

Migration in German History

PANIKOS PANAYI

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No other modern nation-state in Europe has experienced the levels of in and out-migration faced by Germany during the last two centuries. For much of the period between the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the 1890s, especially from the 1840s, Germany was a country of emigration, losing millions of souls, mostly to the USA. By the decades immediately preceding the First World War, when German industrialization could not only absorb the population increase which had caused the emigration of earlier decades, but also required new supplies of labour, the German state began to import people from its immediate surroundings, especially Russia and Italy, a process which continued until the eruption of hostilities.

While the Weimar Republic and the early Nazi years represented the quietest period in German migration history, the economy of the Second World War developed an unquenchable thirst for foreign labour, fitting in with Nazi racial ideology. When the war ended Germany became a vast refugee camp, in which millions of people wandered in all directions, including the foreign workers returning to their homes, mostly in eastern Europe. From the opposite direction came millions of ethnic Germans expelled from their homeland due both to the vindictive attitudes of other nation-states towards them and to the incorporation of historical Prussia within Poland.

Even when the dust had settled by the end of the 1940s, the newly created Federal Republic experienced further influxes of people, again welcomed by the new state because of a need for labour to feed the economic miracle. Initially they arrived from the German Democratic Republic, but, as this supply dried up, especially following the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961, the Federal Republic began to look further afield to the Mediterranean periphery of Europe for labour.

By the end of the 1980s, Germany had a foreign population of 4.9 million people. With the collapse of Communism, the country experienced a new influx of newcomers, consisting of millions of ethnic Germans moving into the country from the areas where they had resided historically, especially the Soviet Union, which they could now leave. In addition, millions of asylum seekers, victims of the ethnic tensions released by the collapse of Communism, especially in Yugoslavia, fled to Germany for a variety of reasons including the fact that it had comparatively liberal asylum laws within the European context, a situation which had, however, changed somewhat by the middle of the 1990s.¹

The scholarly volumes under consideration here look at most of the above historical developments. The two series of books come from the

Institut für Migrationsforschung und Interkulturelle Studien (IMIS) at the University of Osnabrück, one of the leading European research centres for the historical study of migration, established under the direction of Klaus J. Bade, the most important scholar working on German migration research, in 1991.

Two of the volumes deal with emigration to the USA during the course of the nineteenth century. Axel Lubinski, for instance, focuses on one particular region of north-eastern Germany in the form of Mecklenburg-Strelitz. The book makes use of the information provided by 16,000 'release certificates', which people needed from the local state in order to migrate, and places the emigration within the context of the local economy and the mass transatlantic movement of Germans.

Similarly Uwe Reich examines emigration from another area of eastern Germany during the nineteenth century in the form of Cottbus and Arnswalde in the region of Frankfurt/Oder. The author places the emigration within the context of the transformation of this part of Germany from a feudal to a capitalist economy in which population grew, resulting in pressure upon resources, and migration became possible. The studies of both Lubinski and Reich concentrate on the second half of the nineteenth century, as 'migration fever' did not reach this part of Germany until this period, spreading from further south and west.

The volume by Hannelore Oberpenning examines an issue in migration research which, as she rightly points out, has been ignored, in the form of the itinerant traders. Her study focuses on particular areas during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, namely Munsterland, in north-west Germany, Prussia and the Netherlands. However, Oberpenning has a command of both the local and the national picture as she contextualizes her case studies within the European itinerant trading system of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The study is based upon a wealth of both primary and secondary sources and benefits from a wide range of illustrative material including maps, charts, tables and photographs. It represents perhaps the most original and important of the volumes under consideration here.

Two of the other books focus on Italian immigrants in Germany during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The shorter volume, by Adolf Wennemann, began life, like Oberpenning's book, as an IMIS dissertation. Wennemann, who focuses on the Rhineland and Westfalia, examines the whole range of Italian migrants who made their way into Germany during the decades leading up to the First World War. These consisted, on the one hand, of small numbers of independent itinerant traders and musicians who could be found all over Europe, and whose numbers, in the areas examined by Wennemann, barely ran into hundreds. On the other hand, Wennemann also examines the labour migrants who

moved to the Rhineland and Westfalia particularly at the end of the nineteenth century as the German economy looked for new sources of labour abroad. The study covers all aspects of the history of the Italian migrants, from their areas of origin, the reasons for their migration, their demographic and employment patterns in the areas of settlement, and even aspects of their ethnicity, which, however, only receive a few pages of attention in this short book.

