Encounters with Otherness in Berlin: Xenophobia, Xenophilia, and Projective Identification

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COVER PHOTO: “There was a big hot air balloon that we passed that said “politics needs a worldview” in German. I liked this message. It was a comforting first impression.” - Emily Kunkel
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In the summer of 2017, fifteen Princeton undergrads gathered in Berlin for the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies Global Seminar on xenophilia and xenophobia. This text is the product of their experiences. It details how and what they learned in engaging this topic in a foreign setting. It is also a *Zeitdiagnose* (temporal diagnostic) of life as a foreigner in Germany at a time when the standing of the US and the image of America in the world is fundamentally changing. This change is due not least to the success of Donald Trump in the November, 2016, US election campaign, in which a large audience for xenophobic appeals emerged. The Princeton undergrads carried this particular context along with the seminar’s texts and discussions into their life in the German capital, and were asked to document what insights they arrived at in approaching the topic of the foreign and strange ethnographically and psychoanalytically, that is, through the experience of interactions with other residents. They were in the unique position to experience the city as foreigners at the very moment when Germans are being asked to open up to new arrivals on a new scale. In the previous two years, over a million migrants and refugees (the largest group from Syria) had fled to Germany and been greeted in a welcoming culture (*Willkommenskultur*), framed by Chancellor Angela Merkel’s decision to let them enter without prior applications or registration. Many of them ended up in Berlin, even creating within six months what the Syrian and Iraqi refugees call an “Arab Street,” a part of Sonnenallee. There they can speak Arabic and enjoy the familiar smells, tastes, shops and visual culture of streets in the countries they had fled. The question of what their incorporation means, and what social “Integration” might mean in the future, shadowed student experiences of the city.

The description of the seminar from the Princeton course catalogue reads:

*The contemporary world refugee crisis— an estimated 65 million— has increased anxieties about the presence of the foreign in many parts of the world. Identification through irrational fear of the foreign is currently on the rise, manifested in anti-immigrant and religiously motivated national exclusionary movements, discrimination, political party competition, racism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, internal purging, and even massacres. This course examines the socio-psychology of both xenophilia (welcoming the foreign) and xenophobia (fear of the foreign), focusing on the modification of projections and the changing nature of its objects in Germany. It will also introduce students to ethnographic methods by participating in various cultural encounters and observations outside the classroom. The seminar will be held in Berlin, a vibrant, recently divided city with a radical history of xenophobia and xenophilia.*
I have been engaged in ethnographic research in Berlin since 1982, with a brief interlude (from 1999 to 2008) in Lebanon and Syria. In the summer of 2015, the people from my two fieldsites came together in Berlin — tragically (for Syrians fleeing war), surprisingly (for Germans), and serendipitously (for me) — and I began to work on xenophobia and social solidarity. I was joined by my partner Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi, also an anthropologist at Rutgers University and a native of Berlin, who accompanied us in many of our events.

In February, 2017, I interviewed 75 Princeton student applicants for the 15 spots in the global seminar. I subsequently bragged to colleagues that the applicant pool was so diverse and impressive that I could have selected a group comprised of only Asian-born students, only black students, or only Latino/Latina students. Instead I followed my sense of who might get the most out of such a seminar and made the difficult choice to prioritize students from different disciplines who had never been outside the US, and those who had a more direct tie to the topic or to Germany. Four of the students were foreign-born, six brought with them recent immigrant experience, three spoke fluent German. All except one had just completed their first or second year of study.

“Learning from experience” is the prosaic title the British psychoanalyst Wilfred R. Bion gave to a book he published in 1962, which anticipated the tenets of object-relations theory as it has evolved since. In an attempt to help us think through and think more profoundly about experience, he works centrally with the concept “projective identification,” and introduces some new (and initially confusing) terms, such as “digesting experience,” “beta elements,” and the “alpha-function.” The point he emphasizes most relevant to the seminar is that thinking depends on awareness of emotional experience that is the result of frustration and the working through of projective identifications. A projection is easy enough to identify: one projects some qualities onto another person. In a projective identification, one projects them into another person, who then feels compelled to respond to the emotional weight of what has been placed in him or her. Students were asked to pay particular attention to this process not only in interactions between others they observed, but also to what is projected into themselves, along with what they projected into others.

Students were also asked to be alert to their fantasies and dreams. Along these lines, Bion argued that to become aware of emotional experience it is not sufficient to bring dream experience to consciousness (as Freud had it), but rather to bring our everyday experience with others while awake to our dream world. To learn from experience, we must, in other words, be able to make what happens to and with us in the everyday available to our unconscious (to Traumarbeit, dreamwork). There is, then, nothing obvious about learning from experience. It is not a simple process of becoming aware or conscious of something. The fact is, we are creatures of habit and tend to resist learning from experience, especially if those experiences question habitual ways of thinking, behaving, and relating. Learning from experience involves making oneself present to a place in a way that exceeds consciousness and allows for our unconscious to be affected by lived experience.

In the academy, we tend to teach students to learn from reading books, listening to lectures, analyzing history, making interviews, collating surveys, or from controlled experiments. Rarely is the student’s own experience with others made into the stuff from which they can learn about an object in the world. In this seminar, students were encouraged to move outside their comfort zones and to have nonjudgmental experiences, to actively seek out encounters with people, places,
and objects, to expose themselves to the unanticipated, the unpleasant, the accidental. They were to experience the joys of discovery and frustrations of the fieldworker. Only after they had such emotional experiences could they entertain the possibility of learning from them.

We further sought to avoid extractive forms of learning (such as direct interviewing, question and answer sessions). Instead, we listened closely, discussed, observed and were observed (even stared at), eavesdropped and were overheard. We tried to become alert to our responses to the feelings projected into us, or the observed responses to projections by those we were interacting with (Germans, migrants, refugees, and each other). Finally, we asked if those responses involved a modification of the initial projections. The views people hold of each other obviously involve projection of stereotypes. But these projections are constantly reshaped in personal encounters in which inner images—identifications—invoke unconscious phantasies that are either stabilized or modified. Xenophobia and xenophilia are the two extreme responses that such projections take.

For most students, communicating without German competency was the first emotional experience in the global seminar. English is a world language but it is not a universal language. Even in Berlin, many people speak no English, and many Germans do not want to speak English—not even to American students—in their own country. And if they indeed relent to speak in a foreign tongue, they most likely express themselves differently than they would had they spoken in their native tongue. Thus, while any English-born speaker carries from childhood on a language bonus (certainly in academic literatures, where especially theoretical discourses are increasingly written in English), this bonus has limited utility when one wants to penetrate façades and appearances in everyday communication in Germany. As students quickly discovered, English is often insufficient for access to an interaction—in a grocery store, restaurant, train station, bus—much less for a meaningful conversation. German itself often proved inadequate to understand what was going on. Access was also contingent on an emotional response that could be mirrored—a smile, a kind gesture, a serious frown. Of the three students who spoke German, two had problems getting Germans to converse with them in German. Three students spoke Arabic, and several had begun study in the language. To facilitate German language immersion, John Benjamin, a graduate student in German at the University of Texas, met students four times a week for instruction.

The initial experience of most students in the seminar was, therefore, of linguistic incompetence and inadequacy, often felt as embarrassment or even shame. This experience was unpleasant but invaluable, for it was an emotional experience of something that most students had to this point only registered as a thought. They needed to risk other ways to communicate.

The accumulation of episodes in this text is drawn from much longer daily journal entries that students painstakingly recorded about their experiences. Without a protocol of what exactly to see or to say, where to hang out, with whom to converse, students were asked to engage the city on their own terms in their own time. Many frequently wandered out on their own; others in small groups. We also, of course, had many outings together: often twice weekly in restaurants), to museums, parks, the universities, a refugee tour, a refugee-taught cooking class — and for one weekend, to Copenhagen, a historically welcoming country that had recently instituted high barriers to immigration and to claiming asylum status. Student outings together or in smaller groups included going to concerts, bars, clubs, theater, cafés, and beer gardens. My goal in restaurant choice was to expose students to unfamiliar tastes (e.g., Thai, Vietnamese, Turkish, Bavarian, Swabian, Berliner) at the highest quality affordable. Food is the most direct bodily incorporation of culture; it provides a sensual opening to the other’s tastes.
In all of this, the seminar asked about the predicament of the other as an object of incorporation at the extremes of xenophilic inclusion or xenophobic exclusion. That is, the other’s sensibilities in food, clothing style, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, gender, nationality, and class. Working in contemporary German society, the question on which we focused was about the experience of incorporation (or not) of refugees and migrants into German society. We explored how differences between Germans and the new arrivals were drawn, less by experts (although we did hear some experts and read some of their analyses) than in the experience of migrants and refugees themselves, and also in the experience of Germans and longterm residents, above all the offspring of Turkish guest workers from the 1960s and 70s. And we explored this through our own experience as non-Germans (though one student had been born in Germany as well as my partner, Parvis, who often accompanied us) from Princeton University, mostly American-identified. Thus, perspective was never something to bracket out of interactions but something to develop in them. Perspective, ultimately, morphed into singular written voices, intersubjectively shaped, defined not just by location (from where one came) but also by fine tuning, rhythm, mood, and emotional awareness.

Compared to large American cities, Berlin is an extremely safe city, even at night. Yet in all urban environments, men and women have quite different perspectives on danger, security, and risk, all of which counsel more caution for women, especially when it comes to erotic exchanges. Even adventure, one of the central experiences sought in a global seminar, is shaped by the different ways in which men and women can afford to imagine it. Few of the women’s journal entries about safety made it into this final text, but I was impressed by how they watched over and took care of each other to minimize vulnerability and enable some degree of adventure for each other. Male vulnerability is also not absent from these encounters, though, again, not experienced or reported in the same way. As specifically young people studying in the US, this particular generation is experiencing the world outside the US as a much more hostile or foreboding place than it was when I was a student their age. For my generation, American capitalism and imperialism were counter-balanced by envy for America’s inclusive culture (“give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses…”), its democratizing and civil rights movements, and its creativity in the arts and sciences. In the year of this global seminar, 2017, latent hostility toward Americans was intensified by President Trump’s “America First” pronouncements. Trump as person often entered into many interactions as an unspoken and invisible accompaniment, a dark shadow haunting exchanges between the refugees, students, Germans, and other Europeans.

As the experiential episodes in this text illustrate, the seminar’s focus on learning from experience prepared students to become more aware of their and others’ projections, and to work on modifying them in their own responses. Through this personal experience, students were able to more precisely document what they also saw and heard: how projective identifications by Germans and foreigners leads them to engage (or avoid) each other, ultimately shaping the social responses to incorporative or exclusionary politics.

JOHN BORNEMAN
PROFESSOR OF ANTHROPOLOGY
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GLOBAL SEMINAR INSTRUCTOR
LEOPOLDPLATZ

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF LEOPOLDPLATZ

As we exit the metro-station by Leopoldplatz, my first impression is one of disappointment. I had expected a bustling market-square. Instead, Apria, Irma, and I are greeted by the intersection of two busy streets, a small ice-cream stand, and a generic department store. Immediately, we spot a group of veiled young women that Apria and Irma are poised to interview. While they approach the line to the ice-cream store, I scope out the neighborhood. Though the landscape is dominated by automobiles, plenty of people can be seen walking around. Walking past a few fast-food and strawberry stands, a diverse crowd of people walks past.

“The diversity of Leopoldplatz is quickly apparent. East Asian and Middle Eastern fast food joints intermix readily with German bakers”

The second surprise comes from the apparent lack of tourists. The area is bustling, but devoid of the slow bustle of large tourist groups. People, often dragging their small children behind them, walk with a purpose. The crowd is marked by a preponderance of veils that I had usually only observed in NeuKoelln.

Once Apria and Irma wrap up their interview, we walk towards the AsiaImbiss. As we approach the store, we see a marketplace emerging behind the storefront. Bingo.

The stores, predominantly organic, are packing up their goods. The market looks deserted. It is clear that we have arrived after peak-hours. Apria and Irma decide to approach a black woman with two young children standing in front of a store selling African fast-food. I walk around for a couple of minutes. Outside of the market-place, I spot people sitting and drinking. Many of them are black or Middle Eastern men, slumped back, drunk. In the corner of the market, I see a bread-store that still hasn’t closed.
Intrigued by their selection of organic oatmeal, I approach.

The white middle-aged saleswoman is quick to engage in the conversation I strike up. What's the history of this market? What's the history of foreignness at this market? How has it changed?

The saleswoman is helpful and knowledgeable. She has worked here since the market started, more than 15 years ago. She is here twice a week, selling bread and other products. The market was Berlin's first organic market. Throughout our conversation other salespeople walk up to her, exchanging pleasantries and trading larger bills for smaller bills. People here know each other. The marketplace retains the connectedness that is often lost in the highly commercialized marketplaces in other large cities. Salespeople ask how her children are doing, she replies with a bit of gossip about the flower-store owner. The atmosphere is cute.

Things haven't changed much here, she tells me. The group of drunkards sitting around the market has always been there. It used to be the Russians on the North-side, junkies on the West-side, young men on the East-side, Turkish on the South-side. The groups have changed, but not the atmosphere. Ethnic groups of day-drinkers have been replaced with other ethnic groups. She felt equally safe.

Middle-Eastern women had always sought out the market as a source of safety. “Because organic markets usually attract left-leaning wealthy people?” She is appalled. Organic food is actually cheaper, she tells me. And everyone likes high-quality food, not just the left. No, Middle-Eastern women just felt at home here. It was safe, they knew each other, and reminded them of home. They would bring their children, and just spend the morning and afternoon here. She's always enjoyed seeing them.

And now? A few less Middle-Eastern women. Turks got replaced with refugees, but the refugees are not as numerous. “We just have to help refugees integrate. The German state is at fault.” She explains to me.

After a while, we wrap up the conversation. I depart, a big bag of oatmeal in one hand, a jar of organic peanut-butter in the other. I can't help but think of the prices. Surely not cheaper.

Apria and Irma quickly join me. We walk around the market, interviewing other people, before deciding to walk around the neighborhood for a bit. The friendly atmosphere we felt by the market quickly disappears. Everywhere, we see drunk men staring at us. As we approach a playground, the drunk men are replaced with veiled women clinging onto their children protectively. The large Canon camera around my neck has made people suspicious. We all voice our discomfort with the neighborhood. Apria and Irma approach a veiled woman with a young child. She is not interested in a conversation. We move on.

