

Shared memories, shared heritage?

Museal concepts of (im-)migration in Germany

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Introduction

Those who remember, select, and interpret what they see as their own past. Such reconstruction processes have the goal of providing the past with meaning, stabilizing the present, and generating insights for the future; in this way, “historical consciousness” emerges (Rüsen 2001, p. 24). Associated with the selection and recording of memories are mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that relate not only to events of the past, but also to (potential) recipients.¹ The fact that these mechanisms of memory and memorial culture also operate in museums as institutional agencies of mobile material heritage is no longer questioned today.

Museums are, as the 2007 ICOM definition states, “a non-profit, permanent institution, open to the public, at the service of society and its development, which, for the purposes of study, education and experience, acquires, preserves, researches, publicizes, and exhibits tangible and intangible evidence of people and their environment” (see Other Sources: No. 1). Once established as a *museion*, a “sanctuary of the muses” (Baur 2010a, p. 15) and important research institution in Alexandria, the museum developed over the centuries into a place for collecting, preserving, and communicating movable cultural heritage. From the Baroque idea of depicting the world with its curiosities in the collection cabinet (Collet 2012), through the Enlightenment idea of exploring it scientifically-systematically, to the 19th century bourgeois educational program according to which canonical works of art and testimonies of history were to be made publicly accessible, the museum has already experienced many functional attributions. In the process, the collected knowledge became a signum of self-reflexive and, time and again, national identity-building processes.

1 For better readability, quotations from German literature have been translated into English, as well as the titles of German projects and exhibitions. German sources are marked as such in the bibliography.

Less attention was paid to the fact that the creation, interpretation, and presentation of cultural heritage by the museum were also the result of an often implicit, sometimes eurocentric self-understanding. Only critical museology deconstructed such institutional mechanisms (Sternfeld 2009). In the course of this, it also became visible that cultural history museums had often excluded testimonies of material culture if they did not represent an elite culture; this included the so-called guest worker culture.² The invisibility of the heritage of immigrants corresponded with a general neglect of everyday culture as material heritage in museums. At the same time, the circumstance reflected a specific culture of remembrance, that of the German majority society, that had not yet opened up to the heritage of minorities in its own country. To change this, a political turnaround was needed that revised societal strategies of inclusion and exclusion, which also affected the framework conditions of collecting in museums.

This research on the heritage of the so-called guest worker culture in German museums draws on these considerations when it attempts to show the laborious path of inclusion of the so-called guest worker heritage in the German culture of remembrance. To this end, it raises the question of the conditions for a shared culture of remembrance and its material testimonies. Delving into the case study of DOMiD – *Documentation Center and Museum of Migration in Germany* and the ways DOMiD wish to design the guest workers heritage will shed light on the conditions needed to construct shared cultural heritage and its potential material testimonies.³ By analyzing documents related to DOMiD as well as secondary research on migration in Germany, the research exposes the possibilities and limitations of shared narratives. In his outlook, the research gives a preliminary summary and asks what possibilities today's narratives of migration offer to correct exclusion strategies, to integrate neglected heritage into collections and thus to achieve a more inclusive image of history and heritage.

Emigrate, immigrate? Narratives of migration in Germany

In Germany, there is still no museum of immigration, but there are two central museums on the subject of emigration: the *German Emigration Center* in Bremerhaven and the *Ballinstadt Emigration Museum* in Hamburg. They were opened in 2005 and

2 In this context, guest labor is understood as those activities that were performed by foreign workers between 1955 and 1990 due to the dynamic economic growth in Germany (Yano 2007).

3 Several interview requests made to DOMiD staff in 2020–2021, as part of the *Shared and/or Contradictory Heritage?* research project, were declined due to time constraints.