The slightly longer work by René del Fabbro focuses its attention on migrants who made their way into southern Germany from one particular region of northern Italy, Friuli, between 1870 and 1918. The author actually describes his migrants as 'Transalpini', because the journey to their new places of work, as part of the Germany importation of labour in this period, did not involve a particularly long journey. Once they arrived they found themselves employed in the sectors of the German economy which needed labour, particularly coal and steel production. The approach of del Fabbro is similar to that of Wennemann, as both try to cover all aspects of the lives of the newcomers in their new surroundings, as well as examining the causes of the migration. Del Fabbro devotes more attention to non-economic issues, such as ethnicity and hostility to the newcomers, and pays more attention to the contextualization of his work, both within the labour migration into the German Kaiserreich and within the historiography of German population movements.

As yet, the two IMIS series have no books within them dealing with the inter-war years, although as both are ongoing, we can expect to see volumes covering these periods at some time in the future. The rest of the books so far published cover various aspects of migration into Germany since the Second World War. One of them concerns itself with the immediate post-war period. Volker Ackerman deals with refugees from the German Democratic Republic who moved westward from 1945 until the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. He focuses upon the concept of the 'true' refugees and the debate around what this meant in the context of the expanding west German economy, at the start of the economic miracle, and its need for labour. Whatever the causes of the migration, which Ackerman analyses, the movement of east Germans into the west represented a gain for the Federal Republic, both because of the labour power involved and because of the propaganda value.

The other volumes on the post-war period cover a variety of themes. Two of them are edited by Klaus Bade. The first, *Fremde in Land*, focuses on Lower Saxony. It contains essays on all of the major groupings which have moved there since the end of the Second World War, including exiles both from the German Democratic Republic and further east in the immediate post-war period, as well as after the collapse of Communism,

together with foreign workers, covered by Michael Bommers. The bulk of the work actually deals with the various types of ethnic Germans who moved to Lower Saxony.

The other volume edited by Bade is a completely different book from *Fremde in Land*, particularly in its scope, as it does not concern itself just with Germany, although it does contain some essays on the country. Instead, it takes a global approach to the issues outlined in the title, migration, ethnicity and conflict. It is divided into two sections, the first of which consists of global or theoretical studies, while the essays in the second part concern themselves with individual contemporary and historical case studies. Many of the leading international scholars in the fields of migration, ethnicity and racism have contributed to this volume including Myron Weiner, John Rex, Hans-Joachim Hoffman-Nowotny and Stephen Castles.

The collection of essays edited by Eberhard Eichendorfer, on *Social Security of Migrants in the European Union of Tomorrow* is an entirely contemporary and mainly English-language publication examining the way in which the European Union has co-ordinated its efforts in the area under consideration. As well as general essays covering either the entire continent or the reasons for migration, the volume also contains case studies on Italy, Poland and Sweden.

Finally, the book edited by Albrecht Weber places German asylum and immigration procedures against their European and international background and evolves essentially from the continuing concern within German governmental and academic circles with the large numbers of immigrants and refugees which the state has attracted during the 1990s, compared with its European neighbours. This is very much an interdisciplinary volume with contributions from sociologists, political scientists, historians and lawyers, the last of whom feature prominently in a volume edited by a law Professor. As well as the general pieces, case studies focus upon Britain, France and the Netherlands.

Like several of the other volumes in the IMIS-Schriften, this one grew out of the activities of the Institute, in this case an international conference held in February 1996. Other books have evolved from conferences and seminars held at the institute. For anyone with an interest in migration into Germany the two series of books considered here are an essential starting point and, with the promise of further volumes in the future, they are both likely to remain so.

NOTE

1. For slightly more detail on the above processes see Panikos Panayi, 'Race in the Federal Republic of Germany: Immigration, Ethnicity and Racism Since the Second World War', in Klaus Larres and Panikos Panayi (eds.), *The Federal Republic of Germany: Politics, Society and Economy Before and After Unification* (London: Longman, 1996), pp.191-208.