

Immigrants in Berlin

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Any general discussion of immigrants and immigration policy in Berlin is also a discussion of real, specific men and women who came from abroad, for whatever reason. Therefore this essay begins by relating ten short stories of immigrants living in Berlin-Neukölln, a district that is characterized both by ethnic diversity and by poverty. The author works as director of cultural affairs there, and her affinity to the neighborhood has shaped her view of the situation in Berlin as a whole.

People

Elszbieta R., 45, is a beautiful woman who came to Berlin twenty-one years ago from Szczecin, Poland. She had earned a Masters degree in bookkeeping and business management. When she left Poland in 1986, it was more for economic than for political reasons, although the military government disturbed her. Elszbieta obtained a “short-term residence permit” in Germany. This was a special kind of status between asylum and residency that was used often for Polish immigrants. Very importantly, it allowed her to work. Yet she had difficulty finding a long-term job. Her memory for numbers is perfect, but her German is not very good, and she is very anxious to talk. So it is difficult to uncover her potential. It takes a long time to make her laugh.

Not being able to find a job working with her beloved numbers, Elszbieta is currently working at the reception desk of a bodybuilding studio. She is married to a German. Every Sunday she goes to the Catholic Church of St. Dominicus to partake in a Polish mass and to be with the Polish community, which is otherwise a rather inconspicuous minority in Berlin.

Manfred M., 67, is the great-great grandson of one of the first immigrants to Berlin-Neukölln, which was formerly called Rixdorf. His ancestors arrived at Rixdorf in 1737 as

Bohemian refugees, expelled from their home in the Habsburg Empire because they professed their faith in the Protestantism that they had inherited from the Bohemian Brothers. The Prussian king welcomed them, happy to gain qualified workers after the devastation of the Thirty Years' War. Bohemian refugees in Rixdorf received the privilege of having their own settlement, three churches, a school, and the right to speak the Czech language. They lived for centuries in a kind of ghetto or, as we would call it today, a parallel society. They were not allowed to marry a "stranger," and there was a ban on sharing culture and entertainment with the "Aborigines." Their religion, the Moravian Brotherhood (*Brüdergemeine*), fenced them off. Only in the twentieth century did the Bohemian community begin to mix with the surrounding German civilization. The last woman who spoke only Czech died in 1920; and gravestones with Czech inscriptions can still be seen in a special graveyard.

The "Bohemian village," as it is still called today, has preserved its physical structures and unique cultural atmosphere. Its people remain proud of their identity. Manfred M., a serious looking man with his head held high, is the uncrowned king of the Bohemian village and its historian. Nothing happens in the village without his approval. He and his "Bohemian Brothers" are a kind of nobility, preserving carefully their legacy of difference.

Timo, 13, lives near the "Bohemian Village" but in an entirely different cultural sphere. He was born in Berlin, but his parents came from Serbia, looking for asylum because of the Balkan War. His father had been involved in the war, but nobody knows the details. Soon after they arrived in Berlin, *Timo's* father vanished, taking with him his money and protection of the family. His mother had suffered violence in the war, and her injuries remained. The family has some relatives in Berlin, damaged, too, by the war. They are not allowed to work, because they merely have a "tolerated" status.ⁱ *Timo's* mother speaks very

little German, and she has few opportunities to practice it. On the one hand she wants to return to their home, yet on the other she feels safe in her exile.

Timo speaks a very bad mixture of German street slang, Turkish, Arab, scatological language, and fantasy. He can understand and calculate numbers but barely reads words. He can be a very charming boy, with fantastic brown eyes; but he can also become insulting, from one moment to the next. Timo has been arrested for burglary five times and twice for bodily injury, but he is too young to be convicted. His mother does not understand what is going on with her son, and he does not care about her mourning. Sometimes he goes to school to meet friends. He has never experienced work in his family environment, so why should he strain himself to gain a professional education?

Hanan, 36, comes from Jordan. She is the wife of Mohammed, who is Iraqi. Mohammed had studied economics at Humboldt University in East Berlin before the fall of the Wall and is now organizing parts of the Arabic immigrant community in Berlin as chairman of the *Arabisches Kulturinstitut*. He is quite well integrated into German society and has citizenship. Hanan studied chemistry at home in Jordan. After getting her diploma, she entered into an arranged marriage, moving to Berlin to join her husband. She now has three children, 8, 5, and 2 years of age. She is a very attractive woman, dressed in decent clothes that follow the Islamic rules, of course with a head scarf. The family lives in a multi-story building and has little contact with the neighbours, most of whom are old and German. Used to a big family with a lot of social contacts, Hanan grew depressed and lonely for a while. She lost all her energy.

Now Hanan is trying very hard to learn German and to meet other women in order to escape her cage of loneliness. While the children are in school or kindergarten, she attends German lessons at the adult education centre. She has no hope of working as chemist, because she studied too long ago. She hopes to help her children get good grades in school,

but this is hard for her. Not understanding German, she does not grasp what they are learning, especially because they are being taught in a different way than she was. She does not understand the advice and recommendations of the teachers, who don't take the time to explain German methods to her. This makes her feel even more inferior. She hopes to make contacts with other women at public "intercultural meeting places," perhaps earning some money as well. Most of all she needs friendships with other women.

Gary F., 61, arrived in Berlin two days after his conscription into the U.S. Army for the Vietnam War. His grandparents were German Jews. His mother's parents found refuge in the United States, but the Nazis murdered his paternal grandparents in a concentration camp near Riga. Descendants of persecuted or murdered Jews have the right to German citizenship. After Gary moved to Neukölln, he studied German language and literature and became an expert on the cabaret, popular music, and everyday life of Jews in early twentieth-century Berlin. Alongside others Gary fought for the founding of the Jewish Museum and worked there for some years.

Gary is an outstanding outsider--a non-conformist full of inspiration and contentiousness. He has a huge collection of LP records. Sometimes he has a job, sometimes not. Several times he has benefited from the state's job-generating measures for the long-term unemployed. Sometimes his hair is red; sometimes his beard is black. He never has enough money, yet he is always generous. With a suitcase filled with artifacts and documents, he has toured the schools of Neukölln to tell about Jewish life and the Holocaust and simply to be touched--many children in our schools have never consciously encountered a living Jew.

Öner, 76, has lived for 46 years in Berlin. He came as a "guest worker" (*Gastarbeiter*), enlisted along with thousands of other foreigners by the German government to overcome labor shortages during the years of the "economic miracle." His home was a little village not far from Konya, Turkey. Originally he just wanted to stay for a

few years to make money for a good life at home. His wife Rahime stayed in Konya, looked after the little farm, and conceived children when Öner was at home on holiday. Öner had a job in the automobile industry and made good money. After several years he ordered his wife and three of the five children to Berlin. As he became closer with his colleagues in the factory work force and the trade union, his wife made friends with the other Turkish women living next door. He learned German, but she did not. It seemed to be unnecessary, because the stay in Berlin was supposed to end soon. But what does “soon” mean?

The children grew up in Berlin, and they never thought about going home to Anatolia. They became German citizens, married, and had children. Öner and his wife became grandparents; and as they grow older, they need more health care. While they live in their own Turkish world in the midst of Berlin, they remain nostalgic for the little Anatolian village where they were born. Even though they are mocked as the *Deutschländer* in the town, they have built a nice house there in the meantime. Every year they hope to go back. Yet every year there are reasons not to return--their friends, the mosque, the children, and the doctors are all in Germany.

