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Postmigrant media futures

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I Introduction

The following essay proposes an intersection of the concept of postmigration and media studies. I will present arguments on how this concept of post-migration might be contoured: first of all, the postmigrant situation implies that *theoretical heritage* committed to movement and the creation of in-between spaces as a productive force. Second, to research from a postmigrant position means to *perspectivize one's own social situatedness* vis-à-vis scholarly-cultural specificities with regard to such registers of scholarly life that seem contradictory to such cultures. Thinking from a postmigrant position means productively using the social registers of one's own *intersectional disadvantages* and not decoupling them from one's own situatedness.[1] We will succeed if we can use the theoretical heritage as a strategy for making productive those social dynamics that seem resistant to academic sociocultures (class, race, sex).

II On the concept of 'postmigration'

The concept of postmigration owes its origins to the German-speaking context. It gained popularity when Shermin Langhoff, then the director of the diverse theatre Ballhaus Naunynstraße, mentioned it in an interview in 2009 in order to concede the art discourse to marginalised migrant positions. For her and other migrants, it functions in the sense of a 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak). Postmigrants are all those who do not want to be made different due to criteria of otherness and racialisation, but who claim a self-confident place for themselves within society. These are mostly people who have not mi-

grated themselves, but whose lives are affected by migration (e.g. by the migration of their preceding family generations). The aim is to reclaim the discourse about migration and to disconnect it from the racial and nationalistic matrix: migrants have been racially othered since the very first day of their arrival in Germany as e.g. 'guest workers'; postmigrants do not consider themselves as foreigners that have to be integrated/assimilated into a national 'body' but powerful actors that enrich the cultural matrix of society. In the postmigrant discourse, migrants are not victims and exceptions of a national healthy order, but powerful actors who have mobility knowledge and a cultural *surplus* (e.g., tolerance of ambiguity because they have to endure more cultural tensions).

In scholarship the term 'postmigrant' is heavily courted in Germany and abroad;[2] here it functions in the sense of a strategic concept of renewal that wants to bring a resistant epistemology into play;[3] an epistemology that understands migration not as an exceptional case of sociality but as always already constitutive. Stories are not to be told from a methodological nationalism, but from the sites of change, movement, migration, which are the very parameters for describing the world. Globalisation, from the perspective of the postmigrant, is not exclusive, but the very way in which the world (and its art, history, society and institutions) has always been effective. What can our attitude as (media) scholars be for a 'postmigrant' situation?

III Postmigration as other places and the 'situated knowledge'

For postmigration, the 'real' action takes place in the *favelas*, *gecekondus*[4], *banlieues* or *ghettos*, and thus in spaces of cultural intermixing (spaces that especially result from migration). It is no coincidence: these are also places of economic, classist, and racialised oppression. Only rarely do media scholars emerge from these places who can muster the financial and psychological energy to survive in a rather elitist culture of academia and in humanities subjects (that do not directly qualify for a job). One reason for this is that scholarly cultures are still conservative cultures. The conservatism of university cultures lies, for example, in university traditions, rites, and institutions that reproduce socially specific forms of domination characterised by being closed to lower classes. Only 1 percent of the children of workers in Germany

earn a doctorate, while 10 percent of the children of academics do so. Amongst migrants the percentage is surely even lower.[5]

Cultural contamination and social oppression are central places from which people emerge who can provide a humanistic, substantial-productive critique for cultures, such as academia, in which they form the marginal/subaltern position. As Bourdieu showed us even decades ago in 'Distinction', for these subaltern scholars entrance and survival within the scholarly system is dependent on activities of integration. That is the key moment: the socio-cultural heritage (poverty, socialisation as a worker's child or migrant) must no longer be spurned for the purpose of integration into the culture of scholarship, but made productive (and Black feminist bell hooks told us about the importances and contradictions that such a way entails). But how is that?

The historian of science Donna Haraway uses the term 'situatedness' to describe a mode of objectivity that does not consist in a transparent, unembodied view, but insists on its own situatedness, a 'partial perspective'. Every scholar is individual and so are the possibilities of the production of knowledge. This also means that the criteria to evaluate something as scientific or within *the* discourse are to be re-evaluated. The divine male, invisible overview[6] is that of objectivity, which science brings into play; it is a specific cultural space with his own rules. But we also know about its limitations and cultural constructions as well as its violent modes of domination. The overview (the capacity to look at the world from a point that does not see the point of view as part of its look) is a phantasm because it negates the body, the very subjectivity of every look. If I understand how this situated knowledge, this partial perspective, can be made fruitful in the culture of academia, even from a marginalised perspective, I manage to maintain a mode that can bring about systemic change: precisely because then, in one's own productivity, the system of oppression is productively destabilised-not destructively.[7] Productivity means here that the process of adaptation of marginalised scholars into the classist cultures of academia open up spaces of negotiation from which creative paths can emerge: exactly because the very source of activities of adaptations are those of creative solutions that differ from the order of convention.

