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Migration in Postwar Germany through immigrant artists' work

I. Introduction

During the Cold War era, the Federal Republic of Germany started recruiting foreign workers mainly from southern Europe and the Mediterranean region to work temporarily in the industrial sector.¹ Specifically, after the agreement with Italy in 1955, Germany (the Federal Republic of Germany) conducted a series of recruitment agreements with other countries as Greece, Italy, Spain, Turkey, Morocco, Portugal, Tunisia, and Yugoslavia.² Since then, a significant number of people immigrated to GDR to work in industries as unskilled workers which lasted until 1973.³ These workers were called "Gastarbeiter" (guest-workers) due solely to their temporary presence there in Germany.⁴ Although Germany was eager to avoid any injustice towards German workers, however, the foreign workers were placed in workplaces recognized of lower value;⁵ the term 'Gastarbeiter' had a pejorative connotation.⁶ During that period, international artists moved to Germany for many different reasons, including economic, political, and religious, to express themselves freely and to explore the artists' networks in Western Europe.⁷ Meanwhile, they faced such a situation; they addressed immigration issues directly and represented aspects of their immigrant experience.⁸

The primary purpose of this research is to explore an approach of immigrant artists' artworks and to interpret them in combination with their socio-political context. Notably, on the one hand, this paper considers the impact of the socio-political issue of immigration on art and on the other hand, it focuses on the examination of the use of contemporary art forms. Thus, the artworks were analyzed through the study of contemporary artistic practices, the use of methodological tools by the Theory of the Avant-Garde and the sociological theory concerning the concept of the 'scene' and 'networks'. In that case, the analysis indi-

cates that the contact of immigrant artists with the social and cultural networks in the Federal Republic of Germany, the international artistic avant-garde trends helped them to broaden the spectrum of arts, to reject established cultural practices and finally to participate in German's art scene. Therefore, artists expressed interest in everyday life and re-associate art with society,⁹ following the concept of social-cultural policy that had begun to emerge in post-war Germany.¹⁰ In this climate, artistic practices could be seen to be permeated by socio-political realities and artists experimented with new expressive means as their interest shifted to everyday life. For instance, they used prefabricated materials, objects from everyday life or even they combined photography and painting. Immigrant artists criticized the phenomenon of immigration in the FRD and at the same time, refused traditional art forms, standards, social values, and conventional artistic practices, as well as culture and aesthetics. In contrast, they were seeking innovative artistic techniques to express their concerns about the phenomenon of immigration. Consequently, the artistic production of that period could probably be referred to as a critical means or tool against the established social, political, and cultural system. This study constitutes a relatively new area that has emerged from the international artistic cooperation as well as from immigrant artists' interest in the immigration flows and their social position. It covers the literature gap and the outstanding research in the field of art history concerning the contact of immigrant artists with the cultural scene and the social networks in FRD, the international and contemporary artistic avant-garde trends of that period.

II. Research questions

In work described here, a series of questions are explored which concern the reflection of immigration

flows in Germany (FRD) in the work of immigrant artists during their stay there. How art relates to personal issues around immigration and how contemporary artists are responding to migration? How did artists express their concerns and how active was their connection with the international Berlin's art scene? How did European and American art that prevailed during that period in Berlin influence artists' expression? The answers to the above questions reveal a new approach of artworks in a framework of sociological analysis which relates not only to the international artistic avant-garde but also to the socio-political history of that time. Thus, in this study, it is ascertained that the reference to crisis not only describes the social present but also determines how artists perceive reality through their art and how motivates the rupture with tradition and the conventional art forms in FRD.

III. Research Methodology

For the exploration of the artworks of immigrant artists, this study focuses on sociological and aesthetic theory. It presents a scene and network-based approach, formed by Helmut Kreuzer, Ronald Hitzler and Michaela Pfadenhauer developed in Germany in the mid-20th Century.¹¹ According to them, people who participate in a typical scene share experiences, social situations and communicate with each other through networks.¹² This scene arises from similarities, such as specific locations and a common thematic field of interest. Moreover, following Kreuzer's theory which defines Bohemian society as the subculture of the intellectuals in the Romantic Movement, it is approached here in a similar way the art scene in Germany (FRD) where immigrant artists also belonged to.¹³ In particular, Bohemian society is based on the 'artistic cabaret' who enjoy an unconventional lifestyle and rejected conventional standards.¹⁴ Likewise, artists in Germany during the '60s and the '70s disregarded traditional standards and supported the bohemian subculture or other alternative ways of expression. The additional methodological tool drawn from Peter Bürger's theory of avant-garde reveals how the artists on this research rework used elements from the art of the early 20th Century and con-

sequently examines the connection between the avant-garde and the 'neo-avant-garde' which includes the artists discussed in this paper.¹⁵

