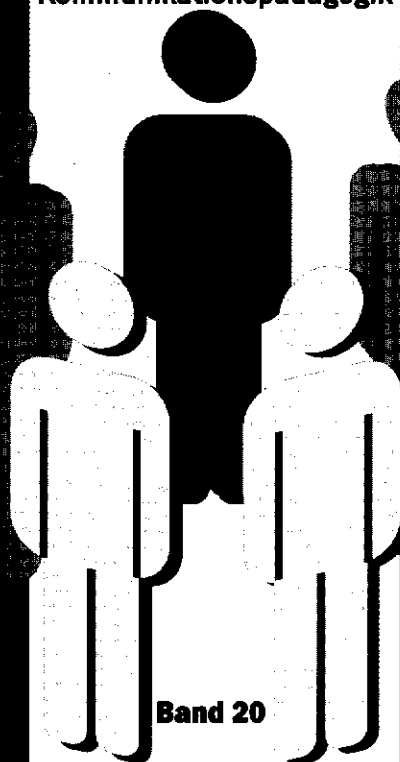


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Communication and Political Change

SPRECHEN & VERSTEHEN

Schriften zur
Kommunikationstheorie und
Kommunikationspädagogik



Band 20

Röhrig
Universitätsverlag

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The Interrelation of Minority Cultural Policy and Minority Cultural Discourse: “KulturQuer-QuerKultur,” a Regional Association Promoting “Intercultural Cultural Work” as Minority Critique in Cultural Policy Discourse

Introduction

One of the legacies of my travels and stays in the USA is its struggle with what modern multicultural society is about. This fueled much of my thinking and writing. Contrasting lives, ideas and communication across cultures and societies has always been a great passion of mine and is still the core of my research interest. So, in many ways, my present contribution will weave a text with biographically different threads of thought. As our discussions at the conference showed, further threads could be pulled from several other articles in the present volume.

I will report on the development of a regional cultural association that aims at changing mainstream cultural policy in German municipalities to account for minority culture. My participation as a member was accompanied by reoccurring non-understanding and some striking “irritations” (in the psychoanalytical sense). I will argue that certain aspects of typical migrant socialization act as a barrier to the development of communicative competencies needed for board members of an association aiming at political change.

“KulturQuer-QuerKultur Rhein-Neckar e.V.“

“KulturQuer-QuerKultur Rhein-Neckar e.V.” (KQ) is a regional association with its center of activity in Mannheim, my town of residence. Rhein-Neckar embraces the region around the cities of Heidelberg, Mannheim and Ludwigshafen. It was founded in 1999 by a group of 38 members and has today nearly 60 members originating from about a dozen different nationalities, with a majority being of Turkish origin. Its main goal is to promote a changed understanding of migrant cultural production as not being limited to the heritage of their country of origin or folklore. KQ conceives of intercultural cultural work as dealing with creative cultural production processes which result in so called “hybrid”¹ forms of cultural expressions. These artists’ works are influenced by their lives in multiple cultures and migrant socialization, which does not inevitably mean their themes to be problematic and laden with conflict.

Social and Regional Contexts

Mannheim counts roughly 320,000 inhabitants, more than 20% of which are of other nationality than German. These nationalities include 34% Turkish (almost 23,000), 14 % Italian, 8% Yugoslavia, 4% Croatian, 5% Polish and Greek (not included are German immigrants from Russia) (Statistikstelle der Stadt Mannheim, January 2001). Those who followed the PISA debate about Germany’s educational system know the most underachieving group are immigrant students (Spiewak, *Die Zeit*, 18. July

¹ Köhl (2001) also refers to critical aspects of the term (48, FN 64).

2002, 3). So, cultural minorities articulating their expectations and demands toward the majority of German society belong to an elite².