Leopoldplatz has a distinct feel of a Berlin Kietz. ‘Kietz’ is a German word that can be best translated as ‘neighborhood’ but encapsulates more than that: a Kietz also encompasses a culture, a community, and a way of self-identification. In that way, it somehow mirrors the connotation of identifying oneself as a resident of the Bronx, for example. The location is stripped of touristy-niceties. People speak frankly, and prefer to communicate in Arab or German. My camera makes people suspicious, whereas in other parts of Berlin it would have made people trust me more. We stand out. Apart from middle-aged adults and young children, no one seems to be of our age. The atmosphere reminds me of Marzahn, the east -German neighborhood I had visited a week prior.

This is one of two locations of a series of encounters we students engaged in. The other location is Hermannplatz, described later on. From the 17th July to the 21st of July we, in groups of 3, ventured to the Leopoldplatz U-Bahn station and searched for encounters. A week later, we put those encounters to paper. They are paired with observations from our 6-week stay in Berlin.

ZARTOSHT AHLERS
7/17/2017
ETHICS OF ENGAGING AT LEOPOLDPLATZ

Sadie, Alaa, and I arrive at Leopoldplatz at 3 pm. It is a hot day but slightly overcast. The U-bahn exits onto a large square, populated by various food stands with places to sit in the shade. To the right is a large fountain, the type that shoots water up from the ground in sporadic patterns. During our time there, a few kids run through the fountain, screaming with joy at the water's unpredictability. Surrounding the fountain are a combination of wooden and concrete seating areas, like large double-sided benches. Parents sit watching their kids play. Woman in hijabs sit and talk in small groups. Other men and woman, some very young and some old, sit alone or in pairs, reading the newspaper or talking on the phone. By one of the small cafe stands, a table overflows with men speaking in a language I don't recognize. There is very little color in the square. At its very back, behind the fountain, is a simple Evangelical church. Attached to that is a small park, but no children play there since it is fenced off from the square. One man sits on the stairs of church, staring out onto the space. I try to follow his gaze but can't.

I am incredibly nervous, we all are. I don't want to enter into something I can't handle, I don't want to interrupt, I don't want to offend. In class, we talk about “ethics of engagement.” I don't pretend to know entirely what this means in its entirety, but nonetheless I think about the ethics of this project throughout our two days at Leopoldplatz. How do I interact and record people's stories without exploiting them? The purpose of this assignment, after all, is to approach people in our assigned space and ask them questions about what it means to be German and (versus?) what it means to be “foreign” in Germany. My interest, therefore, lies primarily with people who “appear foreign” — but, really, what does that mean? I am troubled by looking around the space, an intruder, and identifying people as foreign and, only then, taking interest in their lives. I don't want to make objects of the people I see and interact with. What's more, I can only speak English. Not only is this a turnoff to many Germans, and weakens my credibility as a researcher, it may also give me some sort of power during an encounter, insofar as I am asking a non-native English speaker to try and tell me about themselves, their thoughts, their experiences, in a language that isn't theirs. What right do I have to be here?

RAINA SEYD
7/17/17

HERMANNPLATZ

INTRODUCTION TO HERMANNPLATZ

In Hermannplatz, we are conspicuous. We stick out, a few obviously non-German students looking confused and with no real direction. As people go about their business, they sometimes look up quizzically at our group standing idle in the middle of the plaza, turning around in circles scanning for someone who who looks friendly enough to approach.

Hermannplatz is a very functional place. Sure, there are people sitting over coffee, food or beer and chatting, but most in the plaza are in purposeful movement. They're here for a reason. Some are rushing to the U-Bahn station to catch the U7 or U8 home for the day, some are just passing through and others are shopping at or working the many Turkish stalls.

On the one hand, this is a perfect place for observations and conversations. It is representative of Berlin, with a mixture of Germans, European and Turks doing the things they do daily - eating, drinking, shopping and walking. More than perhaps in touristy, kitschy Bergmannkiez, where we live, we feel like here we may be able to encounter Berliners in their authentic selves. This should be easy.
However, we cannot forget our own peculiarities in the eyes of our subjects, and this is where we struggle. We see our potential interviewees as normal and representative of Berlin, but we cannot help but feel that as soon as they find out who we are and what we are doing, they might change in order to address who they think we are.

We try with limited success to remedy this problem by framing our introductions in different ways. Sometimes we simply say we are students from the US interviewing people about Berlin. Other times we tell them that we are specifically taking an anthropology class focused on xenophobia and the conceptions of and tension between foreignness and Germanness. In certain situations we go even further, mentioning that we are Princeton students and that these interviews are part of a project for our university.

These approaches render a variety of often frustrating results. The more relaxed approach is met often with confusion, strange looks that say “What are you doing here?” and a resulting lack of effort to fully answer our questions, as we experienced with a Libyan man. The middle approach is better, but felt more forced and left our subjects visibly wondering what their answers could really have to do with anthropological research and why anyone would care about what they have to say. Finally, the Princeton approach, as it did with a Swiss woman, intimidates people and causes them to either retract or look for complicated intellectual answers where they really have none of great substance.

In Hermannplatz we are conspicuous, and as a result, our encounters with locals and internationals alike are wrought with tension. Yet, instead of feeling only frustrated, which we certainly experienced, we can listen to our subjects’ responses, make some guesses to offer an interpretation, and go further by trying to understand how our own presence might change the way people think and talk to us about the complex, emotional issues we are facing.

WILLIAM GREAR
7/19/2017

ETNICITY

WHERE IS THIS FROM?

Woher kommen Sie?” said the uniformed woman at the door, holding her hand out for our entrance tickets.

Having not heard her clearly, we looked confusedly at each other. “Sorry?” Alexia said. “Where are you coming from?” she said, switching to English.

The ambiguity of her question made us pause; was she asking what place we were at before walking here? Perhaps where we were staying in Berlin? What museum or ticket booth we had been to before coming here?

Worried we somehow had the incorrect ticket or had come through the wrong entrance. But perhaps she was simply asking where we were from, so we answered: “We’re from the US”

“Where are you coming from?” she repeated, in the same German accent.

“The U…” we tried to repeat.

“California!” she interrupted, confidently pointing to Alexia.

“Oh, well close, actually Arizona, so almost. They’re both in the West, so close.”

“And where is this from?” she pointedly vaguely towards Sadie.

“Colorado… I’m from Colorado”
“No, where is this from?” pointing to Sadie’s arm. “Do you not see the sun in Colorado?”

We laughed and walked away, made uncomfortable by her strange conversation and the pointedness of her last remark.

Alexia:

This brief interaction took place at the entrance of the nearly empty Altes Museum. Having gotten a day pass for all the museums on Museum Island, Sadie and I were trying to squeeze in the Altes at 5pm before everything closed in an hour.

When the elderly woman scanning our tickets initially asked us where we were coming from, I had trouble understanding what she was saying, let alone what she meant. Remember looking at Sadie in confusion, as we both tried to understand what she meant.

Because my mentality coming in was so focused on seeing all the museums, I interpreted her almost accusatory tone and outstretched arm as linked; I initially thought she was asking which museum we had come from last, and that a wrong answer would mean that my ticket wasn’t valid, panicking that security would come drag me off and that I would be thrown in some Museum Island prison…

Irrational fear aside, I felt much more at ease when Sadie answered for both of us: “America”. Almost all of my interactions with a new person in Germany would invariably begin with a question in some form or another about where we were each from. I attributed the fact that I didn’t understand what she was asking at first to linguistic difference in the phrasing of the question.

Her persistence with the question after Sadie had already answered morphed my worries into puzzlement. Her casual confidence took me by surprise when she assigned “California” as my state of origin. She presumably was just trying to see if she could guess where we were from, perhaps as a diversion. However, I couldn’t tell whether she guessed “California” for me because it’s one of the biggest, most well known states in the US (perhaps she’d gotten lots of tourists from California before), or whether it was because there’s a large Hispanic population there.

Over the course of the brief interaction, the question of “where are you coming from” shifted in my mind from immediately preceding location (the last museums) to nationality to state to just color. Sadie and I proceeded into the museum still unsure of what to make of the interaction.

Sadie:

The linguistic confusion at the beginning of our interaction, the woman’s demanding, authoritative tone and her status as a museum guard all predisposed me to confusion and caution at the beginning of the conversation. My initial fear that we were somehow in trouble dissipated as it became clear she was asking where we were from- this was a basic conversation I had had many times in Berlin, and I could confidently anticipate how the conversation would play out. I smiled at her after she ascertained that Alexia was from Arizona, only to be thrown back into confusion when she used the pronoun “this” when asking where I was from. Not “where are you from?” but “where is this from?” and as the conversation ended, it became clear that this “this” was not me, but my skin color. But she hadn’t asked Alexia for an explanation of her skin color, so I assumed she was asking what she had asked Alexia, “where was I from?” The answer Colorado satisfied her (although my skin color obviously does not come from Colorado), but also made it more evident to me that she had been inquiring after my skin tone.

Her response “do you not see the sun in Colorado?” made me feel like my skin tone was a negative thing, that I had somehow failed to tan, to get darker, as if such a thing was within my control (which it isn’t, with my fair skin, blonde hair and blue eyes I invariably burn within 10 minutes of stepping out into the sun without sunscreen.) Of course we do have sun in Colorado, 300 days of it, an ironic fact that has absolutely no effect on the color of my skin. I am rarely asked to explain my whiteness, especially in Germany, where people often seem to assume my Germanness due to my physical experience. Where did my whiteness come from? Geologically, my parents, ancestrally, from a list of countries too long for me to keep track of- Germany, England, the Netherlands…but neither answer seemed to fit into our conversation. Even
more strangely, she was just as pale as I was, so if my paleness was a defect it was one she shared with me. Perhaps she was projecting her discomfort with her own skin tone onto me, asking me to feel bad about my skin tone as she did with hers. Perhaps this reveals something about the changing perceptions of color in German society, a new social desirability of darker skin, or perhaps the distaste of whiteness was simply limited to this museum guard, stemming from some personal experience in her past.

SADIE VAN VRANKEN AND ALEXIA MARTINEZ  
7/21/2017

ENCOUNTER WITH A TURKISH IMMIGRANT AT LEOPOLDPLATZ

I am standing roughly 15 meters behind Apria and Irma as they approach the bakery inside the U-Bahn station by Leopold Platz. I sheepishly look over. The plan had been for the two girls to approach the young baker, whom we presumed to have a Middle Eastern migration background based on his dark complexion, and ask him if he spoke English. If yes, they would ask him a series of questions. If not, I would introduce myself and conduct the interview in German. I see Apria and Irma ask a question, but in response to the baker’s answer, they stand there awkwardly, half looking at me, half unsure what to do.

“Apria and Irma prepare mentally to approach Ali. Ali, swinging a dish rack, can be seen surrounded by the steam of his surroundings”
I approach the baker who is working to fill Apria's and Irma's order. He has a distinct face: a short goatee, short hair, a few facial scars. He looks friendly, inviting. "Haben Sie ein paar Minuten fuer ein paar kurze Fragen? Do you have a few minutes for a couple of short questions?" I ask. "Ja, worum gehts? Yes, what about?" He answers with a Berliner lower-class accent, common with 2nd generation Turkish immigrants. The accent is strikingly modern, thereby lacking the features of the traditional Berliner accent, Missingsch. I recognize the accent immediately. Born and raised in Moabit, a lower-class neighborhood in Berlin, I grew up surrounded by people speaking similarly to the baker standing in front of me.

I explain to him that we are University students, interviewing people with a migration background on what they think of German culture, and on the refugee situation. "I have a migration background," I tell him "and I think …" He cuts me off. "My parents came from Turkey when they were 20. I was born and raised here though. I have a migration background" he says with pride. He seems excited to answer.

I reintroduce myself, realizing that we hadn't done so at the beginning. We shake hands. His name is Ali. "Ali, what do you think of the recent refugee situation?" Ali gets quieter. "Also… Well…” he lowers his voice, "Ich glaube was ich zu sagen habe ist vielleicht nicht politisch korrekt. I think what I have to say might not be politically correct. [Interactions will be directly translated from now on]”. I look at him encouragingly, "That doesn't matter, just say what you think."

"I really don't like the refugees. I don't think Germany should take more refugees. In fact, I think refugees should be sent back.”

I look at him in surprise. "Why? What do you mean?"

"Berlin is just not the same anymore. It's become dirtier, more dangerous. I live in NeuKoelln and refugees are ruining it. It used to be a safe neighborhood, but not anymore. All they do is sit around and drink. Berlin is always awake, sure. But now you see so many refugees sitting around just not doing anything. And man, if you take the two girls with you and walk past a group of refugees, it's just not safe. They will stare and jeer and yell. That used to not happen. You always have to respect women. Women deserve a lot of respect. My mother, man. I would never say anything like what they say to women to my mother. No respect. NeuKoelln used to be a good neighborhood. Now, all you see is Arab stores. All the German stores have left. I mean, there is still one German glass-maker, but nothing beyond that. Arab stores everywhere. The neighborhood has changed”

I am surprised. I was not expecting a response such as this from an immigrant.

“You talk about German culture and Arab culture; do you think of yourself as having German culture?”

Ali: “Yes, I was born here. I am fully German. I feel German.”

Z: “Could refugees ever become German?”

Ali: “No. They can't. You have to have been born here. I know refugees. I know a few refugees. To be German, you have to respect laws, respect authority, learn the language, you have to learn peace. You learn those things in the school. If you come here at age 20, they don't let you go back to school. You have to have gone to school here. German culture has to be taught to you. You have to learn good work ethic and respect for authority. You have to learn that in school. Refugees come here when they are 17 or 18 or later and just don't care about school anymore. I miss school. School was like a second life. I worked hard in school, but I wish I had worked harder.”

A customer interrupts us. He looks at us a bit amused. “I didn't want to interrupt the interview here.” He looks as if he wants to say something. From his looks, I'd also expect him to have a migration background. Ali serves him and turns back to me.

Z: “Do you think young refugees could become German then? Children of refugees?”

Ali: “Maybe. I don't know. Yes, they could maybe. But it is different now. Before 1990, it was different. My parents came here when they were 20. They learned German culture. After 1990, immigrants and refugees were a different type. Nowadays they don't want to learn anymore. All the Arab states, they are all shit.
They are dirty, shit countries. These Arabs come here because they made their own countries shit. Why does Germany have to take refugees? The Arabs can stay in their own countries.”

Z- “What exactly is different now? How could you adapt?”

Ali- “I am not sure. I don’t know. But I work my ass off, and the refugees just sit around and get paid from my tax dollars. I sweat… Come here. See this”

Ali motions for me to join him behind the screen. He opens the door to the small store, and I step in. I am surprised by how short Ali is. He must be 5’5. It really is hot back here. Ali has forgotten about Apria and Irma. As if they are not there anymore. Both of them stand awkwardly behind the counter. Later, as I am re-listening to the tapes, I realize that they are very confused by the situation as it is unfolding.