2007, i.e., both after the turn of the millennium, in order to tell the story of German emigrants who had set out for America due to political and religious persecution, hunger and need (Baur 2006). These emigrants, who left German soil en masse from the 18th century until shortly after the founding of the German Reich in 1871, were joined in the 19th century by emigrants who left Germany as settlers. Emigrants who left for German colonies as settlers, soldiers or civil servants, such as to German Southwest Africa (Namibia), German West Africa (Togo, Cameroon), and German East Africa (Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi), to Kiautschou (People's Republic of China), German New Guinea (Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands), German Samoa Islands (Samoa), and Micronesia (Conrad 2019). However, their history is not told by emigrant museums. It is left to historical and ethnological museums, which are opening up to German colonial history under the pressure of postcolonial criticism (Foundation German Historical Museum Berlin 2016).

Nevertheless, both forms of geographical settlement of Germans outside their own state borders in the 19th century meant that the state had to redefine who was to be considered "German": those who lived on German soil, or also those who adhered to German culture overseas? Since the principle of residence (*ius soli*) no longer applied to exiles, the principle of descent, *ius sanguinis*, seemed to the state to be an adequate solution. As Wolfgang Wippermann (1999) has shown, the change from the principle of domicile to the principle of descent can be traced back, among other things, to the ethnic concept of the nation, which also prevailed in nineteenth-century Germany.⁴ The principle of descent as the basis for German citizenship was still adopted by the new Federal Republic and remained in place with regard to some main premises until the year 2000. It was not until the late 1990s that this circumstance triggered major debates about how the principle of descent could be reconciled with the reality of German society.

Closely related to the principle of origin was an ethnic cultural concept that linked the idea of the nation with that of a homogeneous collective identity qua "people's body". It also formed the basis for the content-related work of national museums and those museums that sought to trace and illustrate German emigration on the basis of historical factors. In the process, it was overlooked that the ethnic concept of culture abroad had often contributed to the reinforcement of mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion and strategies of transmission and preservation, since it offered suitable possibilities of demarcation. The preservation of language and culture, but also the handing down of narratives of a German homeland and origin, shaped the self-image of numerous emigrants, who regarded personal mementos as the heritage of their German cultural identity (see Other Sources:

4 Prussia made a start with the principle of citizenship by descent in 1842, while the Reich and Nationality Act introduced direct Reich citizenship for the first time in 1913 (Wippermann 1999).

No. 2). The ethnic or holistic concept of culture is still evident in the narratives of museums that present the history of German settlers in Eastern Europe or German expellees after 1945, such as the *Sudeten German Museum* in Munich since 2020 or the *Berlin Documentation Centre for Displacement, Expulsion, Reconciliation* (SFVV) since 2021. These narratives refer to lost territories and to the lifeworlds of settlers in the diaspora, who passed on “Germanness” in their communities far from home. With the mass return to the German heartland after 1945, not only the land but also the specific culture of the diaspora was lost, which lived on, orally transmitted, in the family memory (Kossert 2020).

Today, the German culture of remembrance deals with emigration and expulsion in a largely enlightened manner. This may have to do with the increasing historical closure of both phenomena. Historians and museologists, on the other hand, continue to have more difficulty with the topic of immigration, which was actively pursued in the Federal Republic between 1955 and 1973 for economic reasons. Its reappraisal in museums also initially followed an ethnic (and thus homogenizing) point of view. Immigrants were regarded as “strangers” (in language, religion, and education), their stay was considered as episodic and therefore irrelevant for the collective (German) culture of remembrance.

The realization at the beginning of the 21st century that immigration to Germany, in contrast to German emigration, was not a temporary or even completed phenomenon led only slowly to changes in the public as well as the political discourse, toward the official acknowledgement that Germany was a country of immigration. Since then, various governments have largely advocated the “orderly immigration” of labor. In the course of this, the social consequences of immigration are also being addressed and the self-image as a migration society is being publicly discussed (see Other Sources: No. 3). The new political attitude also led to a new vocabulary: for example, after the reform of German citizenship law in 1999 and the ratification of the Immigration Act in 2005, a new terminology was introduced by the Federal Statistical Office that referred to anyone as a “person with a migration background” (see Other Sources: No. 4) who did not have German citizenship by birth or had at least one parent to whom this applied. As critical as this terminology may be on the one hand, it changed public perception on the other. According to this definition, around 20.8 million people with a migration background lived in Germany in 2018 (see Other Sources: No. 5), i.e., a quarter of the population. In view of such figures, immigration became an urgent topic for society as a whole, claiming its place in the culture of remembrance of a pluralistic German society.