The local background for founding this association was a study group on “intercultural cultural work”³ in 1997/98 following two workshops on the topic (Wolfgang Biller, personal communication July 26, 2002). There is an institutional gap for artists with migrant backgrounds, particularly for the 2nd and 3rd generation. The cultural office, which would be the competent institution to turn to for these artists, has very limited financial resources compared to the department for migrant affairs. In Mannheim, money for migrant artists traditionally came from the administrator for migrant affairs. The staff of departments for migrant affairs are typically accustomed to paternal gestures toward the “gastarbeiter” (guestworker) and rather unaware of critical issues of “interculturality.” They are also not qualified for aesthetic assessments. Their concept of interculturality confines itself mainly to “folklore, kebab and tea” (to caricature the German reception of migrant life, referring here to the largest minority, the Turkish population). According to the founding members of KQ, this is also the case in Mannheim. Thus, there are conflicting interests in the fight about relocating finances toward the cultural office so that artists have aesthetically competent persons to turn to.

These issues are, however, not unique to Mannheim. A recent study by the BPB (the National Institute for Political Education) on intercultural cultural work in German communities concludes: “Intercultural cultural

² Multicultural society in Germany is different to the US (cf. Soraya 1994). It is at an earlier stage in its development. This situation is similar across Europe, although in Germany there seem to be even fewer people from ethnic minorities in outstanding positions than in Great Britain or France, or the Netherlands (for example a *Newsweek* survey found all over Europe only three board members in Europe’s largest companies to belong to ethnic minorities (Ferooohar, 2002.) Maybe the increasing attention to diversity issues will bring some change (Stuber, 2002).

³ A rather new term appearing more and more in the context of discussing cultural policy. The term is not well defined yet. The broader meaning refers to various kind of intercultural activities including folklore evenings. The narrower concept refers specifically to aesthetic forms of expressions by (second and third generation) migrant artist integrating plural cultural influences in their work (cf. Internet research, google 26.07.2002).

work has to be regarded as a cross-sectional task [for all institutions] and must not be delegated to special intercultural-institutions” (cf. Görres, Groß, Oertel, Röbbke 2002, 17, translation by S.S.-K)⁴.

After one and a half years of preparation, the study group on intercultural culture work decided to found an independent association in order to achieve political change in municipal cultural policy. This decision was contested (Wolfgang Biller, personal communication July 26, 2002) and difficult to make (Regina Trösch, personal communication July 18, 2002). As founding members told me: “the founding already speaks for itself” ... many [...] were ‘like paralyzed,’ so that one thought ‘now they won’t go along any more’... There are few who think themselves capable to represent themselves and equal-minded fellows.” Consequently, there were a lot of starting problems. The goals of KQ, according to its statutes, are:

- To improve communication between ethnic groups and institutions;
- To achieve greater acceptance by political bodies of the local communities;
- To act as a forum which promotes new creative work with cultural syntheses articulated by multicultural agents and connects already existing activities of this kind.

Parallel to the development of the study group two women ethnographers conducted a field research project in Mannheim on the topic of intercultural culture work. It had initially started on “interculturality,” but this topic emerged as a burning issue in Mannheim among the politically involved migrants.

Last year, the results were published (Köhl 2001), which helped me understand more and to some extent triggered the present contribution. In the following, I will introduce some selected aspects of Köhl’s work as

⁴This development of insights resembles the debates in multicultural education in the USA in the 1980s about reforming the curriculum away from special studies (see also Soraya 1994)

they relate to the current issue of barriers for migrants in articulating their own position promoting political change.

Strategies of “Intercultural Cultural Work” – Ethnographic Field Work Down the Road Naming – “Identities in Question”

In the field, terms like “intercultural” were generally strongly rejected or not understood at all. “Migrants of 2nd (or 3rd) generation” were also refused as acceptable names. The core circle of interlocutors named themselves “migrants” and “not of German origin” (Köhl 2001, 12)⁵. The rejections of names and labeling point at severe offenses in the course of their lives in Germany. “Identities in question” was one of the emerging topics (Hall 1993). The refusal to locate themselves or let others locate them is to a large extent a reaction to cultural or national categorization, a problem the majority of migrants growing up in Germany have to deal with. I observed a frequent combination of dichotomous thinking (good or bad, Germans and non-Germans) and a resistance to acknowledge cultural ways of speaking, thinking and acting⁶. This may partly be due to the fact that many of them – quite different to the situation in the US – do not possess a German passport. Thus, they are not admitted to political participation, and keep the status of foreigner, no matter where they were borne.