Mayako, 53, is a composer from Japan who has lived in Berlin since 1985. After studying piano, she left Japan and decided to compose music informed by European traditions. She performed very successfully and worked together with European avant-garde musicians. She has a lot of students. Within the past ten years, Mayako has become aware of her Japanese roots, and she has integrated Japanese musical traditions into her music. A very personal musical language has emerged, a language that conserves cultural diversity.

Mayako is a friendly and restrained but very self-confident lady who lives in a middle-class, ethnically German part of Neukölln. She lives in an unusual building, a terraced house containing four studio flats and their gardens. When one enters her garden, one knows at once that another culture is dominant, and this impression grows when one goes into the

studio. The materials, the sparse furniture, the colours, the tea, the cups--all are far eastern. Only the grand piano is there to represent Europe. Mayako is good friends with the three artists living in the other studios. They are planning a yearly "Art Salon" for neighbours and friends. The studios will be open for all those who want to partake of the atmosphere that the four women will create. But if you want to come and hear Mayako's music, you will have to take off your shoes.

Maurice, 35, holds a very important position in Neukölln's African community. As manager of a little internet and telephone shop, he looks for the cheapest telephone connections for his customers to their families at home in Africa. His shop is also a meeting point for his compatriots. In Ghana he was a teacher on a very small salary, so he decided to seek his fortune in Germany. After a long, hard time of waiting and fearing expulsion, Maurice finally received a residence permit. Yet he never managed to find a job in Germany that was suited to his professional education. So he took the path that more and more immigrants have followed--he became his own boss.

Maurice became part of the "Ethnic Economics" (*ethnische Ökonomie*) movement--that is, businesses in immigrant hands, which for Germany is a relatively new development and one that economists, policy-makers and city planners are taking more and more seriously. For many of the founders of these businesses, economic independence is a way out of stagnation and dependence. They have to overcome a lot of problems with the German bureaucracy, which is generally unprepared to accept ethnic diversity. Although many of these businesses fail rather soon, a network of diverse ethnic economic initiatives has come into being. In the African community they include above all telephone centers, food stores, and lifestyle supply shops (e.g. hair ornaments and cosmetics). Maurice feels quite well among his compatriots but alienated from the larger society: "I have the feeling that the Germans don't know the Africans. The Germans are just at the starting point, quite different

from France. They are suspicious of Africans and think that we are not able to do things like running a shop.” He sees the Germans as slowpokes without the imagination, courage, and will to take risks. He also complains of the discrimination he suffers from Turks and Arabs. These immigrant groups despise black people as the lowest ones on the social ladder, who can be kicked off.

Aydin, 22, macho-looking and sporting an outfit like an action movie star, is the son of an immigrant worker from East Anatolia of Kurdish origin. He was born in Berlin and therefore had the right to a German passport--at the age of 18 he was required by German law to decide whether he will be a Turkish or German citizen. He did not graduate from secondary, not because he was not intelligent enough, but because he saw no sense in it. Too many young people around him had found neither an apprenticeship nor a job; so why study or make any effort to get a vocational education? Lacking any prospect of a good life based on a steady job, *Aydin* cannot see why education would be worth his while. His parents, poorly educated themselves, have no power to force him; and the school has not managed to communicate to him a love of learning and knowledge. Furthermore, he sees around him that there are other options. *Aydin* has a lot to occupy his time, such as helping friends and relatives with their legal (or illegal) businesses--vegetable and knick-knack stands, moving services, import/export shops. These things make up a job market of their own that requires no social security taxation, so he is able to keep a remarkable car as status symbol. Life is okay, so why study or work officially?

Three years ago *Aydin*'s parents arranged a marriage with a cousin from their home village in Anatolia, because like many other traditionally-oriented immigrants of the first generation, they worried that the immigrant girls who grew up in Berlin might not be honest (i.e. virgins). *Aydin* accepted. His new wife *Aishe* speaks no German at all and suffers from the foreignness and loneliness of the big city. Two babies have already arrived, and the

family lives on welfare along with the money that Aydin earns on the side. Turkish-language TV channels play all day at their place. Aydin loves music, and Turkish pop music pours out of his headphones. The district administration of Neukölln offered Aishe the opportunity to participate in a special language course for immigrant women where they can bring along their small children.ⁱⁱ Aishe feels quite happy. She meets other women in the course, the loneliness is fading. She is planning to look for a nursery school, understanding that her children will have a better start in German life if they learn the language as soon as possible.

Nur, 17, is a beautiful, black-eyed girl. She is dressed like a modern teen, but her navel and shoulders are always covered, and she wears a headscarf. She goes to high school (*Gymnasium*), and in two years she will attain the *Abitur* that will allow her to study. Her grades are quite high. She works hard to prepare for the exams, but sometimes she has problems with her parents, who want her to babysit her sisters when she needs to study. She comes from a Palestine family. For a long period the Palestine people of Berlin had no status that would have allowed them to develop prospects for the future. They had no permit to work and lived from welfare. This changed some years ago, but older Palestinians are no longer capable of working. They have lost their self-confidence, as well as their roots. Missing positive peer groups and heroes, many young Palestine men turn to crime and violence. They grow up surrounded by the sense of despair and failed hopes that most of the grownups in their extended families convey. This atmosphere has encouraged a feeling of hatred among many adolescents.

Nur is trying to escape from this hopelessness. She is curious, active, and competitive. She dreams of becoming a doctor, and the teachers encourage her. She loves to play guitar and to go to the cinema. Wearing a headscarf, Nur is visibly Muslim, but she does not know a lot about her religion. Of course, her family is Muslim, and they observe Ramadan and the religious feasts--but out of a sense of cultural tradition, not as the rituals of a vital religious

creed. She goes to the mosque for lessons, but most of the time the pupils have to learn surahs from the Qur'an by heart. She wants to know more about the difference between herself and the German majority, and she wants to maintain this difference, even if it causes difficulties (for example in the school gym or on field trips). Being a Muslim is part of Nur's identity, but she is also convinced that the world is open for her. She trusts in her own strength.

The examples of Elzbieta, Manfred, Timo, Hanan, Gary, Öner, Mayako, Maurice, Aydin and Nur reveal the diversity of people and their destinies behind the concept of „immigrant.“ They have different motives and perspectives on life in Berlin, different problems and potentials. Coming to terms with this diversity is Berlin's greatest challenge and, at the same time, its greatest opportunity.

*Germany as a Land of Immigration:
Undercover Strategy or Policy?*

Berlin was founded in 1237 as a small double town on and near an island in the river Spree. People long debated whether the Teutons or the Slavs were the first inhabitants of the region. During the Cold War this became an ideological quarrel--what was the region's original character, Western or Eastern? Scholarship has in the meantime settled on the Slavs as the earliest inhabitants. The little trading city grew into a residential center, and in 1451 it became the residence of the Prussian Elector. The first "official immigrants" were a group of Jews of unknown origin who came to Berlin at the end of the thirteenth century. They remained strangers, their rights were restricted, and they were expelled time and again.

The Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) devastated Berlin. The population was reduced by fifty percent to 6000 inhabitants, and one third of the houses were destroyed. Following the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, the "Great Elector" Friedrich Wilhelm I undertook an active immigration policy (the so-called *Peuplierungspolitik*) to revive and strengthen his

mercantilist state. Under the flag of re-colonisation, religious tolerance, he managed to attract important and highly professional groups of immigrants to Brandenburg--Dutch drainage specialists, Jewish traders from Vienna, French Huguenots, Bohemian farmers and weavers. By 1690 twenty percent of Berlin's inhabitants were Huguenots (about 20,000 people), and they became the nucleus of the industrial development of Berlin. A lot of words in the Berliners' vocabulary come from French--for example, their word for hamburger is *Boulette*.ⁱⁱⁱ

In the course of the nineteenth century, Berlin exploded into a big industrial city. The population increased from 100,000 at the beginning of the century to 1,000,000 in 1875, then nearly tripling to 2,710,000 by 1900. The city's ruling elites were not prepared for this demographic revolution. They worked out a plan for extending the city's area of settlement, which was completed in 1920 when the adjacent villages and towns were incorporated to form "Groß-Berlin." It was not an immigration policy that they wanted; rather the growing industry needed workers.^{iv} The big factories of Borsig, A.E.G., Siemens and all the others attracted masses of labourers, many of whom were easterners from Poland, Russia, and East Prussia. Their residence permits were limited, and it was often forbidden to bring a family. Of course, these poor workers had none of the privileges of the Huguenots or Bohemians. Of course the workers stayed in Berlin; they either sent for their families or founded them in the city.

A lot of the immigrants did not find place to live in Berlin itself. They settled in Rixdorf, a town on the outskirts of Berlin. The population of Rixdorf rose from 8,000 in 1871 to 240,000 in 1910. Tenement houses sprang up that soon became infamous as breeding grounds for illness and misery. Even today the highest density of buildings in Germany is found in Rixdorf/Neukölln. In those same tenement houses, in those same neighborhoods, live the majority of today's immigrants in Berlin.

This unforeseen development caused a number of social problems for the inhabitants and burdens for Berlin and its surroundings. Nearby towns like Rixdorf lacked money to build schools, hospitals, and sewage systems because the trade tax (*Gewerbesteuer*) did not reach them. Trade tax had to be paid where the trade and industry were located, not in towns like Rixdorf where workers and their families lived. It was a real struggle to get some money. Moreover, the workers were politically disenfranchised, because the right to vote was bound to a minimum income that a worker could not meet (this was the Prussian „three class system“). Given poor living conditions and the apparent inability or unwillingness of the state to better workers' lives, it comes as no surprise that many of these workers chose to support Social Democracy.

Germany at this time was generally a country of emigrants, which helps explain why there was no political concept of *immigration*. Migration--immigration as well as emigration--was a response to economic developments. As Cihan Arin has written, “Foreign workers--seasonal as well as permanent workers--are valued as an integral part of labour market policy and used when it is useful for economic development. The tradition of using foreign workers as a buffer against economic trends became common not only in Berlin, but in Germany history as such.”^v This has been German policy up to the present day.

In addition to the migration caused by either a lack or an abundance of work, there has also been migration caused by political events or religious intolerance. Following the Russian revolutions in 1905 and 1917, many Russians came to Berlin. And after the anti-Semitic pogroms in Russia and Poland, Jews came to stay in Berlin who were quite different from those Jews who already lived there. They all asked for asylum; some were accepted, others not. Some lived in Berlin illegally, some with the tacit connivance of the authorities, and some with a short-term permit. They had their own poverty-stricken colonies around

Alexanderplatz and the Scheunenviertel. After World War I, people from the east who had been rendered stateless because of the new borders followed.

During the Weimar Republic, Berlin attracted young creative people from all over the world. Even Ho Chi Minh lived for a few years in Neukölln, which in 1920 was incorporated into Berlin. Cultural and moral openness became the trademark of the city. While the employment policy of the Imperial era regarding foreign workers continued, the right of arbitrary expulsion of foreign workers was abolished in the Weimar Constitution. The Great Depression affected all workers in Germany; now there was work for neither ethnic Germans nor foreigners.

Between 1933 and 1939, the fascist government greatly reduced the rights of foreign workers. Those who were already in Germany lost all of their rights, and regime expelled stateless people. The situation changed with the outbreak of the war. Big industries complained about a lack of workers to produce weapons because their former workers were needed as soldiers. The regime deported millions of civilians from the occupied territories to Germany for forced labour. They punished the refusal to work with death or the concentration camp.^{vi}

Meanwhile, some Germans wanted to leave their home--the Nazis' political opponents and those Jews who recognized the real nature of the regime and the danger that they faced. Some of these persecuted people found a haven in other countries, but too many had neither the opportunity nor the finances to seek asylum in a safe country. In 1949 the founding fathers and mothers of the new German Federal Republic included a generous right of asylum in the new country's Basic Law. This amounted to a recognition of those whom the Nazis had persecuted and of the countries that had provided them with a new home.

The first few years after World War II saw the rebuilding of a Germany that became more and more politically divided. In the German Democratic Republic, the main form of

migration was emigration from east to west. This caused a gradual yet considerable loss of labour. In the 1960s the GDR started to recruit two kinds of immigrants. First, “contract workers” (*Vertragsarbeiter*) from Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique and Cuba supplemented the labour force. Quartered in ghetto-like dormitories, they had very few rights but led a rather calm life. Second, the universities and technical colleges trained many foreign students as engineers, historians, philosophers, medical doctors, technicians, economists, artists, and politicians. It was a very effective kind of foreign aid under the political rubric of “International Solidarity.”^{vii} A lot of older immigrants with an academic education who remained in Germany still tell about their economic chances in the GDR, chances they lacked in the Federal Republic because there one had to have a lot of money just to make a living. Most of them did not have money, but the cost of living in the GDR was much cheaper, and usually they had small but sufficient scholarships.

In West Germany the recruitment of workers from abroad began in 1955 with a treaty between the German and Italian governments. Because production during the “economic miracle” required more labourers than were available in Germany, workers were “invited” as to be “guest workers” (*Gastarbeiter*).^{viii} People came first from Italy, Portugal, Spain, and Greece, and later from Yugoslavia and Turkey. The intention was to build up a constant supply of labourers, but with an ongoing turnover of individual workers; thus the contracts were temporary. Accompaniment by families was not desired. However, many of the *Gastarbeiter* remained because they made good money, because they liked the different way of life, and because their employers wanted to keep them. Little by little families arrived--first the wives as workers, too, and later the children. This development was accompanied by a debate whether German child benefits should be paid for children living with their relatives at home, or just for the children living with their parents in Germany. The first political protest of the *Gastarbeiter* grew up around this issue.

Thus immigration to postwar Germany began in a culture that ignored the fact that Germany was becoming a country of immigrants. The fact that a considerable number of Germans were emigrating to Canada, Australia and the United States was much more present in people's minds. The government did nothing to prevent immigration or to support it. At the behest of the employers, the conditions for a reservoir of labour were established, but a vision of sustainable immigration was not yet on the agenda. Yet social welfare organizations and churches warned of the dangers of ignoring the issue of immigration, especially from a sociological point of view. Oppositional German organizations and institutions as well as the small political groupings of immigrants warned about the situation with the famous sentence, "Labour was called, and people came" (*Es wurden Arbeitskräfte gerufen, und es kamen Menschen*).

Only on the edges of society did immigration become a topic of discussion. The *Gastarbeiter* themselves were excluded; they had very restricted political rights. They could not participate in German political life, not even in affairs concerning them, because most of them had no German nationality, and it was extremely difficult to get it. Very few joined political parties. Germans represented the interests of the *Gastarbeiter* and were often mocked as naïve do-gooders for their pains. Many years went by before immigrants themselves got positions as "commissioners for foreigner affairs" (*Ausländerbeauftragte*) within the public administration, and they are still the minority.

The need to attend to the social predicament of the immigrants eventually became clear, especially in the field of education, literacy, and health care. The big welfare organizations installed consulting services; and local funds began to be used to support small community-based cultural activities of the immigrant communities (e.g. celebrations of national or religious events, theatrical projects, etc.). But the main problems--the lack of political rights for the immigrants and the question of their future--were pushed aside by the

majority of Germans and their politicians. The German polity had not yet registered the shift from „guest“ to „inhabitant”--that is, the fact that Germany had become *de facto* a land of immigration--so they lacked a sense of their responsibility to formulate the rights and duties of immigrants.