The agencies of memory and heritage, among them museums, were also increasingly addressing the topic. Numerous museums of urban and cultural history tried to integrate the topic into their exhibitions. The German Emigration Center as well added a second part to its permanent exhibition in 2012, which focused on 330 years of immigration history to Germany based on 15 different migration groups

(see Other Sources: No. 6).⁵ The *German Museums Association* (DMB) also endeavored to introduce the museum to this topic by founding a working group on migration in 2009 (see Other Sources: No. 8). In 2011, it realized the project *Cultural Diversity in the Museum: Collecting, Exhibiting and Mediating* to promote the intercultural opening of German museums, together with the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media. As part of this project, an initial stocktaking of the previous engagement with the topic of migration was also developed (Deuser 2012). In 2015, a handout on *Museum, Migration and Cultural Diversity* was published, in which the *German Museums Association* committed itself to a broad concept of migration (DMB 2015a). In parallel, from 2012 to 2015, museums and migrant self-organizations worked together in the program “All the world in the museum”. In this cooperation between museums and migrant self-organizations, which was also initiated by the *German Museums Association*, 14 cooperation projects addressed cultural participation, diversity of perspectives and intercultural dialogues in museums (DMB 2015b).

How and in what way immigration was dealt with as part of German memory culture, however, depended on which concept of culture and which concept of migration the museums based their work on (Deuser 2012). When examining this question retrospectively, it is noticeable that most museums adhered to an ethnic understanding of culture even in the case of immigration until well into the 2000s, which is why the immigrants’ narrative of origin stood in the foreground and became the criterion of difference. Thus, museums proved to be adherents of a narrow understanding of migration and its varieties of immigration, emigration, forced migration, labor migration, remigration or internal migration, influenced by theories of classical economics and by political concepts of the (ethnic) nation. The narrow concept of migration is based on the idea of crossing borders: representatives of homogeneous cultures leave their territory and live in an area where they act as minorities. As the narrow concept of migration was also adopted in the narratives of the so-called guest worker culture in the museum, there was a danger from the outset of adopting its mechanisms of difference, of inclusion and exclusion. While narrow, ethnicizing concepts of migration in exhibitions often lead to the representation of individual cultures, to the comparison of cultures or to normative narratives that present immigration as a success story of assimilation, broad, discursive or critical concepts of culture attempt to lay the foundation for new narratives of migration by placing an emphasis on the discursive negotiation of cultural encounter and hy-

5 Since 2021, the mission to research and teach about emigration *and* immigration in Bremerhaven has been supported by a non-university research institution called the *Academy of Comparative Migration Studies* (ACOMIS), which draws on infrastructure provided by the institution (see Other Sources: No. 7).

bridization (Buden and Nowotny 2008). In doing so, they first create the preconditions for a new narrative and reception of minority heritage as shared heritage.

Forgotten heritage? Migration and guest work in cultural history museums

Since the 2000s, interest in the topic of immigration has been growing in cultural and urban history museums (Osses 2012). However, many museums have reached their limits. Often, following the narrative of a culture of remembrance that excluded guest labor, they had not collected objects on the topic. To fill the gap, the museums took various approaches. They asked the migrant communities for loans or worked with the method of oral history. On the level of the collection, they tried to reinterrogate already collected objects with the help of migration advisory boards, to revive buried functional contexts, and in this way to generate new exhibition narratives. To convey the theme of guest work, many museums chose the format of the special exhibition, which allowed for experimentation and made it possible to work with loans. The semiotic triad of object, collection, and exhibition will be used to take a brief look at these efforts by museums to incorporate guest work into the culture of remembrance.

