

**Presentation on the opening of the exhibition
"Here and Away. Living in Two Worlds. Immigration and Internal
Migration in Switzerland" ("*Da und fort. Leben in zwei Welten. Immigration
und Binnenwanderung in der Schweiz*") at the Design Museum (*Museum für
Gestaltung*) in Zurich**

Dr. Heinz Nigg, 29 October 1999

Dear guests and friends

Please allow me first of all to address a few words to all the participants of the 'Migrants recount' workshops, and to all those who conceived and conducted the workshops with such tactfulness and stamina.

When we began the workshops, a good year ago now, we didn't yet know how much effort would be involved in this project. None of us had done an oral history project in which nearly a hundred people were involved. We had to gather experience. The abundance of objects, texts, documents and photos available at the end of the project far exceeded our expectations.

Shortly before the summer holidays the material for the exhibition arrived here at the museum. Everything was precisely documented and archived. As exhibition organisers we were spoiled for choice. An exhibition is similar to a television programme: hours' worth of film is shot, and then only a little portion of this is shown. That's often disappointing for the people in front of the camera. I hope that you understand and do not resent the fact that not everything we collected could be included. We chose the things which seemed particularly typical to us, or which were connected with a very personal narrative.

We express our thanks to you symbolically with the book which bears the same title as the exhibition - Here and Away. Living in Two Worlds (*Da und fort. Leben in zwei Welten*). Jürg Zimmerli from Limmat Verlag has set up a stand in the foyer opposite the museum kiosk from which you can all collect your personal copy. That's the case for co-authors too.

I also wish to thank everyone else who helped to make this exhibition and book possible. It was an exciting process for me to work with a museum in making a thematic exhibition happen, especially with a museum known for its high standards in the aesthetic realisation of exhibits.

What role does an exhibition on migration play at a time when the so-called immigration issue (*Ausländerfrage*) is causing such a stir? I think, for instance, of the apparently endless discussion about asylum seekers. For me and for others working in the cultural sector, the most important thing is to get back to the facts. An exhibition such as Here and Away. Living in Two Worlds should cause fixed ideas about supposedly strange foreigners to be questioned. The exhibition is also intended for all those who have tired of encountering the same old buzzwords in the media and the same old recipes for policies on foreigners. The examination of migration needs new impulses. It isn't enough to battle on on the level of propaganda with argument and counterargument. Only when the narrow bonds of political propaganda are broken can we breathe freely and can the spirit of enquiry regain its bearings.

In this way, I hope that this intercultural project gives an impetus to seeing migration in Switzerland anew and to making society fertile.

Perhaps you are asking yourself what results we have gained from our intensive engagement with migration in Switzerland? I would like then above all to direct you to the book, in which all the experiences and insights we could gather and reflect upon are laid out. Read it and draw your own conclusions!

As an introduction to the topic, here are a couple of impressions which are important for me in the discussion of immigration and internal migration in Switzerland.

Parallels between internal migration and international migration

It was certainly worthwhile to deal with people from abroad and from Switzerland on the issue of migration. In the Swiss biography workshop there were participants from the classic emigrant regions of Wallis, Tessin and Graubünden, but also from the Toggenburg and from central Switzerland. What they tell of the 1940s and 1950s shows astonishing parallels with the migration of workers from Italy, and also from ex-Yugoslavia and Turkey: large families, modest circumstances and the significance of religious affiliation. Here's an example from Isenthal in Canton Uri.

Jakob B.: "Our family consisted of the parents and ten children, eight boys and two girls. We boys slept two or three to a bed. There wasn't a mattress, but a sack that was filled with dried beech leaves. The blankets were thin, and the room was very cold in winter. The school in the village of Isenthal was three kilometres from our home, which meant an hour's walk to school in the morning and home again in the evening. There was soup for lunch at the school. We were Catholics. We performed our duties by paraffin light, helped in the stalls and in the field. There was no power, no radio, rarely a visitor. At that time there was no family income supplement, no help for farmers or others in the mountains, no social security, so the family had to take care of itself."

Jakob B., m., born 1929, from Isenthal in Uri, Switzerland, from 1946 to 1952 in various places in Switzerland, since 1952 in Zürich

The narratives from the internal migration workshop show that we in Switzerland have also known the deprivation and need which is often part of the labour migrant's fate, and that the pressure to leave one's home to earn one's bread elsewhere belongs to a chapter of Swiss history which closed not so long ago. Today in Switzerland one speaks not of internal migration but of mobility, if someone, for instance, lives in Chur and commutes to Zurich. But we would do well to keep alive the memory of emigration and of internal migration so as to meet today's labour migrants from economically weaker countries and regions with more understanding.