The discussion increased and intensified after the reunification of Germany. Especially the East German people, who had lost their work and their economic basis, declared the migrants to be unnecessary; they had deprived the Germans of their “right to work,” which had been a civil right in the GDR. Xenophobic attacks accompanied the political discussion. In Rostock in 1992, there was a violent chase and street battles, and in Solingen in 1993, five Turkish men and women died by arson. It became clear both to the migrants and the German state that the legal situation of people from abroad living permanently in Germany had to be put on new foundations. Confronted for the first time with real xenophobia, the migrants wanted long-term prospects in Germany without the threat of being thrown out arbitrarily. For its part the state understood that the existing grey area was a source of social dynamite. The political act of admitting to being a country of immigration became an urgent necessity. Yet it took until the year 2000 for the German parliament to pass the immigration law.

The chief hindrance to this popular acceptance of the new reality was ideological. Most Germans simply could not imagine their nation as ethnically diverse. German nationalism was supposed to have been overcome with the defeat of the Nazi regime, but this was a myth. Nationalism continued to manifest itself in the way that “Germanness” was defined. After unification in 1870, German citizenship had followed the principle of *jus sanguinis* (“right of blood”), meaning that membership in the nation was only enjoyed by an individual born to a parent who was already a citizen.^{ix} It was very difficult for people with

no German parents to become German, and non-Germans lacked full political rights other than the tiny right to vote in local elections.

In 2000 the parliament reformed the citizenship law to include elements of *jus soli* (“right of soil”--that is, citizenship based on birthplace). But the path to this change was long and twisted.^x In particular, the conservative CDU/CSU government did its best from 1981 on to prevent further labour immigration, and it promoted re-migration, going so far as to offer a financial bonus to leave the country. The political slogan “foreigners not wanted” had social and psychological effects. It heightened fear, hatred and anxiety, but it also made people more aware of social contradictions. The subject of immigration and the necessity to develop rules for it achieved a prominent position in the public debates of unified Germany. This was in large part the result of the aforementioned xenophobic attacks against migrants, which raised the specter of the Nazi past. Hundreds of thousands demonstrated with candlelight marches against the new racism in Germany, showing a popular acceptance of a more open, multicultural, and ethnically diverse society.

The quest for work was the most important motive for migrants coming to Germany, but the desire for political asylum was a significant reason as well. Many people from the Middle East, Asia, and Africa sought a safe haven. In the 1980s a discussion over the alleged abuse of the right of asylum (*Asylmißbrauch*) flared up in West Germany. Were asylum seekers really running away from life-threatening political persecution, or were they merely seeking a more comfortable life? The main task of asylum officials shifted from offering safety to potential refugees to discouraging them and defending the asylum laws against misuse. State authorities undertook steps to make the application process less attractive, forcing asylum seekers to live in dormitories, reducing their financial support, and preventing them from working. The process of gaining asylum in Germany was regulated by a new law in 1993 that lay down exact rules and procedures.

Today most applicants for asylum are refused, although some receive “tolerated” status with a short-term residence permit. In any case, they have to undergo a humiliating procedure of interrogation. The questions of the “deciders”, who are officers of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, are well known and feared by all those who have to deal with issues of asylum. The purpose of the interrogation is to scrutinize the reasons why one is asking for asylum and to ferret out signs that the law is being misused. German human rights NGOs have declared that this practice is an abuse of the right of asylum. The Nationality Law (*Staatsangehörigkeitsgesetz*) of 2000, which is the basis for Germany becoming officially a land of immigration, makes possible citizenship for (1) recognized refugees and (2) people with short-term residence permits who have lived a long time in Germany, who speak German and who work here. The discussion is still going on.

Another complicating factor has been the arrival of the so-called *Rußlanddeutschen*. Around 1993 the implications of *jus sanguinis* came to public attention because of the fall of the iron curtain, which made possible the immigration of the *Rußlanddeutschen*. This is a collective term for people whose ancestors emigrated a few hundred years ago from Germany to Russia and who were later scattered all over the U.S.S.R. After the fall of the iron curtain they had, because of their alleged “German blood,” the right to be naturalized in Germany with all the rights and duties of German citizens. In the first few years after reunification, many accepted the German government’s “invitation” and left their homes in Russia for the golden West. Most of them spoke no (or only rudimentary) German, and they were thoroughly shaped by the Russian culture and way of life. Even though they were more foreign to German civilization than were Turkish or Vietnamese immigrants, the *Rußlanddeutschen* now saw themselves not as immigrants but as Germans. Their integration has been difficult particularly for older people, who had no roots in their new home, and for those who had a good education and a job in Russia but who became unemployed welfare

recipients. The success or failure of integration will be determined by the next generation. Some young people, mostly males, resent their parents for bringing them to Germany; they refuse to learn the language and to accept the society. The majority of the young, however, have adapted with lightning speed and now try to be the best at school, supported by their parents. The children have to attain that which their parents could not. In the meantime the immigration from Russia has ebbed, partly because the overextended German state offered the remaining potential immigrants money to stay at home, and partly because word has reached Russia that the golden West is not as golden as hoped.

The case of the *Rußlanddeutschen* shows that migration and its problems are not only a question of laws, but also one of cultural sensibility and the acceptance of diversity. In any case, since the passing of the new citizenship law in 2000 migration is a clear and socially accepted fact. In consequence of the law, the government formulated rules and conditions for naturalization concerning knowledge of language, history, culture and political structures. But it will take a long time before they really take hold. Even though thousands of migrants have stormed the adult education centers to take a preparation course for the “entrance exam,” real integration in the sense of civic participation has yet to be achieved.

The meaning of “integration” is quite varied, but the necessity of finding a way to live together has become obvious to the majority in German society. In 2006 Chancellor Angela Merkel called for an “integration summit” where immigrant organizations could for the first time take part in discussions at the governmental level. Yet the government and the parliament still make the decisions, and the number of migrants in the political parties and in the administration is still insignificant. Indeed, a lot of administrative and practical questions remain open. In 2006 the summit participants agreed to work on a “National Integration Plan” as a basis for discussion, which was presented at the second meeting in 2007. That meeting was accompanied by protests by Turkish organizations against a new law that

prohibits immigration of ready-to-marry girls under age 18 and without knowledge of German (to prevent situations like Aishe's, described at the beginning of this essay). The Turkish organizations see this law as an attack on their culture. The summit remains the subject of controversy; some interpret it as merely a veneer of democracy, while others value it as a first step toward participation.

Besides the area of policy, there are a number of philosophical and societal questions being discussed. For example, is it integration that we want? What does integration actually mean? Is it conformity, a process of assimilation into German society with its traditions and rules? Or is it the development of a new way of living together that will incorporate the diverse characteristics of existing German society as well as the societies of the newcomers? Would a multicultural society that fosters diversity be good for Germany and its citizens, or is *Multikulti* simply a euphemism for a lot of "parallel societies" that fight against each other and make common social life impossible? Do we want to have a state that subscribes to the UNESCO concept of cultural diversity, or should we be guided by principle of *Leitkultur*, meaning European, Christian cultural traditions?^{xi}

The discussion about immigration, which in truth concerns the transformation of German society, has to continue. But at the same time, the social reality must also change, because a lot of everyday problems are caused by the unsolved quandaries of immigration. The situation is still like a toxic waste dump, within which uncontrolled, explosive processes are taking place.

