but they were not included in the statistical data from 1989.<sup>32</sup> This already reveals how guest workers, in Spivak’s sense, were assigned the position of subalterns who had no access to the “abstract structures of civil society” because they were basically not wholly of it and in-

<sup>29</sup> Ulrich Herbert, *Geschichte der Ausländerpolitik in Deutschland* (München: C. H. Beck, 1986), 215.

<sup>30</sup> Ann-Judith Rabenschlag, “Arbeiten im Bruderland: Arbeitsmigranten in der DDR und ihr Zusammenleben mit der deutschen Bevölkerung,” Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, September 15, 2016, [www.bpb.de/233678](http://www.bpb.de/233678).

<sup>31</sup> Sandra Gruner-Domić, “Beschäftigung statt Ausbildung: Ausländische Arbeiter und Arbeiterinnen in der DDR,” in *50 Jahre Bundesrepublik—50 Jahre Einwanderung: Nachkriegsgeschichte als Migrationsgeschichte*, ed. Jan Motte, Rainer Ohliger, and Anne von Oswald (Frankfurt: Campus, 1999), 204–30.

<sup>32</sup> Andrzej Stach and Saleh Hussain, *Ausländer in der DDR: Ein Rückblick* (Berlin: Die Ausländerbeauftragte des Senats von Berlin, 1991), 16.



stead remained marginal and invisible.<sup>33</sup> However, this did not mean that guest workers were not also exposed to state surveillance practices, on the contrary.

The bilateral agreements continued to be based on the so-called “rotation principle,”<sup>34</sup> according to which labor migrants were generally sent back to their home country after a maximum of five years and replaced by new arrivals. The right of residence of foreign workers was always linked to an existing employment relationship. If the employment contract ended, the right of residence also expired. Not even marriage to a GDR citizen was a guarantee of the right to stay in the GDR. Moreover, contract workers could be dismissed prematurely at any time and sent back to their home countries if they were accused of violating “socialist labor discipline.” To what extent such a violation had taken place was left to the discretion of the respective employing company.<sup>35</sup>

Just as in the Western industrialized countries, the guest workers in the GDR primarily took on unskilled, monotonous, and unattractive jobs. They worked assembly-lineshifts with outdated equipment in light and heavy industry, as well as in coal mining. At the time of the GDR’s collapse, foreign contract workers were employed in nearly 1,000 so-called state-owned enterprises in the GDR. The foreign workers were not allowed to choose their place of residence independently. Instead, their accommodation was organized by their employer, typically in the form of dormitories reserved for foreign contract workers. The occupancy of the rooms was also organized by the company management: up to four residents were accommodated per room. Men and women lived separately, and even married couples were not entitled to share a room. An admission control registered the presence and absence of the residents and any visitors. Overnight

<sup>33</sup> Gayatri C. Spivak, “Resistance That Cannot be Recognised as Such,” interview by Suzana Milevska, *Identities* 11, no. 2 (Winter 2003): 27–45, quoted by Nikita Dhawan, “Can the Subaltern Speak German? And Other Risky Questions: Migrant Hybridism versus Subalternity,” *translate.eipcp.net*, April 25, 2007, <http://translate.eipcp.net/strands/03/dhawan-strands01en.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Dennis Kuck, “Für den sozialistischen Aufbau ihrer Heimat? Ausländische Vertragsarbeitskräfte in der DDR,” in *Fremde und Fremd-Sein in der DDR*, ed. Behrens, Lindenberger, and Poutrus, 271–81.

<sup>35</sup> Heidemarie Beyer, “Entwicklung des Ausländerrechts in der DDR,” in *Zwischen Nationalstaat und multikultureller Gesellschaft: Einwanderung und Fremdenfeindlichkeit in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, ed. Manfred Heßler (Berlin: Hitit, 1993), 214.



visits had to be requested from the dormitory management, as well as the resident's overnight stay away from home.

