



Remembering in Circles

Red Thread Journal 6 | Erden Kosova

Looking back from a distance and through the lens of the intervening decades, it is easy to fall into the illusion that the German people emerged from the collapse of the criminal empire built by National Socialism with a profound political enlightenment. We believe that the end of the war, the confrontation with the great destruction brought about by the defeat, the acknowledgement of the destruction inflicted on other countries, the revelation of the details of the genocide(s) committed in the concentration camps must have brought about a radical ideological break, a deep sense of shame and a sobering process. Historians of the period, however, show that in the immediate aftermath of the war there was not so much a sense of responsibility among the Germans as a belief that they were the real victims of the war. It is only through a painstaking effort, spanning decades and kept alive to this day, that this widespread sentiment has been reversed. The “historians’ debate” [Historikerstreit], which began in the late eighties with Jürgen Habermas’ harsh criticism of revisionist efforts to relativise the Holocaust, enabled this process of confronting the past to be followed in detail on a global scale. Extensive debates on how collective memory is shaped and can be guided continue to move in a cyclical rhythm along with current political developments in Germany.

Although institutional structures are being established to preserve, analyse the memory of past traumas and share it with the public and to prevent social patterns that foster discrimination and although significant shares of public resources are allocated to pedagogical programmes, we can see that the corrosive effects of forgetfulness inevitably come into play. Migration is one of the subjects where the gaps created by the passage of time are felt most clearly. With each wave of migration to Germany, certain debates, racist

reactions, discriminatory practices and bureaucratic difficulties are repeated as if the previous experiences had never happened. The current talk about those fleeing the war in Ukraine is as if the experiences of the dissolution of Yugoslavia, or even more recently the large-scale migration from Syria in 2015 and its aftermath, had never happened. It causes a kind of déjà vu feeling in those who follow the agenda closely.

Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW, House of World Cultures), which was founded in Berlin in 1989 with the motto of strengthening Germany's cultural contacts with the outside world and has recently started to critically address the global asymmetries defined as West-East or North-South axes with a critical perspective, has embarked on an oral history project titled Archiv der Flucht (Archive of Refugees) to map the migration movements towards Berlin from different geographies in different historical periods. Curated by Carolin Emcke, one of Germany's leading opinion leaders, author Carolin Emcke and Manuela Bojadžijev, an academic known for her in-depth studies on migration over many years, the series of interviews with 41 people of completely different origins and identities who had to migrate to Berlin and who currently have no possibility of returning to their homeland, was presented in the exhibition at HKW from 30 September 2021 to 3 January 2022 and made available online. The project aimed at presenting the human face of migration, which is often reduced to abstract statistics by the mass media. In the following months, the project was also supported by pedagogical programmes addressed to students and events held in different scales and formats in cultural institutions across South Eastern Europe, in tandem with the Goethe-Institut. As red-thread.org, we participated in these events with a workshop hosted by Depo and supported by the Goethe Institute Istanbul Branch, and following this workshop, we prepared the special dossier you are reading on our website.

In the first part of the workshop held in May 2022 with the generous participation of Mohamad Amjahid, who played a key role in the organisation of the Archiv der Flucht project and was also part of the team that conducted the interviews, and Zeynep Kivılcım, one of the interviewees, the contentual

framework, conceptual preparation and methodological functioning of the archive were introduced to the workshop participants. The text used by HKW in the promotion of the project and the links to the 41 interviews within the framework of the project are included in the pages of our dossier. We believe that the archive will be of interest to our readers who follow issues such as oral history, migration, exile, political discrimination and integration policies. In the second part of the workshop, the participants discussed freely among themselves and shared their professional experiences related to the thematic framework. The discussion inevitably focused on the experiences and the collective memory of Turkish people in Germany as a result of the labour migration over the last sixty years, and how this knowledge can be preserved, processed and presented to the public in institutional, museum or other formats. Our moderators Didem Daniş and Besim Can Zırh, who prepared the framework of the workshop, also contribute to our dossier with their articles. While Daniş brings together the ideas and suggestions that came to the fore during the free discussion in the workshop, Zırh discusses the exhibitions focusing on the lives of migrants from Turkey on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the labour agreement signed between Germany and Turkey. In another article, Sema Erder provides us with a broad mapping of the dynamics of migration in modern Turkey and the political debates that have come along with the recent massive-scale migration Turkey has received from abroad. The long-term project developed by Sema Aslan and Seçil Yersel and continued with the exhibition *My Own Geography: My Name is Sila, My Name is Gurbet* held at Kiraathane in February and March, focuses on the relationship of women named Gurbet [life in a foreign land] and Sila [homeplace that is left behind] with their own names. Melis Cankara's interview with the two artists gives us insight into the progress of this multi-layered project. Lastly, the (self-)exile experiences of artists, more specifically theatre artists, who have left Turkey and settled in other countries as a result of the authoritarian regime's oppression, which has made itself increasingly felt in the last decade, form the backbone of Pieter Verstaete's article.

We present our dossier on Archiv der Flucht as an introduction to the 6th issue of red-thread.org.

In the next few months, we aim to complete the issue by adding a series of articles addressing the bonds between visual culture and post-migrant social formations. In our daily lives, we are facing with the increasingly intensifying implications of migration, and we are witnessing an increase in the number of researches and cultural productions on this phenomenon. Within this rapidly expanding field, we hope that our 6th issue will contribute to comparative research on experiences in different geographical contexts.

Edited by **Erden Kosova**

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