

International Project
Norfolk State University and University of Siegen
March 2009

**“From-Heres” and “Come-Heres”:
Perceptions of the Immigrant Other and Transcultural Encounters in Virginia
and North Rhine-Westphalia**

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UPDATE January 2011: The project papers have been published in a volume titled *Transculturality and Perceptions of the Immigrant Other: “From-Heres” and “Come-Heres” in Virginia and North Rhine-Westphalia*. Editors: Cathy C. Waegner, Page R. Laws, and Geoffroy de Laforcade. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011. (See the table of contents with abstracts below.)

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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 20th/21st-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

Project Proposal:

In late April 2007, Virginia Beach became the national focus for a virulent anti-immigrant campaign headed by TV host Bill O'Reilly who accused the resort city of being a notorious "sanctuary" for illegal aliens. What attracted O'Reilly's attention was the case of Alfredo Ramos, 22, an illegal immigrant driving drunk, killing two local teenagers. Ramos was convicted, and the furor died down. In the political aftermath of the case, however, Virginia Beach's mayor Meyra Oberndorf, the improbable target of O'Reilly's wrath, lost the 2008 election and thus her mayoral position after two decades on the job.

At approximately the same time, in January 2007, legally registered foreigners living in the city of Siegen in North Rhine-Westphalia received official-looking letters ordering them to leave Germany within 14 days or face deportation by the immigration authorities. These foreigners, many of whom had lived and worked in Germany for many years, panicked. Despite intensive police investigation, no one has yet been charged with this unsettling falsification.

These two local incidents, which either aroused or reflected strong anti-immigrant sentiments, are micro-examples of the macro-clash over the claims (and the perceived superior rights) of "being here first" as opposed to "arriving later" and hence intruding as interlopers. Using the expression "*from-heres*" favored by the Caucasian 'natives' of Virginia's isolated Eastern Shore who find their idyllic peninsula 'invaded' by eager outsiders, this project will examine the ways in which new diasporic and migrational patterns arouse ill will and conflict, often violence and xenophobia, but also negotiation and transculturality. Investigating regional immigrant groups as well as the discourses and images of public media coverage and films, the project will both document the contest for geographical/work/community space and place it in larger theoretical contexts, drawing on recent scholarship. The methods will be empirical, analytical, and largely comparative.

The project will be shaped around a combination of video conferences, forums (one in Norfolk, one in Siegen), an intensive course, and a presentation of findings at the MESEA (*Multi-Ethnic Studies: Europe and the Americas*) conference in Pécs/Hungary, 16-20 June 2010, the theme of the conference being "Travel, Trade and Ethnic Transformations." Since both Essen (with the "Ruhrgebiet") and Pécs are **Cultural Capitals of Europe 2010**, one strand of the project will connect with that axis and the relevant cultural events featuring

multi-ethnicity. Pécs' 2010 motto of "the borderless city" could prove particularly relevant for the project theme. The project results will be published both online and in hard-copy form.

Both venues, Norfolk and Siegen, are conveniently situated geographically for conducting interviews among diverse "come-here" groups. The region of Hampton Roads, Virginia – which includes Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Portsmouth, Chesapeake, Hampton, and Newport News – has communities of Hispanics, Asians, Africans, all of various origins. Virginia at large, especially Northern Virginia, provides an additional huge sampling of recent and well-established immigrant populations. Norfolk and Virginia Beach are home to a particularly large Filipino community, many of whom have ties to the U.S. Navy and/or the medical industry. This part of the state also hosts many migrant farm workers who might be willing to speak with German/American researchers.