⁵ A number of Köhl & Menrath’s interlocutors are members of an association called “Die Unmündigen” (the minors), a group on which sociolinguistic research is being conducted at the IDS (Institute for German language) (www.ids.de)

⁶ Similar phenomenon are described in Bennett’s model of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett 1994). This model, however, does not account for the political aspects of interculturality and for the emotional processing of experiences like cultural discrimination or racism.

Solidarity with the Researchers – A Quest for Recognition?

All of the interlocutors tried to win the researchers to their purposes in exchange for information. Köhl reports that it was very difficult for them to withdraw from these demands. For reasons of objectivity and to avoid functionalization, they tried not to take sides. Yet, they could not keep up this distance without disturbing the research process. So they finally did take a stand for an intercultural cultural work “based on a dynamic model of culture and ethnic identity” (70). The interlocutors’ attempts to make the ethnographers declare their solidarity with them can be seen as a quest for recognition, although a rather monopolizing one (see below).

Ethnicization and Marginalization Met by Irony and Satire

A large majority of the second and third generation of migrants in Germany experiences continuous discrimination and structural racism. Cultural movements of independence are Kanak Attak (Zaimoglu – “the Malcolm X of German Turks”), which uses a new style of language and caricaturizes German cliché of Turks to absurdity. The younger generation (mostly born in Germany) experiences much rejection in the course of their socialization and are consequently critical of ethnic categorization. Increasingly they do not define themselves by the folklore of their heritage; at the same time, they also do not strip off their origins. They combine various experiences and plural cultural influences into their own ways. Today migrant artists do not want to be categorized by the cultural heritage

of their countries of origin (Staiano 1997 quoted in Köhl 2001 speaks of “ethnicization”). They feel marginalized by municipal cultural policies as described above. Their themes are not necessarily dominated by their status as migrant or migrant descendant, but deal with general issues, be it aging, love, or landscape (Köhl 2001). Migrant artists want to be judged by aesthetic criteria and not by origin (cf. · enocak in Amirsedghi & Bleicher 1997, 133). This issue also relates to their need for recognition as artists⁷.

Köhl (2001) discusses structural or institutional racism as a form of hidden racism including “all processes which, intentionally or not, result in the continued exclusion of subordinate group” (Miles 1989, quoted in Köhl 28). A good example from their fieldwork in Mannheim is the native term “Sozialmafia” (“social mafia”), meaning the network of people working with migrants in the area of social work, youth groups etc., mostly of German origin. They adopt the cause of protecting, supporting, defending “foreigners” and their supposed ways of life, but actually lead a ‘Stellvertreterdiskurs’ (“substitutes’ discourse”/discourse by self-appointed advocates). Besides the artists’ critique of the present cultural policies and its discourse, Köhl discusses also new concepts and proposals for a change in cultural policy, particularly with respect to minority cultural policy. The emergence of KQ can be regarded as a logical consequence of the situation and debate in Mannheim.

Köhl found irony and satire to be strategies used in intercultural cultural work. These ways of communicating unmask ethnic categorizations and show their authors as subjects and agents in minority cultural discourse, not any more as mere objects. She also experienced irony and satire as communicative strategies in interviews and concluded irony to be a general attitude towards life for some of the interlocutors.

⁷ Critique is an essential part of recognition, as Straub (1999) argued in his article on “understanding, critique and recognition.”