The following remarks take the given assumptions up. They are dedicated to those social origins and constellations that are affected by classist, post-colonial, and racialised otherness. They make it possible to continue to think about media studies impulses for the future in terms of a critique of the system of domination and academia – impulses that have been the very source

of media studies and intersect with a theoretical heritage that transgresses the borders of paradigmatic philosophical dichotomies (subject/object, epistemology/ontology, etc.).

IV The contradiction of scholarly activity critical of domination in the context of intersectionality and postcolonialism – and Eribon's shame about class

Not exactly in this sense, but based on the empathy that this situationality entails, I would like to ask about the relationality between the cultural matrices of our life of scholarly activity in relation to a possible subaltern origin. How do we, as academics, deal with subalternity when it does not seem to be a social and cultural capital of our scholarly work or for our scholarly environment (but it can very well be 'situated knowledge' and thus powerful)?

   Postcolonial theorists have often described this dynamic of contradiction (elite academic culture vs. subaltern cultures such as socially-immobile lower classes) for themselves as one of tension: scholars, who had the experience of colonisation or suffered from its consequences, wanted to reflect on it and turn/argue against relations of domination. But in order to remain capable of articulation in discourse, to make their voice heard in discourse, they have to adopt the language and culture of the coloniser (of *white* scholarship) – something that produces an epistemological contradiction. On the one hand, the experience and modes of socialisation of subalternity are needed to be able to approach the postcolonial situation in a way that is capable of criticising domination: the experience of violence, oppression, racism, and exploitation allow for a different involvement and gaze (or 'situated knowledge') as Fanon's writings in particular present to us – a state of 'double consciousness' (Du Bois). The one who is able to articulate and analyse against 'the order of the discourse' (Foucault) is primarily the one who is himself part of the subaltern social relations. This experience produces and advances the knowledge that *the* discourse needs to arrange subversively against the tyranny.[8] On the other hand, the milieus of origin itself must be abandoned, even 'played off against each other', as the journalist and author Didier Eribon described it once in his autobiographical book 'Return to Reims'[9] – with regard to his own situation between working class background, homosexuality, and the longing for belonging to a culture of intellectuals.

Eribon's book has become a key text for critical reflections of classism in the environment of academic culture. One of Eribon's core arguments is that a renunciation of the culture of origin for the purpose of turning to academic or intellectual milieus leads to shame as soon as the desocialised intellectual figure re-enters the classist-different context – or this context currently erupts. In Eribon's case, this is the story about the own culture of origin of a sexually marginalised (because homosexual) person who has outgrown the lower class and who advances to an intellectual upper class. When Eribon is back with his (working-class) family, it is a situation of alienation. For Eribon, it had to be that he outgrew his familial sociality: 'Yet because they came into conflict with each other at a certain moment in my life, I was obliged to shape myself by playing one [sexuality – author's note] off against the other [class – author's note].'[10] It was thus these two axes of identification (class and sexuality) that Eribon played off against each other in order to be able to form a life as a homosexual intellectual. The result was success as an intellectual with the possibility of finding a space of sexual self-development, but at the price of separating himself from his own social origins, which he henceforth had to encounter in the mode of shame; a feeling he encounters when he meets his family or his old 'home'. However, describing one's own incommensurability with one's social origin in this mode of shame represents only one among multiple other possibilities or modes. Being supple in identification modes means being open to migratory dynamics also in academic life. This situation is similar to that which I believe also applies to postcolonial or otherwise configured, undermined contexts that seek to become active in philosophy or the humanities in terms of academic culture.