“Ali wipes off his work-place as I approach him”

Ali- “You see how hot this is? I stand here. Day after day and sweat. I work my ass off in this heat and I sweat. It’s worse usually, it’s not bad now. But I sweat. And the refugees just take my money. My family all works hard. We all sweat. And our money goes to the refugees. And what do the refugees do? They sit around. Starting at 17:00 all they do is go to restaurants. Eating, hanging out. And us? We are tired from work, we go straight to bed. And they get our money. What do we get from that?”

Ali is angry now. He is animated. In the beginning of this conversation, he was cautious to tell me of his opinions. He is not anymore. He is angry and proud of his beliefs.

Z- “Do you think you are representative of what people with a similar background as you believe?”

Ali- “I don’t know. There are many people in the world. Everyone is not like me, and I’m not like anyone. Me, in my family, with our culture, our traditions, our family, in our household it’s like this. We have a large family. I don’t want to talk for my family, but me, personally? I think it’s shit what they have done with the refugee situation. Whether my parents think so, whether my family thinks so, whether my friends
think so, I don't know. I don't know that. Whether other Arabs with a migration background think like this? I can't tell you. I also don't really care. Me personally, this is how I feel.”

Ali looks at me for a second. Then his attention is diverted

Ali- “And here is my family. And here they are.”

I turn around, two tall, good-looking Arab men are looking at us curiously. They are dressed well, just as trendy as the other Turks we have seen around. Both of them could have come straight out of a fashion magazine. One of them has a lanyard around his neck, indicating his place of work.

They greet us.

Z- “If you want to purchase something, please, go ahead.”

“No, no.” one of them responds, amused.

Ali- “Let’s step outside. It's getting really hot.”

We step outside. Ali introduces us. Points to the lanyard of his friend. “He is working. Hard worker” he tells me. His friend grins. “I am telling him about the refugees. They know too, they know too.” Ali tells his friends. One of the two looks at me, “Are you from the newspaper?”

“No, just students doing research. Do you also have migration background?”

He has a similar background to Ali. His parents moved here in their 20s. He was born here. His answers are similar to Ali’s, but he doesn’t talk as clearly. He talks more aggressively. At one point he exclaims: “If the German government needs help moving the refugees back. I’ll volunteer. I’ll carry them back. One by one. I’ll carry the refugees back on my own shoulders.”

We end the interview. Ali has to work, and his friends are less interested in talking to me than he is. I ask him whether I could take a picture of him, but he doesn’t want to. He doesn't want the interview to be associated with him. Irma suggests taking a picture of his hands. That doesn’t go over well either. He doesn't want the interview to be associated with his work place either.

As I leave, I buy a Broetchen. It seems strange to have stood here for about 30 minutes without purchasing something. Ali insists I take it for free. I insist on paying. We play the Middle-Eastern game of competitive politeness before he accepts the money. We shake hands, smiling, and depart. Irma and Apria are disappointed at the refusal to let us take a picture. I show them the picture I had taken before the interview started. It works well.

Later, I reflect on the interaction. Ali sounds, at times, like a Southern, poor, working-class American. Their situation is eerily similar. Ali feels cheated. He perceives his family to have succeeded in Germany without the help of the state. To him, it is unfair that the recent influx of refugees are getting, what he perceives to be, handouts. He readily adapts right-wing rhetoric, unaware that it was the same rhetoric used against his parents and him by an earlier generation. Ali is proud of his work ethic, proud of his ability to have integrated himself. He fills the markers of a successful immigration. The first generation of refugees lacks exactly the things he prides himself in having. They lack the time he has had to have become part of the German community and lack the economic opportunities to become productive members of society. For this, he feels a tremendous amount of resentment.

On another level, this resentment is a projection of his own anger at his situation. Ali wishes he had taken school more seriously and is unhappy with his job at a bread-store. The joking manner in which Ali points out his friend’s work-lanyard hides jealousy at his friend’s economic advancement. Ali’s loyalty towards his employer, seemingly unnecessary as we explain to him that the pictures will only be shown to a small group of American students, gives Ali a feeling of importance that he was seeking in his occupation. This unhappiness in his occupation and his own situation is projected onto the immigrants, whom he dislikes for their laziness and lack of participation in the economy, things he himself is liable to be criticized for by other Germans.

Ali creates a completely arbitrary distinction between his parents’ generation and the current generation
of immigrants (the year 1990) so he can count himself as part of the in-group. There is an inherent conflict between his own background and his views on refugees, which he seeks to overcome through this inclusion of himself in the in-group. Ali seeks to gain acceptance into the German national community by adapting right-wing rhetoric of otherness- in order to be able to do this, however, he needs to create a sharp historical distinction between himself and the latest generation of immigrants.

Ali also makes a point of establishing the refugees as being dangerous to women- relying on the right-wing narrative that used to be specifically used against Turkish guest workers. Ali, a Muslim, seeks to differentiate Muslim refugees from previous Muslim immigrants, hence also his reliance on the term 'Arab' in place of 'Muslim' which other critics of German's refugee policy more commonly use. Ali establishes me as 'protector' of Apria and Irma and appeals to what he perceives to be protective feelings when he warns me of the treatment of women by refugees. While relying on sexist notions that women need men to protect them, he aims to perform his status as not being frauenfeindlich (Frauenfeindlich is the German word for misogynist, but is literally translated as “enemy of women”, a term that doesn't cover misogynistic forms of patronizing women). This performance seeks to underline his point that his generation differs from the current generation of refugees through a common marker of integration- treatment of women.

Ali began this interview by showing a certain kind of shame for his own political beliefs. Initially, he speaks with a lowered voice, cautious. Throughout this interview, this shame dissipated and was increasingly replaced with a pride in his unusual thoughts. This pride culminates with the arrival of his two friends, who share his beliefs, but is quickly replaced with a shy caution when we raise the topic of taking a picture of him. Initially, Ali feels that he is not allowed to have these political beliefs as an immigrant himself. It is only when I affirm his status as a German that he embraces his beliefs. His pride in these thoughts and beliefs stem from the fact that he believes that they make him more German, his shame and caution in these beliefs stem from a fear of being painted as an imposter for attempting to force himself into the German ‘in-group’ with these beliefs. He feels like an imposter, as he expects people to doubt the authenticity of his views towards refugee, due to the fact that he himself is an immigrant. In the end, my affirmation, the affirmation of a Middle-Eastern 2nd generation refugee who grew up in Berlin and portrays himself as a Western (or a German), helps him navigate his imposter syndrome. It only re-emerges when we ask him for a picture. He does not want to extend the trust he extends to me to my classmates, as they might interpret him as an imposter. Later, when I tell them about my conversation with Ali, his fears become justified. Irma and Apria are shocked and surprised at Ali’s beliefs. It seems shocking to them that an immigrant would hold such views.

ZARTOSHT AHLERS
7/18/2017

LEOPOLDPLATZ: AFD AND A SOCCER MATCH

While Alaa is speaking to a hijabi woman and her brother under the shade of a tree near the U-bahn station, Sadie and I wander around. I find a poster and call Sadie over. The poster is an advertisement for an “interkulturelle” (intercultural, multicultural) soccer game. This is interesting in and of itself. Many immigrants or refugees (or their children) we speak to emphasize how little they voluntarily interact with people outside of their ethnicity or nationality. But what complicates the poster — what interests Sadie and me — is the letters that have been written or scratched onto the poster. First, Sadie recognizes the letters “AfD” as a right-wing populist, anti-immigrant, and nationalist German political party. In English, they translate into the “Alternative for Germany” party (Alternative für Deutschland). Under the title of
the soccer game, is “Grenzen zu! Schluss mit Asyl.” In it, I recognize the word “asyl” (asylum) and schluss (stop). After looking up “grenzen” (border), I translate the sentence to roughly mean “Close the borders; stop asylum,” an overtly anti-refugee slogan.

RAINNA SEYD
7/17/2017

AN UNEXPECTED CONVERSATION

I find it interesting how most of my cultural experiences arise from accidents. Although this was stated within the seminar reading on fieldwork encounters, it stills catches me by surprise when these serendipitous moments occur. On this day, Apria was particularly craving Jamaican food so we decided to take the 30 minute trek. We encountered a few setbacks, such as almost missing a train and a 20 minute wait for the bus. Upon arrival we unfortunately found out that the Jamaican restaurant was closed. Thankfully there was a Vietnamese restaurant across the street. The inside was decorated with Bonsai trees and lanterns. The dark wooden furniture created a serene atmosphere that was aided by the fact that it was empty other than a young looking waiter at the counter. I could only see half of his body, but I assumed he was young because half his hair was bleached blonde in a small ponytail with the sides shaved, giving him a sleek and hipster look.

I approached the counter and grabbed a menu. He greeted me in German.

“Do you speak English?” I asked as I held the menu.

Waiter: “Of course,” with an affirming look on his face.

I was flipping through the menu, deciding on a dish, when he sparked a conversation with me.
W: “Where are you from?”
I: “I’m from America.”
W: “Oh nice, I have friends studying in America.”
I: “Oh cool! Do you know where?”
After some thought, he gave a perplexed look and answered that he did not know. He looked down to continue preparing an order.
I: “Were you born in Berlin?”
W: “Oh no, I’m from the Czech Republic, do you know about it?”
I: “Yes, of course.”
W: “Yes...I’ve been in Berlin for a year now, working here.”
I: “Why Berlin?”
W: (laughing) “I wanted to get away from my parents and this is where I could find work.”
I: “How do you like it here?”
W: “Well I only really get to see the path from my work and home... but I like it here. It is very multicultural. I think it is less racist.”
I: “How do you mean less racist?”
W: “I see all kinds of people walking around here together. In the Czech Republic, you see the same kind of people...When I was a kid, I was the only Vietnamese kid at my school. They would call me yellow and I would get into one fight every week because they would always make fun of me. I was very angry for a long time but it started to get better when I joined them and laughed when they made fun of me. But here in Berlin, it seems that it is not like this”
At this point, my food was ready and he was packing my box.
I: “Thank you so much for talking with me.”
W: “It is nothing. I hope you like the food so you can come back and talk again.”
I laughed and wished him a good day as I left. I was immediately reminded of the Fassbinder film, “Ali: Fear Eats the Soul,” and wondered if he shared the same loneliness and mundane attitude towards his working life as the immigrant Ali. I wondered what effect the bullying that he endured had on his self-esteem and the formation of his identity. It also reminded me of Andri from Max Frisch’s “Andorra.” Say something about Andorra Both the waiter and Andri represented two opposing reactions to instances of discrimination and othering from a young age. I wonder if the waiter had similar sentiments to Andri in terms of internalized hatred of himself but was not able to express them to me because of my whiteness and the negative experiences he had with other white people. His willingness to share this information with me and his suggestion that I return leads me to suspect that his interactions with others are limited to work and possibly with others digitally at home. I thought of him that night as I walked through the streets of the Kreuzberg Kiez, where we live, and I wondered whether his opinion of Berlin would change if he had the same opportunity that I have to explore this city.

IRMA QAVOLLI
6/28/2017
LET’S TEST YOU FOR EXPLOSIVES RESIDUE!

In the airport, I was pulled aside from the group after we went through security. I was behind Professor Borneman in the line. We took our jackets, backpacks and shoes off, and placed them in the grey boxes on the conveyor Belt. I opened my bag and took my laptop out of the backpack and placed it in a separate box as instructed. Professor Borneman then went through the metal detector and I waited for the officers to signal to me to pass through. When they finally did, I stepped into the metal detector, turned my body to face my right and placed my arms above my head. No metal! (of course.) They signaled to me to move forward and I started to put my shoes on and put my laptop back in by backpack.

Right then, a woman came from a side room with white curtains on all sides. She approached me and stood to the side of me and waited until I put my backpack on. She signaled me to follow her and I went into the room. I was getting nervous. I knew I got pulled aside from the group because I was Muslim and I was wearing the hijab. But I was not sure what was going to happen: questions about why I am heading to Denmark, additional checks of my passport or a pat down.

The room was even tinier than it looks from the outside. It has one table, with a huge machine that looks like a very elaborate fancy printer with a small screen on the side, and one chair.

The woman open a drawer under the desk and took a piece of white paper. She then streaked the paper on me: my head, my back, she lifted my shirt a little and took a swab of the bottom side; She unzipped my backpack and streaked it from the inside.

The woman could tell I was very nervous. I did not like what she was doing so I was twitching around and trying to turn my head and see. She repeated multiple times in English, “It is okay, do not move.” And she finally came to my front and streaked the front of my shirt. Then she placed the white paper inside a printer-like machine and waited ten second until the screen showed that there was nothing on the paper.

I went back to find Professor Bornmen. I told him and Parvis of what had happened. Parvis explained that they were testing me for explosives residue.

ALAA RAGAB
7/7/2017

AN ETHNIC CULTURE?

Today, Emily, Nate and I conducted our first set of interviews at Hermannplatz, starting at about 3:00 in the afternoon. Immediately after getting off the U7 though, I realized just how uncomfortable it would feel going up to people and asking if they could speak to us. This was particularly nerve-wracking when we were standing between the two U7 tracks trying to decide who to approach. Partly out of nervousness and partly out of politeness, we constructed an entire mental list of people we didn't want to disturb: people whose trains were coming soon, people who looked engaged in a book or conversation, the worker sweeping up the platform, the guy selling croissants we wouldn't buy, but who might lose business if we kept him from engaging with other (paying) customers. On reflection, it probably wouldn't have hurt to ask, but at the time we above all did not want to impose on anyone. Thus, we ended up asking a group of teens (12-14) who were loitering in the tunnel. Unfortunately, they didn't speak English and nor did the next woman we asked. After those failed attempts, we decided to go up to the street-level and toward the open plaza area above the U-Bahn entrance.

There we engaged in 3 compelling conversations, one with a pair of friends and two with individuals. The area we were exploring was a sort of outdoor market selling mostly fresh fruits and vegetables but
also with a couple stands selling clothes, shoes, and fidget spinners. There were also three or four places selling prepared food (falafel, a bakery, currywurst, etc.). It seemed that most of the sellers at the fresh food places were Arab or Turkish, while a lot of the food vendors were hipster-looking stands run by, mostly, white men. The weather was warm and sunny and the market was crowded. There was a woman about halfway between the two ends of the rectangular plaza who was singing on a partially covered stage with a complete musical set-up (mic, speakers, etc.). A lot of people were walking through and headed straight for the U-Bahn entrance but there were also a lot of people, individuals and groups, sitting around at chairs or on a ledge eating, talking, or reading while some appeared to just be waiting.