Commentary and Critique

In my view, there is some interesting bias in Köhl and Menrath's research. First, they were not given much credit as ethnographers until they took sides for the political position of the migrant artist. Thus, they made an arrangement that did not allow them to develop an impartial understanding of the structural relationships. Also, the artists themselves were not viewed critically, neither with respect to aesthetic qualities of their work nor with respect to their accounts of mainstream cultural politics and their personal commitments and contributions to change. Among Köhl's original intentions was also a critique of the minority elite (personal communication July 24, 2002), unfortunately she could not maintain this position.

Second, some of the people involved in the discourse on minority cultural politics are of German origin. They were not given a voice in Köhl and Menrath's research. In order to account for more complexity of the issues at work, one would need to include all participants. Also, from the point of view of policy change as implying organizational change, one would need to consider the opposition in this conflict: the staff of the municipality. Political change needs to take into account a whole system of interdependencies.

Generally, cultural policy (which in Germany is mostly municipally administrated) works as a network of old ties and connections. Innovative, (cultural) critical voices are seldom heard. This is an experience not only

migrant minorities share with other minorities, for example, homosexuals or political dissidents in political satire⁸.

Irritations and Reflections

My Own Involvement

Acquaintances had won me as a member of KQ. In this way I entered “the field” in the Fall of 1999. From its beginning, KQ organized several successful events, often in cooperation with other institutions: exhibitions, literary readings, political satire, and public speeches and panel discussions on “culture,” its ideology and the consequences for cultural policy. Yet, among the board members conflicts increased. I perceived some striking irritations at my first encounters with the association, which I will interpret ethnographically along the lines of an ethnohermeneutic approach as introduced to the colloquium on ethnohermeneutics in 1992 (Soraya 1992, 1996, 1998). However, time resources for the present article did not allow for strict methodology: no tape recordings were made, only notes were taken during the interviews with members of KQ; also no external supervision was used to reflect on my own biases. I did share my interpretations with my interlocutors and asked for their response. Therefore, in spite of some “dialogical validation,” the present contribution remains at an exploratory level.

⁸ Here is an interesting parallel in wording as KulturQuer entails “quer” as opposing the mainstream. Queer as being in opposition to straight refers to homosexual critique. This parallel can unfortunately not be pursued in the present context (cf. the debate in queer studies, Johnson 2001).

“Parricide Aboard”

Among the founding members of KQ, no one volunteered to run for president of the board. Instead they asked someone who was recognized and respected in Mannheim to represent them, an elder man of Greek origin⁹, a so-called first generation migrant. After a short period, conflicts arose, several board members perceived him to be too “patriarchal,” too “bossy.” This was the main story I encountered when I first joined a board meeting. My immediate reaction was admittedly rather stereotypical psychoanalytic: what was going on here seemed like a classical “parricide” (as portrayed in Freud 1912/1999). I spontaneously articulated this interpretation and even found some cautious support. But the reactions were something between slightly embarrassed, laughing as if they had been caught or unmasked, and admiration. For Christine Köhl, the interpretation of the parricide also rang a bell (personal communication, May 9, 2002, and July 23, 2002); she supported it. I had confronted some of the founding members: “Why did you hide behind a man of the first generation? Someone who was not even involved in the formation of the group?” Various accounts were given: “he first seemed ok,” “he is well respected,” “we had little experience leading an association” – they did not convince me. The founding members did not present someone from among their own ranks to stand up for them and take responsibility. The very goals of KQ had to do with overcoming the heritage of the guestworker cliché. Why select a first generation representative? The expectation was that his influence would empower them. As conflicts between the president and other board member increased, they were not solved communicatively, but the first president was urged to resign.

⁹ Whether the Turkish-Greek conflict tradition played any role in the development of the relationships here is subject to speculation, I found no support for it in my interviews and observations.

In our interview, the first president of KQ expressed his perception of these incidences as follows: “They were looking for someone who can make the dirty work – excuse me – : administrative bodies, offices, registering at the local district court [...] In meetings, I had the impression the Turkish participants had already conferred before [...] there was dissent ... I was accused of being authoritarian. [...] There is one thing they underestimated, I was teaching on intercultural topics for more than 20 years at the PH (educational college) in Heidelberg [...] I am not a lay person in intercultural questions. And I have a very strong opinion” (Pantelis Nikitopoulos, personal communication, January 16, 2003). In my view, the expectation of the first president was a double-bind: on the one hand, he should empower the group by virtue of his reputation, but simultaneously the group “disempowered” him by ignoring his expertise.