Additional research data in this work consists of primary archival documents, oral histories, interviews with artists, art historians, as well as of secondary sources deriving from libraries and state institutions in Germany. Data were analyzed in conjunction with international artistic trends and the use of the prementioned theories of the Avant-Garde and the sociological theory in order to examine immigration issues through artists' perspective. Furthermore, the study of modern German history was crucial to understanding the temporary labor migration flows to Germany (FRD), the recruitment procedure, the different waves of immigration to analyze their work based on the social and political situations of the period in Germany (FRD). It is also essential that through the above research in archives and private collections or even though the oral histories were discovered artworks that have not been studied before. As a result, we can make out both the socio-political issue immigration to Germany and meanwhile to explore the innovative or experimental artistic practices that international immigrant artists used to express their thoughts, their experiences and their concerns.

IV. Analysis example and a brief presentation of immigration issues in immigrant artists' work.

The phenomenon of immigration gave rise to the creation of a series of artworks as it can be seen in the work of the Greek artists Vlassis Caniaris and Jannis Psychopedis, the artist Croatian Drago Trumpeta, the Turkish photographer Mehmet Ünal, the Yugoslavian filmmaker Željimir Žinik. The prementioned artists, while experiencing in part the phenomenon of immigration and at the same time observing migratory flows in western Germany, expressed through their artworks the difficulties they faced, during their integration into their new country. Notably, they attempted to convey to their work the emotionally charged image of the immigrant, the uncertain reality, the social exclusion in the host country, and the living conditions of migrants in Germany (FRD).

Immigrant artists represented the prementioned sociological characteristics of the living conditions and migration policy. It is captured in their artworks and their titles as well (*Gastarbeiter*, *Arrivederci - Willkommen*, *Father is working in German*, etc.). Namely, Caniaris initially illustrated the private life of migrants in West Berlin, and he emphasized, especially on their children. Using indigenous elements and household objects such as used clothing and toys, Caniaris gradually created a human form. For instance, Hopscotch is an installation including headless human figures which are made of chicken wire over a wooden frame, paper and plastic filling, suitcases, a birdcage, and used clothes. The figures, reminding the bronze sculpture of the German artist Messer, were standing around a hopscotch court where words written by chalk, instead of numbers, described the stages and mechanisms of labor immigration policy. *Arrivederci - Willkommen* is another installation of the Immigrants series, which consists of nine figures arranged over a corridor and two platforms. The one platform with the inscription 'Willkommen' represents the host country (Germany - FRD) and the second one with a sign 'Arrivederci' represents the artist's country of origin (Greece). Between the two platforms, there is a railway corridor, wagons and a figure of a little drummer boy symbolizing the mass movement of economic immigrants.

The issue of migration of Greek citizens to Germany (FRD) also preoccupied Jannis Psychopedis who created a series of drawings, collages and photomontage. Human figures play a central role here as in work entitled *Father is missing in Germany* and the series *Patridognosia*. The first work depicts a family in an old fashion photo where the father's face is absent. In the picture below, there are flags of different countries arranged in series. These countries were associated at that time with the phenomenon of migration either as host countries of migratory flows or as countries of origin of the migrants. In the second work entitled *Patridognosia*, there are corresponding images of Greek immigrants and migratory scenes. However, Psychopedis specifies the migration in the drawings *Gastarbeiter* and *Immigrants* where well-dressed men are waiting in the queue to submit the required documents under the migration laws and regulations. Psy-

chopedis makes references to the massive migration wave using photographic document and photomontage, a technique which was also used by Dadaists and the artists of Critic Realism in Berlin. The issue of migratory flow is also mentioned in other works of Psychopedis in which the human figure is absent. Into these drawings, the Greek artist integrates immigrants' personal belongings. Precisely, in the picture entitled *Monument of the Unknown worker*, a pair of shoes is depicted, placed on the top of a box, flags from various countries, including the Greek one, and an open envelope with a colored photo from a Greek landscape. The absence of the human figure intensifies the immigrant's nostalgia for their country. The project *The Journey* is like the previous one and depicts a worn brown suitcase which alludes to the immigrants' belongings.