(1) *Objects*: Museums that did not have any objects of their own on the topic of guest work usually went the route of loans. The *Museum of Art and Cultural History Dortmund* also chose this route in 2008 when it prepared its special exhibition *Evet – Yes, I want! Wedding Culture and Fashion from 1800 to the Present a German-Turkish Encounter* (Allmanritter 2010). The exhibition wanted to show objects from Turkish communities in Germany in addition to exhibits from Turkish museums. Therefore, the curators asked both the German and the Turkish population for contributions through the press (Allmanritter and Siebenhaar 2010). However, this medium only activated German lenders, which is why it required the activation of intermediaries of Turkish origin to reach migrant circles as well. In contrast to the German lenders, the Turkish lenders usually demanded their objects back after the end of the exhibition, which is why the museum's hope of permanently increasing its collection through special exhibitions was not fulfilled. The reasons given for reclaiming the object were the emotional value of the memento and the fear that the object might end up in the museum's depot (Deuser 2012).

(2) *Oral history*: Working with eyewitness accounts appeared to be an adequate way out where either no objects were available or explicitly virtual museums on immigration were to be created. The *Museum Life Paths – Online Migration Museum Rhineland-Palatinate*, which was founded in 2009 on behalf of the state government of Rhineland-Palatinate, curated its permanent and special exhibitions on the basis of archival texts, memories, photographs, and eyewitness videos (see Other Sources:

No. 9).⁶ In pictures and text, entrepreneurs, social workers or immigrants recall the first decades of guest work. The *Life Paths* section contains personal portraits in sound and vision of immigrants, such as that of the Turkish vocational school teacher Hüseyin Kaya. They make clear how great the hurdles were that the guest workers initially had to overcome in German society, starting with the language and food and ending with everyday life and work. With humor, Kaya relays these difficulties today in retrospect: “Although the milk bottle was labeled, we couldn’t understand it” (see Other Sources: No. 10). As impressive and authentic as these accounts are, the oral history approach does not solve the museum’s factual problem of having to fill gaps in its material heritage. The question of social desirability also comes into play in the format of the eyewitness account, as does the psychological problem of memory that is often subsequently turned into positive, traumas of the past are toned down, and the achievement of assimilation is emphasized, since such assimilation also fits better into one’s own culture of remembrance.

(3) *Questioning the collection*: Museums whose collections do not have the topic of guest labor or immigration explicitly inscribed in them, have the opportunity to requestion it with the help of a broad concept of migration. This was the approach taken by four Berlin museums in the research project *New Views of Collections: The Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum*, the *City Museum Berlin*, the *Werkbund Archive – Museum of Things* and the *Museum for Islamic Art*. With the help of interdisciplinary sources and migrant advisory boards and in dialogue with visitors, they surveyed their collections in order to understand them from multiple perspectives. The results of this project, initiated by the German Museums Association, were presented in 2011 in the laboratory exhibition *NewEntries* at the Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum and published as a book in 2013 (Bluche et al. 2013). Two examples from this cooperation work are briefly presented as illustrations.

Mosque-shaped alarm clock: The Werkbund Archive – Museum of Things houses the collection of the *German Werkbund Association* (DWB), which was founded in Munich in 1907 with the idea of preserving the intellectual and material heritage of the artists’ association (see Other Sources: No. 11). This also determined the structure and further reception of the collection. As Fabian Ludovico writes, guidelines for “good taste” in the sense of the *Werkbund* ideology were formulated as early as 1912 on the basis of a “department of aberrations of taste”, established by Gustav Pazaurek in the *Stuttgart State Museum of Decorative Arts* (Ludovico 2013). Alluding to this systematic approach, the museum had developed an exhibition on *Bad Things – An Encyclopedia of Untaste* in 2009, for which a mosque alarm clock (Mosque-shaped alarm clock) in Berlin-Kreuzberg had been acquired. (Fig. 1)

6 Other examples are the *Osnabrück Virtual Migration Museum* and the *Virtual Migration Museum*. The latter was opened by DOMiD in 2018.

