

**STORY:**

**KÖLSCH  
KÜLTÜR**

**BY MURAT GÜNGÖR & HANNES LOH**

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# Kölsch Kùltür

**Cosmopolitan, multicultural, cosmopolitan - this melting pot narrative is firmly anchored in the historical consciousness of the people of Cologne. And anyone who looks around the city's cultural scene will find plenty of evidence to support this thesis - from the Philharmonie to Afro-Trap. Only recently, the city guide "Cologne Cosmopolitan" by Milto Oulios was published, which presents the entire range of intercultural projects in Cologne and explores their potential. But what about the memory of Cologne's migrant culture of the past?**

Which city chronicle remembers Cologne's Yüksel Özkasap or Metin Türköz, who sold hundreds of thousands of records in the 1960s, 70s and 80s? Who knows that Türküola - the most successful independent label of the Bonn Republic - had its headquarters at Hansaring? And who has any idea of the influence that the lively cultural practice of guest workers and exiles had on the development of the Cologne music scene - from Arsch Huh to hip-hop?

## **In the beginning was Türküola**

There is this story and it has a beginning. In 1955, Yılmaz Asöcal came to Cologne to study German. He describes his life story impressively in the book "Nasil Kazandılar" (*How did you win?*) by Doğan Pürsün. To finance his studies, he worked as an interpreter for German employers. This had the advantage that he was close to the so-called guest workers and got to know their needs. According to music

expert Cevdet Yildirim, news and music from Turkey were high on the wish list of workers from Anatolia. Asöcal recognized the huge economic potential of this population group - because the German entrepreneurs saw the guest workers only as workers and not as customers. And so he founded his first company in 1964: Turkish-German Export. With this company, he created the blueprint for the countless import-export stores that now exist in all major German cities and whose range of goods is aimed primarily at migrants. Nowadays, one would speak of start-up qualities; but the truth is also: At that time, migrants were not allowed to start their own business without a German business partner. Accordingly, the young company was on the verge of going out of business when differences arose between Asöcal and his German partner. But Asöcal managed to get permission to set up a business on his own through a contact with Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski, an SPD federal politician from Cologne. Within a few years, he created a small empire: his Cologne-based company Türküola became the most important label for migrant music in Europe, and Asöcal became a successful entrepreneur who sold several million records through his structures. He also turned artists living in Turkey, such as Ibrahim Tatlıses, into stars in Germany. His record releases were accompanied by large advertising campaigns in Turkish newspapers. Today, not even a Wikipedia entry commemorates him. People like Asöcal did not wait for Cologne's civil society to offer them a platform, but took the initiative on their own to respond to the musical and cultural needs of migrants. In Germany, Cologne has long been the epicenter for migrant music. How could this development have passed the people of Cologne by?

## Metin Türköz conquers the dorms

Two biographies that could not be more different: Asöcal, a doctor of German studies and entrepreneur, meets guest worker Metin Türköz, who is employed at Ford and plays the saz (long-necked lute) in his spare time. After an impromptu concert by Türköz for the Turkish national holiday, the next day customers are standing in front of Türköla's door asking for Türköz's records. The story is quickly told: Contract, studio recordings and big sales. In 1967, Türköz's first single "Turist / Almanya Destani" was released. During his career as a songwriter, Türköz released 13 albums and 72 singles, on which he sings about the longing and homesickness of the first generation of guest workers, but also describes everyday working life and the conditions under which Ford workers had to earn their money. The German-Turkish director, DJ and music expert Nedim Hazar rightly calls Metin Türköz "the voice of the Turkish workers in Germany". Türköz cleverly plays with irony, multilingualism and neologisms in his songs in order to undermine power relations in the factories. The figure of the German foreman, the "Maestero," frequently appears in his songs, which he leads onto the ice with a wink. Türköz fills the cultural void of the people in the dorms and self-confidently creates an outlet for the inequalities experienced in the workplaces. Long before the word empowerment becomes a buzzword, Türköz offers his colleagues clever self-empowerment strategies. Imran Ayata, who together with Bülent Kullukcu released the compilation "Songs of Gastarbeiter" in 2013, even sees him as a forerunner of hip-hop culture: "For me, Metin Türköz is the first hip-hopper both in terms of attitude and approach. On the one hand, because he arranged his

music in a very collage-like way, similar to what happens later in sampling, and on the other hand, because he kept experimenting with a German-Turkish language mix."