"The Market above the Hermannplatz U-Bahn Station"

Our first productive encounter was with a couple (or two friends) who we found sitting on a ledge eating. They didn't necessarily look “German” (in the blonde hair, blue-eyed sense) or even white. The man appeared to be of Middle Eastern descent but I couldn't identify the woman as any specific ethnicity. When we first walked up to them and asked if they could speak English they said yes, so we started asking them about what it meant to be German. The guy then inquired if we'd be willing to come back when they were done eating so we walked away and sat for about 5-7 minutes before going back to find them. As we approached they were just getting up to leave but were looking around as if they were trying to find us too. Although this may be a small detail, I found it noteworthy that they were attempting to continue the conversation. When we first approached, they could have easily, and decisively, turned us away by saying “We're eating” and leaving it at that; instead, they invited us to come back and were even a little reluctant to leave before we had gotten our chance to speak with them. Compared to what I would expect of strangers I see in public spaces in the U.S., they were much more willing to help us and to share their experiences with a foreign interrogator. If someone had come to me in the U.S. and asked these questions, I think my first reaction would be suspicion. Hearing that we were students from the US taking an anthropology class about Germany was enough to persuade them to share.
Anyways, when we came back to continue the interview we started by trying to determine their connection to Germany. The first question we asked was what it meant to be German, which caused them both to pause. Eventually the woman answered, “He’s not German, and I’m even mixed.” We learned that her companion, the man, was from Turkey and he had lived in Berlin for 12 years while she was born and raised in Germany. The man elaborated that he wouldn’t consider himself German and further that it took him 5 or 6 years just to get settled into the city. Even so, there were some actions and feelings he noted as signifying German-ness. For instance, he mentioned that when he goes back to Turkey and misses Germany, those are times he feels German. He also explained that if Germany is playing soccer in FIFA, he supports them. But even this was mitigated by his admission that if Germany were to play Turkey, he’d support Turkey. Moreover, these actions that he described as indicative of German identity, actions that he had himself performed, weren’t enough to make him feel ‘fully’ German.

What made these comments even more interesting though was how they related to his female companion’s understanding of German-ness. When we asked if being German requires being born in Germany, she immediately said no and that it was instead the “culture” and “rituals” of Germany that determine German-ness. Thinking back, I now wonder if she considered her male friend’s support of German soccer as not the “right” kind of culture/ritual to be German, or if he just needed more cultural/ritual practices to become German. Another thing I noticed in her descriptions of what it means to be German were allusions to race. Throughout our conversation, this woman referred to herself as “not German, but mixed” as if these were mutually exclusive, or at least distinct, identities. She didn’t tell us with what she was “mixed” and she didn’t say that German-ness required a certain skin or race; however, just the term “mixed,” as Nate pointed out to me, has racial (as opposed to cultural) connotations. What also suggested a racial definition to me was the way she looked at her companion and then at us when she first told us, “He’s not German.” Her expression seemed to say that it should have been obvious to us that he wasn’t German which, if I was reading her face correctly, would mean we should have known by his racial or ethnic features.

Now thinking back on this encounter, I wonder what made her decide to avoid an explicitly racial or ethnic definition of German-ness, despite what seemed to be an understanding of German-ness as at least related to race. Perhaps she really did believe that German-ness arises from culture, and yet subconsciously understands it as related to appearance. Perhaps she believed that German-ness is related to race or ethnicity but didn’t want to state that in front of her friend, thereby implying that he could never be German. Or maybe, feeling put on the spot as a representative of what it means to be German, she simply didn’t want to tell foreigners that Germans would still define themselves according to race or ethnicity.

However if we assume that her native language is German, perhaps a fault in translation produced the word “mixed” which may not have the same racial undertones in Germany as it does in the US; perhaps in Germany, one can claim being “mixed” because one holds two different cultures, rather than because one is a product of two or more different ethnicities. But since she didn’t specify what she was a “mix” of, and because I didn’t know if it was racial or cultural, I didn’t know how to ask her to clarify. If my reaction to “mixed” is more racial than what she intended and if I misread her expression when describing her companion’s German-ness, there is also the possibility that she didn’t see German-ness as related to race at all. Maybe I am simply projecting my American perspective, in which so much comes down to race, onto the experience of a different set of people in a different country.

We ended our conversation discussing the famous döner kebab and how she had heard that döner originated in Turkey but that it’s preparation in Germany was specific to Berlin. Then we thanked them and sought out other people to speak with.

SYDNEY JORDAN
7/13/2017
BEIRUT STATE OF MIND

A man sat on a wooden picnic bench, feet propped up in front of him, leaning forward on his knees. He was staring at us, as we scanned Hermmanplatz looking for an interview subject. I had seen him as we emerged from the U-Bahn, but had avoided eye contact. As I noticed him staring at our group of three, I instantly looked away. I glanced at him again, and he maintained steadfast eye contact. I was immediately uncomfortable – it felt like a game of cat and mouse, with him as the predator. As I thought back on the interaction, later, I realized that if he had looked ethnically German, I would have placed it as a Berliner Stare and smiled at the quirk.

After trying a few other groups with no success, we began to approach him. He looked Arab or Turkish; dark, oiled back hair and a groomed beard and he was wearing a tight khaki t-shirt and dark jeans.

We began talking to him, and asked if he spoke English. He tipped his head, as if to indicate he didn’t speak much. Alexia and I gestured towards Sam – the German speaker in our group – to come over and continue the conversation. But as he said he was from Beirut, I began to chime in too, with Arabic, and so the conversation took on a tri-lingual dimension. Alexia would speak English, Sam German, and I an Arabic-English mix, with the man answering in a mix of the three. He was friendly, open, and unashamedly glad to be having a conversation.

At one point another older man passing by came over, touched his shoulder, and kissed him on the cheek; ‘Keef, habibi?’, before continuing on. It struck me how comfortable Arab men are with touch. Picture an American businessman bending down in the middle of a business transaction, and kissing the hand of another man. It’s unimaginable – it would be seen as submissive, wildly overly intimate and, probably, gay. Simply put, Arab men are confident enough in their own identity and sexual orientation to touch one another. Most likely, this is because there is far more homogeneity in what is accepted. Homophobia is rampant and generally accepted in Arab society, but homoeroticism is welcomed, and so, ironically, there’s little discomfort with physical touch among men – men don’t assume the touch indicates anything sexual. Conversely, the USA is far more tolerant, and relatively speaking, urban popular culture dictates a gay-friendly society. So, American men are less comfortable with touch lest they be misinterpreted.

The conversation continued, with him asking just as many questions as we did. The interview had become a conversation, off-the-cuff and casual.

‘Do you go out? At night?’ he asked.

‘Not much.’ smiled Alexia.

‘Why not?’ he asked, gently mocking. She laughed, surprised at his candour.

He looked at Sam and me ‘Do you?’ he asked.

‘Yes.’ I said, wondering what he hoped to achieve with this line of questioning.

I thought of my time in Beirut; a chaotic, buoyant city filled with contradictions – multitudes of religions, nationalities, and ethnicities all rubbing up uncomfortably on one another. There is always tension; sometimes the sparks erupt into flames. This steadily simmering tension infuses the nightlife with spirit and a wild, untameable soul.

‘Is Berlin’s nightlife as good as Beirut, you think?’ I asked.

He laughed. ‘No, but you know...’ He seemed to be indicating that the trade-off of security was enough for him.
I thought of my friends from Beirut, who all discuss America in faintly superior terms, dismissing Trump as a product of typical American idiocy. They all had teased me endlessly for going to America for college – the underlying message being: you’re selling your soul. This man didn’t seem to care about American politics – or any politics.

A plump woman, wearing stretched light washed blue jeans, came over pushing a pram with one hand, with another child strapped to her front. Her shoulder length brown hair was well styled, and she was wearing thick, dark eye makeup. She had on an eye-catching diamond ring on her fourth finger - a wedding ring. I looked at the man’s hand – he had a ring on too. I hadn’t noticed earlier.

Looking slightly flustered, he gestured to us to explain to her that we had approached him. We stared at him, confused. And then, understanding, clarified that it had been us to approach him, and not vice versa. Awkwardly, we thanked him, smiled at her, and left.

LEILA BEN HALIM
07/20/2017

CULTURAL BELONGING

BODY LANGUAGE IN A CONVERSATION ON FOREIGNNESS

The first people Will, Yang and I spoke to at Hermannplatz were two young people, sitting at one of the small tables in the square, talking animatedly. We approached them because they looked sunny and friendly. The woman had a particularly interesting look—her hair was dyed a couple different shades of pink and purple at the ends and was whipped into a braid that fell onto her left shoulder. She wore a pair of black sunglasses that turned up gently at the ends, making them a little edgy, and her arms were splattered with a couple tattoos here and there. As we approached I could tell she was relaxed—she leaned back into the bench, draping her arm around the back of it and tossing her head as she laughed. The man looked like a typical German man, by my stereotypical definition. He had blonde hair that was receding slightly from his face, light skin, blue eyes and some hints of a blonde beard and mustache. When we approached them and explained our project they seemed just as enthusiastic to talk to us as they had
to each other. “Come! Sit down!” they said, and made room for the three of us on the bench. At first I felt awkwardly like we were imposing on their lunch/coffee, but they seemed genuinely relaxed and happy to talk to three strangers for a couple minutes. The man had lived in Berlin for three years and had initially shared a house with the woman and six other people in Neukolln. “Most of them were from everywhere,” he said, referring to those housemates. They both described Berlin as “super cosmopolitan and diverse.” The woman turned out to be from visiting from France, she had moved back there from Berlin after a few years. Here is a little bit of our conversation with her about Germany and France:

Will: How long have you been in Berlin?

Woman: So I lived for three years here, but I’m not living here anymore, I’m just on holiday seeing friends.

Yang: Where in Germany are you originally from?

Woman: I’m from France. I love that [you thought that]. She said this while laughing and leaning back, clutching her hands to her heart as if she was flattered at the question and thought it almost cute; the man laughed with her.

Will: How does it make you feel that she assumed you were German?

Woman: I love it. I wish I was born in this country. She laughed again.

Will: Why?

Woman: I don’t know. It’s so good in everything. Just look at the situation...all the French people come and like make a mess. I don’t know, you have good morality. Like easy things. I was doing a super strange thing here and nobody cares. I wanted to go take a shower in the fountain and this old guy came to me and said ‘What are you doing?’ I’m like ‘Well I want to take a shower I don’t have shower in my car,’ and he said ‘Oh okay that’s cool, all the kids shower here, why not.’ In France they would be like so shocked like ‘ughhh people like you…’

Man: People in Berlin are really open for everything and nobody really minds what anyone is doing as long as it’s not disturbing a lot.

Yang (to the woman): Do people often assume you’re German?

Woman: Sometimes. Maybe if I had like blonde locks and like blue eyes they would think I’m German.

Will (to the man): Where are you from in Germany?

Man: I’m from Stuttgart, which is more in the South. There people are not as open minded and not as accepting to foreignness so much. It’s a bit different there, I think.

For this part of the conversation, I wasn’t really the person asking the questions. This was actually extremely valuable, though, because it meant I got to observe the interviewee’s body language as they answered the questions. As a dancer, I take note easily of the way people’s bodies shift as they speak and interact with one another. Both the man and the woman seemed very at ease as they were talking about her and how she would like to be German. They laughed and looked at us and each other and leaned towards the table, engaged in the conversation. This kind of loose, easy body language continued as we talked about how Berlin is an open place, where nobody minds what anybody else is doing. They spoke loudly and without hesitation. However, as soon as the conversation shifted to the point where the woman said maybe if she was blonde with blue eyes she would be thought of as German, the body language shifted. Both parties lowered their previously enthusiastic voices and brought their arms in closer to their bodies—the woman took her arm back from its position draped her arm from around the bench. They stopped making eye contact with us and only made eye contact with each other. It was as if their guards went up, maybe because they felt that it could be a controversial topic that they were addressing or maybe because they felt uncomfortable with the realization that the woman’s definition of a German as blonde and blue-eyed probably fell in line with the less-accepting southern German mindset that the man mentioned in regards to Stuttgart.

ELENA ANAMOS
7/18/2017
I ran a 30-minute timed race at Marzahn. After a cold welcome, I was surprised by how quickly people became kind and polite to me once I put on my running shorts and started running. I spend some time thinking, and came to some conclusions.

Every person engages in different form of movement. A man walking in a suit experiences the world differently from the same man walking in casual clothing. In Berlin, I have experienced 3 distinct forms of movement that have shaped my experience of the city.

1st Movement
When I run, I get constant stares. My shorts are short, and reveal a lot. My shorts are brightly colored. The sight of a young, fit man running is unusual. I run quickly, another unusual sight. People give me looks of surprise, admiration, annoyance, disgust. They shriek when I run past, they stare at my legs, they give each other mocking looks.

At the heart of it, however, my short shorts and my hobby disarms me. Running is a rich people's sport. Running is a tourist sport. Running is a Western sport. As such, people are not afraid of me. People are not afraid I will steal their purse. People do not see me as a threat. People see me as a wonky, weird, athletic tourist. I do not pose any danger.

When I run, parents motion for their children to get out of the way. I pose a physical threat to them- in the same way a bike would. When their children are out of the way, however, I am an attraction, not something that makes people afraid.

2nd Movement
When I walk alone, I am a threat. People clasp their purses, people look down on me, people force a physical confrontation by not moving out the way. The vast majority of people look at me the way they look at anyone else. The vast majority of people does not see me in a negative fashion. There are, however, the few that take my slightly brown skin as something to hate, something to be afraid of. The number of people that I experience in such a way is much smaller, granted, than the number of people Middle Eastern immigrants of a darker hue experience. To these people, when I walk alone, I am not a tourist, I am not a Westerner, I am not a wealthy athlete. To these people, when I walk alone, I am a young immigrant, scavenging through the wealthier parts of Berlin.

I have noticed distinct differences between how people perceive me when I walk alone versus when I walk alone with a camera. The camera immediately puts me in the mental category of a tourist.

3rd Movement
The third type of movement that I have done through Berlin is in a crowd of other students. When the class, led by our fearless leader John Benjamin, has walked through Berlin together, I am part of a collective. The individual stereotypes that people might associate with me are lost in the crowd. We become one stereotype- the American tourist group. Our individual experiences of the city are vastly different alone than in a crowd. In a crowd, the individual differences that set us apart are explained away by our membership of an American tourist group.

As such, we are generally disliked for the volume of our conversation, but not feared. We are appreciated for the money we spend, but rarely is a tourist liked. Clubs, bars, and restaurants pride themselves of being devoid of tourists, of being 'local'.

