

Narrating Migration

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# WORLDS IN MOTION

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## **WORLDS IN MOTION**

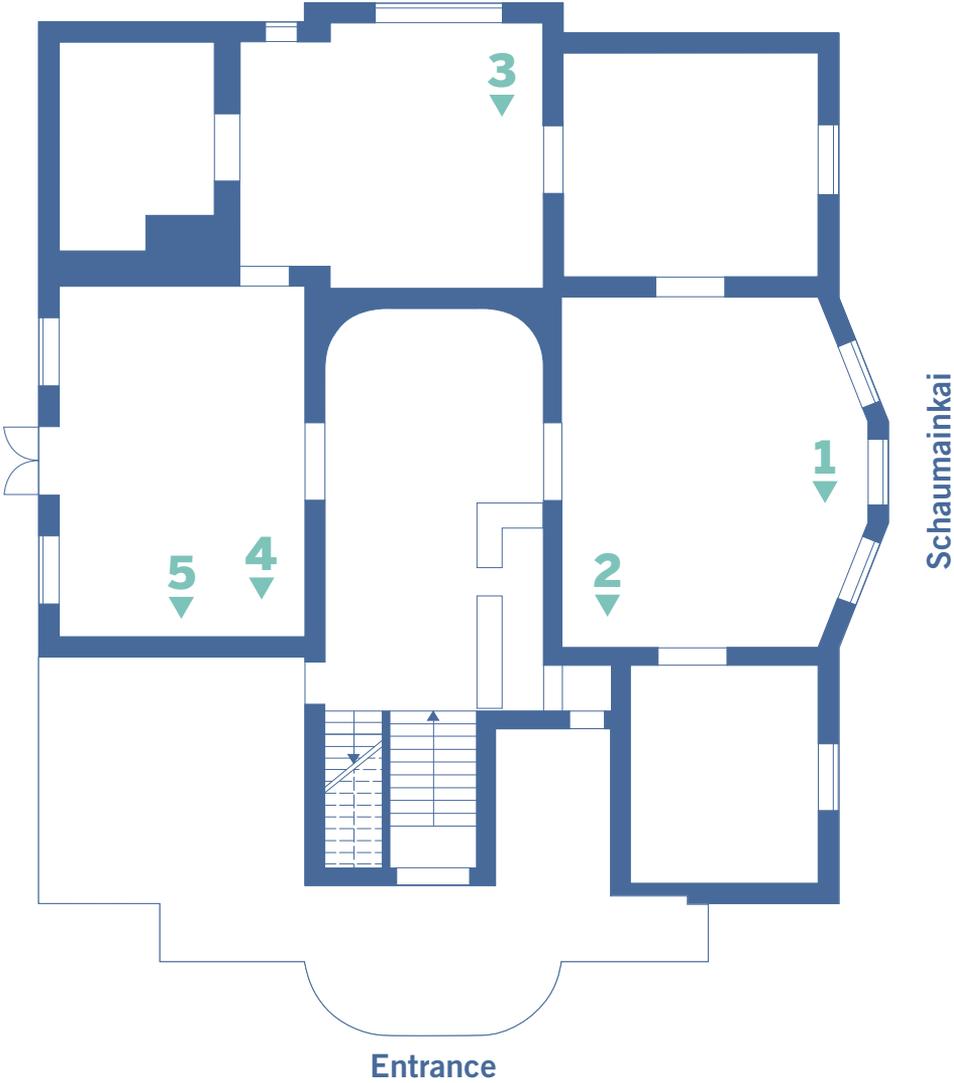
### **Narrating Migration**

Throughout the world, people used to be and still are in motion. Their lifestyles, languages, music, arts and handicrafts also migrate with them. Much of what is regarded as 'authentic' in a culture actually turns out to be imported when examined more closely. Our cultural realms of experience are repeatedly intertwined and intermeshed. New cultural phenomena are thus constantly being created by encounters and exchanges.