Migration in Berlin

Berlin has its own story of migration because of its special political and geographical situation. Today it is the heir of two different immigration processes. Labour immigration increased after the building of the Wall in 1961. In the East there was a growing dearth of

workers because so many had escaped to the West; and West Berlin lacked workers because many had migrated to western Germany out of fear of a Soviet takeover. Many industrial firms had moved their production to West Germany, but they often kept a token bit of production in Berlin in order to receive state subsidies.^{xii} The least desired jobs were offered to the “guest workers.” Many of these “undercover immigrants” remained in Berlin after the Wall was built. They chose for their domiciles the old, shabby tenement houses in Kreuzberg, Neukölln, Wedding and Tiergarten that had been constructed for industrial workers decades earlier. These districts still have the highest percentage of immigrants--in some places up to fifty percent of the population. Thus the concerned discussions of ghetto-like concentrations of ethnic groups and the development of parallel societies in Berlin continue to this day.

Nobody can tell the exact numbers. It is only possible to count those who are officially registered but are not naturalized citizens--13.9 % as of June 2006, i.e. 463,000 people. Those who are naturalized but who are still mainly shaped by their home culture (the *Rußlanddeutschen* and the first generation of *Gastarbeiter*), as well as those who are here illegally, are not countable. The “Ombudsman” for integration estimates that there are about 600,000 immigrants in Berlin total. Migration happens mainly in the western districts of Berlin, in Neukölln, Kreuzberg, Wedding and Tiergarten. In some quarters of these districts, the immigration rate is more than 50 %. Only about 6 % of the inhabitants of former East Berlin are immigrants, most of them *Rußlanddeutsche* and former “contract workers.” Unfortunately, the problem of racism and xenophobia is virulent in some eastern districts. People who are visibly from an immigrant background are often afraid to venture into those neighbourhoods.

Immigration and its consequences are mostly regarded as burdens (except for the immigration of high tech specialists). A lot of problems are said to be caused by migrants, such as criminality, unemployment and dirt on the streets. The facts prove these conjectures

to be at least in part wrong. Criminality in general is not a problem of migrants, but most of the criminals under 21 years have a migrant background. Unemployment? The migrants themselves are the group most affected. In Neukölln 42 % of all migrants are without work (quote for Neukölln as a whole: 19 %). A real burden to the society are the young people with no education or professional training, like Aydin and his wife Aishe. But in a larger sense, this problem stems from disregard for the public responsibility to give everybody a chance and to provide social inclusion. Even though teachers and attentive observers have been warning about the growing number of “illiterates in two languages” for the past 25 years, the politicians and administrators have acknowledged the right to an education inconsistently and too late.

Germans still find it hard to acknowledge not only the burdens, the problems, the necessities, but also to see the many new colours they are gaining, to enjoy the new tastes, to observe the benefits of a diversity of lifestyles and the influx of new skills. But Berliners in particular are on their way toward this new attitude. A lot of people who come from abroad to Berlin--artists, scientists, academics, diplomats, representatives of big companies--are regarded positively, but not as migrants. And as a rule, they are not migrants with the intention to stay in Berlin. They drift through the world. Even before the 1989 revolution, Berlin had a more open and tolerant atmosphere than the “Bonn Republic.” Young men who wanted to avoid military service, people who wanted to live their homosexuality more freely or who preferred other alternative life styles, Germans and foreigners alike--thousands of them came to Berlin. Since reunification this this tendency has increased. Today’s Berlin is highly attractive to creative people from all over the world, because it is not yet “finished.” There is still space for new developments and new ideas.

Neukölln: Crossroads of the Future

The district where I am working as head of the Cultural Office is the kind of place that attracts curious people from all over the world. The rather cheap flats are desired by people who like the open, international atmosphere of the old worker's district, a neighbourhood that tolerates all kinds of diversity. The Neuköllner are diverse themselves, and xenophobia has had no chance to take hold. This face of Neukölln is seen, for example, during the very special art festival "48 Hours of Neukölln," when many resident artists show their neighbourhood to be a contact zone of urban art.

On the other hand, immigration, unemployment and poverty have combined into a dangerous cocktail over the years. The population of the northern part of Neukölln--some 160,000 people--includes over fifty percent legal immigrants and an estimated ten percent more who are illegal. Over fifty percent of the immigrants are without work. Most of the immigrants are from Turkey, but they have also come from the former Yugoslavian states, Poland, and Arabic countries. A significant number are "stateless," such as the Palestinians. They live in the dense old worker's quarter, which comprises one-sixth of Neukölln's area. The other areas of Neukölln are similar to the rest of Berlin in terms of average immigrant population.

The school system in Neukölln is particularly affected by the high immigrant population. The northern area has no schools where kids of German origin are in the majority. In most elementary schools, 75 % or more of the children have an immigrant background, and some schools have only 3 to 5 % of German origin. An optimistic estimate of the percentage of children who can speak German in northern Neukölln is 25 %. This makes it impossible to grant equal educational opportunities under the usual German school conditions and teaching practices. Overtaxing demands, no teachers with migrant backgrounds, teachers who do not teach but do social work, the ignorance of the school administration, lack of funds and qualified teachers, apathy and a lack of understanding

among the parents--all these things are turning the schools into dead ends. The more effort is demanded as pupils move to higher grades, the fewer pupils with migrant backgrounds can be found at those grade levels. The two Berlin high schools with the largest number of immigrant students are in Neukölln (70 and 50 %). Yet only 12 % of all pupils with an immigrant background go to high school to achieve the *Abitur* that would entitle them to go to a university (compared to 45 % of all Berlin students).

The worst situation prevails in Neukölln's intermediate schools (*Hauptschulen*), which are those schools for teenagers who are not able or willing to go to a classical high school (*Gymnasium*). After graduating from the *Hauptschule* the pupils--most of whom have an immigrant background--are expected to start vocational training. The truth is that few of them actually graduate, and even fewer have the opportunity (or the energy) for a training vacancy. Too few openings are offered, and too few companies are willing to take on young people with immigrant backgrounds. Coming from Neukölln is an extra stigma. For all of these reasons, young people from the back alleys of Berlin remain stuck in the blind alleys of life. The impossibility of social inclusion is the catastrophe that continues to threaten many immigrants in Germany's capital.

Education is the key to change for the better, but for it to work, the schools will need to be overhauled. In April 2006 the teachers of Neukölln's *Rütli-Schule* wrote a letter to their schools minister to draw his attention to the problems described above. The minister did not answer, so they gave the letter to a newspaper, which published it. The letter turned out to be a disaster for the educational administration. The school became notorious throughout Germany as a symbol of failed educational policy. The problems were discussed from newspapers and academic circles to the pubs. Openness and a willingness to reform is increasing, concrete models of alternative school organisation are being developed, foundations are offering help, and the universities are ready to consult. In 2008 the Rütli-

Schule and two nearby schools will unify to create a new type of school for pupils between the ages of six and sixteen. The school is beginning to open its doors to the neighbourhood, especially for the parents of their children. Volunteers are working as tutors for both the pupils and their parents. The school seems to be on the right path; but the problems that the scandalous Rütli-Letter drew attention to are problems of all comparable schools in all comparable quarters. Thus a solution for the *Rütli-Schule* alone does not equal a solution for a failed, non-integrative system of education. A UNESCO survey in 2007 faulted this problem in no uncertain terms.