My interpretation of this conflict evolves from trying to make sense of the contradictory movement of first inviting someone from outside then expelling him. This movement parallels the fate of the German “guestworkers,” who were also invited by Germany, not with the intention of having them stay, but only to do the dirty work no one else wanted to do. Upon completing their tasks they are expected to return, for they are guests, migrants not immigrants.

But there are also other themes at work here: In a sense, the establishing of such a presidential figure, and the subsequent “coup” seems in two ways symbolic:

- a) with respect to the institution KQ:
- b) The decision to separate from this president parallels the very act of founding this association with its goals of emancipating from the cliché image of the first generation migrant in German society, the “Gastarbeiter.”
- c) with respect to migrant members personal development:

- d) There may be an unconscious (repetitious) need for emancipating from a figure of the old patriarchy which does not fit their own self-conceptions any more (cf. McLuhan 1958/2001, 93-94: “educating father”).

The criteria for choosing their first president point at a collectivist orientation (Hall 1976). It seems as if the persons involved are considerably influenced by a traditional socialization with rather patriarchal features¹⁰. On the one hand, this may support dependency patterns which strongly rely on personal relationships, which at worst can lead to helplessness, paralysis, and rather closed systems. On the other hand, the founding of KQ and the conflict with their first president shows a need to individualize from the migrant history, which gives the impulse towards struggle. At times I had the impression that migrant members seemed caught in between these two motions. Understanding this conflict and its “solution” in terms of a parricidal scene accounts well for these various layers of meaning.

The Paralysis of the Board or “Aboard without a Captain”

The problem of a missing president had not been solved. After the first president of KQ had resigned, no one followed as president. After several points of dissent, members of the board simply stayed away from board meetings. Without ever naming an open conflict, the treasurer resigned, and the administrative minimum was hard to ensure. Rather normal group conflicts, one may assume. I see them, however, to be symptomatic for a particular dynamic in this group, a view also shared by one of the board members of German origin with a rich experience in various associations.

¹⁰ This can, of course, also apply to many German families, depending on various socio-cultural factors.

Some members of KQ told me about some professional dependencies as they work for municipal institutions, and their jobs are often paid by or supported by the administrator for foreign affairs. These existential dependencies constitute a serious threat for their freedom of expression, which also influence the board. But independent members also became reluctant pursuing their jobs. My overall impression of what works as social-psychological barriers to the self-government of the migrant members has to do with their self-images, a lack of self-confidence and an obvious ambivalence in taking a public stance in representing themselves. Only a few seem sufficiently politically committed, no one filled the power vacuum. My last experience (July 4th) may support this interpretation even further.

The Second Round: Who Speaks for Us? Near Death Experience and Resuscitation

Until July 2002, no one had taken the position of the president, and the vice president had led the board. The lower district court requested an election of a president, otherwise the association would have to be disbanded and liquidated. New board elections were called for. In the run up to the elections, one member of the board, himself an artist and a founding member, was willing to run for president. Yet, to the surprise of everyone, he indicated at the general meeting that he would not run for president. (As he told me later, after a little dispute with some members the evening before, he felt not enough backing among potential board members.) The association would have to be disbanded and liquidated that very evening. No one else wanted to run for president. At the very last

moment, I decided to stand for the position. After that, six other women volunteered to be candidates for the remaining posts. We were elected as the new board of KQ¹¹.

The idea of writing about the conflict within this association had been brewing for some time. When I had planned this paper, ‘action research’ was not my intention. I could gain some useful insights, maybe even more so because of my observer position. Taking over the presidency seriously limits my self-reflection. At this point, I would like to reflect upon certain aspects of myself as a researcher, which differ from most other members of KQ and which played a role in getting myself involved, both as ethnographer and as active member.