In Europe the term migration is often equated with the political dimensions of people fleeing and being displaced. In WORLDS IN MOTION we want to extend the definition of this notion. Various tales are told: of settlement movements in the past, of trade routes and the spread of artistic and musical styles, and of refugees and economic migrants. These illustrate various facets of migration – both positive and negative. The curators take the museum's own collections as a starting point for asking associated questions, showing not only how various cultures have been engaged in processes of exchange since time immemorial, but also revealing that these (historical) encounters link today's cultures and societies. This is supplemented by the Dutch-Moluccan artist collective Teru and its cooperative project MAHINA, which highlights how different women in the second and third generations negotiate their cultural identity.

The stories emphasise that migration can be more than merely a reaction to or cause of problems; at the same time it is also an important mechanism for establishing new ways of living together in a constantly changing world.

# GROUND FLOOR



# 1



## THE STAR COMPASS

The Austronesian peoples developed a remarkable navigation technique for sailing the high seas, and evidence of it can still be traced today even to the Malay Archipelago. This technique, which also incorporates the wind, currents, the swell of the sea and the flight of birds, is largely based on observing the stars and other celestial bodies.

Since stars always rise in the east and set in the west at the same points on the horizon, a navigator can set a course for a rising or setting star to reach an island in that direction. This 'star compass' system of orientation on the high seas divides the horizon into 32 segments. Rising and setting stars and constellations are assigned to the various segments, together with the Pole Star near the North Pole, and the five southernmost points of the star compass through which the Southern Cross passes every night as it rotates around the celestial south pole. However, the star compass was not an instrument carried on board. Navigators only drew the compass with cowry shells and corals to illustrate and teach it. The complex sequences of rising and setting stars together with star courses connecting certain stars and islands had to be learnt by heart.

Austronesian astronomy and navigation are closely linked to mythology and the cosmological worldview. After the god Tane caused the creation of the world by separating Rangi and Papa – the sky father and earth mother – he supported the sky on four pillars shaped from the brightest stars in the night sky. These are the corner points of the universe and the basis for navigating the high seas.

In the east, Tane supported Rangi's neck on *Tautoru* – the three stars in Orion's belt – that on its way from east to west marks the celestial equator. In the north-east, he rested one of the sky father's shoulders on *Matariki* (the star cluster of the Pleiades).

This pillar shows the position of the rising sun on 21 June, the day of the southern winter solstice. Rangi's other shoulder in the south-east rests on *Takura* (Sirius) and indicates sunrise at the southern summer solstice on 22 December. Finally, in the south-west, Tane supported Rangi's feet on *Rehua* (Antares in the constellation of Scorpio).

At daybreak in early June, at the time of the winter solstice in the southern hemisphere, the four pillars are in their original position during the creation of the world and initiate a new annual cycle.

## 2

### AUSTRONESIA'S 'BOTANICAL GARDEN'

Many plants now considered typical for the Pacific islands were first introduced by the Austronesians from Southeast Asia. The taro root and breadfruit tree were important staple foods. Since fermented breadfruit mash remains edible for weeks, this was especially important as a source of food on long sea voyages.

The coconut is one of the key cultivated plants brought by the Austronesians. Aside from the nourishing coconut meat and water, the fibrous husks could be used to make ropes resistant to sea water. The paper mulberry tree was also especially important, cultivated across the Pacific region for its soft inner bark to make barkcloth fabrics.

But the Austronesians also added new plants to their botanical stocks. From South America, they imported the sweet potato. This facilitated the colonisation of New Zealand, where neither taro nor breadfruit grow well. As paper mulberry trees for barkcloth do not thrive in New Zealand's harsher climate, the Austronesians there developed a new technique of plaiting fibres from New Zealand flax. On Vanuatu, they discovered kava, whose roots can produce an intoxicating drink. As a ceremonial

drink, kava came to have an important role in rituals. In contrast, the custom of chewing betel nut, a major stimulant in South-east Asia and Melanesia, disappeared entirely. Many plants that we now think of as typical for the Pacific Islands were first introduced by the Austronesians from Southeast Asia or were added to their stocks while they were travelling to other islands.

### 3

## **REBAB REBEC RABECA**

The *rabab* is a bowed spike fiddle that spread via trade between the Arab world and Southeast Asia, extending as far as modern-day Indonesia. The *rabab* is now an integral component of Javanese and Balinese gamelan orchestras. For a long time, a stringed instrument derived from the *rabab* also played a key musical role at European courts: the *rebec* was a favourite accompanying instrument at Spanish, French, German and British courts in the High Middle Ages.