V The mode of endurance: Postmigrant media futures

Homi K. Bhabha explores precisely this contradiction, ultimately to insist on the unceasing nature of that commitment.[11] We have no choice of language. The language of intellectualism carries with it the violent legacy of a higher stratum. Eribon's situation seems different here because the working class and intellectual milieu is less like the situation of colonisation, but the dynamics are comparable. If the academic intellectual milieu and its discourse demands to decouple itself from that milieu of origin that is culturally fabricated by a language that abhors this language precisely because it is not made of it, what solutions remain? The solution is not to leave the axis of class to

that of shame, but to think of one's own ways of negotiation as mobile – in those other axes of identity as well.

If we are able to transform the relation of shame into one of self-conscious relation to the subaltern milieu, we create a space in which the forces of the postmigrant can become particularly effective. The intellectual who engages with the coarse language and logic of his working class has to endure a lack of conformity in return, something for which Bhabha describes the *third space* in terms of a space of outsourcing, a space whose function is precisely to enable negotiation between contradictory poles. This means keeping up with the mode of the 'fight', the mode of endurance of the 'neither/nor'; the mode to be reached is the mode of 'liminality': it is the mode of migration. This form of identity critique is not new; it has always inspired media studies. Here, the ways of scholarly work intertwine with the theoretical models that media studies is able to offer.

Deconstruction (Derrida), hybridisation (Bhabha), fictionalisation (Rancière) and many more; the solutions offered, especially also from political philosophy, look for interstices of escape from identity. What all of the above solutions have in common is that they function through a process of boundary crossing: that is, the form of movement that generates transitions and boundary destabilisation. Deconstruction shatters binarism, hybridity shatters it as well, and fictionalisation shatters the relations of politics and aesthetics in favor of aesthetics in order to escape the *police order*, the order that does not want us to see and sense the way that we are able to form substantial critique. The movement and crossing of borders as a central moment of destabilisation of orders of domination can be found in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *nomadology*, in Vilem Flusser's reflections 'On the Freedom of the Migrant', in Luce Irigaray's *mucous* and angels, Homi K. Bhabha's hybridity and *third space*, Michel Foucault's *heterotopias*, in the mode of queerness of queer studies *par excellence*, in Victor Turner's *liminal space*, Donald W. Winnicott's *transitional objects* and in Donna Haraway's *cyborg* and other (techno-)feminist transgressions (Karen Barad).

To overcome dichotomies is always already a matter of migration – and in turning to multiplicities, media studies is at the moment in search of new solutions (in the turn to media ecology, etc.). Postmigrant media futures means paying attention to the three named levels of boundary softening: to one's own 'situated knowledge' (1), the theoretical and methodological milieu of the movement (2), and therein, (3) to understand one's situatedness as a

productive source of reflection from the classist 'outside' that enriches the given structures with creative and flexible solutions.

The future lies in making productive those ties that have always been haunted by the mobility and movability of the world – we find them everywhere, but especially in the remote and violence-, domination-, and oppression-infused spaces of subalternity, which we have to confront not with shame (Eribon), but with affirmative 'situated knowledge' and a 'partial perspective'.[12] Postmigrant media futures mean thinking cultures of migration and media studies together and interrupting the closedness of cultures — discursively and in endurance of (one's scholarly) struggles of life itself.

Author

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Notes

[1]   Haraway 1988.

[2]   See Thomas & Kruse & Stehling 2019.

[3]   See Hill & Yildiz 2018.

[4]   *Gecekondus* (meaning 'built over night') is the Turkish name for self-made buildings that were mostly illegally built at the edge of metropoles. Istanbul is particularly famous for its *gecekondus* that shape the silhouette of the mega city.

[5]   https://www.fluter.de/welche-chancen-haben-migrantenkinder (only in German).

[6]   Ibid.

[7]   This plea does not want to put pressure on the academic subject or even to propose simplification. The text wants to escape a unidirectional dichotomy between subjectivity and system but sees the very subjective position as a productive source of power and will.

[8]   In many cases, identity-political calculations are assumed against this perspective of the necessity of experiential knowledge. Is it necessary to be able to describe i.e. the poor and poverty adequately? Not that: however, socialization itself represents a form of inquiry that cannot be achieved otherwise. The question is therefore not: 'Do we need the poor in order to be able to adequately describe, analyze and understand poverty' or 'Is this or that person qualified to speak about this and that', but whether the perspective of the poor (the affected positions) itself is excluded from the milieu of descriptiveness, analysis and interpretation, which first and foremost makes a critique of domination possible.

[9]   Eribon 2013.

[10]   Ibid., p. 225.

[11]   Bhabha 1994, pp. 18-39.

[12]   Haraway 1988.