Fig. 1: Alarm clock in the shape of a mosque, c. 2000, Collection Werkbund Archive – Museum of Things, Berlin, inv. no. O 14257 (Copyright: Armin Hermann)



Fig. 2: Hans Rudi Erdt, Problem cigarette tin for the “Moslem” brand, Berlin ca. 1912, Jewish Museum Berlin, inv. no. 2000/324/o (Copyright: Jens Ziehe)



According to the aesthetics of the Werkbund ideology of 100 years ago, the alarm clock had been grouped as “devotional kitsch”. As a result, “other implications, such as its function for religious practice, initially went unnoticed” (Ludovico 2013, p. 115). In the course of reexamining the object with the assistance of migrant focus groups, the curators now learned that the alarm clock was not only to be seen as a product with religious symbolism, but could also generate in its recipients the “feeling of the sacred realm extended to the product” (Beinhauer-Köhler in: Ludovico 2013, p. 116). From a design perspective, the alarm clock is Far Eastern mass-produced goods, with no major design aspirations. By migrants, on the other hand, it is associated with Islamic culture, and thus their own. The new survey brought to light life-world contexts that were different from those of the museum. The museum can now tell both stories and make connections to other objects.

Problem Moslem: The second example is more complex, as it is historical. The Werkbund Archive – Museum of Things owns a tin cigarette box (1912) whose lid shows the inscription *Problem Moslem* and the figure of a smoking Oriental. The figure wears a fez and Western clothing, as was customary in the Ottoman Empire at the time. (Fig. 2) It was designed by Hans Rudi Erdt for the Jewish entrepreneur Szlama Rochmann, who founded the *Mahala* cigarette factory in Berlin in 1889. He later renamed his company Problem: “Moslem was the best-known brand of the Problem cigarette factory” (Ludovico 2013, p. 118). For the Werkbund Archive – Museum of Things, the can’s significance today lies primarily in its modern packaging design because, as Ludovico points out, Erdt was one of the best-known German poster designers of the early 20th century. The orientalized representation was primarily intended to emphasize the “escapist function of tobacco consumption” (Bignens, in: Ludovico 2013, p. 120). Such exoticism formed a popular advertising strategy around 1910. It ascribes to the cigarette box a strategic sales function that plays with reality (the increasing secularization of Turkey under Kemal Atatürk created such hybrid fashions) as well as with Western stereotypes of the Orient (Ludovico 2013). Without historical knowledge, however, this advertising strategy of the time seems strange. Thus, even in the migrant focus groups, the combination of company and brand names *Problem Moslem* “led to implications that certainly did not exist at the time the cigarette can was created” (Ludovico 2013, p. 122). At the same time, the dialogue brought to light different perspectives and levels of knowledge that showed that a museum object can open up “a whole horizon of topics” (ibid). It goes beyond what a *semiophor* (Pomian 2013), an object whose property as a specific sign carrier is created by the museum context, can do.

(4) (*Special*) *exhibitions:* Overall, exhibitions on migration show different approaches, but four dominant approaches can be identified: (1) migration as immigration history, (2) migration from an intercultural and global perspective, (3) migration as cultural comparison, and (4) migration as “migration main-streaming” (Deuser 2012). According to Deuser, the first form, the narrative of immigration,