ZARTOSHT AHLERS
7/19/17
THE “GUEST” MENTALITY

Will, Elena and I looked for people to talk to at the square next to the Hermannplatz U-Bahn station, where passengers came and went amidst a lively scene of stands selling merchandise ranging from coffee and kebabs to belts and raw fish. The first people we approached were a couple sitting at one of the white benches next to a kebab place. They were a bubbly pair, talking to each other with gestures and profuse facial expressions. The woman had colorful, braided hair and wore a pair of dark sunglasses. The man had defined features, dark hair and a light beard. They both looked European, and at first I thought they were both German.

“We conversation happened on these benches bathed in the afternoon sun.”

We learned that the woman came originally from Paris and the man from Stuttgart. After this introductory part of the interview, the focus of our conversation shifted to the woman's perception of differences between France and Germany. The couple had an interesting exchange in this discussion, which I have transcribed below.

Woman: … I think that this specific thing about Berlin, situated in Germany, is that people are responsible for what they are doing, because the communication between government and people is comprehensive. (People get told that) 'you should do this and respect the rules because it is good for you and good for everyone.' And people would do it. In France it is the opposite. The government is like, ‘you bad kids, you shouldn't do this.’ And people are like, 'I'm not a kid, fxxk off, I'm never gonna listen to any rules you're saying.' And here (in Germany) there is a communication, and it works. In France I never pay for the U-Bahn, because I don't care about what you (the government) are saying. But here (in Germany), I feel bad if I don't pay, because they make me feel like order can work.

Man (interrupts her): But I guess you're also doing this because you are here as a guest. For example, here I don't pay for the U-Bahn or steal from the bar. I don't stick to the rules. But I would not do so when I am abroad. I stick to the rules and be a “stupid German.”

Will: So you said she's a guest. (Asking the woman) how long have you been here?

Woman: Three years.
Man (speaking to the woman): So I think in your mindset, you still feel a bit as a guest. Do you?

Woman: (in thought) hmmmm… I don't know… What I wanted to say is that being here changes my way of viewing hierarchy. I live in the car, and (when I encounter them because of the fact) the police have been super nice…

Man (affirming her while adding): I think the police are also more relaxed because they have to deal with bigger problems, and the police don't care (about this kind of small problem) anymore. If you do this in Stuttgart you will get fined…

In this brief exchange, the woman elaborated on her positive experience with the German police authority. Her perception of German society’s order and German government’s comprehensive communication with its people came across to me as very ideal. My first reaction was that this Rousseauian “social contract” vision of German society was not a comprehensive view, and probably pretty unique for a person to have of Germany nowadays. I was very curious to hear how the man from Germany would respond.

Interestingly, the man attributed the woman’s positive experience to a “guest” mindset. Using his different behaviors in Germany and abroad to mirror the woman’s, he suggested that she was probably more submissive to rules in Germany not because the social contract in Germany was more clear and appealing, but because she felt the need to behave well as a “guest.”

Having had no encounter with the police in either Germany or France, I could not testify to either the man or the woman’s words on a specific, factual level. However, on a more general, abstract level, I found the man’s idea of a guest-host relationship between the woman and German society fascinating.

I started thinking of the woman’s experience with this guest-host dynamic. The woman seemed reluctant to identify as a guest, but she subconsciously assumed the role. She constructed fantasies of Germany as a hospitable host to her. For example, she seemed to be deeply impressed by the fact that the police let her live in her car. In a symbolic way, the society accepted and welcomed her way of accommodation in it. As foreigners abroad, we all prefer to think of ourselves as welcomed by a hospitable host society. This is probably why the woman focused more on the niceness of German society than other factors when trying to account for her positive experience. For example, she needed to be reminded that the German police might only be lenient with her because of the complexity of bigger issues for them to deal with in a city like Berlin.

The woman’s imagination of the German society, represented by the Berlin police, as a hospitable host, then fed into her “guest” behavior. She thought that the German authority was nicer and thus deserved her obedience. In reality, the German society was not necessarily so much better than the French one. German guests living in France may in fact construct the very same story, in reverse. Her behavior as a guest submissive to the host country’s rules was perhaps caused by her own construction of Germany as a deserving host.

Finally, I appreciated the exchange because it put the two interviewees in conversation with each other. Instead of solely answering our questions, the man asked the woman a question. There was an authentic interaction between a German and his “foreign” girlfriend with us as the audience. They were looking at each other, gesturing at each other and challenging each other's ideas. It was a relief to actually see that we were not just extracting information from the couple, but also providing a chance for them to share a meaningful reflection on their Berlin experiences.

YANG SHAO
7/18/2017
For our first day of observation, Sadie, Raina and I went to Leopoldplatz. The weather was good. People were hanging out by the fountain. They come and go, and move along with the clouds. Perfect day to be observing! Some people were sitting in groups, others alone. After coming to the street from the underground and getting our eyes used to the new brightness, I decided to go sit down for a few minutes and just look around before I start talking to people. I sat next to an elderly woman who covered her head with a beautiful flowery silk scarf.

I said “Salam Alaikum” (Peace be upon you) as I approached her. She responded with a soft smile and “Walaykum Al Salam,” (and upon you.) I thought she was Turkish but wanted to make sure so I asked “Arabisch? Turkisch?” Hard of hearing, she leaned forward towards me and I asked again. She responded Turkisch.

She asked me “Arabisch?” I nodded and said “Ja!” We both then smiled, knowing that our conversation would end right there. We turned and looked ahead at the children playing in the fountain. Over ten children were running around the fountain in Leopoldplatz.

Raina, Sadie and I then walked around, hesitant of who we should approach. I approached a family of five: one middle aged woman, who I took to be the mother of the other two young women, young man and a baby. All the women wore the hijab and the young man was dressed in a recently-ironed dress shirt. The baby, who looked no older than six months old was sleeping inside the stroller. The family were waiting by the side of the u-bahn entry.

“Salam Alaikum,” Peace be upon you, I said; they all replied with “Wa Alaykum Al Salam.” I could tell that they spoke Arabic from their response. Relieved, I stepped forward and introduced myself as a University
student from the United States. I was studying the idea of foreignness in Berlin. I asked if I could ask them a few questions and they agreed. The young man, who looked about eighteen years old, took it upon himself to respond, while the women just smiled and nodded.

(Because of the length of the interview, I will not be presenting the entirely of it; rather I will provide what I thought was interesting and memorable about my conversation with Omar. Though the interview was conducted in Arabic, I will be only provide the English translation)

Alaa: Where are you from?
Karim: I am Palestinian and I lived in Syria.

Alaa: How long did you live in Syria? And when did you leave?

Karim: I was born in Syria actually because, you know, the occupation, so I lived my whole life there. I left because of the war in 2012.

I found it really interesting how he identified as Palestinian even though he was not born in Palestine and never grew up there. This conversation occurred while the Al-Aqsa conflict in Jerusalem had escalated. I sympathetically nodded, gesturing affirmatively. As I moved on with more questions, Palestine kept coming up throughout the conversation.

Alaa: When you think of a German, what that first things that come to mind?

Karim: I guess I think of hard work, maybe someone I can learn something from.

A few days earlier my class met with a young Syrian refugee for a class discussion. When we asked him the same question about what first comes to mind when he thinks of German, he said a white man with blonde hair and blue eyes. My class was not convinced with the answer and they tried to push back against it. Zartosht, for example, argued that he does not fit this description yet he is identifies strongly as German since he was born here. So, as I was talking to Karim I wanted to know what was his take on this.

Alaa: Do you think of a German as a white person, someone with fair skin, and colored eyes?

Karim: No, I do not think a German has to be necessarily white. I think it all has to do with where you were born, where you grew up.

Alaa: Do you feel that there will come a time where you identify as a German, maybe after twenty or thirty years of living in Germany?

Karim: No never. Arab is better.

Alaa: Oh really. Why do you think that?

Karim: Uh I do not know. It is just a different culture. Arab people are more lively. They are more sociable and louder. Germans do not talk much.

Alaa: You mentioned your sister living in Norway with your father. Would you stay here in Germany, or would you move to another country?

Karim: If I can, I would live in Palestine, but then again the occupation.

His mother and one of his sisters who had stepped away during the conversation came back. They led me to understand then that it was time for them to leave. I thanked Karim and the women, told them it was a pleasure to get to have this conversation with them and wished Karim best of luck in his future.

ALAA RAGAB
7/17/2017
On our way out of a café/gallery in Mitte, I notice a neon sign that hangs in the cafe portion of the place. It is written in Arabic. Although I don’t know what it says, I take a picture.

This place is a very hip, trendy place — the type of spot Germans might call “schickimicki,” that Americans might deem “bougy.” The Arabic sign hanging over the café, in bright neon yellow, strikes me as incredibly odd. It seems to me disingenuous, like the Arabic has somehow become trendy. I already hate the place for kicking us out, and so I may be misdirecting my anger — regardless, I am uncomfortable with the idea of a language being “cool,” specifically Arabic, which is a language that, in other instances, signifies a majority immigrant neighborhood — a language which, for many Germans, represents a fear of Islam, a fear of invasion. Later, I ask my friend who speaks Arabic to translate the sign for me and he translates it, roughly, as “Strange in Every Place” or “Outsider in Every Place.” What is interesting is that this sign is intended to
create ambiance in a space where most of the customers presumably cannot read what it actually says. Perhaps this is not an exploitation or appropriation of Arabic, but instead a political statement, a piece of art. If it is the later, I have to wonder how effective it is. What is it supposed to do? It is so subtle, a kind of whispered secret that hangs over people's heads without them hearing. Only certain people — those very "Outsiders" — could understand the secret act on it. I wonder what the reaction of, say, an Arabic-speaking immigrant might be upon walking into this very expensive and hip (read: white) cafe in the middle of Mitte. Is the secret a comfort to see? Does it emphasize one's outsider status? Or is it an inside joke that it reverse the Germans, who do not understand Arabic, to outsiders for once?

RAINIA SEYD
7/22/17

HERMANNPLATZ ENCOUNTERS:
DAY TWO

Back at Hermannplatz for another round of discussions, Alexia, Leila, and I felt encouraged because the first outing had gone well. I still wanted to talk to someone in German, so I was pleased when the first man we approached, an electrical worker from Lebanon, was willing to do so. I finally put my language skills to work as I translated for the group during parts of the conversation (he could also speak Arabic and limited English), yet this encounter only served as a promising starting point for better things to come.

The final encounter of the day stands out in my mind because it yielded the most relevant information concerning foreignness in Berlin, and it also reminded me of an experience I had during the class trip to Copenhagen (more on that later).

Searching for more subjects, Alexia suggested that she and I approach a table of three folks, one man and two women who all looked our age, while Leila could stay back and record the interaction in her notebook. I was reluctant to interrupt their conversation, but I went along anyway.

Alexia got us started, making sure they spoke English, then asking if they had two or three minutes for a few questions for our project. They had the time, so Alexia first asked where everyone came from.

"We are from Berlin," the man told us. One of the women agreed and, perhaps sensing that we were curious about this answer because she and the man were black, added that they were both born in Berlin. The other woman, who was white, did not add anything about her origins and mostly stayed out of the conversation unless we asked her a direct question.

The man told us that his parents came from Ghana and his friend mentioned that her parents came from the Congo.

"Do you in any way feel foreign?"

"No, we don't feel foreign because this is where we were born," he answered. "But, I think it's difficult for others to accept me as German because of my name and the color of my skin."

Nonetheless, both told us that they felt like they belonged to Berlin in particular. The man stressed how Berlin was unique in its openness to difference, stating that he liked "that people can live with each other. It's not necessary to be white, black, Christian, or Muslim, or something like that. We can all live together."

The woman agreed, but added that Berlin did not represent all of Germany. When she went to Munich, for instance, she felt uncomfortable because there was no one else around who looked like her. She also said that she would not feel comfortable traveling to eastern Germany.
After a few more minutes and a few more questions, we thanked them for their time and called it a day. I found that the overall interesting point of this interaction was the idea of how folks perceive race as a marker of cultural inclusion or exclusion.

This reminded me of our class trip to Copenhagen’s city hall to view a refugee exhibit. The display featured the personal stories and photographs of mostly non-white refugees from diverse geographic and cultural backgrounds who all ended up in Denmark. As far as I understood it, the exhibit ultimately aimed to challenge the tendency to use differences such as race as the main criterion for belonging.

By chance, I had confronted questions of race and cultural identity that very morning before the exhibit. I went to breakfast just after seven and sat next to Parvis. One of the breakfast staff asked Parvis where he came from and, although I forget his exact answer, he was surprised and indicated that he was certainly not from Denmark. The worker expressed no surprise at Parvis’s answer and, even though I wasn’t engaged in this exchange, he turned his attention to me and said, “He looks Danish.”

At first, I took it as nothing more than a compliment, even though “looking Danish” is not necessarily a good thing. But after we finished the exhibit, I began to wonder what it actually meant to “look” Danish. My ancestry is a mix of German, Irish, and Mexican (for most folks, the fact that I am not completely white is a surprise). I suppose my Latino heritage doesn’t show too well, therefore it would not be difficult at all for someone to include me in ethnicities that are historically and popularly associated with the white race (my partial German background must be reasonably close enough to account for my apparently Danish looks).
I thought that this kind of broad categorization was understandable—it is a way for folks to make sense of others who they don’t know well. Nonetheless, the conflation of race and ethnicity—that is, a shared national and cultural tradition—was interesting when I thought of the refugee exhibit or even my own knowledge of the United States. In the US, there generally seems to be less of an insistence to view national and cultural belonging through a racial lens; this, I assume, is partly thanks to the policy of birthright citizenship and a lengthy history of immigration. Probably in the eyes of most Americans today, being anything other than white does not presumptively alienate one from our national and cultural identities.

As far as the breakfast worker’s comments and the very existence of the refugee exhibit provide a general picture of Danish thoughts on this question of identity, the most visible differences seem to carry more weight in classifying folks as national and cultural insiders or outsiders. Similarly, based on the comments from the final encounter of day two at Hermannplatz, so too does the case in Germany seem more racialized than the liberality and tolerance I had expected when I first arrived in Berlin.

SAM VALLE
7/20/2017

On a brisk, cloudy Thursday afternoon, in between two rain showers, I headed out with Alaa and Raina to do my second round of interviews at Leopoldplatz. We found the square transformed into the Wochenmarkt aller Kulturen, the “weekly market of all cultures,” a boldly named concept which did not seem to correspond to the four or five stalls set up around the square.