## **With the submarine into the charts**

In 1970, something unusual happens. A Turkish song places in the top ten in both Germany and Austria. It stayed in the charts in Germany for eight weeks. It was not sung by Metin Türköz or Yüksel Özkasap, but by the pop singer Peter Alexander. The song was called "Oh Lady Mary" and was written by the Turkish film composer Metin Bükey. In Turkey, the song is played at almost every wedding, but there in the original as "Samanyolu". The fewest buyers of the single might have realized in 1970 that it was a Turkish folk song. Again the guest workers in the dormitories might have been irritated, since the Turkish text was rewritten as a German Schlager and also musically adapted to the German ears. This revealed the strict segmentation of the German music market, but also a cultural racism: On the one hand, a label like Türküola, which sold 800,000 units of the album "Beyaz Atli" alone (quadruple platinum by today's standards) through its import-export structures of Yüksel Özkasap, the "Nightingale of Cologne." On the other hand, German record companies such as Ariola, Polydor, Phonogram or Bellaphon did not open doors to these successful artists; but instead, as in the case of Peter Alexander, changed Turkish songs beyond recognition. "The Germans probably perceived this music as whining," suspects Türküola expert Yildirim. However, Asöcal also tried to gain a foothold in German Schlager with the founding of its subsidiary Teledisc with artists such as Jessy, Adam & Eve and Chris Christiansen, who had already

released a version of "Oh Lady Mary" on Teledisc a year before Peter Alexander.

## **Cologne as a transit country for exiles**

Turkey experienced military coups in 1971 and 1980, which were instrumental in causing political activists to leave the country. The repression also affected musicians, especially those who were in the tradition of the Aşık . These were bards and folk singers who always referred to social and political issues; and so many Turkish, Alevi and Kurdish musicians left Turkey to live in transit in Cologne for a few years. Among them were the artists Cem Karaca and Nedim Hazar. Cem Karaca was expatriated in 1979 and put on the wanted list by the Turkish police. He came to Cologne and quickly networked with other exiles, but also with the city's left-wing scene. In the beginning, Cem Karaca also worked with Türküola. However, his most important record in exile - "Die Kanaken" - was produced in collaboration with the left-wing Dortmund label Pläne. Long before rappers in the late 1990s and 2000s engaged with the term "Kanake," the Germans' favorite slur, Karaca made an attempt to undermine this racist attribution. Musician and actor Nedim Hazar also quickly makes friends in the cathedral city. He met Geo Schaller from Cologne, and the two musicians founded the band Yarinistan, released two albums and won the German Record Critics' Award. Yarinistan also quickly networked with the Cologne scene - Stefan Brings, for example, played bass guitar with Yarinistan in the early days. In his lyrics, Nedim Hazar also deals with the situation of migrant workers in Germany and promotes multicultural coexistence. Karaca, Hazar and other exiles bring important issues of the German-Turkish guest workers onto the agenda, although they have

different migration biographical experiences. As intellectuals and artists, they are not affected by the most pressing issues of the guest worker generation: they do not work in factories, have time to learn the German language, and move in circles where they hardly encounter racism. But as political artists, as Aşik, they take up the issues they find in their environment. And in Germany in the 1980s, that is above all the growing racism against migrant workers. "The Türküola artists consciously addressed a Turkish audience at that time," explains Kutlu Yurtseven, co-founder of the Keupstraße initiative, "it was the political exiles who addressed the German population for the first time and also consciously wrote lyrics in German." The group of exiles thus became an important bridge between the guest workers and a broad alliance of churches, trade unions and alternative movements resisting the "spiritual-moral turn" under Chancellor Helmut Kohl in the 1980s.

## **From Multicultural Dream to Hip Hop Plain Text**

The artists of Türküola addressed their songs to the first generation of migrant workers. When the political exiles from Turkey arrived, they made the problems of the guest workers' families in Germany visible to a German audience and combined their anti-racist criticism with a multicultural vision. This vision was also attractive to the children of the guest workers, who were sweepingly labeled "foreigners" in the 1980s Federal Republic and for whom the majority society had provided no place. It was the 2nd generation that vehemently demanded an equal place in German society. They confidently took up the question that the Cologne singer-songwriter Ozan Ata Canani had already formulated in his song "German Friends" in 1979: "And the children of these people are divided into two worlds, I am



Ata and I ask you, where do we belong now?" Ozan Ata Canani hit a nerve with this question and was invited with his band to appear on *Aktuelle Stunde* and Alfred Biolek on WDR television. The "children of these people" now struck a different note. They spoke plainly and found in the young hip-hop culture a form of expression within which they renegotiated the issues of participation, citizenship and racism. And when, in the early 1990s, the multicultural dream charred in the flames of Rostock, Mölln and Solingen, the young rappers took up the baton of political exiles. They shouted out their rage and didn't want to be objects of a paternalistic discourse about cultural discord. "Mölln and Solingen, those were events that paralyzed and shocked my parents," recalls Cologne rapper Kutlu Yurtseven, "but for us it was the signal: now more than ever! Now it's our turn!" But for Türküola artists like the experimental disco-folk group "Derdiyoklar," too, the strengthening racism of the 1980s and 1990s was a turning point and was reflected in songs like "Hop Hop Dazlaklar" (Stop! You Skinheads) and "Dear Gabi"; these songs are not only about criticism of neo-Nazi skinheads, but also about the xenophobic policies of the black-yellow government of the time: "Helmut Kohl and also Strauß, want foreigners out. Are we not human beings, dear Gabi?". Humanism, anti-racism and the fight for dignity connect Derdiyoklar with rappers like Kutlu Yurtseven. And the outrage over the burning houses and murdered people also brought an interest in the history of his own parents. In 2002, for example, Kutlu Yurtseven wrote the song "Denkmal" ("Memorial") for his father, in which he recounts his migration biography, but also makes visible the labor struggles of the first generation, such as the great Ford strike in 1973. For 30 years, Kutlu and Signore Rossi