The complexity of the migration phenomenon

And this leads me to a further observation, which I made again and again while analysing the workshops: the phenomenon of migration is a far more complex process than it is often assumed to be. An example is the causes of migration: the reasons for emigrating cannot be reduced to purely economic or purely political motives. So there are no 'pure' labour migrants or 'pure' refugees or asylum seekers. These are constructs which obscure reality more than they illuminate it. Pellegrino T from Italy described how, alongside the search for work, the desire to avoid his father was a reason for his emigration:

"My father was like a teacher. He was very patriarchal. He used to say: "the command is beautiful, obedience is sacrosanct, and you must simply obey. Don't ask why, just do it, that's all".

Pellegrino T., m., born 1941, from Campania, Italy, since 1962 in Zurich

Mükerrem G. from Ankara also left a constrictive family background hat:

"I was the third of six children. My mother died young. My father married again, and his new wife had two more children. Because of the many problems that there were in my family, I felt under pressure. During this time I had the chance to build up a friendship by correspondence. It developed into a good friendship. In 1984 I came as an eighteen-year-old to Switzerland, because I had become engaged to my penfriend and he had invited me here."

Mükerrem G., f., born 1965, from Ankara, Turkey, since 1984 in Switzerland

Giving migration a face means paying attention to nuances and not simply relying on political and scientific explanations.

The foreigner and the tradition of exclusion

Dealing with the issue of migration also requires the abandonment of naïve conceptions of good foreigners showing solidarity and wicked racist Swiss, and vice versa. It's about perceiving and acknowledging the heterogeneity of human experience. Terms such as 'foreigner' and 'native' are complex and composite categories which cannot be reduced to origin, and certainly not to ethnic origin. A person isn't defined simply by their origins, but also by gender, social status in society and individual development, by connections, needs, desires, and personal lifestyles

In contrast to a differentiated view of foreigners and natives, a central part of any racist ethos is that these differences do not count, because, depending on the position, all foreigners or all natives of a particular group are perceived as identical: they all look identically dark, or they are all identically arrogant, identically cold, identically egotistical, identically disrespectful, identically stupid, or violent, etc. These negative characteristics can also be turned to the positive, and stereotypes appear again: all Italians sing well, as do Austrians, because they have Mozart. And the French are witty, the Turks are belly dancers, the ex-Yugoslavs have the best plum brandy, slivovitz, and they have the most beautiful beaches on the Adriatic Sea.

In European societies, the stereotyping of strangers and the exclusion of foreigners has a long tradition. We know this in Switzerland in relation to anti-Semitism and the persecution of the gypsies.

One young woman from the Hungarian workshop - her parents fled in 1956, and she grew up here as a second-generation Hungarian - described impressively how she, from her position as observer, noticed that the rejection of foreigners must lie deep within us.

Anna J.: "I didn't understand why my mother didn't get a job. They said to her that the post wasn't vacant any more, but then it would be advertised for weeks afterwards in the paper. I didn't understand either why in every bar people would start talking about foreigners after the third beer. Then at some stage I read the book *The Boat is Full (Das Boot ist voll)*. I was too young for it. It really shook me, and I suddenly understood that this fighting-with-foreigners is a tradition in this country. This policy towards foreigners has a tradition, and it's in this people. That was my first experience of politics relating to foreigners. Something's gone awry when it's so deep in people."

Anna J., f., born 1973 in Zürich, her parents come from Hungary: her father has been in Switzerland since 1956, her mother since 1970

When we look back into the history of Switzerland, we actually come across foreigners again and again who, -depending on the circumstances of the day - were travelling through, looking for sanctuary, or were of different faiths.

An example of exclusion from a family history

An example from my own place of origin in Graubunden: a family called Bernhard fled - probably at the time of the reformation - from Tirol into Graubunden. Christian Bernhard wanted to settle in the town of Maienfeld in 1727. In a text to the administration he described how his forebears had found through divine inspiration the way to the true beatific evangelical religion, that they had therefore left the papacy and sought comfort and asylum in protestant Maienfeld. Since nothing was "sweeter" or "more pleasant" than to "praise one's own home and fatherland", and that nothing was more painful than to have no permanent site, he would ask the authority and the entire citizenry beseechingly and imploringly that he, Christian Bernhard, and his descendants might be accepted as residents (*Beisassen*). The status of such residents corresponded broadly with today's 'C' permit holder. The application was accepted on payment of a fee. He and his descendants could no longer be driven from the place. However, they remained excluded from most citizens' rights, and thus could not hold public office or have a say. The rights of such residents could only be inherited through the male line; the women remained excluded, although it could be that they married in the place and were prepared to buy in. Christian Bernhard's application was the last granted. The citizenry of the town in fact decided on the following day not to allow any such new residents for the next 90 years. The reason: the world had "grown quite strong and populous". In 1817 one Thomas Bernhard was finally granted full citizenship. In 1848, the year of the founding of the Swiss Confederation, his son also had to buy his citizenship. This son was another Christian Bernhard and was my great-grandfather.

