

The Turkish Post-Migrant Perspective: Cultural Roots and Artistic Routes between Europe and Turkey

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I will present the results of a research project, which was recently conducted at the Istanbul Policy Center of Sabanci University in Istanbul. The project looks at the forming networks and individual pathways of artists in the field of post-migrant theatre. It looks particularly at the issues of representation, cultural education and the support mechanisms of multiculturalist policies, the EU Framework and the international exchange programme circuit.

Particularly in Germany, “post-migrant” has become a new, productive label to claim more representation of artists with a migration background – in a now second and third generation – in the theatre and art scenes. Although the label plays a specific role in the identity politics of post-migrant theatre projects, such as at Ballhaus Naunynstrasse in Kreuzberg-Berlin, it is not a euphuism or neologism for the identity of ‘people with a migrant background’. It rather denotes the specific *perspectives* and stories those artists evoke that deal with issues of cultural diversity, multi-ethnic identity and community in the face of a migrating Europe. It expresses a change of perspective from the mainstream and hegemonic culture to the point-of-view of people who carry their migration background as a cultural capital into artistic production, which also constitutes a re-orientation on the history of migration. As such, the term ‘post-migrant’ deals foremost with perceptions, that have so far been dominated by Orientalist stereotyping, ‘othering’ and ethnic labelling, but that enables artists of colour – within the confined spaces of governmental categories of cultural diversity and cultural education – to criticize the asymmetrical power relations in the theatre industry and in society.

In other European countries, artists have also developed cultural practices and community initiatives that reflect upon the increasing multiculturalism. Key actors in this field are recently collaborating and connecting, such as in the Europe Now project between five theatre production houses in different countries, which strengthens the awareness and visibility of Europe’s diverse cultural landscape. Turkey has become an elemental part of this growing transnational network. In the present paper, I will give a contextualized overview of the theatres in this network of

post-migrant and intercultural venues, the challenges they face in their respective national contexts and the relation to the situation in Turkey with regard to cultural policies and audiences. I will frame this in a context of two interconnected social developments in Turkey and Europe: a coming to terms with modernization (including the development of a professionalized theatre circuit) and a coming to terms with migration (including the artistic/symbolic reflection of it).

The metaphors of ‘routs’ and ‘roots’ will be critically looked at in relation to the development of this artwork and forming network. Whereas the knowledge of individual artistic ‘routes’ seem adamant in times of labour precarity and transnational collaboration, the idea of ‘roots’ (cultural legacy) is still deeply embedded in the system of cultural funding and the associated artistic discourse. Post-migrant theatre seems to enact upon a promise of acting upon the tensions between ‘roots’ and ‘routes’, which are increasingly at work in cultural politics as well as in the very structures of the multicultural community.

Biographical Note

Dr. Pieter Verstraete is a Belgian researcher based in Turkey. Since 2012, he has been researching post-migrant theatre as a Mercator-IPC Fellow at the Istanbul Policy Center of Sabancı University. He is also an Honorary University Fellowship of the University of Exeter, where he was previously Lecturer in Drama. Besides this research project, Verstraete is an expert on contemporary music theatre and opera. His research on Turkish post-migrant opera was previously granted the support of a TÜBİTAK Fellowship for Foreign Citizens at Ankara University. In 2009, he completed his PhD, entitled *The Frequency of Imagination: Auditory Distress and Aurality in Contemporary Music Theatre*. He has co-edited and authored numerous works on sound, voice and aurality in theatre, the most recent being published in *Performance Research* (Routledge 2010) and *Theatre Noise* (CSP 2011). This year, a chapter on “Turkish Post-Migrant ‘Opera’ in Europe” will be published in *Music/Theatre: Experience, Performance, and Emergences* (Rodopi 2013), as well as a co-edited volume, *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality* (Ashgate 2013).

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