By the tenth century at the very latest, there was a lively scholarly and cultural exchange between Europe, Byzantium and the Arab world. This was partly the result of Arab kingdoms conquering Andalusia and Sicily, but also stemmed from accounts given by returning crusaders. In addition to knowledge about mathematics and astrology, the *rabab* became well-known and highly popular in Europe. The material from which it was made, the number of strings and the construction gradually changed until the *rebec* was played resting on the shoulder rather than being held upright. Only in the fifteenth century did this precursor to the violin fall out of favour in court circles when it became regarded as too rustic. It is still possible to find stringed instruments in Brazil known as *rabeca*, which have their roots in the *rebec*: the instrument became familiar there in the wake of Portuguese colonisation.

## 4

### INSPIRATIONAL WINGS

The wing motif is one of the Javanese graphic elements to be used – frequently in an adapted form – on waxprints for the African market. In Java, the heart of Indonesian batik production, the *lar* wing motif counts as a particularly high-ranking symbol representing, for example, the Hindu God Vishnu and the monarchy.

On this batik from the central Javanese sultanate of Yogyakarta, the wings have been combined with architectural elements and the *meru* symbol. According to Hindu beliefs, the three central deities Vishnu, Brahma and Shiva live on the mountain Mahameru. Consequently, these fabrics are valued very highly and are worn either by representatives of the sultanate or by bridal couples.

The motifs and the use of batik already make reference to Java's multifaceted culture. Java was long subjected to powerful Hindu influence, under the rule of the Hindu Majapahit kingdom. The impact of Arab traders from the thirteenth century onwards strengthened the position of Islam, which led to the establishment of sultanates. However, numerous Hindu elements are still found on batik fabrics in central Java.