Our interactions started badly, after Alaa approached two women sitting in front of an African food truck asking if they spoke English. They agreed, but looked extremely wary. Alaa asked if we could ask them a few questions, and one woman mumbled to the other in French. The first woman refused, saying that she “was working,” although she was obviously socializing with the other woman. I felt an almost irrational sense of loss, convinced that if I had approached them in French, they would have been more open to talking, and I could have explained why we wanted to ask them questions, which might have set them...
more at ease. This interaction preoccupied me as we continued to search for people to talk to. I felt like I had missed my best opportunity, and I was still interested in finding out what type of “African” food they sold.

Despite my lingering disappointment, I agreed to go with Alaa to talk to a boy, about our age, sitting on a bench eating Chinese takeout out of a box. He was white, with rosy cheeks, close-cropped hair, and he had colorful stains on his hands, as if he had been painting. We approached him assuming he would speak English, as our general observation seemed to be that younger people were much more likely to be confident in English, and we weren’t disappointed. He agreed to talk to us, and Alaa started to ask questions. He was a college student in Berlin, born in Postdam. We started by asking him how he felt about refugees, and he expressed an openness towards receiving them. We talked for a while about generational differences in attitudes towards migrants, his own interactions with refugees, and then we asked, “What does German mean to you?” More than with any other question, he seemed to struggle to express himself in English as he tried to answer: “Uhh, let me think, I’m trying to translate…” He finally looked at us, raised his hand expressively, and said “Deutsch, it is, it was originally, it was many tribes. It was never about one tribe, it was always many tribes.”

This answer intrigued me. In all my readings, visits to museums, and interactions with Berliners, I had never heard anyone refer to a historical concept of Germany as a multi-ethnic place. His narrative seemed similar to the American narrative of the “melting pot,” that the very fabric of society was composed of different ethnicities and nationalities. This American story struck me as far-fetched when applied to Germany, especially given that so many people insist that Germany was not a country of immigration until the 1970s, and given the German imagining of an ethnic Germaneness of blue eyes and blond hair, so often projected onto me during my time in Berlin. I wondered why he was using this particular argument with us, which defined Germany as an inclusive place. I imagined he would not have said the same thing if we had not started the conversation by asking about refugees, prompting him to answer our question about Germanness in reference to foreignness. I also wondered where he had heard this narrative— from a politician? From a teacher or history class? It seemed unlikely to have been imagined by him without some outside influence. And why had he switched to the German word deutsch rather than use German, the word we had asked him to define? For him, the association was evidently stronger with the original
German word in the historicizing he was trying to get across to us.

I was reminded again of this interaction in our last week of class, when I was reading an article by the German sociologist Wolfgang Welsch. He writes, “the recognition of a degree of internal foreignness forms a prerequisite for the acceptance of the external foreign. It is precisely when we no longer deny, but rather perceive, our inner transculturality that we will become capable of dealing with outer transculturality.” Welsch’s argument is focused on an individual’s internal contradictions, the parts of the self which we dislike and therefore project onto others, a common basis of xenophobic associations of refugees with dirt, laziness or over-sexuality. In recognizing the historical and current transculturality of German society, the interviewee was perhaps also accepting his internal contradictions and refusing to project them onto the perceived other.

SADIE VAN VRANKEN
7/20/2017

DINNER OF “HYBRIDS”

Mary, Vincent and I simply chose the closest table when we ducked into the little hole-in-the-wall Indian restaurant, just wanting to take off our wet coats as soon as possible. The three of us had met at the Christopher Day Parade, when a sudden downpour drove groups of strangers together under trees and umbrellas. The rain fell on the demisexual American-German intern, Lebanese Frenchman volunteer, and Mexican-American Princeton student alike.

Now taking refuge in this empty little restaurant, we cared far less about the food than the company. After ordering a few dishes to split, we continued to find what besides the moody Berlin weather brought the three of us here together.

The most natural first question we asked was where everyone was from. Such a simple question, one might expect a simple answer. But for the three of us, musing on this question led to an extended dinner discussion that lasted hours. Since Mary and I already knew each other somewhat, first we asked Vincent about himself and where he was from.

Vincent was born and raised in Paris, France. He was 23, yet somehow already had managed to have dual masters degrees and done a year working with an NGO in Senegal focused on economic development. Having studied German himself a few years, this was his first week of a year he will be living in Berlin, volunteering with an organization specifically helping teen refugees acclimate. It was fascinating to hear about how his work relates to the theories I am currently exploring here.

I asked him about how he chose his work. Though usually laid back and calm, he shook his head and became more animated as he said, “I’m ashamed of us” when he described the statistics of population, applicants, and the staggeringly low number of admitted refugees into France last year.

He spoke excellent English with an equally excellent French accent (we had to explain to him the American stereotypes of French accents). Every now and then he paused to search for a word or phrase. It was interesting for me to hear the differences about the “real” French that Vincent knew, and the “Canadian” French that Mary knew. I found myself wondering if he knew Arabic as well; his appearance and last name suggested Middle Eastern far more than French. Again I caught myself about to ask, “So you know Arabic?” during dinner, but then I stopped and wondered why I would make that assumption automatically, and that either way was quite possible.

I’m glad I didn’t assume, and in fact later without me asking he laughingly said he was angry at his dad (who married a French woman but himself was from Lebanon) for not speaking only Arabic to Vincent growing up, so he could have learned it.

At that point I shared that I am coming from a similar place; I only speak English, although my mom
knows Spanish. Although I wish I would have grown up with Spanish so that I could be bilingual now, I do feel frustrated when people assume automatically that I speak the language, or shame me for not knowing it. Given my own frustration, I realized how hypocritical I was for mentally making the same assumption about Vincent with Arabic.

I asked if Vincent found people made assumptions about him in France, and he said nearly never in Paris. The way he put it, “The confusion doesn’t come from the outside… people in Paris completely know, I am completely French.” Pausing and looking back a bit, he said that the only place there was confusion was “from me, from inside, internally… I know I’m French and people know me as French, but sometimes I wonder, am I really more Lebanese?”

Next, Mary shared her story. In her last year of college as a student in International Relations, she is currently working an internship in Berlin. She is tall, with short brown hair and blue eyes. I was surprised when she said,

“People tell me I’m too white to have an immigrant family.”

I had no idea that she came from an immigrant family. Whether from my own preconceptions, or simply the frame of mind I’ve been in for our class (studying migration INTO Germany), I experienced cognitive dissonance switching the roles and imagining a stereotypical German native becoming the immigrant.

When I asked her how she would respond if someone said “Where do you come from?”, she answered, “Well that’s kind of a complicated story. Technically I’m from Michigan, I was born and raised there. But, that’s the whole thing. Under the surface, my parents are immigrants, my mother is from Germany and my father is from the Netherlands.”

Despite Mary herself visiting Germany 14 times and the Netherlands about 7 times, she only has American citizenship because her parents “didn’t expect me to want or need German citizenship, so never bothered to apply, so now it’s a hassle for me that I want to live here.” Finishing her last year of studies in International Relations, with a focus on Germany, she plans to live here in Germany and is in the process of applying for citizenship.

After explaining a discussion in my class about how movement and cultural identity is central to what we are exploring, I asked Mary if I could record the sort of response that she gave at dinner. Happy to help, Mary responded to the nebulous question that we in our class come back to time and time again: “What does it mean to be German?”

Her response: “To identify as German, no German knows… We always struggled to figure out what is German. Is it culture, is it language, is it location? And that’s the thing, all these things can be very fluid and interchanging so… for me, to identify as German, it’s more of my um, heritage and where my mother comes from.” She also said that speaking the language is very important to her. However, at the same time, given that there are people who feel German who don’t speak the language, she acknowledges:

“It’s really a lot of grey areas and there’s no black and white to being German, which is probably true for every other culture. So for me, it depends on how you feel. Because here there are people or their parents weren’t from Germany, but they were born here, and they feel German. That’s absolutely valid. Um, there’s people whose parents were born here and went to the United States that don’t feel German, that’s also valid. So it’s a matter of your perspective, and how you identify yourself. Germany is not just stereotypes… we make efficient cars, stop at every red light, we wear lederhosen (that’s a Bavarian thing, so please don’t get that into your mind)... but to be German I think is more of a mindset and is associated with the location…. It’s very much a fluid concept.”

Mary herself feels both German and American. During our dinner conversation Mary humorously groaned, “Yeah Germans say I’m too American to be German, and Americans say I’m too German to be American, haha, what even am I?! Ha I guess I’m a weird hybrid of some sort.”

After a brief pause, and finishing her rice, Mary added, “But at the end of the day, you know, I’m just Mary.”
I could not agree more. I look more Mexican, feel more American, but I would much rather be treated as “Alex.” Vincent looked more Middle Eastern, feels French, and himself doesn’t have a solid answer of “what he is.”

We ended the subject by jocularly reintroducing ourselves like: “Hi, I’m Mary;” “You’re Mary, hi Mary, I’m Alex;” and “Hi Alex and Mary, I’m Vincent.” I wonder if our silly reintroductions were totally in jest, or whether maybe there is something to re-establishing your name as the start and ending point of identity, not reducible to a simple background. That is not to say background is unimportant; however, If someone wants to know why our appearance does or doesn’t match up with our identities, it takes more than a short “Where are you from-I’m from X” formula to describe the places, ethnicities, backgrounds, migrations, and homes each of us contains in us as individuals.

We decided “what” we are exactly was far less important to us hybrids than “who” we are.

ALEXIA MARTINEZ
7/22/2017

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

Today I had a nice visit from a friend at Princeton who I know because she went on Bridge Year in Peru with my older brother Max.

The only really interesting experience I had was at an Asian fusion restaurant called Transit near Rosenthaler Platz. Sure, I’ve been warned that Asian food, especially “fusion,” can be very risky in Berlin given the lack of Asian immigrants here aside from Vietnamese. However, I’d read online that this was one of the best and hippest cheap restaurants in Berlin.

It was very cheap, 3.50 per tapa, and the food was delicious. My friend Delaney and I shared 5 tapas, both got dessert and a Singaporean beer each and our total was only 25 euros.

The only thing I found interesting here, but which I don’t have too much to say about, was that none of the waiters were Asian. They all were white and dressed in very hip, black, mostly Puma and Adidas wear usually sported by Berlin’s young and cosmopolitan. It certainly felt a bit odd to be served the best Asian food I’d had in Berlin so far by a staff completely devoid of ethnic Asians.

Could you call this cultural appropriation? I personally don’t think so, especially if in fact the dishes were accurate representation of what they’d be like in their countries of origin. But it makes me think of a case in Portland earlier this year in which a list was posted by a group of activists of restaurants that are appropriative of certain ethnic cuisines. The list was ridiculous, essentially just revealing the best restaurants in Portland serving non-American food that happen to have white owners. In my opinion this is too far.

WILLIAM GREAR
7/13/2017
In the underground of Leopoldplatz, a square known for its diversity and multiculturality, I talked to two girls who were waiting for their train. The two girls were about fifteen years old. They were not sisters, but rather friends. They both had white hijabs, wrapped in what I knew was popular way to wrap the hijab in Syria. Many Syrian women who wear the hijab wrap two scarves to add volume. Their hair is made into a bun on the top of the head to lift up the scarves. It is an elaborate wrap. The Turkish hijab is much different as it known for its simplicity; usually one scarf made of colorful, flowery silk, wrapped on the head and tied around the neck from the back and sometimes from the front.

The U-bahn was coming in 4 minutes, so I needed to make this quick. I approached the girls and said “Salam Alykum.” They turned to me, replying “Wa Alaykum Al Salam.” When they saw me, they both smiled big and positioned their bodies to face me completely, giving me full attention.

I introduced myself—my name is Alaa, an Egyptian, I live in the United States, and study in the university. In thirty seconds or so, I explained my class and asked if I can ask them a few questions. They both were very welcoming, saying “of course!”

Alaa: How long have you been in Germany?
Girl 1: Nine months.
Girl 2: I am the same.

Alaa, looking at the backpacks on their back: Do you both go to school?
Girl 2: Yeah, we are students.

Alaa: Do you feel like you find it somewhat easy to integrate into German society because you go to school? Like because you are more likely to always be around German students your age.

Girl 1: They don’t talk to us. We are by ourselves and they are by themselves.
Girl 2: Yeah, if you go and talk to them, they will not respond or acknowledge you.

Alaa, clearly looking surprised: Are you serious?
Girl 2: Yeah. I swear! We try and they just don't want to talk to us.

Right then the train had pulled up to where we were standing and I knew my conversation must come to an end. I thanked them generously and wished them the best of luck in their futures, and they graciously responded and smiled. I was still surprised when I went back to talk to Raina and Sadie, who were standing some ten feet away. I told them of my very short conversation with the Syrian girls.

I was surprised of what the girls said because I thought younger people are more tolerant and accepting. At least that is the way in the US, and I thought it would be similar in Germany. Young people in the United States are usually more liberal; they are not dominated by conservative ideas opposing refugees and immigrants. But I was clearly wrong. Germany, I learned later from a Syrian refugee who talked to us in class, appears to be the opposite of the US. Often older people here are the ones who express kindness and acceptance towards refugees. They are the ones who have lived through the difficult times in post war Germany. They are often then sympathetic to those seeking asylum and immigrants. The youths, on the other hand, are so distanced from the war that they do not feel the sympathy the older generations feels.

Both girls learned German in their nine months of stay. They still were not able to form connections with natives. The refugees are expected to form connections with Germans; they are expected to integrate
into German society. But how could the refugees and immigrants possibly be expected to integrate into German society if the German people are not willing to talk with them?

ALAA RAGAB
7/20/17

“"I AM EUROPEAN”: ENCOUNTER AT LEOPOLDPLATZ"

Our second day at Leopoldplatz is sweltering hot. Many more children than last time play in the fountain. It makes the entire square kind of come to life, there is laughter everywhere. Parents look over their children, who intermittently run over to their moms and dads to grab a snack or beg for attention. The same man as last time sits on the church stairs. There is also some sort of market going on. Vendors sell graphic shirts and luggage, bags, wallets.

I see two young girls sitting under a tent set up near one of the coffee stands. They are deep in conversation.

“Excuse me? Do you speak English?”

“Yes, we do,” one responds. She has a short, brown bob and is wearing little to no makeup. She has big brown eyes and has a few moles scattered along one side of her face. Her friend smiles up at me. She has bright red hair, long and curly. It falls in her face with every movement, so she is constantly pushing it back with her hand. Her skin is very white, nearly porcelain, and she has bright blue eyes. She has a gap between her front teeth.

“I am a student from the U.S., and I was wondering if I could maybe ask you a few questions?”

The second girl asks me what about and I explain that I am interviewing people in this square about their identity as a German. I leave out of the world “foreign,” so as to not spark any sort of discomfort.