As a city traditionally based on metal-working industries, Siegen boasts firmly rooted Muslim communities of what were once called "Turkish guest workers," now moving into the third generation. New ethnic faces from Africa and Asia abound. Singhalese and Tamils in the nearby Bonn area can be contacted. The ethnic Germans from Russia, Poland, and Rumania can provide insights into complex perceptions of 'otherness'; moreover, large numbers of "new EU" immigrants are currently moving to Germany from the latest EU member countries to the east. Brand new immigrants from Iraq are presently being distributed throughout Germany, presumably including NRW. The airports in Norfolk, Düsseldorf, and Cologne can provide material for examination of a special transculturality based on mobility, which is rapidly breaking down such binaries as "resident" and "foreign." With viable survey techniques and sufficient language support, opinions can be gathered in representative interviews which will cast light on sensitive issues causing pain and indignation on both the "from-here" and "come-here" sides of the migrant divide, a line all too often infused with perceptions of skin color. The interviewers can refine their command of the distinctions among the respective immigrant groups – both in the U.S. and Germany, for instance, the various African national and ethnic affiliations are usually 'lumped' together in the popular mind.

The study group members can choose to emphasize specific topics within the very broad area of the perceptions of immigrants *by* local people and the perception of the local

people *by* the recent immigrants. A catalog of possible wide themes within this area includes the following:

1) How do groups establish the sense of 'home-team' advantage?

a) The length of time of their own residence in a given area is just one criterion, as shown by the irony of the descendants of the British colonizers appropriating indigeneity, thinking of themselves as "F.F.V.s" – First Families of Virginia – after having killed or displaced the truly indigenous peoples of Virginia.

b) Claims of privileged race/ethnicity are a broad criterion. It is undisputed that some White Americans consider Black Americans as "Others" despite Black Americans having arrived in 1619, only 12 years after Jamestown's founding and a year *before* the settling of Plymouth in New England.

c) Does the degree of assimilation into certain sub-groups or organizations gradually qualify them for "home-team advantage"? The Lost Boys of Sudan group, for instance, was greatly aided in their adaptation to the Hampton Roads area by a network of local churches that 'adopted' them and smoothed their way.

d) Clearly, economic class can play a large role. The large group of Japanese in Duesseldorf, for instance, are tied to the business elite and enjoy high-profile publicity with their annual "Japanese Day." However, the world-wide economic woes can only strengthen the fears and needs which exacerbate the "from-here"/"come-here" divisions.

e) The bestowal or withholding of citizenship can also serve to influence feelings of alienness. New laws in Germany have attempted to create a more just situation, allowing the children born in Germany to a Turkish national who fulfils certain legal requirements (such as eight years of residence), for example, to have German citizenship.

f) Outward signs such as Muslim headscarves, which teachers in NRW schools are controversially forbidden to wear, can offer easily recognizable signs of potential otherness.

g) Depiction in the media – including television, films, (online) newspapers, blogs – influences the reception of the ethnic arrivals. Deliberately "politically incorrect" TV shows are a fast-growing genre which need to be considered carefully, particularly with an eye to the ethnicity of the producers or hosts of the shows.

h) Language can be integrative, although the German "language test" for naturalization is controversial.

h) Many governmental offices and NGOs work to encourage integration; in compiling a resources bibliography and webography, aspects of their work can be assessed (cf. <http://www.migration-siegen.de/>;
http://www.migration-online.de/biblio._aWQ9ODc0_.html).

2) The EU nations are reacting to the pressure of (illegal) migrants, particularly from Africa, leading to the close and often harsh guarding of “fortress Europe.” In an urgent diasporic movement which in some ways can be considered an “inverse Middle Passage” (cf. “New Middle Passage: Barcelona or Die,” radio program produced by Ndiaga Seck in Jan. 2007), desperate Africans risk their lives to seek entry.

3) The threat of terror from cells embedded in immigrant communities, often comprised of second-generation, ‘home-grown’ inhabitants, even citizens, remains real and looms large in imagination on both sides of the Atlantic. Security measures must be in place, but their implementation is often based on discriminatory “racial profiling.”

4) Acute concern with supposed drawbacks of immigration tends to reappear cyclically, largely as a result of likewise cyclical economic slumps. In how far are other factors, such as short-term episteme changes or the triumph of particular political parties or personages, responsible for this as well?

