

TRANSCULTURALITY AND PERCEPTIONS OF  
THE IMMIGRANT OTHER:  
“COME-HERES” AND “FROM-HERES”  
IN VIRGINIA AND NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA

CO-EDITORS

CATHY C. WAEGNER, PAGE R. LAWS,  
GEOFFROY DE LAFORCADE

**PREFACE:** Cathy C. Waegner and Page R. Laws

**PART 1: Historical Perceptions and “From-Here” Memory**

CHAPTER 1: Charles H. Ford, **Our Own Boat People: *The Norfolk Journal and Guide* and the Haitian Refugees, 1979-1986**

Scholars have rarely examined the responses of African Americans to immigrants of color. This paper provides a relevant case study of long-forgotten local controversies that may shed light upon why some immigrants are still deemed much better than others. Especially significant here are the travails of Michele Bleus and her ultimately successful attempts to bring her son from Haiti to the United States within the context of the exodus caused by the Duvalier dictatorship. Ironically, the Bleus family is currently engaged in a similar struggle to bring relatives to America against the backdrop of the recent devastating earthquake.

CHAPTER 2: Stephanie G. Walker, **School Integration as Internal Immigration: The Journey of the Norfolk Seventeen**

In 1954, the United States Supreme Court ruled to integrate public schools, creating a socio-political upheaval that challenged the “imagined communities” of blacks and whites, although whites’ views of blacks as “the lesser beings” persisted. Tremendous anxiety developed as the entrenched hegemonic practices were questioned, overturning the centuries-old constructions of “self” and “other.” Even Virginia’s

governor defied the federal courts and shut down six of Norfolk's all-white schools instead of accepting black students. Undaunted, the Norfolk Seventeen remained steadfast—seventeen black children entering previously all-white terrain—to traverse alien cultural, political, and geographical boundaries in a kind of interior immigration.

**CHAPTER 3: Sonja Georgi, *Transcultural Remembrance: Stolpersteine, Silent Promises, and the European Capital of Culture Ruhr.2010***

The European Capital of Culture (ECC) is one of the European Union's cultural hallmark institutions. In 2010, the Ruhrgebiet (Germany), Pécs (Hungary), and Istanbul (Turkey) are the proclaimed European Capitals of Culture. This paper critically examines the ECC and its stand on ethnicity and multiculturalism, discussing one of its projects in more detail: the art installation "The Square of the European Promise" in Bochum/Germany, which is currently being created by the internationally recognized artist Jochen Gerz and European citizens on the site of a 1931 war memorial. This mode of re-shaping cultural memory will be compared to the "stumbling stones" placed in front of Cologne homes which were inhabited by Jewish German citizens.

**PART II: Immigration and Citizenship**

**CHAPTER 4: Janine Werner, *Integration Courses and the German Naturalization Test: Creating Good Citizens?***

Who is German and who can become German? Migrants who have been living in Germany for at least eight years are given the opportunity to become German citizens by attending "integration courses" and then passing a Naturalization Test which evaluates their knowledge of German politics, society, history and culture. The test is quite controversial and has many critics. Taking the debates in the German media into account, Janine Werner discusses whether the test determines "good future citizens," whether it is patently unfair, or whether it is simply is a "pseudo solution for a pseudo problem."

CHAPTER 5: Isabel Killough, **Linguistic Identity and Ethnic Transformations in the United States: The Hispanic Community in the Media**

The perceptions of the Immigrant Other in the United States vary greatly depending on the circumstances of arrival into the country. Forced transnational, and transcontinental migratory relocation gain the sympathy of most Americans, while voluntary influx of immigrants in search of better living and economic conditions provokes mixed reactions and a strong anti-migration sentiment among those who believe “foreigners should just go back home”. This negative feeling is especially exacerbated at times of economic uncertainty and strife in the nation, and is accentuated due to lack of understanding of the immigrants’ culture, traditions, ethics, and mainly their original language.

CHAPTER 6: Geoffroy de Laforcade, **Broken Mirrors: Race, Historical Memory, and Citizenship in 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup>-Century France**

This paper examines the ways in which slavery, republicanism and colonialism have impacted approaches to race and citizenship in contemporary metropolitan France. It traces controversies over the past three decades regarding nationality law and the role of immigration in French society, as well as publicly staged attempts to revisit the impact of racism, discrimination, and imperialism in French history, culminating in the current, very contentious policies of selective immigration, massive deportation of undocumented workers, and timid multicultural representation under the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy.