Many inhabitants of Neukölln are doing their best to improve the situation. They understand that there is no use in waiting until the state takes care of the deficiencies. A “Community Foundation” (*Bürgerstiftung*) was set up in 2005, through which engaged people from ethnically diverse backgrounds--Turks, Arabs, Greeks, Poles, New Zealanders, Americans and of course Germans--have been developing new forms of intercultural and civic engagement of the kind that have been very scarce in Berlin until now. Their aim is to draw attention to the potentials of Neukölln’s diversity and to make use of their benefits. (See Appendix C). There is much at stake. Because it is the weakest member who decides the future of the whole, if the district of Neukölln is not able to overcome its problems, Berlin as a whole will suffer.^{xiii}

The Impact of the Arts

Culture plays an important role in the efforts to strengthen Neukölln. It is a small team I have to lead--16 people in the Neukölln Department of Culture itself. There are also 65 people working in the libraries. Most of my colleagues are women. Unfortunately we have none with a migrant background, because the financial situation of Berlin is keeping us from employing new colleagues. Therefore we work as much as possible with freelancers and

people associated with the job creation schemes (*Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahmen*). Our job is to reach the people of Neukölln, who are traditionally not very well educated but are interested in culture that has to do with their lives. We have the responsibility to present art, music and theatre in a way that people can understand. So we have run galleries, a museum, a theatre, community centers and so on. But we have also been trying to develop the arts landscape of Neukölln.

More and more artists like to live in this difficult district, mostly in the northern part among the migrants, and they play an important role in the empowerment strategy. Many of them are able to communicate well; they are able to find strange and marginal ways of life; they are entrepreneurs with a variety of subjects and aims; they live courageously and experimentally; and many of them are curious to meet other, “normal” people. All these things have proven fruitful for Neukölln. The best example is the festival “48 Hours Neukölln,” which since 1998 has been organized by a network of artists und cultural activists. It reveals an unexpected face of Neukölln: a courageous, multicoloured, experimental, high quality event throughout the northern quarter. In 2007 more than 1200 diverse art activities could be visited. People from all over Berlin and abroad are coming to look into the “pot of urban culture”, as newspapers have begun to call it. Neuköllners are proud of it, and the local politicians understand that this helps the image of the district. They give a little bit of money.

The work of the department of culture has always been oriented not so much around the consumers of highbrow culture, as there are enough such venues in Berlin. We are guided by a strong will to support those who are excluded by the dominant culture in Berlin but also firmly convinced of the possibilities of art to break down walls and to make people see things in a new way. Through a long process of trial and error, of experiments and theoretical

reflections, guidelines for a concept of cultural work and policy have developed around the principle of cultural diversity. These guidelines are as follows:

- The precondition of cultural participation is *social* participation. Increasing social segregation, which is dividing communities into ever richer and ever poorer sectors, has consequences in education and social policy. Therefore it is necessary to address the issues of participation and inclusion in the social as well as the cultural field.
- A productive approach to cultural diversity reflects a change of the paradigm. The notion of immigration as a burden is giving way to an awareness of the benefits that are to be gained from diversity, in the form of cultural resources. What was once perceived as a burden is turning into a pleasure. European societies, shaped more and more by immigration, have to acknowledge cultural diversity as a resource that in the future will also enrich the arts. It is necessary to understand diversity as an immanent principle of national as well as local cultural life and to provide the conditions for its development.
- Cultural and aesthetic education is a condition for participation as well as for a future for the arts. The arts need an educated and interested audience as well as artists for the future. Funds have to be provided for this purpose. But first and foremost, we have to pay attention to the importance of cultural education to create a strong, democratic and pluralistic society. Education in culture is capable of fostering strong, cooperative, self-confident, sensitive, and creative people.
- The arts and artists play a central role in making these guidelines a reality. The great potential of the arts stems from their unique language and their ability to take uncommon points of view, to exaggerate, and to provoke. Moreover, the arts can deconstruct complex situations, offering possible solutions and putting the audience in a different, strange or hostile role in order to help them grasp differing perspectives.

Last but not least, the arts can have a very special human and social impact by opening doors to new worlds.

To show how we have put these guidelines into practice, here are some examples of our recent projects:

1. Récup--Rubbish of the World

This project, which lasted from January to April 2007, tied together arts and education in cooperation with an ethnic community in a way that worked very well. The starting point was the fact that Neukölln is looked upon as the “Third World” of Berlin, a refuse dump--just as Africa is often treated as the dump of the world. The guiding theme for us was refuse, the refuse of wealthy “First World” societies.

The project involved a contemporary African art movement that makes use of refuse through “*récuperation*,” recycling and reinterpretation. A project promoting African art in this district makes sense, because most of Berlin’s African immigrants live in Neukölln, and they suffer from the lowest social status in the self-created hierarchy among the immigrants. We invited two African artists to work with us for six weeks as artists in residence. One of them, Dominique Zinkpè, installed in a prominent urban arcade an alternative “arcade” installation, the “Passage des Emigrés,” made of the red, blue and white checkered plastic bags that accompany migration and poverty all over the world. The other artist, Socrate Safo, worked with Neukölln kids to create telenovelas using the methods and techniques of the mental garbage of the media, that is, soap operas, advertising, useless information. Some very entertaining and funny films were the result .

Parallel to this work of our “artists in residence,” we ran creative workshops in which African artists living in Berlin worked with children on the topic “Recuperation,” and in the process they imparted knowledge about Africa and foreign aid. More than 2000 children attended for one or more days, and they created fantastic artworks .They developed new

musical instruments and made music, designed dresses, invented necessary and unnecessary objects. and produced superb masks, all the while getting a new impression of Africans. Both parts of the project were intensively accompanied by the African community with parties, musical events, and a new kind of social network. In the public space, we presented with the “Passage des Emigrés” agitational art from the point of view of another continent.

Everybody could understand this kind of art, which informed, *sensitized* to differences, and encouraged creativity. The project *Récup* opened minds to other cultures and to larger problems. An exhibition is now touring Germany that presents works by both the artists and the children of Neukölln.

2. *Rabababatz on the Hermannplatz*

In 2004 a wonderful musical was born from a collaboration between the Neukölln Opera and an elementary school that emphasizes music. The Opera is our local jewel, a very creative independent opera company that hovers between seriousness and parody, opera and musical. The name itself, combining “opera” with Neukölln, suggests the dynamic and experimental tension in the company's vision. The elementary school was in a deep crisis. The reason for its orientation toward traditional German music education was no longer clear, because the pupils were completely different from those for whom the curriculum had been developed. For instance, in earlier times all children had to learn to play in the recorder orchestra (besides those few who learned violin). However, the school is located in a poor immigrant quarter, and 85 percent of the children are of non-German origin. Their musical background is not German--not even European. It was a school of willing but very tired and burnt out teachers. The Neukölln Opera sent a professional music theatre director and a dramaturgist to the school. Supported in the background by the small opera team, they managed and conducted programs for the students.

Although the process was sometimes quite chaotic, amazing things happened. Students' complaining was relieved by *doing*, cooperation was asked for and given. The school regained energy as everyone had a lot of fun as the rigid idea of being a "learning-school" disappeared into the background, and the children discovered self-discipline and self-confidence.^{xiv} The project showed the students that through effort and attention to quality, a wonderful creation can rise out of seeming chaos. The play that they developed was about being strange, foreign, alien. Alien kids from another star visit the department store at Hermannplatz, miss their space shuttle, and meet kids who have skipped their own school excursion. Dread of parental authority, disobedience towards the teachers, youthful solidarity, crime, and detective gags all mixed perfectly together in this crazy musical. And a really incredible orchestra played instruments of almost unimaginable diversity, erasing all boundaries between the cultures. Kids became big and powerful, surpassing themselves. Cultural diversity was the main spice in this hot soup of children's culture. The school gained power for the coming years, proof that setting an example is far preferable to moaning in a quiet corner.