Once again, this reflects the mechanisms of the “domineered society” and how the GDR was characterized by totalitarian control of the population by the state apparatus, which fundamentally differed from the situation of guest workers in West Germany. Although guest workers were not officially considered part of the population, The Ministry for State Security observations intruded into almost all areas of public work and private lives. For example, Michael Feige documented the spying on Vietnamese contract workers by the Stasi. In addition, the State Secretariat for Labor and Wages informed the Central Committee of the SED about weekly incidents with “foreigners.”

### **Doublespeak to Distance from the Class Enemy**

Although officials in the GDR tried to distinguish themselves from the so-called “exploitation of foreign workers in the West,” it can be observed that discrimination against foreign workers not only took place in the sociopolitical interaction with them but already manifested itself in the propagandistic theses of “friendship among nations” and “successful integration.” Here Spivak’s definition of Othering even manifests in the GDR’s public, oblique rhetoric as the active formation of opposition, in which the description of the Other takes place in the service of one’s own supremacy.

The fact that foreign workers were employed in the GDR just as West Germany was initially concealed and then classified as qualitatively different. Popular here was the “narrative of the twofold education.” The function of this narrative was not only the positive self-portrayal of the state party and its policies. The narrative also served to distinguish itself from the guest worker policy of the “class enemy” and, in particular, of the Federal Republic, which in the public discourse of the GDR was referred to as the “foreign worker policy” and was seen as being in the immediate vicinity of National Socialist crimes.<sup>36</sup> Eventual-

<sup>36</sup> Lothar Elsner, “Zum Wesen und zur Kontinuität der Fremdarbeiterpolitik des deutschen Imperialismus,” in *Wesen und Kontinuität der Fremdarbeiterpolitik des deutschen Imperialismus: Materialien einer wissenschaftlichen Konferenz* (Rostock: Universität Rostock, 1974), 2–76.

ly, compared to the guest worker agreements of the FRG, the agreements were formally more egalitarian and contained essential rights and provisions (such as training), which, however, were not put into practice. Furthermore, in most GDR reports, migrant workers were simply referred to as “friends.” This representation corresponded with the GDR’s self-image as an anti-fascist state that had successfully left the “brown German” past behind. Class consciousness, not ethnicity, was to be the decisive criterion for identity formation. According to Erich Honecker in August 1978, “misanthropic racism had been eradicated at the root”<sup>37</sup> in the closed society.

However, when taking a closer look at the linguistic articulation of this aspired ideal image, noticeable contradictions reveal themselves. In the reporting of the GDR press, a power imbalance was established on several levels between GDR citizens and guest workers, portraying the citizens of the GDR as superior and the immigrants as inferior. For example, factory records speak of the “education” of the migrant workers, who are referred to as “boys” and “girls” despite their adult age or addressed consistently by their first names, while German work colleagues were called by their last names.<sup>38</sup> Here, GDR citizens are presented in the role of the teacher and adult, while the immigrants are assigned the role of the destitute, the student, or even the child. Vietnamese guest workers, for example, who worked as seamstresses in a Berlin factory, would “later pass on their knowledge and skills in the industrialization of their homeland.” Hereby, the employment of immigrants was considered to be fruitful for the “development of their personality” while benefiting from “ideological formation” and “education.”<sup>39</sup> Thus, in everyday interaction with their German colleagues, guest workers were supposed to experience real existing socialism and then “export this body of thought to their home countries.”<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Erich Honecker at the World Conference for the Fight against Racism and Racial Discrimination in Geneva, August 14, 1978, transcript found in *Gegen Rassismus, Apartheid und Kolonialismus: Dokumente der DDR 1977–1982*, ed. Alfred Babing (Berlin: Staatsverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1983), 158; my translation.

<sup>38</sup> Ann-Judith Rabenschlag, *Völkerfreundschaft nach Bedarf: Ausländische Arbeitskräfte in der Wahrnehmung von Staat und Bevölkerung der DDR* (PhD diss., Stockholm University, 2014), 120, 94–99.

<sup>39</sup> Rabenschlag, 86–88.

<sup>40</sup> Rabenschlag, 88.