is realized most frequently.⁷ Exhibitions that tell migration as immigration history proceed thematically or chronologically. The arrival of the guest workers is contextualized with German postwar history, and often a German narrative voice leads through the overall concept, which can be detected in the room and exhibit texts. The illustrative motifs and metaphors such as border, journey, suitcase, or the “cornucopia” equally emphasize the narrative of immigration (Baur 2009). Quite a few of these narratives have a positive ending. The assimilation performance of the migrants is emphasized, the overcoming of the “foreigner” and his absorption into the majority society. Difficulties, conflicts, and ruptures are only hinted at or staged as part of the (mastered) past. Traumas are hardly mentioned in the narratives, nor are the causes of migration in the countries of origin (lack of democracy, economic recession, civil wars) or the living conditions of migrants in the host country (Baur 2009). Since the history of migration as immigration is mostly told in special exhibitions, their narratives do not so much promote an institutional change of perspective as the reappraisal of the content of excluded events with the aim of generating knowledge. This is then to be included in “national’ metanarratives” (Kolb and Fuchs 2017, p. 293). This is a first step towards an expanded concept of migration, but not towards a permanent inclusion of alternative perspectives in German museum narratives. Exhibitions that understand immigration not as a periodic special case of history but as a regular case of modern immigration societies would have to change their perspective on migration. This is apparently only possible to a limited extent for German museums, which often lack migrant heritage in their collections and mostly operate with German staff. Therefore, the question must be asked whether a change in perspective can only be achieved through the participation of immigrants in the narrative of migration. DOMiD answers this question in the affirmative.

Shared memories? DOMiD and the narrative of a culture of migration

At the same time as the work of the urban and cultural history museums, an alternative model for the museumization of migration “from the margins” emerged in North Rhine-Westphalia. In Essen and later in Cologne, migrants articulated the desire to preserve their heritage in Germany for their descendants and to tell their story themselves. This motivation gave rise to the establishment of DOMiD in 1990, the year of German reunification, which had initially been founded as *DOMiT – The*

7 Deuser cites as examples: *For years you have not taken care of us* (2005, Kiel City Museum); *Merhaba Stuttgart. My city – my history* (2009, Linden-Museum); *Ice cold passion. Italian Ice-Makers in the Ruhr Area* (2009, LWL Industrial Museum Hannover Colliery) and others (Deuser 2012).

Documentation Center and Museum of Migration from Turkey. In the beginning, the association set up an archive in Essen to preserve material evidence of Turkish guest workers from disappearing.

The original plan was to establish a Europe-wide center for this purpose; later, Germany was to form the core of the concept. The goal was to build an organization that would preserve the historical heritage of immigrants for future generations and make it accessible to the public (Eryilmaz 2012b, p. 33).

In September 2003, the *Museum of Migration in Germany Association* was founded, in which representatives of various migrant communities and academics joined forces with the aim of establishing an immigration museum (Eryilmaz 2012b). Both associations merged in 2007 to form DOMiD, which since then has been concerned not only with the heritage of Turkish guest workers, but with the heritage of all immigrant cultures.

The merger also resulted in a change in the underlying self-image. Whereas DOMiT had still been committed to a more ethnic cultural and origin narrative, DOMiD saw itself as an “open forum for people with and without an immigrant background” (Eryilmaz 2012b, p. 33). It was no longer their origin that united the association members, but the experience of the common territory. Germany as a place to live became a point of reference, as it had been for the narratives on German emigration, but this time under different auspices. It was not their origin in Germany that connected the migrants, but their immigration to Germany. The common ground was of a geographical nature, but not according to the usual pattern of origin, but that of arriving. Since 2007 at the latest, the work of DOMiD has thus been based on a discursive concept of culture. The experience of migration to Germany became the metanarrative of a collective migrant culture of remembrance. With it, the association tried to distance itself from a migration understanding of origin, which it expresses in its mission statement:

All of our lives have been and will continue to be shaped by migration. People come and go – and they leave traces behind. As diverse as society is, so many stories are collected, preserved, and told by the museum. Through a trust that has grown over decades, a collection that is unique in Germany has emerged from the midst of society and forms the basis of our museum (see Other Sources: No. 12).

As founding member Aytac Eryilmaz makes clear, the initial focus was on ensuring the visibility of the material heritage of migration in Germany. DOMiD was able to realize this goal to a large extent through special exhibitions, traveling exhibitions

and projects with German partners.⁸ Overall, DOMiD thus brought the topic of migration to greater public attention, especially in North Rhine-Westphalia. For many migrants, the exhibitions were also an incentive to deal with their heritage and to visit German institutions such as museums for the first time.