3. Good Daughters, Good Sons: Misunderstandings in Community Life

In the context of the unfortunate German debate about traditional values--*Leitkultur*--we started looking for these values in the different ethnic communities of Neukölln. Our research developed into the project "Good daughters, good sons," which started from the assumption that everybody--mother or father, as daughter or son--could be an expert. We identified key values and concentrated on those that played an important role in all ethnic communities: obedience, respect, honour, shame, and tolerance. The concept of shame, for example, has a wide variety of meanings. What shame means in one language is probably different from what I, a German, associate with it. It quickly became clear that the meanings in non-European cultures and languages differ even more.

These conceptual differences become tangible when they crash into each other in the form of “critical incidents.” These every day events became the attention-getters of our exhibition. Actually more an activity and research centre, this exhibition was accompanied by dialogue in the form of public discussions with representatives of our communities about education and generational or gender gaps. With installations, which tried to fix critical incidents, with artistic comments, tools of knowledge (little libraries on wheels) and interactive situations, we made our Neukölln key values researchable and able to be experienced. This experimental design was set up and accompanied by school workshops, contacts with parents and teachers, and talks in the communities. Of central importance were guided tours of the exhibition for 12 to 16 year-old students, as well as discussions run by German and non-German “young professionals” (university students or young people who just had finished their studies). For the first time in their lives, the young people came to understand something about their own values, about how they had been shaped by them, and about the diversity of resulting codes of behaviour. The necessity for agreement on a concept of democratic cultural pluralism became clear in the course of this project.

4. “News from Babylon”: a project on languages, books and reading

Usually, multilingualism is regarded as an indication of being well educated and as a key for the future. Yet the multilingualism of immigrants, especially of children, is in the German educational system regarded not as a potential but as a shortcoming, and it is not supported in school at all if the languages are Turkish, Polish, Serbian or Serbo-Croatian, Arabic, or Russian rather than English or French. Efforts by the communities to teach their mother tongues to their children are not supported at all by the state. There is no doubt that mastering the German language is required for equal opportunities in the educational system and in professional life. But the condemnation of the mother tongue contradicts the UNESCO convention on cultural diversity; and well-known linguistic researchers have proved the need

to master a mother tongue before learning more languages. Finally, failure to attend to the multilingualism of immigrant children amounts to an unforgivable squandering of cultural resources.

To try to remedy this situation in Neukölln, we undertook in our public library--part of "my" department of culture--a project called "News from Babylon," which deals specifically with the treasury of world culture that immigrants deliver free to us: their variety of languages. The public library is a very important space for immigrants in Germany, as it is the institution that they make the most use of. Yet often this institution does not care for them. To make the library a place that responds positively to its immigrant visitors, and to signal respect for their home culture, we tried through some sub-projects to focus attention on the languages spoken in Neukölln. One of the most successful was the "tent of storytelling." With the advice of our communities, we chose fairy tales from 13 different countries, which were illustrated on large plates by 13 artists from these countries and narrated by 13 storytellers from the countries exclusively in their own language. Today we can offer stories to schools or kindergartens in Russian, Doulu, Ghanese, Spanish, Japanese, Serbian, Arabic, Turkish, Hindi, Polish, French, English, and German, in a package of one to three languages. The things that make it possible for the children of Neukölln to understand a foreign language include the storytelling ability of the narrators; the repetition of certain words, phrases, or verbal formulas that is typical in all fairy tales; and the large illustrations, which are also common in different cultures. In these ways the young people gain pleasure from the different languages and play with new words. Because of this, many Neukölln kids now know the Japanese word for dragon and power drink or the Russian words for grandfather, grandmother, mother, and father. Although they do not fully understand the content of the stories, they can ask after each story performance and talk about them. Those children who

hear a fairy tale in their mother tongue are very proud, because now it is not them but the others who are not literate.

Another related sub-project is the “Treasure of World Cultures.” We asked twelve different communities in Neukölln to name the twelve most beloved children's books in their home country--that is, books that have left their marks on them, books they have wanted their own children to read. It was a long, laborious, but extremely exciting process, which led us to diverse kinds of decisions and different ways of dealing with books. In the Arab community, for instance, only men decided; our interventions were not accepted, for they regarded the decisions as too important to be made by women. In the Russian community, the classic authors like Pushkin and Tolstoy were the main choices. The people from Togo wanted to have their schoolbooks in the treasure chest, because they had no other books.

We organized all these books according to their respective languages and, when available, in German or English translation. We had some books, like *Le Petit Prince*, *Pippi Longstocking* and *Jim Knopf*, in three or four different translations. Also, we constructed a special transparent “treasure chest” in a corner in the library, between the adults’ and the children’s sections, and we held a ceremonial opening with all our partners. Next to the “chest” there are shelves with copies of all the books, ready to be enjoyed. Most of the time children or parents with their children are sitting in the corner and reading their books. They are proud to find books in their mother tongue.

5. Headscarf girls in the Ethnological Museum

In the context of the currently evolving “godparenthoods” (*Patenschaften*) between cultural institutions and schools as part of the improvement of cultural education in Berlin, a fascinating partnership has taken shape between the *Ethnologisches Museum* and the ninth grade of a grammar school in Neukölln. This school has the highest percentage of immigrant

pupils (75 %). The background of most of the pupils is Turkish or Arabic; most are Muslims. In the educational administration there had been plans to close the school because of its chronic failures (very few pupils reached the final exams); but a new head teacher has transformed it into a completely new institution, albeit with the same teachers and pupils as before. His concept is rather simple: *open the school to the town*. He invites partners to cooperate with his school, thus opening it for new people, new topics, new methods. So he offers a chance for his pupils to find orientation points for learning and life and create a new atmosphere in the school. Highly esteemed partners are cultural institutions like the Neukölln Opera and the *Ethnologisches Museum*.

For their part, the staff at the museum realized that Berlin's migrants were not aware of their institution, which keeps their cultural treasures and which they do not visit. The staff decided to change the traditional method of presenting objects; they instead took seriously the principles of contextuality and social inclusion. As a result, the museum developed its new exhibition together with and as an experience for young people, most of whom lived in Neukölln. They prepared an exhibition entitled "Every Day Special - Especially Everyday: Young People in Neukölln" (*Alltäglich besonders–besonders alltäglich: Jugendliche in Neukölln*). The Neukölln Department of Culture helped to foster cooperation and to establish a long lasting *Patenschaft*, that is, a five-year alliance based on special forms of mutual responsibility.^{xv}

To find a way to reach the public, the museum's staff wanted to look into the heads and hearts of Neukölln's young people. They embarked on a project of local ethnological field research not using the curious but alien gaze of the scientist, but with the eyes and ears of those who are normally subjects of the research. Together the ethnologists and the students formulated the topic of the research. They worked on the concept of the exhibition,

researched and interviewed. Then they produced the exhibition with the technical staff of the museum. 18 months they worked together, a long time for youngsters.