5) The university itself as an institution promotes ethnic cross-routes. Preliminary interviews with Turkish and Arabic students who have been raised in Germany have shown, however, that they are constantly reminded of their “otherness” in subtle ways, even by generally well-meaning peers and teachers.

6) A fascinating ‘migration of goods’ links the two areas of Norfolk and the Ruhrgebiet: The railroad company Norfolk Southern ships steam coal via ‘Lamberts Point Pier 6’ to electrical power plants in Europe, apparently including the Ruhr area, which has been closing its own coal mines. An export surge of American coal has been encouraged by the weak U.S. dollar. To what extent has this trade development been accompanied by job shifts and hence perhaps im-/emigration?

One particular topic which I would like to pursue in Germany is the depiction of immigrants in German films both historically and in 2009. I was fortunate enough to teach a summer course at the University of Siegen on ethnicity in contemporary “social problem” films. This grant would enable me to teach a similar, completely updated course on American films (e.g. *Gran Torino*, 2008; *The Visitor*, 2008) while analyzing current German films in the tradition of Rainer Fassbinder’s *Angst essen Seele auf*, 1974.

I can attest to the enthusiasm of both my NSU colleagues and those at the University of Siegen about the idea of this interdisciplinary, cross-cultural exchange. Since we are requesting funds primarily to be expended during the spring and summer of 2010, there is ample time to shape the forums, intensive course, and interviews formats at the venues of Norfolk and Siegen. Dr. Cathy Waegner and I have collaborated before on conference presentations on both sides of the Atlantic (Feb. 2007, June 2008). She helped organize the week-long seminar I taught at the University of Siegen in July 2007. Furthermore, we are both members of the European-based academic organizations MESEA and CAAR (Collegium for African American Research), having just attended the CAAR conference in Bremen (March 2009). We are eager to expand our professional collaboration to include other colleagues and some advanced students. Both Norfolk State University and Uni Siegen are relatively young institutions which stress interdisciplinarity and seek international connections. NSU can offer the special perspective on issues of race and ethnicity that our heritage as an HBCU (historically black college/university) affords us; Siegen, for its part, can introduce us to the changing currents in Germany’s ethnic profile. The technical means to accomplish our planning phase – sophisticated video-conferencing facilities – are ready and waiting for use at both institutions. What we seek is funding for travel expenses that will enable us to go forward with this exciting and unique exchange plan.

Study Group Members:

Norfolk State University:

Page Laws, Ph.D., Professor of English and Dean of the Honors College (German and French language skills; has worked on immigrants in popular culture/film): **co-project proposer**

Charles Ford, Ph.D., History

Geoffroy de Laforcade, Ph.D., History

Isabelle Killough, Instructor, English and Foreign languages (native speaker of Spanish)

Robert Perkins, Ph.D., Sociology (background on immigration studies)

Stephanie Walker, Instructor, English (background of post-colonial studies)

BA/MA students

University of Siegen:

Cathy Waegner, Ph.D. (English and German language skills; has worked on immigrants in popular culture/film): *co-project proposer*

Mita Banerjee, Dr.phil, Professor of American Studies

Sonja Georgi, doctoral candidate and professorial assistant in American Studies

BA/MA students; other team members to be announced.

Action Plan

- October 2009: first video conference
- November 2009, December 2009, January 2010, February 2010: monthly video conferences to discuss empirical and theoretical progress
- 22 - 27 March 2010: forum at Norfolk State University, including selected empirical investigations with 10-member bi-national team
- April, May, and June 2010: continued and finalizing video conferencing
- 12 -15 June 2010: forum including intensive seminar at University of Siegen; five team members from NSU travel to Siegen
- 16-20 June 2010: 8 members of bi-national team travel to Pécs/Hungary for MESEA conference
- July 2010: follow-up video conference to solidify publication plans