The Croatian artist Drago Trumbeta created a section on immigrants as part of recent German social history with strong references to Canaris' immigrants' series. It is an autobiographical work in which he presented his experience as an immigrant in Germany (FRD). Specifically, he mentions Germany's efforts for economic and political recovery after its destruction in World War II, the country's lack of workforce, and the bilateral agreements that legitimized immigration.¹⁶ Trumbeta, having experienced migration himself as he moved in 1966 to Frankfurt as a Croatian worker, sought to create projects through which he could convey his feelings to the viewer. Similarly, during his stay in Germany (FRD), he collected archived, photographic material by observing and recording the daily life of *Gastarbeiter*. Initially, he used this material as a tool to represent their daily lives in the Federal Republic of Germany and created a thematic unit, consisting of 100 drawings and collages. Then his need not only to present his feelings but also to have direct communication with the viewer to achieve his psychological involvement in this social issue led the artist from photographic and drawing representation to installations and environments. However, the photographer Mehmet Ünal managed to transfer to the viewer the life of *Gastarbeiter* through 300 photos from 1977 to 2000 in Germany (FRD).¹⁷ In these impressive pictures, he represents the difficult everyday life between home and work, family celebrations and trade union

demonstrations, multiculturalism, and xenophobia.¹⁸ Besides, the Yugoslavian filmmaker Željimir Žižnik made short films, including the awarded at Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen in Germany *The Unemployed* (1968) in which he narrates 'Gastarbeiters' living and working conditions between Socialist Yugoslavia and Germany (FRD).¹⁹ Many of the workers describe the working environment, the general lack of stability in their working situation and they criticize the bureaucracy.²⁰

V. Results

The present study confirmed the findings of the reflection of the immigration flows in Germany since the end of World War II on the work of the international immigrants' artists who lived during the '60s and the '70s in Germany (FRD). The prementioned artists expressed their personal views on the above issue. They shared their experiences with the public, highlighting their concerns to the public by connecting real life to art. From the short analysis above, this investigation confirms that immigrant artists in Germany (FRD) examined the entire grid and the process of economic migration, the immigration policy of the German state that was implemented during the 1960s. As immigrants themselves, artists came closer to immigrants' life either through storytelling or displaying everyday objects to convey more accurately the working and living conditions of migrants to their artworks. They intended to raise public awareness on a social and personal level, confirming once again the trend towards social-cultural policy and the promotion of the idea of the participation of the viewer.

Furthermore, the direct contact of immigrant artists with the artistic avant-garde trends in Germany (FRD) broadened their spectrum of art in the context of social culture, rejecting the current cultural policy. The analysis indicates that they were engaged in artistic experimentation and extended the existing morphological forms, the relationship between art and everyday life and the artist's role. Immigrant artists, following the contemporary artistic practices in Germany, cast aside the abstract painting, which was dominant until the mid-60s, and they chose different art forms of expression. However, sometimes they turned to more figurative painting. This option contributed to the wi-

despread dissemination of both the image mainly through the media and the need of artists not just to experiment with new media, but also to express their personal view about immigration issues in a more eloquent way. In this case, they followed German standards and especially the critical realism, seeking to awaken and activate the critical function of the viewer towards the modern social and political reality.

Additionally, immigrant artists reused pictorial and expressive art forms of the avant-garde artists of the early 20th Century. This is an essential finding in the understanding of how 'neo-avantgarde' artists revisited the historical avant-garde which highlights that little is known about that. For instance, they found artistic standards in Dadaist practices, photomontage or even ready-mades. Meanwhile, they used elements from European and American art that prevailed during that period in Berlin such as pop art, Critical Realism, Fluxus, neo-Dadaism and neorealistic trends. These trends derived from the Dada movement by the transformation of the object or even from Arte Povera such as Caniaris and Trumbeta.