Can we thus speak of a shared heritage, even though the association itself prefers to call it “shared memories”? It seems that the idea of sharing found its limits where the question of ownership was concerned. Thus, one of the association's first experiences in the mid-1990s was that a museum in Bonn did not offer to cooperate in exhibition and mediation work, but did offer to buy its collection (Eryilmaz 2012b). However, building up the collection had been an emancipatory act, which is why a sale was out of the question. Reactions like these encouraged the association not only to maintain sovereignty over the collection, but also to have a say in its mediation – ideally in its own museum. The independence that DOMiD had acquired as a civilian agent in the changing German culture of remembrance in the Federal Republic proved to be a good basis for this (Gogos 2021). In this museum, not only immigrants could rediscover their material heritage, but also German visitors could be told the common (postwar) history – from a migrant perspective. From the point of view of the association, such a museum (or *House of the Immigration Society*, as DOMiD calls it today) would fulfill a task for society as a whole and deconstruct old concepts of migration.

Questioning ethnic identity, tradition and homogeneity as social constructions and expanding them through concepts such as difference, change and hybridity, deconstructing social attributions and power relations, are the preconditions for the appropriation of history and the production of “shared” memory (Eryilmaz and Rapp 2009, p. 273).

With the call for a central migration museum as a place where memories and heritage could be experienced and shared from multiple perspectives, the association's migrant metanarrative which uses poststructuralist notions of culture as a discursive space of negotiation also solidified. This narrative, which is referred to here as the “culture of migration”, is not only meant to be reflected in objects, memorabilia, and eyewitness accounts of different countries, but also to help create an “alternative view of history” (Fuchs and Kolb 2017, p. 295), in other words: a paradigm shift in perception. The narrative of the “culture of migration” will now also be examined

8 As one of the most important projects, Aytac Eryilmaz mentions the exhibition *Foreign homeland – A history of immigration from Turkey* in 1998, which was created in cooperation with the Ruhrlandmuseum. Until that time, “it was not common for a ‘Kanaken-Association’ to cooperate with an established German social history museum on an equal footing” (2012a, p. 33).

in more detail using the heuristics of the semiotic triad of object, collection, and exhibition.

(1) *Loans*: Following the broad concept of migration, DOMiD sees itself as a collecting institution, but not as a selective gatekeeper. Therefore, the association keeps memorabilia from all migrants who want to hand over their heritage to a public institution – including furnishings, clothing, devotional objects or objects brought from home, written material, photographs and films. The fact that DOMiD openly communicates the option of loaning objects allows two conclusions to be drawn: even at DOMiD, object donors seem to find it difficult to part with their memorabilia altogether (this process is no different from German museums). However, the association shows a sensitivity to ownership and possession: it is not concerned with acquiring the exhibits for the collection, but rather with safeguarding and researching personal memories.

(2) *Collection*: The preservation of the material heritage of guest workers does not follow a targeted collection logic, except that of avoiding oblivion. It has led to an archive that includes some 150,000 writings, documents, and objects on the social, everyday, and cultural history of migration in Germany (Eryilmaz 2012b). To date, the narrative of this collection is simply the diversity of migrant experience.⁹ By not undertaking the selection process of what goes into its repository itself, but leaving it to the object donors, DOMiD creates a multi-perspectival and participatory metanarrative that many have a say in the “culture of migration”. It is characterized by the decision of many, the heterogeneity of cultures and the experiences of individuals who hand over their heritage to the archive. Thus, the collection is not based on a static and homogenizing understanding, as is the case with narratives of origin, but on a dynamic one. It is based on the idea that it is not primarily a matter of preserving the representative memory of an era or time, but rather the personal memory of the object donors.