Regarding this dynamic, Ann-Judith Rabenschlag sees parallels here with the narrative of the “white man’s burden,” infamously coined by the writer Rudyard Kipling. One might speak of the “GDR citizen’s burden” that explains in a paternalistic tone and with the sense of duty of being a good socialist.<sup>41</sup> Rabenschlag concludes that discrimination, racism, and xenophobic incidents in the GDR cannot be just related to the lack of assertiveness of a state ideology oriented toward equality. Rather, discrimination against non-Germans was already anchored in the linguistic articulation of this ideology itself. Ironically, the central propaganda of the GDR government even shares similarities with “Doublespeak.” Derived from Newspeak from George Orwell’s novel *1984*, it deliberately obfuscates, distorts, or inverts the meaning of words through language manipulation in order to hide facts and camouflage the goals or ideologies of the practitioners.<sup>42</sup>

Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky argue that Orwellian Newspeak is an important component of the manipulation of language in the mass media and that it serves as a system-maintaining propaganda function.<sup>43</sup> Here it seems as if the GDR used an “anti-capitalism” news filter that followed the opposite logic of Herman and Chomsky’s so-called “anti-communism” filter developed against the background of the Cold War: Based on polar and binary pairs of opposites, it considers communism as the antithesis of the Western way of life.

### Surveillance, Pogroms, and Repatriations

In the end, the fact that the “brotherhood” rhetoric did not have much in common with reality was ultimately demonstrated by physical racist pogroms against contract workers. One of them was directed against Algerian workers in 1975, which was supported by latent attitudes against “foreigners” in general and Muslims in particular. These pogroms were never covered in the GDR press. Furthermore, the GDR state media withheld the exact circumstances of the death and lynching of two Cuban workers, Andres Garcia Paret and Delf-

<sup>41</sup> Rabenschlag, 276.

<sup>42</sup> George Orwell, *1984* (New York: Plume, 2003), 210–17.

<sup>43</sup> Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Book, 2002), 134.

in Guerra, in Merseburg in August 1979 and the Mozambican apprentice Carlos Conceicao in Staßfurt in September 1987 from the public.<sup>44</sup>

Racist attacks on dormitories of contract workers occurred in the GDR from 1975 on. In this respect, the statement that the attacks on dormitories of former contract workers and refugees in Hoyerswerda (1991) and Rostock-Lichtenhagen (1992) were the first pogroms in Germany after the Second World War needs to be revised. They already took place in the GDR before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Another particular form of racism in the GDR emerged in the assaults against Arabs, Africans, and Cubans. In September 1987, The Ministry for State Security investigated the violent confrontations and described in their secret documents how a “group of foreigners [Mozambicans] is exposed to provocations by negatively minded, predominantly youthful GDR citizens, which in the end lead to physical confrontations.”<sup>45</sup> Here, although the Ministry noted that “workers from the People’s Republic of Mozambique were often not the instigators of incidents,” the contract workers were eventually victims of deportation (“repatriation”). From the outset, racialized contract workers were made the culprits without a thorough investigation of the causes of outbreaks of violence. For example, a total of approximately 1,000 Cuban workers were forcibly repatriated prematurely in 1986, and at least 730 by August 31, 1987. During the same period, at least 120 workers were forcibly repatriated to Mozambique in 1986 and another 120 by August 31, 1987. In the case of the Vietnamese, only 60 workers were repatriated in 1986 and only 27 by August 31, 1987. However, Vietnamese women, who were the majority of female guest workers, who became pregnant while working in the GDR either had to have an abortion or were forcibly repatriated.<sup>46</sup> The criminalization strategy of the SED propaganda also included defaming the expanding work of Vietnamese contract workers in the shadow economy, which had a stabilizing effect during the escalation of the supply crisis in the GDR at the end of the 1980s. With slogans such as “smuggling” and “buying goods” by “foreign-

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<sup>44</sup> Harry Weibel, “Rassismus in der DDR: Drei charakteristische Fallbeispiele aus den 70er und 80er Jahren,” *Zeitschrift des Forschungsverbundes SED-Staat* 39 (2016): 114.

<sup>45</sup> Stasi Records Archive, Berlin, BStU, MfS, HA XVIII, no. 19422, 13, 126.