In the exhibition, shown for two months in autumn 2007, one could learn about the lives of young migrants--about their childhoods, their experiences as students, their families, their religion, their dreams and fears, their hopes in the future. Little films, photographs, objects, drawings, music, poetry and essays were presented at the normal professional level of a top-flight museum. The students had the opportunity to look behind the scenes at a museum, and the museum people gained insight into lives that they are normally far away from. The work process was difficult and very delicate. "Critical incidents" occurred that revealed that complexity of the partnership. For example, because an important part of the research was the Islamic religion and religious practices of the students, the director of the Museum of Islamic Art invited the youngsters to his office, described his work, and showed them some very precious objects that are kept in his safe. The guests were deeply impressed by the perfect Arabic speech of a German, something they had never heard before. But suddenly the youngsters grew disturbingly reserved. The director had taken out an extremely precious, marvellously embellished Qur'an and presented it full of pride, as if it were the crown jewels. But the pupils had learnt in their religious lessons how to touch and present their holy book and to show their respect. The director's white gloves and his way of handling the book seemed to them to show a lack of respect. They interpreted the director's grasp as an insult to their holy book. The discomfort of the students lasted some time until the cause of the disturbance was discovered. It took time for everyone to understand the cause of the critical incident. It took more time for it to be made clear to all that an object like this holy book may be sacred in a religious context, but that in a museum it is a valued object in a collection. At the same time, the museum people had to think about how to express respect for the object not only as a work of art. Both sides learned from their collaboration.

6. *Tek-stil*

The last project I want to describe is different from the other ones, in that it aims to be more than an enriching and educational cultural activity. If it succeeds, it will may create real work for creative people.

Berlin is trying to become a centre for “creative industries” and young creative people. Part of this movement is the regeneration of the textile industry. Fashion and design schools are springing up, and the young professionals want to hold shows and bring their ideas to fruition. In Neukölln a lot of young fashion designers are trying their luck in old fabric halls or sheds, hoping to design a new label that will earn them a living. They work very hard, but success is seldom.

The idea of the *Tek-stil* project is to bring together these designers with a special kind of needle worker--women with migrant backgrounds. In Neukölln live many immigrant women without paid work who are skilled in the textile and handicraft fields, especially needlework. In the afternoon they can be seen sitting in the backyards or around the playgrounds and producing marvelous needlework. They have no professional perspective, few connections to other people, and no opportunity to speak German or to talk to people besides their families. Integrating them into this project may open the door to earning a part of their living and connecting them with society.

The designers develop their ideas and prepare material and machines, and the women do the sewing (or knitting or embroidery) and influence the design, the patterns, the technics with their cultural traditions. A young artist, architect and urban developer had the idea to open a new studio as a workplace for this meeting of potentials, hoping to develop a cooperation with lasting effects, perhaps even a new fashion label. Since spring 2007 she has had to overcome several difficulties. The biggest problem has been the different work rhythms and concepts of obligation on the part of the immigrant women. Most of them are

not used to working regularly and are not yet able to commit themselves to accomplishing their work within a definite time frame. In addition, they have difficulty accepting the idea that professional training is necessary in order for them to be able to cooperate with the designers. The designers, too, have had to acknowledge the different rhythms of the immigrant women—rhythms of families, of motherhood, of powerful traditions. But they have to follow the rhythm of their profession and are bound by deadlines and the fetters of marketing.

We think this project needs more time to become fruitful. Yet time is money, and the project has only enough money for a short time. There are, nonetheless, glimmers of hope. Having come to understand their chance of succeeding with the project, the immigrant women are now willing and able to come to short workshops. It is hoped that this attendance will have a snowball effect. I believe in this project, because it fits exactly with the human potential that is Neukölln, and it may release even more potential. And it is very intelligent, designed with the insight of an artist. The first collection was presented in the gallery of the Department of Culture and was available for everybody to see. There were handbags in thirty shapes, all made from the same material as the *Passage des Emigrés*--the red, white, and blue-checked plastics. The different models have names like Bangkok, Birmingham, Caracas, Istanbul, Paris, and Tokyo, and they manage to embody the spirit of these cities. This collection is a perfect symbol of diversity as Germany moves into the new, globalizing century.

- ⁱ According to the German law of residence, this permit of toleration (*Duldung*) is a temporary suspension of deportation. It does not signify a right to residence in Germany.
- ⁱⁱ Other such courses for the mothers are offered in the kindergarten and in the elementary schools. The German education system has at last come to understand that if the mothers cannot speak German with their children, and if the children are not prepared for the German educational system as soon as possible, the tragedy of exclusion will only perpetuate itself. And the time when children were the interpreters between the teachers and the parents, translating what they liked to translate or doing it in a very “creative” way--must be overcome.
- ⁱⁱⁱ See Frédéric Hartwig and Stefi Jersch-Wenzel, eds., *Die Hugenotten und das Refuge: Deutschland und Europa* (Berlin, 1990).
- ^{iv} See Cihan Arin, “Traditionslinien der Migration und Stadtentwicklung in Berlin” in Renate Amann, ed., *Berlin: Eine Stadt im Zeichen der Migration* (Darmstadt, 1997), 26-33.
- ^v *Ibid.*, 27.
- ^{vi} See Ulrich Herbert, *Hitler’s Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labor in Germany under the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 2006). More generally on the subject of foreign labourers in modern Germany, see Ulrich Herbert, *A History of Foreign Labor in Germany, 1880-1980: Seasonal Workers, Forced Laborers, Guest Workers* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1991) and *Arbeit, Volkstum, Weltanschauung: Über Fremde und Deutsche im 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main, 1995).
- ^{vii} Patrice Poutus, “Die DDR, ein anderer deutscher Weg? Zum Umgang mit Ausländern im SED-Staat” in Rosmarie Beier-de Haan, ed., *Zuwanderungsland Deutschland: Migrationen 1500-2005* (Berlin/Wolfratshausen, 2005), 124 ff.
- ^{viii} These terms were used to mark the difference between the present situation and the painful history of forced labourers in wartime Nazi Germany, who were euphemistically called “foreign workers” (*Fremdarbeiter*). It was not until the late 1990s that German officialdom was able to start calling them “forced workers” (*Zwangsarbeiter*).
- ^{ix} On German citizenship during the period 1870-1945, see Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, MA, 1998); Oliver Trevisiol, *Die Einbürgerungspraxis im Deutschen Reich 1871-1945* (Göttingen, 2006).
- ^x Karen Schönwälder, “Migration und Ausländerrecht in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland” in Haan, ed., *Zuwanderungsland*, 106 ff.
- ^{xi} The Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions was adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in October 2005. The treaty stresses “the need to incorporate culture as a strategic element in national and international development policies, as well as in international development cooperation, taking into account also the United Nations Millennium Declaration (2000) with its special emphasis on poverty eradication.” The treaty also emphasises that “culture takes diverse forms across time and space and that this diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities and cultural expressions of the peoples and societies making up humanity.” See portal.unesco.org.
- ^{xii} Volkswagen produced the car in Wolfsburg, for example, but the fastening of the blinker was done in Berlin.
- ^{xiii} The government of Berlin is well aware of the fact that while the city’s middle-class districts are doing relatively well, those with poor and migrant population are the losers. In the districts in crisis, programs of “neighbourhood management” (*Quartiersmanagement*) have been implemented that are trying to mobilize the power to spur processes of social inclusion, economic and social enfranchisement, and popular participation. In Neukölln there are nine neighborhood management programs, some of which are quite active (i.e. in the *Rütli-Schule* process described above). See also the chapter by Hans-Uve Schwedler in this volume.
- ^{xiv} Otherwise they would be expelled from the production, as happened to one boy.
- ^{xv} The idea of the *Patenschaft* between cultural institutions is the central idea behind the Berlin concept of cultural education. An institution and a school (or kindergarten or youth club) make a contract to work together for at least three years. The cultural institution works continuously with the educational institution, develops projects, offers practical training in the technical area, invites to rehearsals, comes to school meetings, and is part of the *Schulkonferenz* that is responsible for the results of a school. The realization of the *Patenschaften* started in February 2007 with an open rehearsal in the *Konzerthaus*. By the end of 2007, some thirty such *Patenschaften* are in effect.

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