(3) *Exhibition*: The collection is joined by education. The most obvious interface of the association with a general social education work is its exhibitions. In the special exhibitions, but above all in the permanent exhibition of the new House of Immigration Society, which is being prepared, it is important for DOMiD to implement this change of perspective and to make it tangible: migration is to be viewed from the perspective of the immigrants. This is accompanied by the challenge of deconstructing classic concepts and terms of migration as immigration history – among them “nation”, “borders” or “integration” (Kolb and Fuchs 2017, p. 304) – and filling them anew. Old patterns of knowledge are to be made transparent, concepts are to be questioned, which is what the concept of the permanent exhibition in the House

9 Thus, the website reads, “do you have treasures in your attic or basement? If you have materials on migration history and would like to preserve them permanently, we invite you to contact us” (see Other Sources: No.14).

of Immigration Society is supposed to stand for. Discursive “concept spaces” (Kolb and Fuchs 2017, p. 305) are planned, in which visitors can reflect on concepts such as identity, nation, change, memory, mobility, border, or foreignness, and enter into conversation (DOMiD 2013). In this way, according to DOMiD, previously excluded worlds of experience should become visible, as well as internalized stereotypes and monoperspectival positions of power.

This concept cannot yet be tested in reality, as the House of Immigration Society will not open until 2027. Initial indications of what its permanent exhibition might look like are provided by the association's *Virtual Migration Museum*, which has been accessible since 2018. Here, an exhibition tour was designed on three time and space axes, which are connected by superordinate terms such as “value”, “home-land” or “perception” (see Other Sources: No. 13). The visitor can navigate through living rooms, schoolyards, and workplaces of migrants of three generations with the help of virtual reality glasses, where he/she finds digitized objects from the DOMiD collection and hears sounds and lively voices. The association has similar plans for the permanent exhibition, as can be seen in the brochure *New Ways* of 2020. Here it presents itself as a nationwide center for the research and mediation of migration (DOMiD 2020). In this way, DOMiD sets itself apart from previous exhibition approaches and explicates its own dynamic narrative of a “culture of migration”: migration is to be stripped of its exotic status, and experiences and heritage are to be discursively negotiated and shared.

To summarize, the narrative of the “culture of migration” represents the diverse origins of the migrated by appealing to anthropological and social commonalities. Migration, understood in this way, marks a discursive space in which testimonies of the past are interpreted before the experience of the recipient. In this logic, the moment of the common negotiation process comes to the fore; only it gives the “culture of migration” its meaning. It is defined together, as the discursive negotiated meaning of migration. This experience represents a common heritage of all migrants – they share it, as a shared heritage, with the German population by using their voice to create their own narrative (Dätsch 2022). This understanding of a shared heritage emphasizes less the process of assimilation than the transcultural potential of heritage. It opens up in the multi-perspective narrative and by means of objects of migration.

Common or shared heritage? Possibilities and limits

What possibilities does a “culture of migration” offer for correcting strategies of exclusion, integrating forgotten heritage into discourses, and in this way, arriving at a more inclusive image of self and history? One aim of this paper was to shed light on how this question is dealt with both in German museums and by the migrant initia-

tive DOMiD e.V., which seeks to tell the story of guest work in Germany differently by means of its archive.

One quality of the approach is to make migration discourseable. It is possible to talk about causes, but also about problems of migration of people and objects. The intended multiperspectivization can lead to narratives of cultural heritage that not only use the polysemy of the objects, but also the polyphony of the observers. They allow for transnational and transcultural interpretations as well as different understandings and conceptions of what unites and what distinguishes. The readiness to (re)interpret and define the cultural heritage through a change of perspective and to make it available as an offer for dialogue confronts all museums in the 21st century with new tasks.

A world that is networked and on the move is increasingly making migration the normal rather than the exceptional situation for nations. For this reason, new narratives and changes of perspective, as well as structural concepts on migration, are necessary for agents of change. That such a perspective ultimately transcends the national as a point of reference for individual and collective identities is already indicated in the broad concept of migration. In the migration society, “despite current developments, ultimately the overcoming of the ‘national’” (Kolb and Fuchs 2017, p. 304) is already inherent. Only one concept of heritage seems to be able to adequately respond to such a dynamic development in postmodern societies – that of shared heritage. Even if, at the present time, it still has a certain utopian quality, as can be seen not least in the area of ownership and the interpretive sovereignty of the institution, the dialogue about different perspectives leads in the end again to common ground.

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