<sup>46</sup> Almut Zwengel, *Die Gastarbeiter der DDR: Politischer Kontext und Lebenswelt* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2010), 264.

ers” in the controlled GDR media,<sup>47</sup> the SED propaganda ultimately attempted to distract attention from the failed economic development in real state socialism.<sup>48</sup>

### “Wendeverlierer” after the Fall of the Berlin Wall

The SED government’s rapid loss of power in the light of a mass fleeing of GDR Citizens to the West, a new opposition movement, and the Monday Demonstrations during the Peaceful Revolution catapulted the migrant workers not only into a legal no-man’s-land, but also into existential and xenophobic abysses after the Fall of the Berlin Wall.

While many predominantly white GDR and FRG citizens rejoiced at the fall of the Berlin Wall, on both sides of the border the Wall fell primarily on the bodies of the Other Germans who had been living in Germany for several years and were now once again considered “foreigners” and “migrants”: those with precarious status such as the former contract workers in the GDR, whose bilateral state contracts lost their validity. Angelika Nguyen, director of the documentary *Bruderland ist abgebrannt* (1991), who for the first time, tried to shed light on the situation of the remaining Vietnamese contract workers in her film, but which no German television station was interested in during that time, put this situation as follows: “The Germans had their own worries at the time. What were they supposed to do with migrant stories?”<sup>49</sup>

Patrice Poutrus notes that of the 59,000 Vietnamese and 15,100 Mozambican contract workers registered at the end of 1989, only 21,000 and 2,800, respectively, were still living in East Germany at the time of German unification. Numerous migrants went to West Germany after the fall of the Wall and applied for asylum, but just like the newly arrived Vietnamese who came for family reunification,

<sup>47</sup> Poutrus, “Fremd Im Bruderland,” 8.

<sup>48</sup> Jonathan R. Zatlin, “Scarcity and Resentment: Economic Sources of Xenophobia in the GDR 1971–1989,” *Central European History* 40, no. 4 (December 2007): 683–720, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008938907001082>.

<sup>49</sup> Duc Ngo Ngoc, “‘Wir würden gerne mitfeiern, aber wurden aufgefordert zu gehen’: Eine Filmbesprechung zu ‘Bruderland ist abgebrannt’ und ‘Wir bleiben hier,’” Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, March 5, 2021, <https://www.bpb.de/themen/deutsche-einheit/migrantische-perspektiven/325138/wir-wuerden-gerne-mitfeiern-aber-wurden-aufgefordert-zu-gehen/>.

the Federal Republic of Germany did not recognize them as politically persecuted and thus did not provide them with a secure residence status. They received only a temporary residence permit, which was based on the original term of their contract with the SED state.<sup>50</sup>

Meanwhile, in the summer of 1990, the freely elected and, at the same time last government of the GDR endeavored to facilitate the targeted repatriation of the former contract workers to their countries of origin instead of securing their residence by means of financial support payments. After the GDR's accession to the Geneva Refugee Convention in 1990, the right of asylum could no longer be applied because of the imminent reunification. The transition to a market economy worsened the economic situation in the GDR, leading to the closure of state-owned companies by the private 'trust agency' ('Treuhandanstalt') due to outdated structures and cost considerations. The contract workers were among the first to be affected by company layoffs and lost their legal work and residence status with the end of the GDR. The Federal Republic's "law on foreigners," which was amended in 1991, also did not provide the contract workers with a secure residence status, as most of them lost their jobs, unlike the very few political refugees who had already been living in the GDR for a long time when the Wall came down and whose residence status was recognized in unified Germany. The guest workers received only a temporary residence title based on the original terms of their contracts that were still concluded with the GDR.

Contract workers who traveled back to their homeland were promised a free return flight and compensation of 3,000 Deutsche Mark during the transitional period, but in many cases, the amount was never paid out. Many former contract workers traveled back home under the pressure of the GDR government, where in the case of the Mozambican guest workers, they were "repatriated" to a civil war that lasted until 1992. These self-called "Madgermanes" count themselves to this day among the biggest *Wendeverlierer* or "losers of the turn-around."<sup>51</sup> They have never received their due remuneration for their performed work in the

<sup>50</sup> Patrice G. Poutrus, "Ausländer in Ostdeutschland," Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, August 24, 2020, <https://www.bpb.de/themen/deutsche-einheit/lange-wege-der-deutschen-einheit/314193/auslaender-in-ostdeutschland/>.