The two laugh, and explain that the girl with brown hair is from France, visiting her German boyfriend. “But sure, yes, you can” the redhead says, slightly cautiously — or maybe she is just cautious in her English-speaking ability, it is hard to tell.
I ask her if she lives here in Berlin, and she says she does, she has lived here her whole life, but her parents are from Russia. “They have lived here since 25 years,” she says. I ask if she identifies herself as German and she pauses. “I mean, yes, I am a ‘German’” — her voice places the word in quotation marks of sorts — “because this is where I am born and where I live and study, but I am not German, I would say I am more, like, European than I would identify with all of Germany.” She turns to her friend and asks if this is the same in France.

“No, not really, I am French but with Germany it is harder - “

“Yes, it is - “

“ - Because of the history of Germany, yeah?” This comparison makes sense to both myself and the girls, and we talk briefly about how and why many Germans are cautious when aligning themselves to a post-WWII German nationality. I mention how being American is perceived negatively in Europe sometimes, and they both laugh and nod.

I then ask if her parents consider themselves German, and she rushes to say “No, no, they are Russian, Russian always.” She tells me they are very conservative, “right-wing” and that they “support Putin” but she doesn’t elaborate further. “They live in a very Russian neighborhood, everyone is Russian, and so they don’t have to be with anyone else. They are always Russian.”

“But I like Germany,” she says again, “because I live here and it is where I study, and I can study for as long as I want for free.” This is a trend with another young man Alaa and Sadie speak with. It is interesting that a binding sense of national identity, even national pride — however “taboo” and politicized in Germany’s historical context — can stem from the university system here. On a very basic level, the state supports these young people. The state invests in their futures and, within this relationship, is a reciprocal sense of emotional investment in the state, perhaps.

I thank them for their time, and apologize for interrupting.

Outside the Evangelical Church, I notice a glass box reserved for posters and information, presumably about other activities sponsored by the church. It is relatively empty, but a sign entirely in Korean catches my eye. Interesting because I have not seen a single Korean or Korean-German in Leopoldplatz over the course of our two visits. Unlike the poster for the intercultural soccer match, the sign isn’t vandalized. But it does attest to the “multikulti” of the square and neighborhood — and, by extension, Berlin. Sadie, Alaa, and I note how many different ethnicities of children run and jump around in the fountain. Their parents largely stick to their own ethnic groups — like the young woman said, her parents are Russian, and live in a Russia microcosm they have constructed for themselves within the city. The children don’t seem to notice. Talking to the young woman was a glimpse into who these children around us may become one day, they may say similar things about their parents — or maybe not.

RAINIA SEYD
7/20/2017

CHILDBEARING AND CHANNEL SURFING: A REUNION WITH MY FAMILY

I sit in my older cousin’s living room for the first time, drinking tea while listening to a conversation between my aunt, Majra, and her daughter, Melisa. It was 10 am on a Saturday morning; my second day visiting my uncle and his family in Wilhelmshaven. The differences between Berlin and Wilhelmshaven are stark; the constant hustle of Berlin city life is nowhere to be found in the small port side city, other than a small shopping center. The rain seemed to never stop and only subdued to a slight drizzle as Majra and I made my way into Melisa’s apartment.
Both she and my aunt live on the 3rd floor of their buildings, which is a daunting trek for me as I had gotten used to my first floor living situation both at home and in my dorm in Berlin. Their buildings are only separated by a small courtyard. My uncle and aunt are proud ex-Yugoslavians, originating from Kosovo and Montenegro, respectively. They have three children, Melisa being the oldest; they were all raised in Germany. After my family fled Kosovo, we all landed in different places in the world; for me, this meant that I was not able to see my first cousins until this trip. I entered their homes as a familiar stranger, representing many childhood memories but also painful family separation. For me, this created an interesting dynamic in which I was able to observe my family as both familiar figures in my life but also with some impartiality because I was not raised with these people—perhaps an intersubjective third has been created.

Melisa turns on the television. A German weather reporter declares that the rain will not stop until Monday afternoon, which means the rain will continue all through my visit. As the German news plays in the background, I eat baklava with green tea for breakfast. Despite being the center for attention most of the weekend, I find this moment to be a calm break from the norm in which I can simply observe Majra and Melisa's conversation in Bosnian as they leave me to eat. The conversation begins with the hot topic for the weekend: Melisa's upcoming wedding.

Majra: “The suit looks so good on him,” she says in reference to her fiancé whom just recently got his suit tailored.

Melisa: “Yes, he lost weight so it fits him very nicely,” she sighs a bit, “I need to keep eating salads.”

I decide to chime in with a cheeky comment as they view the television. “Melisa, since the wedding is so close, that means kids will probably come soon after” I say with a smirk. They both laugh.

Majra: “You know, Irma, Germans here don’t like having kids. None of them have kids anymore, they just focus on their jobs. Actually, they would rather have dogs than kids. The Germans treat the dogs better than the kids.” She laughs.

Melisa: “Mom, that’s not true. People don’t have as much money to have kids anymore, they think ‘I want to wait until I have more money so I can give the kids a better life.’”

Majra: “Why would they have to wait? The government gives money to you if you need it, there is no excuse.”

Melisa begins to get frustrated and transitions into speaking German periodically in her next response.

Majra: “Mom, it’s different now because sometimes the money is not enough.”

Melisa: “No way! Your father and I raised three kids even when we didn’t have a lot of money.”

Majra: “It’s not that easy for everyone.”

Majra then turns to me, “You’re going to have kids right?”

I was startled by the question. I knew the answer that she wanted to hear was that yes, I will definitely have kids, however, this would not be the full truth. I decided to approach the question with a bit of ambivalence.

“I think I will. I could see myself adopting kids too… I’m not sure honestly.”

Majra seemed unsatisfied with my answer, “But why not just have kids of your own?”

“I think there are a lot of kids that need to be adopted so I don’t have a problem with that,” I concluded.

At that moment, Melisa received a phone call and the conversation ended. I focused on the German telecaster and thought of the television in my uncle and aunt’s living room. My uncle’s television consists of only Bosnian movies or channels.

“Do you have these at home in America?” he asks me in Bosnian on my first day at their home,

“No, Mom and Dad just watch in English” I respond.
“This is better,” he states as he shows me the multitude of channels he has to choose from. My uncle’s family are one of the only immigrant families within the apartment complex. When asked about the refugees that came to Germany, he states, “even during that time, there were many one- or two-families that moved into the town, and they live farther away.” As a result he does not have many immigrant friends in this town. He cannot fully see himself within his German co-workers, despite not being visibly different from an average German. When he speaks about his German co-workers, he constantly refers to them as “Nijemci,” which is the Bosnian word for Germans instead of colleagues or other such words.

As we watched a movie, he chooses an American film with Bosnian subtitles. I laugh at his deliberate decision.

“In German TV, you would not be able to find subtitles, they just completely take out the original language and replace it with a German speaker” he stated, looking at me very matter-of-factly. Surprised, I responded that I did not know that.

My uncle spent most of his time in the living room watching television. He works every day other than Sunday from 5am to 2pm. He takes his daily nap within his reclining chair with the Bosnian program blaring in the background. I think about how most of his day is spent interacting with other German workers in his fishing company. Despite him not being vocal about how he feels about Germans, his careful efforts to cultivate an area within the house where he can fully submerge himself within Yugoslavian programming suggest to me that he may be willing to put up with Germans and German culture during the working day, but his living room is where he can be unapologetically Yugoslavian. You mean Yugoslav or Bosnian?

I wondered what it felt like to feel a singularity in culture. My uncle and aunt would not hesitate to say that they are Yugoslavian when asked about their ethnicity. However, I find myself in a strange gray space. I feel like I am not Kosovar enough but then I don’t feel completely American. I imagine that Melisa shares similar sentiments to me, as we both lived in ex-Yugoslavia for a very short amount of time before we were immersed in a completely different culture and country.

Within the context of the conversation that I witnessed between Majra and Melisa, I could see two cultures clashing in values. Majra represented a traditional Eastern European perspective on children while Melisa represented a more modern and Western perspective. I could imagine the same conversation occurring between my mother and I. Through her comments, Majra expressed her dislike for what she perceived to be the German values of selfish, working women. However, Melisa was raised within this mentality and can speak as an insider. Because of my upbringing, I could relate much more with Melisa’s line of reasoning, and this led me to question why I held this Western view to have more merit than the more traditionally immigrant perspective that my aunt held. I wondered whether my aunt and uncle’s negative perceptions of Germans originated from their inability to view themselves, or for others to view them, as insiders to the culture. I wondered whether my ambiguity towards my own identity gave me a dual perspective on foreignness, as both a perceived insider into the culture but yet with an immigrant background nevertheless.

IRMA QAVOLLI
7/01/2017
A few days ago, as it began to pour, I flagged down a taxi. As I hopped in, the driver swivelled in his seat, fired a line of questions at me first in German, and then – when I hesitated, in English.

‘Where are you from? Arab? Where’s your father? You live in Berlin?’

A little taken aback, I began to work my way through the answers. As it transpired, he was a Lebanese shi’ite from Beirut who had left about 40 years ago (I assume during the war) and had raised his whole family here, in Berlin. In response to my gushing about Beirut, he scoffed. He had nothing left in Beirut, he said – just one lone sister who he sent money to occasionally. I put my headphones on, content to enjoy the rest of the ride in quiet. After a few moments, he raised his eyes, and looked at me in the rear view mirror.

‘Your father is a modern Muslim?’ he asked.

I paused, then, ‘…Yes.’

I had no desire whatsoever to plunge into a conversation about my family, and he didn't question my hesitance. But our conversation continued, with mostly I asking him simple questions and he talking expansively – monologue-ing, backtracking, and interrupting himself in his eagerness to explain his point clearly. He told me he had three daughters, ranging from their early 20s to late 20s. The eldest one was engaged to a Turkish Muslim man.

‘Where do your daughters live?’

‘Where! In Berlin! Yaani, with me. I’m their father. Sometimes they want to go somewhere else, and I say no! Yaani, it’s dangerous. Remember what happened in Paris. My daughter had wanted to go to Paris. I say no. Then she saw what happened, and now she listens to me.’

‘You mean Charlie Hebdo?’ I asked.

‘Yaani all the killings, the guns, the bombs.’

I wondered what he would think if his daughters wanted to move to Beirut – where guns and bombs were not all that uncommon. But before I could ask, the conversation progressed onto men – divided in his words, as German men on one side, and Muslim men on the other.

‘What if your daughter marries a German? Is that ok?’ I asked, testing the waters.

‘What?! Why! There are so many Muslim men. Why? No, they marry Muslims. I don’t care if they’re Lebanese yaani, but not German. These Germans, they don't have religion. They just want to have sex and drink. They just want to, yaani sleep with each other.’ In other words, a German can’t be a Muslim – they are two inextricably distinct compartments.

He continued, and his language became increasingly sexualized. I realized at some point in our conversation that he had begun talking about virginity, which I hadn’t initially understood because of our language barrier. ‘Mademoiselle’ was his word for a virginal woman, and ‘lady’ for a woman – no matter the age – who had lost her virginity. His daughters (except for the married one) were ‘Mademoiselles’ he explained. German women were ‘Ladies’.

I was surprised that he was so casually discussing this with me – considering what he had just said about his own daughters. He was surprised too, I think. He caught himself a few minutes later, suddenly stopped his tirade, and apologised, before saying ‘yaani, but you're a modern Muslim, so its ok. I don't mind what other people do. I just look after my children.’

He was a staunchly strict Muslim, who clearly felt morally superior to the Germans he lived with, and yet he felt no impetus to export his beliefs onto them. He had initially branded me a ‘modern Muslim’ (something he did not consider himself to be) and yet his conversation wasn't at all infused with a moralising sermon. He cared deeply what his family did, but that was the limit of his desire to control
others around him. I wondered if this would please those who oppose immigration in German society. Yes, his beliefs were the very antithesis of liberal Berlin, but he loved Germany as a country, spoke fluent German, and felt no ambition to change what was around him. He would probably infuriate the liberal pro-immigration supporters because he was so content living in a starkly un-conformist way.

I asked him if he was German. He scoffed; no – didn’t I understand? He was Lebanese!

I asked him if his children were German.

‘Yes’ he said. ‘100%’

LEILA BEN HALIM

10/07/2017

GERMAN CULTURE: THE MOST EXCLUSIVE CLUB

On this particular day, Irma, Zartosht, and I traveled to Leopoldplatz in order to complete our observations for the collective assignment. When we first arrived, we decided that we wanted to approach the man working at the bakery in the U-Bahn station. The strategy that we developed was for Irma and I to approach our target at first, and to ask them if they spoke English. If they said “yes,” then we would proceed to have a conversation with them about German culture and their identity in relation to it. If not, we call Zartosht over so that he can speak to them in German. We approached the man at the bakery and asked him if he could speak English and he seemed very unconfident when he responded with “a little bit.” We didn’t want to force him to speak in a language that he didn’t feel comfortable speaking in so we gestured for Zartosht to approach while we purchased a croissant and stood over to the side.

Quickly, they began a very animated conservation. As they were speaking, I could pick up on words like Sonnenallee and Neukoelln. The man behind the counter was incredibly animated when he was speaking. I assumed that he was incredibly passionate about immigrant rights and that he was incredibly dissatisfied with the treatment of refugees in Germany. However, after the conversation concluded, Zartosht translated it for us and my assumptions were completely wrong. He was completely opposed to refugees arriving in Berlin and felt that they were a drain on society. In addition, he argued that since the refugees had arrived, the conditions of Berlin had worsened. I will admit that I was not expecting that type of answer to our questions. Not because people don’t hold those views, but because I figured that the people who did would not be so willing to share them with someone that they had met less than ten minutes ago.