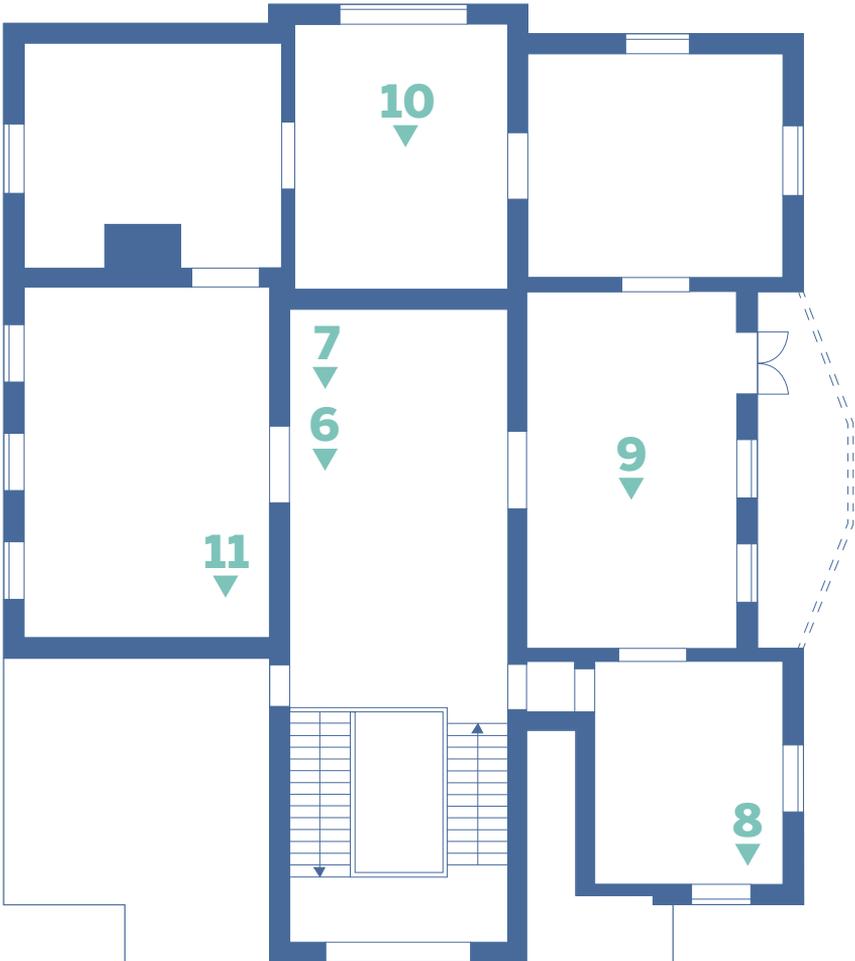
## 5

### IT'S THE LABEL THAT COUNTS

The huge success of Dutch waxprints in West Africa led to companies in Great Britain and Switzerland investing in this sector too. Vlisco, which was first established as P. F. Vlissingen & Co in Helmond in the Netherlands in 1846, has remained not only as the sole producer in Europe but is also the undisputed market leader. Since independence, waxprints have also been produced in African states, in some cases under the auspices of Europeans. The main competition for these producers since 2005 has come from Chinese textile companies.

The growing popularity of these fabrics has also resulted in elaborate waxprints being imitated by simple screen printing. Known as fancyprints, these materials are only printed on one side and are significantly cheaper. Local traders in West Africa often offer both the original fabrics and their imitations for sale to different market segments. The printed selvage on original fabrics listing the producer and place of origin is thus frequently incorporated into the cut of the clothing, because it confers prestige upon the wearer.

FIRST FLOOR



Schaumainkai

## 6

### **MILLI BAU – ALONG THE SILK ROAD**

Milli Bau was a journalist and photographer who spent many years in Asia and amassed a considerable collection of photographs, books, diaries and other writings. She was born in Darmstadt in 1906 and lived in Hamburg from 1932 onwards with her husband, Waldemar Bau. After his death in 1956 she gave up her Hamburg home, bought an adapted Volkswagen van and set off on her journey along the Silk Road. She travelled from the Mediterranean via the Arabian peninsula to reach Asia. Her constant companion was her Rolleiflex camera, which captured her experiences and impressions in the form of snapshots, documentary images and even aesthetic travel photography. Between 1968 and 1974 she lived in Tehran as a correspondent for the newspaper *Die Welt*, then in the 1980s she was a cultural expert on the cruise ship MS Europa, and in the 1990s she promoted cultural exchange with the Yakutia region of Russia. Milli Bau died in Darmstadt in 2005.

## 7

### **TRANSLATION OF THE NEWSPAPER ARTICLE A COURAGEOUS FEMALE REPORTER – WEST GERMAN REPORTER MILLI BAU TRAVELS AROUND THE WORLD**

(by Su Yu-Zhen)

A 'gipsy'<sup>1</sup> woman roams around in a horse drawn carriage, working as a fortuneteller to earn her life's income. A Lady from Western Germany travels all over the world and wherever she goes is her home. This West German lady, the reporter Milli Bau (see picture), recently came to Free China [i.e. Taiwan] to report on the Kinmen artillery action [the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis].

<sup>1</sup> The term 'gipsy' is a mostly negatively connotated designation used to refer to persons belonging to the group of the Sinti and Roma. As a collective term it unites negative prejudices with romanticizing clichés and is rejected by the group itself as discriminatory. It is repeated here as an authentic translation of the original.

### **She lost her loved ones**

After losing her loved ones – her husband, her son, and her parents – she started her nomadic life. At the time Milli Bau was 50 years old and carried a broken heart. With the greatest courage she started to explore this unfamiliar world. She wanted to employ her ears, her eyes and her hands to record what happens in different parts of the world and to report it to the people of the world. As a result she became a well-known columnist.

### **She brings a ‘home’ to report the news**

As a columnist, the first thing she did was not to buy a pen or manuscript paper or a typewriter; instead Milli Bau bought a car – a car which had a fully equipped bathroom, bedroom and kitchen and was decorated like a house.

(Most likely from a Taiwanese newspaper dated Friday, 15 October 1958)

## **8**

### **WHAT DOES IT MATTER?**

Language represents a symbolic level in social interactions where we express attitudes and dispositions without necessarily being aware of it. In this sense, the question ‘Where do you come from?’ can become a means to ascribe ‘otherness’ and deny membership of (German) society.