<sup>51</sup> See Stefan Ehlert, "DDR-Gastarbeiter aus Mosambik: 'Bis heute haben wir kein Geld erhalten,'" Deutschlandfunk, November 9, 2019, <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/ddr-gastarbeiter-aus-mosambik-bis-heute-haben-wir-kein-geld-100.html>.

GDR from the Mozambican Ministry of Labor, let alone compensation from the Federal Republic of Germany, which includes unresolved pension claims from payments into the GDR social system.

### Scandalization and Criminalization

In the end, most of the remaining contract workers from the former GDR were among the *Wendeverlierer*. Their only means of subsistence were often jobs on the fringes of legality or self-exploitation in small trades since claiming social benefits under their precarious residency status would have meant immediate deportation.

The most socially and legally marginalized were increasingly stigmatized as supposed “foreigners” even in unified Germany and were most directly confronted with xenophobia and violent murder attacks in East and West. While the 1991 revision of the law on foreigners and a 1993 reform of the Citizenship Act made it easier for former first- and second-generation guest workers in the FRG to acquire German citizenship, nonetheless, they too became targets. The pogroms of Hoyerswerder and Rostock-Lichtenhagen in 1992, as well as in the West German cities Mölln in the same year, followed by another one year later in Solingen, horrifyingly evince this.

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As Fatima El-Tayeb notes, “bogus asylum seekers” who allegedly managed to obtain a life of luxury in the German welfare state increasingly became scapegoats for the real neoliberal dismantling of social rights that was setting in at that time.<sup>52</sup> Here social rights were taken away to serve the growing racism in the heated atmosphere and produced overlapping processes of Othering. This included besides former contract workers also Sinti and Roma people from Eastern Europe who were considered “work-shy, lazy, dishonest and unalterably foreign” and whose deliberately miserable circumstances played a subordinate role in the collective memory of the events in Rostock-Lichtenhagen. Their presence now became the symbol of German excessive demands and their deportation thus the highest priority.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> El-Tayeb, *Undeutsch*, 121n.

<sup>53</sup> El-Tayeb, 121n.



Sabine am Orde notes that there was a shift from a victimization to a criminalization discourse against migrant Others following the years of the fall of the Berlin Wall: “In the first period after the fall of communism, Vietnamese appear in the press primarily as (former) GDR contract workers and victims of racist violence. It was not until the end of 1992 that media interest in the illegal cigarette trade increased—the tone became harsher. From now on, the now-familiar ‘mafia rhetoric’ appears more frequently.”<sup>54</sup> Migrant workers and asylum seekers who were already criminalized by the GDR media in the course of their activities in the shadow economy were also increasingly criminalized and “scandalized” after reunification.

Hereby, it can be assumed that with the shifting status of the guest workers after the fall of the Berlin Wall, economic and racist contradictions could no longer be functionally related to each other in order to enforce national economic interests in a capitalist logic and to preserve the image of a national descent community that has been linked to racist notions.<sup>55</sup> On the contrary, however, the former guest workers were once again devalued, as they were now perceived as useless “social parasite” among *sans papiers*—a French term for so-called “illegal migrants” that literally translates to “without papers” in English—that, in comparison to “guest workers, [. . .] have never been called for, they simply should not be there.”<sup>56</sup>

### The Making Other of East Germans

Here, the transformation processes after the fall of the Berlin Wall in the course of German reunification represented a special case for migrant Others insofar as the basic social institutions were predetermined with the accession of the GDR to West Germany. Furthermore, the development of East Germany has been

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<sup>54</sup> Sabine am Orde, “Zwischen Vertragsarbeit und organisierter Kriminalität: Zur Kriminalisierung der vietnamesischen Minderheit in der Bundesrepublik,” *CILIP*, December 21, 1996, <https://www.cilip.de/1996/12/21/zwischen-vertragsarbeit-und-organisierter-kriminalitaet-zur-kriminalisierung-der-vietnamesischen-minderheit-in-der-bundesrepublik/>.

