

Visualizing and Representing Migration History: Images of the Other – Other Images? By H. Motte and R. Ohliger

Commentary
By D. Mihaylova

This paper is an insightful example of linking social science and practice through the focus on representation and visualisation of the past. The authors draw from both critical historical approaches and experience in order to suggest one possible way of constructive and systematic representation of migration history. The paper begins with a thorough analysis of the scholarly debates about the meaning of history and the role of historiography in identity construction and making of commonality. It then provides a novel approach in how to create migration history in order to include and integrate in and unite the European communities without falling into the traps of bounded, exclusive and essentialist national narratives. It offers a straightforward yet under-utilised way of how historiography could become a tool for writing immigrants into collective European identities. The solution is found in the production of a more diverse and subjective attitude to writing history, which will incorporate migration history as an equal part of all European societies' history. This task is indivisible from the urgent attention needed to representation and visualisation of all types and all historical periods of migration.

The contribution of this work does not stop here and provides a further insight into already existing efforts to establish migration history. The first efforts seem to be in the representation of migration history and, hence, in creation of museums of migration in most of the European countries. These efforts are probably the most direct access to widening people's way of thinking about their own history as one that incorporates migrants' history. However, the paper points critically to the yet fragmented efforts in this sphere and, thus, to the huge responsibility that historians face in order to integrate migration history into their own vision and then into the vision of all European people.

Furthermore, the paper provides a through analysis of the German case – of both the positive and negative experiences in migrants' representation on which to build future efforts. The most innovative and provocative part of the paper is the last one, which offers one possible way to challenge existing misrepresentation or insufficient representation of migrants' history. They take the German case and stage a 'drama' – the story of migration in Germany through pictures that in my opinion truly provoke an empathy and catharsis, which could indeed lead to changed attitudes towards migrants' history. The main approach used is to move ahead of empty rhetoric as well as to give the parole to migrants themselves to present their versions of the past so far mostly silenced. It is crucial to surpass the stereotypical vision and provoke a different point of view and the authors lead the viewers skilfully through images with extremely diverse and fragmented yet insightful and logical dramatic line of reliving migrants' pasts.

The authors have demonstrated that true historical competence, such as theirs, could be a powerful tool in the efforts to create social cohesion today and that migration studies of the past have a lot to offer to the contemporary society. The paper is a brave political statement as well as a highly professional piece of history writing and representation of migration history. Only in five images they have managed to achieve two major aims: firstly, to challenge the majority society (that has so far remained largely closed to migrants' experience and role) that it is time to consider 'the other' (in this case the migrants) as part of the self and to give them the parole,

and, secondly, to demonstrate that migrants have something very important to say about the past (and thus about the present too) that concerns us all.

What really inspires in the way the paper is written is that the authors challenge the reader to continue the drama (it is intentionally left without an end) or to offer their own version of the drama. This is an excellent way to offer a possible direction that poses so many questions and then step aside to leave oneself the freedom to continue the search alone and provide their own solutions. With me this paper inspired an intense reflection on how to construct and represent the history of Pomak (Muslim Bulgarians) migrants. In the case of Pomaks we see that they would often prefer to merge into the larger society and silence (or cover up) the past themselves as not to have their origin or past uncovered. Thus, in many cases, they would not want to be represented openly as migrants with a history even if the aim would be to integrate them better. Some of them would express a concern with uncovering their undocumented migration and in some rare cases they would even prefer to forget their past as migrants completely. Such exceptional cases demonstrate even better the great contribution of this paper –its call that it is high time to finally address critically and highly professionally such complex issues.