The question creates classifications, which are always linked to inequalities. These inequalities become problematic when they are value-charged, i.e., when one constructed category is presented as better than the other. We encounter such processes in many different ways in daily life.

To describe these processes, sociologists use the term *symbolic violence*, a concept developed by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. *Symbolic violence* may be more ‘subtle’ than physical violence, but is no less powerful – except that we are not as aware of the fact. It is symbolically transported on the levels of language, gesture, expression and on the level of images. ‘Where do you come from?’, for example, may convey to a person ‘marked as a migrant’ that she or he cannot possibly come from here.

*Symbolic violence* builds on social and power relations and consolidates them. It constantly creates and reproduces the asymmetrical relationship between groups of people. Crucially, however, such societal value judgements are historically rooted and reflect socio-political developments. For this reason they can also be changed.

## 9

### **MIGRATION AND RELIGION IN FRANKFURT**

Company proprietors who have migrated from their homelands to Frankfurt, a city with international character, not only share products, culinary specialities and services from various countries with their Frankfurt customers, many of them also integrate good-luck symbols and individually decorated altars from various religious and cultural contexts into the interior design of their business premises. A shelf, an alcove at floor level, an entranceway or an empty furniture cornice: these can all be used for housing good-luck symbols or representations of deities and saints with whom the proprietors have possibly grown up. These specially decorated spots might be considered places for remembrance or contemplation, or it is hoped they will bring protection or wealth, or perhaps they are part of the narrative about someone’s country of origin. Far beyond any economic interests, they make it possible for the proprietors to enjoy a mutual relationship with their customers based on exchange. Altars in semi-public space expand the

spectrum of religions in urban society and influence religious coexistence in the sense of creating a new shared reality in Frankfurt. The link between migration and religion is highlighted with three narrative examples in the form of video interviews, which are presented in conjunction with an altar from the Weltkulturen Museum collection created by Brazilian artists.

## 10

### SYMBOLIC

In the diaspora, specific objects from the cultures of origin are often ascribed a special meaning. Fitrah Umarella is certain that every Moluccan family in the Netherlands has a conch shell (*tahuri*) at home. Quite apart from its function as an instrument, it is clearly associated with 'home' and a Pan-Moluccan identity.

The Moluccas are situated between Sulawesi and New Guinea and can be divided into approximately 19 island groups. While cultures differ from island to island, there are many shared features – and the same is true of material culture. The conch shell is found on many of the archipelago's islands. The same is true for the shield (*salawaku*), the machete (*parang*) and the hourglass drum (*tifa*), which can all appear in a number of variations.

The shield, machete and drum are also used for the *cakalele*, the Moluccan war dance which Indonesian school books categorise as 'typical' for the region, although it does not even exist on some of the islands. Dance and music play a central role in the cultural associations of the Moluccan diaspora, and so the *cakalele* and other dances have been passed on down the generations. The community's online magazine is called *tifa* after the drum, and the shield and sword are used in other contexts as symbols defining its identity. Particularly from the third generation onwards, the objects have become symbols of a Pan-Moluccan identity – although someone's relationship to their family's island of origin remains the most important affiliation.

# 11 ▼

## **HANDS – TURKISH IMMIGRANTS OF THE FIRST GENERATION AND THEIR MEMORIES (2011)**

(edited after Thomas Hoeren)

*Hands* is a series of photographs by Prof. Dr. Thomas Hoeren and Edzard Herlyn documenting the paths taken by first-generation Turkish migrants to Germany. The images focus on the subjects' hands as an expression of why the migrants came to Germany: hard manual labour for decades on end, down mines and in hot steel furnaces. But above all, the hands are shown holding something, and expressing something. They are intended to show what was important to the first generation, what they brought with them from Turkey and what they kept with them for decades as mementos of their homeland.

The photos encourage us to reflect upon the feeling of being strangers, foreigners, outsiders. What would happen if we left Germany due to financial hardship or simply followed our dreams of a better life? What would we take with us? What would our hands look like after 30, 40 or 50 years? What would remain of us abroad, torn between the cultures and social expectations of our homeland and a foreign country?

# WORLDS IN MOTION

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## WHAT CAN I SEE?

Representation of a European,  
unknown artist from Angola,  
19th century,  
Weltkulturen Museum Collection

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