

# Going Back Home through One's Language

Romanian Diaspora in Germany

Bearbeitet von  
Gabriela Goudenhooff

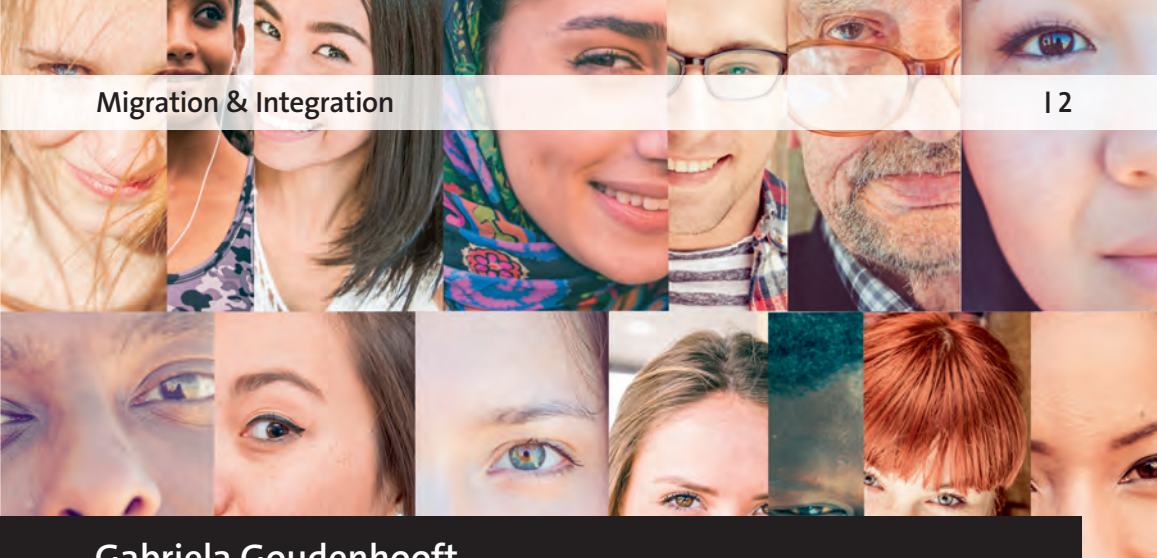
1. Auflage 2016. Taschenbuch. 96 S. Softcover  
ISBN 978 3 8487 3675 1

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Gabriela Goudenhooff

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Nomos

Migration & Integration

is edited by

Dr. Anna Mratschkowski, Ruhr-Universität Bochum

Volume 2

Gabriela Goudenhooff

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**The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek** lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>

ISBN 978-3-8487-3675-1 (Print)  
978-3-8452-8027-1 (ePDF)

**British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-3-8487-3675-1 (Print)  
978-3-8452-8027-1 (ePDF)

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Goudenhooff, Gabriela  
Going Back Home Through One's Language  
Romanian Diaspora in Germany  
Gabriela Goudenhooff  
96 p.  
Includes bibliographic references.

ISBN 978-3-8487-3675-1 (Print)  
978-3-8452-8027-1 (ePDF)

1. Edition 2016

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## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, people's mobility around the globe, in a globalised world and an enlarged European Union, is questioning not only the classical patterns and paradigms of conceiving social structures and social actions, but also some special ties like the one between identity and nationality, involving both "imagined" homelands and real places of habitation, as is the "physical neighbourhood" and "cultural proximity" (Bauman, 2011: 36). The awareness of the proximity of otherness should not be limited to a "position associated with status", but it is to be seen as a "quality of interaction" (Rosanvallon, 2011: 208).

Based on Bauman's concept of "liquid world", extended to "liquid migration" by Engbersen, I will use expressions such as *liquid diaspora* and *fluid identity*, with respect to the Romanian community living in Germany. Transnational spaces, global communication and diasporic communities face two opposite trends: a more pronounced and rapid modernization of means and the ineluctable power of symbols and cultural formation of origin. Not only casual, mother tongue gets to be used in a symbolic way, playing a captious role comforting as a refugee place, in the continuous dynamics of shaping fluid identities.

