

# GFL

*German as a foreign language*

## **Introduction: Cultural Responses to Migration Experiences since Unification**

Klaus-Dieter Rossade, Milton Keynes, and Joanne Leal, London

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This collection of papers continues the theme of the GFL volume *Cinema and Migration since Unification* (Leal and Rossade, 2008). Both volumes go back to an Association of Modern German Studies (AMGS) conference on ‘Migrant experiences in Post-Unification Germany’ held at and with the support of the Goethe-Institute in April 2007 in London. The focus of the first volume reflects the growing popularity of cinema as a vehicle to explore currents in modern German society, in this case the experiences of filmmakers with migrant backgrounds.

Migration experiences in literature were, unsurprisingly, also well represented at the conference and two of the four papers in this volume reflect this. Interestingly, both papers selected here focus on the meta-level of literary criticism and scholarship rather than dealing with particular authors and their work, as was the case in the first volume about a hyphenated *auteur* cinema. Such meta-level reflections are usually either the sign of a new field which is still in search of definitions and paradigms that can steer and structure its processes of inquiry, or a sign of age and maturity where the study of literary criticism itself provides clues as to the changing nature of sentiments and discursive practices over time. In this case, the papers seem to indicate that scholarly literary criticism, as established a discipline as it might be, is still struggling with definitions, identity constructions and paradigms for those authors and their products that are in some way connected to the experiences of migrant communities.

The third contribution to this volume deals with memory and migration experiences and is thus representative of the few conference contributions which dealt with fields other than literature and film, fields which were otherwise, and much to the disappointment of the organisers, rather underrepresented at the AMGS conference. The final paper, once more on the cinema of two widely discussed German filmmakers, re-visits some of the central themes that surfaced frequently in the discussions at the conference such as the

interrelationship of binary constructions of gender, sexuality and ethnicity. Thus, this paper links back to Guido Rings' keynote conference contribution (published in the first volume) which explored the growing cinematic variety in representations of migrant experiences between the binary poles of monoculturalism and transculturalism. The editors of both GFL volumes hope that their selection of contributions from the conference provides a good introduction to the rich picture of '(post-)migrant experiences' in the works of some of the much discussed hyphenated film makers and authors of our time.

In the first paper, 'For Feridun Zaimoglu's *Leyla*: Crime Facts and Fiction', Tom Cheesman refutes in detail the allegation of plagiarism and 'symbolic matricide' levelled at Feridun Zaimoglu and his novel *Leyla* (2006) by NZZ cultural correspondent and author Sieglinde Geisel. Beyond the narrow confines of the controversy, he re-examines the relationship between fiction and reality or experience, and the particular demands that are frequently made on writers from ethnic minorities or with migrant backgrounds. Rather than having to produce a 'literature of duty' aimed at positively steering readers' perceptions of ethnic minority cultures, any author of literary fiction, regardless of origin, has the right, argues Cheesman, to the 'freedom to imagine and to help readers imagination'.

Chantal Wright, in her contribution 'Writing in the "Grey Zone": Exophonic Literature in Contemporary Germany' proposes the new classificatory terms "exophony" and "exophonic" as a way to overcome some of the difficulties of dealing with 'migrant' or ethnic minority writing. One of the advantages of these terms is that they can bring to the fore the innovative stylistic features that she identifies in the works of Franco Biondi, Emine Sevgi Özdamar and Yoko Tawada. Whether her terms can indeed address tricky questions relating to hybrid identities and issues of authenticity in the work of writers with more or less significant migrant backgrounds, or whether these terms will turn out to be just the new kid on the block of 'Migrantenliteratur', negotiating the space with other terms such as 'axial', 'postnational', 'transcultural', remains to be seen.

In *Das Museum als Vermittlungsinstanz von Migrationserfahrungen*, Silke Arnold-de Simine compares ways of remembering the history of migration in recent temporary and permanent museum and exhibition projects and plans. The consequences of portraying

either immigration or emigration or of representing migration as the result of economic developments or of persecution are some of the issues explored in the paper. It also considers the role of museum/exhibition visitors along a continuum from observer to (inter)active participant, and explores the interplay of power, ideology, interpretive authority, memory management and the competition for authenticity in this context.

Joanne Leal and Klaus-Dieter Rossade conclude the volume with their paper ‘Negotiating Gender, Sexuality and Ethnicity in Fatih Akın’s and Thomas Arslan’s Urban Spaces’, in which they look at representations of male and female identities in recent films by these hyphenated filmmakers. They also discuss the role of urban spaces for identity construction and examine some alternative representations that fall outside the binary logic which so often underpins the cultural stereotyping of hyphenated communities.

As with all AMGS conferences and publications, it is hoped that this special GFL issue attracts not just professional readers of film and literary studies, but is also of interest to anyone involved in teaching or learning German.

### **Biodata**

Klaus-Dieter Rossade is Lecturer in German in the Department of Languages at The Open University in Milton Keynes. His research focuses on the history of scholarship and Higher Education with reference to German studies, memory and ‘dealing with the past’. He has also presented and published in the area of technology enhanced language learning (TELL) and is currently involved in research projects on language learning at primary level. His book “‘Dem Zeitgeist erlegen?’ Benno von Wiese und der Nationalsozialismus’ was published in 2007. He was convenor (until 2007) and is currently treasurer of the Association of Modern German Studies.

Joanne Leal is a Lecturer in German in the School of Languages, Linguistics and Culture at Birkbeck College, London. She teaches and researches mainly in the areas of post-war German literature and film, with a particular focus on gender. She is currently working on representations of masculinity in the aftermath of ‘1968’ and is co-authoring a volume on the collaborative films of Wim Wenders and Peter Handke. She is Secretary of the Association of Modern German Studies.