As a binational having lived in several countries not sharing the same discriminatory and racist experiences of the majority of migrants, I grew up differently. I am educationally privileged, having a university degree and an international education. My family does not have a working class migrant background. With an academic father living as a political dissident in exile, I became politicized early on. I lacked any understanding of municipal cultural policy, I was a true “stranger” in that respect. I was not involved in the conflict within the board as I hardly knew anyone when I joined. My bias may be to underestimate: a) how much members of non-German origin are still influenced in their communication and thinking by their cultures of origin; b) what impeding effects discriminatory experiences may have on competencies in conflict resolution. I sympathize with the sacrificed expert, as I also joined as an outsider and as expert in intercultural issues. Besides he, like my father, is a political dissident, and therefore we share a certain degree of fighting spirit and self-assertion. Thus, I may lack empathy for other migrant biographies.

¹¹ In Köhl’s research, only 20% of the interlocutors were women.

Discussion

The near death of KQ and its consequent resuscitation by myself and six other women was a rather strange and unplanned experience, particularly as I was working on this paper. But the deadlock situation of coming together in a general meeting and being confronted with such an expected turn around fits the parricide-scene quite well. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud (1912/1999) introduces the construction of the “primordial crowd” (‘Urhorde’), an attempt to sketch prehistoric social development. Drawing from theories by Smith and Atkinson, Freud (1912) describes the basic pattern of the parricide in the primordial crowd to be driven by the perception of a despotic father who would not let his sons grow up as men and leave them their own reign with their own wives. The sons unite against the father, kill and even devour him. Freud suggests that the killing of the father leads to a decay of the group (1912/1999, 172f.). A power vacuum results, due to rivalry among themselves the brothers cannot legitimize someone from among their own ranks to follow the father’s position. Freud sees here the beginning of social contracting, including the incest taboo and exogamy, upon which “[A] good part of [...] the perfection of power was passed over to the women, the period of the matriarchate began” (Freud, 1950/1999, 188). Maybe it needed women to take over the board of KQ. But I do not want to overestimate this indeed very interesting parallel.

I would like to go back to the phenomenon of the paralysis of the board. The ability to debate about points of dissent is rather underdeveloped among the migrant members. Conflict communication is avoided. There

seems a lack of awareness of the fact that groups do not have naturally shared ways of dealing with differences in opinion, in modes of talk, in coming to common decisions, but need to negotiate these. How far these barriers are rooted within the German migrant socialization is beyond the reach of the present contribution.

Mario Erdheim (1982) describes various forms of internalized mastery, mechanisms that stabilize existing conditions of power. With reference to Parin's (1978) case analysis of political events, he states: "The repetition of the basic personality conflicts triggered by political conflicts is the gateway for mastery to enter the individual and settle in. To the same extent as the individual does not succeed in solving his inner conflicts, these become potential bases for masters" (417, translation by S. S-K).

Maybe here is a potential starting point for developing a program in communication education that accounts for the particularities of migrant needs for people working in NGOs¹²: giving them a chance to reflect upon their own "internalizations of mastery" and thus maybe letting them find ways of "solving" inner and social conflicts more consciously.

Conclusion

These present interpretations serve as preliminary working hypotheses which do not claim the status of results. The problems KQ experienced within its board, its self-governing organization, seem partly due to a specific lack of experience and abilities to deal with group conflict as well as to take a public stand in representing themselves.

¹² The need for such programmes is expressed in Kabis (2002). Compare also von der Fuhr (1998).

This structural change is one side of the coin political change: the other is the communication, certain forms, certain ways which correspond with the political requirements for change. The communication people display in order to change the status quo also needs to change. Strategies of irony and satire will not be enough to move things. What is needed is political power. This requires a certain degree of self-reflexivity, communicative efforts for compromises beyond black and white. The interrelationship between political change (in minority cultural policy) and communication (in minority cultural discourse) shows a need for both structural changes and political communication education.

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