<sup>55</sup> Veronika Kourabas, *Die Anderen ge-brauchen: Eine rassismustheoretische Analyse von “Gastarbeit” im migrationsgesellschaftlichen Deutschland* (Bielfeld: Transcript Verlag, 2021), 28.

<sup>56</sup> Monika Mokre, “On the Intersections of Globalized Capitalism and National Politics: Gastarbeiters, Refugees, Irregular Migrants,” in *They’ll Never Walk Alone*, ed. Buden and Dokuzković, 35.

embedded itself in the crisis-ridden and rapid modernization thrusts of the old FRG. This led to a “double transformation”<sup>57</sup> and transformation shocks of a “disarmed society,”<sup>58</sup> which the East German population experienced in the 1990s and that have neither been completed nor processed. Besides the contract workers, around 2.3 million former GDR citizens were affected by unemployment and ruptures in their biographies within two years.

Consequently, being made into Others was also one of the most formative East German experiences after reunification: A society stepped out of its own center and was pushed to the periphery. The reunification process can be basically described as the becoming East German of the former GDR citizen.<sup>59</sup> For example, East Germans are still called upon as a collective group when it comes to negative attributions and have been repeatedly exposed to an experience of constant discursive devaluation, which confirmed the feeling of being a “second-class citizen” in reunified Germany.<sup>60</sup> Thomas Ahbe notes how East Germans are ascribed those characteristics that West Germans—if one follows the implications of their self-image—have successfully discarded, namely authoritarianism and docile irresponsibility, xenophobia, racism and indifference to National Socialism, which also legitimizes their own non-questioning of their role in the unification process. This also exemplifies how the “East” and “East Germans” are classified from a Western perspective after the Fall of the Berlin Wall: “East Germans” are said to be backward and not yet fully arrived in modernity but rather are identified with a process of “catching-up modernization.”<sup>61</sup>

Here the concept of Orientalism coined by Said could be applied to the German *contra* German context, where the “West” and the “East” oppose each other as dichotomies. On the one hand, the enlightened, civilized, and democratic “Oc-

<sup>57</sup> Hildegard-Maria Nickel and Sabine Schenk, “Prozesse geschlechtsspezifischer Differenzierung im Erwerbssystem,” in *Erwerbsarbeit und Beschäftigung im Umbruch*, ed. Hildegard-Maria Nickel, Jürgen Kühl, and Sabine Schenk (Berlin: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 1994), 259–82.

<sup>58</sup> See Heinrich Best and Everhard Holtmann, *Aufbruch der entscherten Gesellschaft: Deutschland nach der Wiedervereinigung* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2012), 9n.

<sup>59</sup> See Foroutan and Hensel, *Die Gesellschaft der Anderen*, 143.

<sup>60</sup> See Thomas Ahbe, Rainer Gries, and Wolfgang Schmale, *Die Ostdeutschen in den Medien: Das Bild von den Anderen nach 1990* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2009).

<sup>61</sup> See Rainer Geißler, *Die Sozialstruktur Deutschlands: Zur gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung mit einer Bilanz zur Vereinigung* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2008).

cident” of West Germany and the “Orient” (East Germany), which is uncivilized or in need of civilization.<sup>62</sup> In a similar way, this applies to how Western Europe constructed itself in opposition to Eastern Europe without acknowledging the historical processes of evacuation, abstraction, and expropriation.

### East-Migrant Analogies

“Migrants left their country, East Germans were left by their country,”<sup>63</sup> concludes Naika Fourouton with the assumption that the relationship to the lost country set in motion similar processes in East Germans as in migrants, even if it was unloved or intentionally left behind.