VI. Discussion

The findings of this research noted that Germany's plurality and the heterogeneity of its inhabitants enabled immigrant artists to express freely their concerns about extensive immigration and emigration flows to Germany. The prementioned international artists resided there during the Cold War era and they felt the need to express their socio-political concerns about the mass movement of economic migrants. Immigrant artists didn't follow the conventional artistic practices of their country, but they deliberately rejected standards and the traditional art forms. In contrast, they formed a picture of workers who were exploited and undervalued through alternative art forms, innovative or experimental artistic practices such as the use of prefabricated materials or a mixed media Photography. The use or innovative art forms was encouraged by their direct contact with the international artistic avant-garde trends of that time, the cultural scene and the social networks in Germany.

From the results, it is clear that immigrant artists used new art forms and qualified artistic experimentation

that were formed in the cultural scene in Germany (FRD) and especially in Berlin. The present findings confirm the emergence of an art scene in Germany during the '60s - and mainly in Berlin in the late '60s - that promoted ideas toward socially-oriented cultural politics, bringing art closer to everyday life issues and problems. Therefore, the art of that period makes critical judgments about specific social issues and it could probably be referred to as a means of critical and radical tool against the established social, political and cultural system. Among the innovative artistic trend should also be mentioned that artists' and the viewer's role changed since they have a more active role and expressed social criticism. Their role could probably reveal the connection of 'new avant-garde' art with the avant-garde of the early 20th Century and their contribution to the development of Western art and specifically the contemporary art in Germany. Ultimately, under those circumstances, it becomes evident that immigrant artists integrated into Germany's art scene and consequently into the Euro-American artistic scene that was prevailed.

VII. Conclusion

The main conclusion that can be drawn is that although international artists resided in a foreign country during the '60s and the '70s, they expressed their personal view and their concerns about immigration issues and specifically the mass movement of economic migrants to Germany (FRD). It was conducted that their artworks represent a wide range of views and perspectives on immigration. Besides, a pivotal role in their expression was the fact that they encountered the immigration flows, the cultural scene, and the social networks in Germany as well. Moreover, Germany's art scene and specifically its networks promoted new cultural forms and other alternative ways of expression which are linked to Bohème society, as described on Kreuzer's theory. Consequently, the direct contact of immigrant artists with the phenomenon of immigration in Germany (FRD) enabled them to share their personal stories through their art in a more original and direct way since they were immigrants themselves. They created a highly experiential environment to sensitize the viewer on a

social and personal level. In this way, they tried to create an emotionally charged image of the economic immigrant who is socially excluded. Not only did they express their thoughts and their experiences, but they also used contemporary art forms. They borrowed elements from European and American art that prevailed during that period in Germany. In other words, they focused on innovative artistic trends rejecting conventional art forms that enable them to participate to the contemporary art scene in Germany and finally to be incorporated into their host country.

However, when comparing our results to those of previous studies such as those by Burcu Dogramaci and Birgit Mersmann (2019),²¹ it must be pointed out that the current study not only shows how migration has been reflected in contemporary art, but it also focuses on immigrant artists' artworks. Therefore, contrary to earlier findings, this study identified a significant number of immigrant artists who also resided in Germany (FRD); an approach that had not been conducted previously. However, additional research needs to be undertaken to determine the impact of immigration in art during different periods to understand in depth the view of individuals who did not share the same historical past. This research could eventually lead to a more thorough understanding of how international immigrant artists who resided in a foreign country contributed to the development of new artistic trends and practices.

Endnoten

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Zusammenfassung

The purpose of this study is to research the immigration flows to Germany (FRD) through art and accurately through the view of immigrant artists. This paper explores how artists who emigrated in the Federal Republic of Germany during the '60s and the '70s had been influenced by the social phenomenon of immi-

gration and how these images from immigrants' everyday life reflected in their work. Immigrant artists integrated these moments into their artworks and mentioned their personal views. This study focuses on international artistic practices, sociological and aesthetic theory, concerning the Theory of the Avant-Garde and the terms of the ‚scene‘ and ‚networks‘. Consequently, it is proved that new art forms with social references were formed. Specifically, immigrant artists' artworks described the emotionally charged image of the immigrant, the uncertain reality, the social exclusion in the host country, the radical criticism, the social and the cultural intervention.

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