have been mixing it up in the Cologne music scene as Microphone Mafia. They have played in small cellars and at large festivals, participated in the Arsch Huh initiative, played with the Höhnern at the Philharmonie and have been on the road with Holocaust survivor Esther Bejarano and her son Joram for many years on the stages of the Republic. Looking back, Kutlu says: "We children of guest workers were constantly told that we were sitting between two chairs and that this was a problem. But at some point we saw that as an achievement: If we don't really belong anywhere, then we don't have to choose. We're in transit, we can play with roles and identities and evolve."

Nedim Hazar's son, the Cologne rapper and actor Eko Fresh, also dedicated a track to his parents' migration story in 2012 - ten years after "Denkmal. His song "Der Gastarbeiter" tells the story of his mother's family, who came to Germany at the age of 15. The video for the song counts almost 4 million clicks on Youtube, and anyone who reads through some of the more than 5,000 comments on the song will notice what a nerve Eko Fresh has struck with the topic. He skillfully masters the balancing act between a social location in a migrant milieu and the status of a successful German musician who critically and ironically deals with the conditions in the country. On the one hand, he takes up the issues of German Turks and reflects them wisely (as in his current song "Aber..."), on the other hand, he is an artist who receives recognition from society because of his talent and performance. In addition, Eko Fresh's biography crosses the two main currents of Turkish migration: His father, Nedim Hazar, belongs to the political exiles; his mother's family, on the other hand, came to Germany in the course of the recruitment agreement with Turkey.

## **The Cologne Aşık tradition**

But is there an artistic continuity between the songwriters of the guest workers, the political exiles of the 1980s and the 2nd and 3rd generations of migrants in Germany? Can an arc be drawn from Metin Türköz to Ozan Ata Canani, Cem Karaca and Nedim Hazar to Kutlu Yurtseven and Eko Fresh? Sure, musically references can be traced via samples. But another line of tradition weighs heavier: Cologne musicians Eko Fresh and Kutlu Yurtseven tie in with the Aşık tradition with their lyrics. Musicologist Martin Greve points out that the Aşık interpreters were often the only source of news and stories in Eastern and Central Anatolia until the middle of the 20th century and are still known for their socially critical and political song lyrics afterwards. The Aşık were enlighteners, preservers of knowledge and disseminators of knowledge. In the age of Youtube, Twitter and Facebook, a new Aşık generation is taking up topics that threaten to disappear in the noise of mainstream society. Eko Fresh tells stories that have not yet found a place in the curricula of German schools, and Kutlu Yurtseven recalls struggles, resistance and migrant knowledge that official historiography passes over without comment.

## **Quo vadis Cologne?**

Our historical longitudinal section of migrant music in Cologne is only one piece of the puzzle of a rich narrative. The Greek, Spanish, Italian or Korean immigrant groups have no less exciting stories to tell. And also the people who fled Iran, Iraq or Lebanon in the 1980s, the refugees from Syria, North Africa and Afghanistan who came to Germany in recent years - they all bring their knowledge,

their songs and experiences and influence and change the majority society. These narratives are multi-layered because immigrants are not a homogenous mass and their cultural articulations, empowerment strategies, and struggles differ. After all, it makes a difference whether one immigrates as a student, a labor migrant, an exile, or a refugee. The different social backgrounds influence one's view of the country of immigration and one's position in society.

But what do we do with these narratives, struggles and processes of transformation? How do we, who have lived here for a long time, want to remember them together with those who have come to us? Doesn't looking to the past determine actions in the present, changing options for the future? Narratives of migrant self-empowerment have the power to challenge the rigid positions of national attributions and challenge processes of social change. Such dynamics make societies more complex, diverse, and progressive. One way of remembering and preserving is sought by the Documentation Center and Museum on Migration in Germany e.V. (DOMID) in Cologne, which has been working for decades to establish a public migration museum. But we can also ask ourselves why there is still no Metin-Türköz School, no Özkasap Square and no Asöcal Street. We can ask ourselves why artists and activists like Nedim Hazar or Kutlu Yurtseven have not yet received any public recognition. Or why Eko Fresh's lyrics are not yet in the textbooks. In the past, the people of Cologne have proven that they can rescue buried stories and add them to the collective memory. Bartholomäus Schink, Mucki Koch or Jean Jülich are known to many people today. In two years, it will be the 60th anniversary of the labor recruitment agreement with Turkey. It would be a good

occasion to make the history and cultural heritage of the immigrants and their children visible.

*This text is dedicated to Necla Türköz, the wife of Aşık Metin Türköz, who passed away unexpectedly on February 3, 2019.*

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