We only have to look into Swiss family histories a little to meet 'the strangers' and 'the foreigners'. The myth of the independence and singularity of Switzerland obscures the fact that Switzerland has always been a pluriethnic society, and that, from the historical viewpoint, migration has had a strong influence on the character of the country.

The role of the second generation: keeping and passing on the memory

To develop a differentiated understanding of ethnicity and national affiliation, it is important that such histories of flight and naturalisation are documented. In that we preserve the memory of them and pass this on to the next generation, we are acting against suppression and forgetting.

On this, here is another quote from Anna J., who related this about her father's escape from Hungary. "Even before 1956 they wanted to bring my father into the party, but he wouldn't join. He said to me: 'at that time you couldn't get anywhere with honest work', and he didn't want to live in a world in which one had to lie and betray and steal to get on. Two of them went off together. They helped a farmer with his potato harvest, and as the others turned in the middle of the row, they carried on to the end of the row, and then ran on to the border. They had three bottles of spirits with them, one for the Hungarian soldier and one for the Russian soldier at the border, and the third they sold in the first Austrian village they came to."

Anna J., f., born 1973 in Zürich, her parents come from Hungary: her father has been in Switzerland since 1956, her mother since 1970

The second generation has a special role in handing down oral and written family histories. Through the school they are in far closer contact with the receiving society than their parents, and yet the second generation is very close to the culture and language of the parents.

A look forward

The work with migration histories sharpens the view of the present. When a participant of the Turkish workshop expresses his hope for better integration in Switzerland and the restraint of Swiss people, this is more comprehensible from the historical background of xenophobia than when one reverts to exclusively psychological explanations of prejudice.

I quote here Ali G. from the Turkish workshop: "I now have a Swiss passport. There are situations in which people say to me 'aha, you're a foreigner', and treat me with pity. I say that I'm Swiss, and they say 'aha, a paper Swiss', and distance themselves from me. I didn't have myself naturalised because

felt only Swiss, because I only came here when I was 23 years old. I took Swiss citizenship so that I could vote and be voted for. If I live here and pay taxes here, I also want to have my say in decisions."
Ali G., m., born 1958, from Ankara Turkey, since 1982 in Switzerland

Ethnic discrimination and racism indeed result from the prejudices of individuals, but they are also grounded in societal structures. They are largely determined by the majority culture, or what is understood to be the majority culture, and serve predominantly economic and social interests.

The future life together of natives and foreigners

Migration policy is particularly contentious and awkward in periods of economic crisis. Immigrants, today above all asylum seekers, are made responsible for unemployment, rising crime and growing costs in social and health matters. A deeper perception and better understanding of the phenomenon of migration can also lead to the shaping of a migration policy which strengthens the positive aspects of migration (cultural wealth, economic and social benefits) and mitigates its negative effects.

Here's Angelo T. from the Italian workshop: "there's as much hospitality as there is xenophobia. In this respect, Switzerland is divided. Switzerland is already cosmopolitan. It just needs to stabilise itself, and this stability will inevitably occur. You can reject such a development, but you can't stop it. Everything depends on the next generation."

Angelo T., m., born 1947, from Calabria, Italy, originally from Abruzzo, since 1967 in Zurich, four years before that in Germany

In the children's workshop ten children, who have been here five to ten months, revealed their wishes for the future. One of the children, Antonio from Angoa, said this:

"At 31 I'm going to be two metres tall. I'll be working as a taxi driver. My taxi's yellow, it's called the Anton-taxi. I've got a phone in the car. I buy a house for me and my wife, and we have three children (a girl and two boys). My wife is Swiss. In my free time I play football with Ruban. In the holidays I drive to Geneva."

There is nothing more for us to do than to listen well to children. Wishes often come true, if we let them!

(Presentation of the video "What I want to be when I grow up" - *Was möchte ich werden, wenn ich gross bin*)

The exhibition is open. Opposite the exhibition hall on the ground floor you will be served a drink and snacks. Please enjoy it!

Nigg, Heinz (1999) Here and away. Living in two worlds. Zurich: www.migrant.ch
 Translation: Simon Milligan



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