The notion of diaspora has had a long journey and still it is the subject of scholar definitions, losing or achieving connotations and being extrapolated to such extent that today, as "an all-purpose word" (Faist, 2010), it has come to designate almost any group living out of the country of origin and developing a self-conscience, an emergent identity and specific relationships with homeland and hostland. Conceived as "imagined" or real communities, the revived interest in studying the diaspora comprises almost every aspect of this old but also modern or maybe postmodern form of social existence.

Migrant transnationalism, on the other hand, conceived with the meaning of Vertovec's idea of "practices and institutions linking migrants, people and organizations in their homelands or elsewhere in a diaspora" (2009: 13), focusing perception on the prominence of the practice of cross-border migration, should make us revisit classical and new paradigms on migration. Though the paper's topic concerns the Romanian community in the German-speaking Europe, I shall dwell only on some contemporary reflections on the new forms of migration and transnationalism, as is the concept of



## 1. Introduction

*liquid migration* developed by Godfried Engbersen (2013), characterized by: new geographical patterns, as it is the case of EU enlargement and Romania's accession in 2007; new types of migrants (the *post-industrial migrant* and the temporary worker from Central and Eastern Europe, for example); residence status divided into: *citizenship*, based on nationality, *denizenship* status generated by a permanent residence and formal acceptance, and *alienship*, temporary residence status for seasonal migrants and undocumented migrants; new survival strategies like self-employment, informal support, crime etc.

Keeping in mind all these approaches and the sociological, anthropological, cultural and philosophical theories, in our attempt to reveal how identity is communicated, negotiated and mediated in a specific community (Romanians in Germany), another question arises: is this community diaspora or a transnational community? The research carried out highlights features from both categories, as I will show.

### 1.1. Diaspora, transnationalism, migration

The notion of diaspora had a long journey and still it is the subject of scholar definitions, losing or achieving connotations and being extrapolated to such extent that today, as “an all-purpose word” (Faist, 2010), it came to designate almost any group living out of the country of origin and developing a self-conscience, an emergent identity and specific relationships with homeland and host land. Conceived as “imagined” or real communities, the revived interest in studying the diaspora comprises almost every aspect of this old but also modern or maybe postmodern form of social existence.

The use of the concept of diaspora in very different contexts (academic writing, political discourse, institutional strategies, media or journalistic discourse), it is also a reason and source of some ambiguities. Conceived as any national group of people scattered from their homeland to other places around the globe, or as national segments of population dispersed outside their traditional homeland, it is the object of interest of a lot of research, all the more because nowadays one speaks about different forms and types of diaspora. Robin Cohen for instance is talking about *victim diaspora*, *labour diaspora*, *imperial diaspora*, *trade and business diaspora*, *homeland diaspora*, *cultural diaspora*<sup>1</sup>. And the discourse on diaspora itself reveals a lot

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1 Robin Cohen, *Global Diaspora. An introduction*, second edition, Routledge, London and New York, 2008.

1.1. *Diaspora, transnationalism, migration*

of aspects of the phenomenon: social, cultural, linguistic, economic, politic, communicational, and historical, which occur wherever the idea of population dispersion appears: “Where once were dispersions, there now is diaspora”<sup>2</sup>.

Given these many contexts, broad meanings and purposes of using the term *diaspora*, it is maybe too harsh to label the spread of literature on diaspora as misuse, since even in the recent decades its acceptance has been exceeding the original meaning<sup>3</sup> and the link to the Jewish, Armenian or Greek groups and/or religious feature.

The proliferation of diaspora’s discourse is also related to post-modernism in the global age (Cohen, 2008). Robin Cohen highlights the link between diaspora mobilization and globalization, diaspora’s mobilization being made by the contribution of several conditions and factors: *a globalized economy* enabling grater connectivity; *new forms of international migration* – limiting and fragmenting family ties otherwise specific to permanent settlements; *the development of cosmopolitan sensibilities* specific to many “global cities”; *the revival of religion as a focus on social cohesion*, linked in many ways with the diasporic phenomenon (2008: 141).

In modern or post-modern societies, we can apply the extended notion of diaspora in all the situations where we can find some common features as they were synthetized by Safran (1991), Cohen (2008: 161-162) and Vertovec (2009: 133):

- Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions;
- Alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions;
- A collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history and achievements;
- An idealization of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation;
- The development of a return movement that gains collective approval;

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2 Kachig Tölölyan, “Rethinking diaspora (s): stateless power in the transnational moment”, in *Diaspora: a journal of transnational studies*, 5(1), 1996, p. 3.