In a study, Foroutan and her colleagues examined which strategies minorities develop in order to remain unrecognized, assimilate and attract attention as part of the mainstream society. The study concluded that assimilation and adaptation strategies to the West German norm were not only used by East Germans, but also by subaltern migrants: On the one hand, processes that occurred through migration into the West German codified society, such as arriving in Germany after reunification, learning new social structures, language, or just banal everyday coping. This also applied to experiences of impoverishment, isolation and the non-recognition of school degrees or professional certificates, downgrading in career processes as well as questions of identity loss and identity reconstruction, assimilation, radicalization, and resistance.<sup>64</sup>

In *Die Gesellschaft der Anderen*, Naika Foroutan and Jana Hensel further discuss East Germans in the context of migration research and elaborate on similarities and differences between the groups of East Germans and migrants in regard to stereotypes, feelings of devaluation, and foreignness without aiming at equating different experiences or denying hierarchies since most of the former guest worker migrants in East and West, in contrast to the predominantly majority white East Germans, were already and are still made into Others through racialization. Even though it can be empirically proven that East Germans took away jobs from migrants in the early 1990s, East Germans were complicit in degrad-

<sup>62</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), 149.

<sup>63</sup> Foroutan and Hensel, *Die Gesellschaft der Anderen*, 98; my translation.

<sup>64</sup> Foroutan and Hensel, 122.

ing migrants in the course of an attempted social-economic climbing in the West German society—according to the motto: “We are both Germans after all!” as Foroutan describes.<sup>65</sup>

By contrast, migrants’ criticism of racism in Germany when it comes to unfair payment or structural discrimination, for example, was never exclusively directed against the group of East Germans but against Germany’s systemic structures. Eventually, a frighteningly high level of everyday racism and everyday violence against migrant Others in the post-transition period make the emotional insecurity of the early years after reunification just as evident as the deeper-seated racist thought structures in East and West.

### Fading Affiliations: “We, Too, Are the People!”

The lack of symbolic reaction to the violent acts of exclusion by the federal government of the time also sent a very clear signal of non-belonging to the group of people of migrant origin, among them former guest workers in West Germany. Those guest workers had risen to the status of “fellow citizens” before the Fall of the Berlin Wall but were categorized as “third-class-citizens” or “foreigners” again after the fall of the Berlin Wall, marking a segment of the population that lives in Germany but is not part of German society:<sup>66</sup>

At the height of our childhood games, the Berlin Wall had fallen, and suddenly the Kotti was teeming with Ossis. They had come to collect their welcome money—from our banks. [. . .] As always, we also stood around there. After all, it was our meeting place. The Ossis gawked at us, we gawked back. Thirty black heads against hundreds of East Germans.<sup>67</sup>

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Neco Çelik’s words reflect the mistrust among citizens with a migration background toward this new Germany, which in the years to come should be primarily concerned with the “new citizens” of Germany and their integration in order to achieve an effective alliance between East and West. Here the process

<sup>65</sup> Foroutan and Hensel, 122.

<sup>66</sup> See Christine Morgenstern, *Rassismus—Konturen einer Ideologie: Einwanderung im politischen Diskurs der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Hamburg: Argument Verlag, 2002), 252.

<sup>67</sup> Neco Çelik, “Soziale Häutung,” in *Manifest der Vielen: Deutschland erfindet sich neu*, ed. Hilal Sezgin (Berlin: Blumenbar, 2011), 171–74.

of integration, indeed of growing together, was made in disfavor of an effective migrant Other—or in the sense of David Lloyd: The over-represented oppressed individuals excluded from sovereignty along racial lines.<sup>68</sup>

Member of the anti-racist network Kanak Attack, Massimo Perinelli, describes how the capitalist liquidation of the East German infrastructure after reunification was compensated with the evoked image of a homogeneous nation: a supposedly successful reunification process that implied the discursive integration of German citizens and which in Perinelli's view was made possible on the backs of the migrants.<sup>69</sup> This shows how the reunification process was not only a significant rupture when it comes to the expulsion of migrants from the German norm, but moreover, how “East Germans” were involved in cementing migrants as Others—since East Germans themselves were trying to find entrance into the majority society. Instead of the West German promise of individualization, opportunities, or forming alliances, competition prevailed.