**PART III: Growing Up “Other”**

CHAPTER 7: Cathy Covell Waegner, **Bildung(sroman): Ethnic Transformations at School in North Rhine-Westphalia, Virginia, Pécs, and Autobiographical Novels—Or Can transcultural impulses serve/save our schoolchildren?**

Students and educators in Siegen/North Rhine-Westphalia and Virginia have provided (often startling) empirical evidence of problems arising from current efforts to “integrate” children of ‘migration background’. In contrast, the principles of *functional transculturality*, with their emphasis

on constant choosing of components of affiliation and on-going hybrid transformations, show promise; if they could be internalized by ethnic subjects, encouraged by parents, teachers and school authorities, and demonstrated in ethnic literature, the ethnic hierarchy and tense separation could gradually but surely be eliminated. The radical stance (“integration through segregation”) of the only Sinti & Roma high school in the world (located in Pécs/Hungary) reveals the prerequisites needed for viable transcultural impulses.

**CHAPTER 8: Melanie Jäger, German Turkish Teens: Second and Third Generation Transcultural Identity**

In interviews with Turkish second-generation immigrant students at the University of Siegen, Melanie Jäger explores how they construct their personal identity in the context of migration and transculturalism. The concept of *dynamic identity* means that identity is not a static element that one possesses from birth on but involves a permanent and lifelong process in which conflicting experiences have to be balanced constantly. How do the Turkish students place the accents in their identity construction? Do they largely hover in a state of in-betweenness or do they manage to construct a relatively stable but dialectical “immigrant identity”?

**PART IV: “Come-Heres” at Work**

**CHAPTER 9: Frankie Copeland, When Jobs Become Ethnic**

Why are the Vietnamese and Koreans in the US so closely associated with nail shops? Why are Asians (for instance, Apu in *The Simpsons*) associated with convenience stores? Why is it that so many African immigrants own hair braiding salons? This paper journeys into the lives of immigrants who make a living practicing niche trades. The objective is to learn about their experiences, struggles and career determinants.

**CHAPTER 10: Robert K. Perkins, Coming out of the Dark: An examination of how social capital is used in Hispanic-owned small businesses in Virginia**

There are nearly 1.6 million Hispanic-owned firms, a small percentage of the 23 million individually-owned businesses in the United States. The purpose of this study is to examine whether small-business owners' social capital is directly and positively related to their firms' entrepreneurial orientations. Are Hispanic businesses utilizing Portes and Sensenbrenner's four components of economic social capital: value introjection, reciprocity transaction, bounded solidarity, and enforceable trust? Quantitative methods (factor analysis, correlation models, and t-tests) have been used to obtain data and test hypotheses. The sample 'population' for this project will be Hispanic-owned small businesses in the Northern Virginia area.

## **PART V: Transcultural Encounters in the Media**

### **CHAPTER 11: Mita Banerjee, *Race Matters in Cologne: Migration, Aesthetics, and Popular Culture***

Three encounters—all in Cologne—of the dominant German culture with migratory ethnicity are investigated in this paper, which asks whether in the new millennium “blackness” has been or is being mainstreamed into the dominant German culture. Cologne was the site of the first-ever exhibit on migration in Germany (2005), implying that until rather recently Germany did not define itself as an immigrant country. Furthermore, recent seasons of two highly popular television shows, *Deutschland sucht den Superstar* (German version of “American Idol”) and *Germany's Next Topmodel*, hosted by blond German supermodel Heidi Klum, ended with a black German singer or model winning the respective contests. Complex ethnic association may have influenced the public perception of—and the host's interaction with—the black German contestant.

### **CHAPTER 12: Susanne Engelmann and Florian Nölting, *Wallraff's 2009 Schwarz auf Weiss: Investigative Journalism in Cinematic Blackface***

In Günter Wallraff's recent and decidedly uncomfortable undercover film *Schwarz auf Weiss* (2009) the famous German journalist travels, with darkened skin and a fake afro, through the Federal Republic to ‘find out what life is like for Black residents in Germany’, starting and ending with his hometown of Cologne/North Rhine-Westphalia. The documentary

production which records his encounters has sparked a public debate on the legitimacy of Wallraff's 'blackface strategy' and on attitudes toward the migrant Other in a country which generally prides itself on having overcome its historical racism.

**CHAPTER 13: Page R. Laws, *Cinema of Acceptance: Changing Perspectives on the Immigrant Other in Recent American and European Film***

This article focuses on three films—*Gran Torino* (2008), *The Visitor* (2007), and *Sin Nombre* (2009)—dealing with three respective immigrant groups: the Hmong, an unlikely Syrian and Senegalese couple, and Hondurans. Two are in English; one in Spanish. The most memorable of the three, *Sin Nombre*, holds the thematic key to all of them: Previously nameless undocumented immigrants are finally given their own stories and names. Comparisons are made with several classic German-language films, for instance *Angst essen Seele auf* (1974), *Drachenfutter* (1987) and *Reise der Hoffnung* (1990), to trace a similar genealogy of pro-immigrant films. Once the immigrant Other is individualized by an empathetic director able to convey his or her perspective, the 'Other' can never be truly alien again.

**PROSPECTS:** Geoffroy de Laforcade

*(Note: The date of last access for all online sources listed in this volume is 30 November 2010)*