3 “The word ‘diaspora’ derives from the Greek *diaspeirō* ‘to distribute’; it is a compound of *speirō*, ‘to sow, to scatter’ like seed, and *dia-* ‘from one end to the other’. The term has, of course, become associated with the Jewish historical experience, and hence is associated with being a dispersed people sharing a common religious and cultural heritage”. (Vertovec, 2009: 129).

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- A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long period of time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate;
- A troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting at least a lack of acceptance or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group;
- A sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement; and
- The possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.

To these features Safran underlines the ultimate “triadic relationship” between “(1) a collectively self-identified ethnic group in one particular setting, (2) the group’s co-ethnics in other parts of the world, and (3) the homeland states or local contexts whence they or their forebears came” (Vertovec, 2009: 133). These relations could be a starting point of an endeavour of explaining the vital social role which diaspora is playing as an agent of development in their homeland<sup>4</sup> and as an influential agent also in the host country, from a cultural but also economic and demographic point of view. The diaspora’s dynamic is also an important issue to be studied in international relations research.

Moreover, in order to define and uncover the limit within which diaspora might be used as a modern notion, Rogers Brubaker (2005: 5) has underlined three major theoretical poles: dispersion in space (“trans nationality out of the borders”), orientation to a “homeland” – a real or even an imagined one, as Anderson would describe it defining the notion of “nation” and boundary-maintenance (“the preservation of a distinctive identity vis-à-vis a host society (societies”).

Nowadays, by diasporans, one is targeting in a very confusing way “immigrants, guest-workers, ethnic and ‘racial’ minorities, refugees, expatriates and travellers” (Vertovec, 2009: 131-132). Anyway, one chooses to define this term while staying true to the idea of nation, thought as an “imagined community”<sup>5</sup> or as, before him, Hugh Seton-Watson called it a “fictitious nation” (1977: 5).

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4 “They bridge the gap between the individual and society, between the local and the global, between the cosmopolitan and the particular. Diasporas can be used to spread liberal democratic values to their home countries” (Cohen, 2008: 174).

5 “I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives

1.1. *Diaspora, transnationalism, migration*

Nevertheless, Manuel Castells has criticized the theory of the nation imagined as a community, observing that the distinction between “real” and “imagined” communities is not very useful from an analytical point of view and “empirically inadequate” beyond, of course, the natural demystification of ideologies of “essentialist nationalism à la Michelet” (2010: 31-32). He believes that ethnicity, religion, language and territory can neither build, *per se*, nations, nor, induce nationalism, but “shared experience” can.

In and despite the crisis of legitimacy our world is facing, Castells thinks that power continues to exist and is still ruling society through new forms and “new codes of information and in the images of representation around which societies organize their institutions, and people build their lives, and decide their behaviour. The sites of this power are people’s minds” (Idem, 425). There are “multiform networks”, there is “mass self-communication” (*autocomunicación de masas*)<sup>6</sup> and all of them are staying under the power of identity.

Here we are structuring the very successful idea of nation, revisiting the idea of imagination and its critics, using as a common issue the idea of representation and self-representation and, as in all forms of representation, we have to deal with language, because no representation could be formed outside language and lacks words as a vehicle of image.

In short, all terms: diaspora, transnationalism and migration operate in this context<sup>7</sup> as cross-borders entities/processes. Diaspora and transnationalism involve nuanced studies and some accuracy and specificity in application, while the mainstream public discourse easily uses migration as a general, non-specific term.

The concept of diaspora integrates the idea of geographical dispersion of a population, the development of a specific consciousness, a myth of homeland associated with nostalgia and a suspended possibility of an eventual return, distinctive responses and attachments towards homeland and host country based on a shared cultural identity.

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the image of their communion” – (Anderson, 2006: 5-6)

6 See also Constantin Schifirnet: “a new form of communication by which the individual exposes himself in front of a wide audience through new media” (2014: 260)

7 The clarification of the international context is necessary also when one may speak about internal migration.