Hereby, the aggressive demarcation from the “non-German” allowed the East Germans to project frustrations about their position in the new all-German hierarchy onto those positioned even further down. West Germany remained the idealized norm, while ethno-nationalism as structural to the national understanding of the Federal Republic remained unrecognized. In this regard, Stuart Hall observed the escalating nationalist conflicts in Eastern Europe and the construction of nations of their own shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union as “a passport to the West”:

These emergent nationalisms are not simply revivals of the past but reworkings of it in the circumstances of the present—entry tickets to the new Europe. Though they look like a return to a pre-1914 historical agenda, they are functioning as a way of evading the past and making a bid for modernity (i.e., entry to the Euro-club).<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> See David Lloyd, *Under Representation: The Racial Regime of Aesthetics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019).

<sup>69</sup> See Massimo Perinelli, “Die Obergrenze der Demokratie,” *Jungle.world*, April 26, 2018, <https://jungle.world/artikel/2018/17/die-obergrenze-der-demokratie/>.

<sup>70</sup> Stuart Hall, “Europe’s Other Self,” *Marxism Today* 42, no. 8 (August 1991): 18–19.

## From Welcoming Culture to Staying Culture

Eventually, the denied history of migration and Germany as a traditional “non-immigration country” on the one hand, and an often-superimposed pluralistic diversity in German society on the other, demonstrate an unprecedented challenge to a formerly homogeneous national and continental community. In such a community, the promise of democracy did not and still does not materialize for all. German citizens and non-citizens with the supposedly opening of the borders between East and West in 1989, but rather fosters the installment of new walls in front of the “Euro-club”: fences, detention camps, deportation to civil war zones, reduced social benefits, bans on family reunification, tightened residence requirements, and so on. As in the 1990s in Germany, migration management has become a euphemism for repelling people.

Although Germany became a “de facto immigration country” at the turn of the millennium with the reform of the citizenship law moving away from the law of blood to the law of soil—and although a welcoming culture has increasingly grown since it was brought to life by migrant communities in the wake of Europe’s “migration crisis” in 2015—the notion of an established host society dominates. Such a society unilaterally motivates people with migration biographies to integrate into it, still for the benefit of national economic interests.

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Ellen Kollender and Veronika Kourabas describe how the instrumentalization of migrants as “ethnicized integration entrepreneurs of their own” goes hand in hand with refugee and integration management undertaken by the state.<sup>71</sup> For example, the cooperation of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) with consulting firms such as McKinsey demonstrates how private-sector agencies and consulting firms are commissioned to develop “pragmatic solutions” for migration and integration policy challenges.<sup>72</sup> Here Germany’s suppression of immigration as a structural prerequisite of the “normal” functioning capitalist order recalls the well-known words of Max Frisch in 1965: “We wanted a labor

<sup>71</sup> Ellen Kollender and Veronika Kourabas, “Zwischen Ein- und Ausschluss der ‘Anderen’: (Dis-)Kontinuitäten rassistischer und ökonomistischer Argumentationen im Diskurs um Migration von der ‘Gastarbeit’ bis heute,” *Wissen schafft Demokratie* 7 (2020): 93, <https://doi.org/10.19222/202007/08>.

<sup>72</sup> Kollender and Kourabas, 93.

force, but human beings came.”<sup>73</sup> Here a step towards overcoming the “dehistorization” of migration, described by Boris Buden and Lina Dokuzović as the “tacit ideological precondition for its populist politicization,”<sup>74</sup> would be to finally stop considering migration as a sudden issue, threat, and state of exception.

In this light, the question arises how a German postmigrant society<sup>75</sup> might look like that is not only “rhetorically” propagated but rather forms alliances between Others: by freeing the German nation from its dependence on migrants, asylum seekers and refugees as a representation of the Other and whose acceptance is not predominantly linked to their economic productivity and performance.

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<sup>73</sup> Original quote: “Wir riefen Arbeitskräfte und es kamen Menschen.” Max Frisch, introduction to *Siamo Italiani: Gespräche mit Italienischen Arbeitern in der Schweiz*, ed. Alexander Seiler (Zurich: EVZ, 1965), 7.

<sup>74</sup> Buden and Dokuzović, eds., *They’ll Never Walk Alone*, 17.

<sup>75</sup> See Naika Foroutan, Juliane Karakayali, and Riem Spielhaus, eds., *Postmigrantische Perspektiven: Ordnungssysteme, Repräsentationen, Kritik* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2018), 10.



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