After this encounter, we headed toward the exit of Leopoldplatz. On the way out, we talked to an 18-year old male at a strawberry stand. His views were the polar opposite of the man that Zartosht had spoken to before. Eventually, we ambled away from the U-Bahn station and headed towards a square which seemed to be filled with many different types of shops. After speaking to two men consecutively, Zartosht suggested that Irma and I approach an African woman that we saw standing near an African food truck. She had a stroller in front of her and was watching her two children run around. After the experience with the man at the bakery, I was especially nervous about her views on German culture and identity. I really wanted her views to coincide with mine regarding these issues because she reminded me so much of my mother. She was a black woman seemingly raising her two children alone, which is exactly what my mother has been doing with me and my two sisters. I was hesitant to speak to her because she was obviously occupied with her children but I forced myself to ask, “Do you speak English?” And this is the conversation that ensued:

Irma: We’re from America and we're doing a project about immigrants and immigrant backgrounds. Do you have an immigrant background?
Woman: I'm coming from Africa, I'm coming from, specifically, from Cameroon.
Me: Would you be interested in talking to us for like 5 minutes, very briefly?
After listening to the recording, I realized that she responded to my question with this:
Woman: I'm supposed to go in the house.
However, during the encounter, Irma and I didn't hear this so we continued to stand in front of her. I imagine that she was wondering why we chose to remain there. During this time, her daughter falls over and begins to cry. The woman tends to her child and when she realized that we weren't leaving, begins talking to us.
Woman: Is this a project or?
Us: Yeah
Woman: And you want to study here? Or you want to go back to America?
Me: We're taking a class here for the summer and then we're going back.
Woman: Oh…
In this moment, the woman struggled to find the words to describe our studying situation in Berlin. She kept repeating a word in what I assumed to be German. She was trying very hard to find the term but eventually asks us:
Woman: What is the name for this? That you stay for only for the summer and then you go back?
Irma: Yeah, yeah, study abroad.
Woman: Oh okay…
Irma: Do you consider yourself German?
Woman: What?
Irma: Do you consider yourself German?
Me: Like do you feel German? Or do you feel like you're not a part of the German way of life or the German culture?
Woman: German culture…
Irma: What do you think of German culture too?
When Irma asked this question, she made a face which indicated that German culture was not something that she was fond of and we all laughed.
Irma: You can be honest.
Woman: It's for me a little bit...like annoying, I don't really love this culture. I don't really love it. For me, it's a little bit of the same. We love…
At this point, she trails off as she struggles to find the words for things that she found to be characteristic of German culture. When she began speaking again, it was almost as if she was thinking to herself out loud. We struggled to understand her, so we suggested things in hopes of helping her make the connection between the words that she was thinking of in German and their English counterparts.
Irma: Food?
Me: Like the kebab?
Woman: The Germans love eating only frites, pommes frites, the sausage.
Me: The currywurst?
Woman: Currywurst. They love it, for me it's annoying, something like that. What else? They are simple. They are so simple. They are not all, not all so nice people but there are nice people, not all.
I thought it was incredibly interesting that she had to clarify that not all of the Germans were nice people which indicates to me that she has probably had some bad experiences in Germany. In hindsight, I wished that I had asked her a little bit more about these experiences and whether or not they shaped her view of the culture.

Irma: How long have you been here?
Woman: 4 years
Me: Do you feel welcome here?
Woman: At the beginning that was a little bit difficult; when you don't call to them, they cannot accept you. You're supposed to make a first step before you have something from them.
She would frequently interrupt the conversation to address her children who were running around and playing with one another.
Woman: So it's not so crazy like I don't know. the night is something else. Don't you go out?
Irma: We've been out, yeah.
Woman: I'm sure you were already out and what did you think?
Me: It was pretty wild.
Woman: It's wild. How did you feel?
Me: Some of it made me uncomfortable.
Irma: The men were a bit creepy
Woman: Yeah that's why me, I only go out with my community. I don't, I don't really love this culture, that's why. I don't really love it. They are a little bit crazy, a little bit...when you have difficulty maybe with the language there are some people that don't want to correct you. They want to give the best expression.
Here, her child starts playfully making loud noises and I think that she is grateful that her child had taken our attention away from asking questions because at this point, she had been struggling with communicating to us in English in regards to this particular point.
Me: How old is she?
Woman: 1 year and 7 months
Me: So cute.
Woman: Thank you, so that, I don't know. I don't know, You're out, you can see. It's just not...how long are you here?
Me: 6 weeks
Woman: So another one month? So you will really live the experience and you can see. Do you have German friends here? No?
Me: No, we don't have any. We're all from the US.
Woman: Some at the university? Don't you have at the college?
Irma: Yeah we have a student that's born in Berlin here.
Woman: And they can help you..
Irma: With German? Yeah
Woman: So you can a little speak?
Us: Yeah
Her children become antsy so she spends time calming them down. We realized that she probably needed
to leave so we concluded the conversation.

Irma: Well thank you so much for talking to us.

Me: Thank you

Irma: Do you mind if we get a picture of you? Or no?

Woman: Really? I don’t know…

The woman was hesitant at first to allow us to take a photo but eventually she said yes. I asked her if she wanted her children to be in the photo and she responded with a no which I found really interesting.

A common sentiment amongst many of the people that I’ve spoken to, including the African woman, is that, even if it doesn’t feel like it, Germany is doing something to help the masses of people moving into the country. Whether or not that is enough is a different question. In this particular case, the woman believed that simply asking for help was enough to receive adequate assistance from the government. However, we spoke to a Syrian refugee named Ali, also at Leopoldplatz, who argued that the actions of the German government were purely performative and that their assistance was not truly meant to help them. He was a video journalist in Syria, working for companies such as Al-Jazeera and he hoped to continue
that in Germany but the government prevented him from doing this. Understandably, he expressed a great deal of anger at the way Germany handles its refugees. When we asked him if he felt German, he responded with no. He also said that he didn't necessarily feel Syrian either because he had spent so much of his life traveling to different places that it was too hard for him to identify with one place. Instead, he identified himself as multi-national. I find it incredibly interesting that most of the people that we interviewed could not fully identify themselves as German. It seems that the government is taking some steps to incorporate refugees and migrants on a macro-level, but when we look at individualized cases like Ali's there appears to be a discrepancy. The goals of the German government and the behaviors of the German people do not coincide and I wonder what can be done to address this, or even if anything can be done. Either way, it feels that there is distinct lack of feelings of belonging within these communities.

APRIA PINKETT
7/17/2017

A MARKET CONVERSATION

Today was a relatively relaxing day. I stayed in the Market all afternoon doing my readings for class and observing the people around me. The weather is nice so there are a lot of people sitting out at the tables on the sidewalk. I closed my eyes to take in the sounds of the people around me. I thought of the noise as existing in various layers. The background layer was the soft sound of the cars turning the corner and passing the market. They created such a soft rhythm that it sounded almost like I was at the beach listening to waves. On top of the traffic sounds there were layers and layers of conversation. A group of American voices rose above the rest—there was a large family sitting a few tables down from me. They had several children whose voices rose and fell as they ran around through the tables, coming closer to me and then scurrying away. Their footsteps fell like rain on the cobblestone sidewalk. I heard patches of an American man loudly telling his friend a new invention—something technology related. I sat there listening the hum of the scene in peace, until a voice interrupted my meditative state. My eyes were still closed when he spoke, so I identified him first by his voice. It was gruff and low but also hesitant, as if he felt a little bad about interrupting me in my almost-sleeping state.

“Hello, can I sit?”

Though I could tell from his accent that he was German, he spoke to me in English immediately. My eyes shot open with surprise, as his voice had cut through all of the layers of sound in the landscape with its volume and proximity to my ears. He was gesturing to the table next to me which had been previously pulled up to mine to form one big table.

“Sure, of course,” I said. “I don't need all this space just for me.”

He must have been about 60 years old and his hands wobbled a little as he sat down and placed his coffee on the table. He seemed quiet, not really the conversational type, but I decided to go out on a limb and talk to him anyways.

Me: May I ask you, how did you know I spoke English?
Him: Well I can tell you are American.

Me: But I hadn't spoken any language yet how could you tell?
Him: I can tell by just looks.

Me: What do you mean? How can you possible tell from just my looks?
I was so bewildered because I most certainly couldn't tell what language people spoke from looking at them in this city—it was so diverse. Sure, if a man had on a huge shirt that said something like 'I'm A Patriots Fan' then maybe I would assume he was American, but I was dressed pretty inconspicuously. In fact, I had the most non-descript outfit on, it was black shorts, a gray T-shirt and plain black sunglasses perched on my head.

Him: I don't know. It is the way you sit with your laptop in the market maybe. You sit here with work not with relaxed self.

Me: Do people not sit with laptops out here?

I panicked a little because I thought perhaps I was being rude.

Him: In cafes, yes—here, no. This is the market. This is where you just sit you watch you don't work or maybe read. But only not from here would you sit and work so hard on a lovely day like this warm and nice. You relax; you drink a beer.

I slowly closed my computer and put it away.

Him (waving his hand dismissively): No you can work if you want to.

Me: No it's okay maybe you are right, maybe I need to put it away and watch.

Our conversation ended there, but I spent a long time just sitting there with him, watching the people pass. I watched the American family I had been listening to finish eating and spend five minutes trying to corral the running children before picking up and taking off down Bergmannstrasse. I watched people sit down and gingerly sip their coffees, while other sat and greedily gulped down a soda before lying back to take in the sunlight. The smells of various different food flowed past my nose—the market had so many different kinds of cuisines, so Asian aromas mixed with Greek ones, which mixed with the scent of German currywurst.

ELENA ANAMOS
7/17/2017

**BASKETBALL IN BERLIN**

Today after visiting the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church and having lunch at a Thai restaurant, I finally experienced basketball in Germany, playing pick-up at a playground for the first time.

The Kaiser Wilhelm Church was amazing. Having grown up in a quiet suburb of Washington, D.C., it is astonishing to see, in real life, the results and damage of war. The only massive destruction I’ve ‘seen’ in my lifetime was 9/11 and even that was through pictures and TV; the next time I visited New York, the site was covered with a modern memorial and an information center. There aren’t many areas in the US where you can really see the results of mass military violence, especially as related to modern warfare. Even the Manassas Battlefield which is 20 minutes from my house and serves as a reminder of the Civil War doesn’t have the same emotional power. That battle happened in a field outside of the city and away from most buildings and civilians, and consequently there aren’t many ruins to commemorate what happened. WWII happened everywhere in Europe and did not spare cities; in fact, it specifically targeted them. I’ve never seen destruction like that, destruction that was intended to kill. Contributing to this surreal vision of war was the stark contrast of the beautiful, modern church right next to it. I feel like a crucial part of my understanding of WWII was completed as I looked simultaneously at its destructive force and the enormous efforts to rebuild and to transform.
When I got back from that trip I went to the gym and then walked over to the basketball courts expecting, if anything, for there to be elementary age kids there and to simply shoot at a basket on the far end of the court and try not to draw attention to myself. Instead, I saw through the gate probably 30 men who were playing pick-up and/or shooting around. Being an introvert, I have a general aversion to standing out as the only female in all-male spaces and I could feel stares as I walked to the far court. In fact, as soon as I started shooting at a basket, the one guy also there (apparently about 15 years old) left to go to a different basket. But this is not an exclusively German thing nor is it much different from the reaction I get when going into gyms in the US, though guys aren’t usually that obvious back home. At my local LA Fitness court or rec center, when a man walks into a gym in which I am already shooting, he will simply choose to go to another basket that is empty or has other men shooting there; but if a man is already shooting at a basket and I join him, he typically won’t abruptly move to a another basket.

After about 20-25 minutes of just shooting around, a guy named Sam asked me if I wanted to join a 3-on-3 team. Here, everyone was playing 3-on-3, which is different from the US where, if you have enough people, you generally choose to play 5-on-5. The third player besides me and Sam was a man named Ben. Sam looked to be in his mid-20s and was ethnically ambiguous; Ben, a slightly older white man, looked like he was well into his 30s. Unfortunately, the game didn’t go so well for our team. The opposing team consisted of men, all in their late-20s, who seemed to know each other well. I hadn’t been watching their court for long, but they were on at least a 2 or 3 game winning streak. Unfortunately, the game didn’t go so well for our team. The opposing team consisted of men who were apparently all in their late-20s and seemed to know each other well. I hadn’t been watching their court for long, but from what I had seen they were on (at least) a 2 or 3 game winning streak. We ended up losing and though I held my own, it was a little strange adjusting to this new basketball environment. There was a lot more English spoken than I expected, but there was still a lot said that I didn’t understand. Essentially, when people were having conversations (about fouls, the score, etc.) it was in German. But curse words are apparently international and terms like “bang-bang” for made shots or “dunk” or “match-up” were often in English.

It’s often frustrating in the U.S. to play against men because they don’t give me the same initial respect as a basketball player that they would give to another man. And while I am athletic in most respects (I
am fairly quick, fast, and strong), my quickness, speed, and strength are often not at the same level as athletic men of my same age. Still, I generally have as much if not more skill because I’ve been playing basketball competitively for so long. Obviously, I was carrying a chip on my shoulder into these games, first because so much of my identity is defined by success in basketball and second because I feel some sort of responsibility to represent the worldwide success of American basketball.

After that first game, Sam and I went back to the far basket to shoot and he asked me where I was from. I told him I was from the U.S. to which he clarified “Yeah, but like where in the U.S.” which sort of surprised me. I’ve usually assumed that people here know as little about the differences between the U.S.’s states as I did about Germany’s states before arriving. After I told him “Virginia, outside D.C.,” he mentioned that he has family “there” (I don’t know if he was referring to the U.S., to Virginia, or to the D.C. area). About 10-20 minutes later, a group of guys came to this basket, all of whom looked to be either in high school or college, and asked if I wanted to join their game. Actually, they had decided to play a game while speaking in German, and then realized that I hadn’t understood them and so asked me if I wanted to join (though the only other option was to simply leave the court). We shot free-throws to divide up the teams (different from the U.S. where teams are usually chosen in advance among friends) and because I missed my shot I sat out the first game.

While I sat and watched, I asked an older gentleman, maybe in his 40s (older than the average age of the people playing) about the rules. I was a little nervous to ask him because I didn’t want him to think that I didn’t know the rules of basketball generally; but the rules of pick-up are different in different gyms, different contexts, different states, etc. to say nothing of different countries. Additionally, the way that he interacted with the other younger players felt to me like a coach-player relationship and I sensed that many of the guys at the basket both knew and respected him. Consequently, I at some level wanted to ensure that this man, who everyone else respected, would recognize my knowledge of basketball so that everyone else at the basket would follow suit. Fortunately, he seemed more than happy to help me and, though his English wasn’t perfect, quickly described the scoring, court boundaries, and foul calls.

After finishing he asked me if I played basketball in the U.S. When I said yes, he asked if I played in college and then, looking at my “Princeton Basketball” t-shirt, if I played for Princeton. When I answered yes to all of those, he told me he had guessed as much from watching the first game I’d played in and specifically “my footwork.” It was such a small thing to recognize, but it reassured me that I belonged in this space and put me more at ease when I joined the 3-on-3 game later. Footwork, though not as exciting as dunking or 3-pointers, is something that my coaches at Princeton consistently talk about and consequently is linked in my mind with nuanced and expert knowledge of the game. Thus in my head, his comment felt like a compliment of my ‘real’ basketball skills (beyond flashy play) from a person who really knows the game. And in this next game I also played better than I had in the first one. I wouldn’t say it was the best I’ve ever played, but we won and I felt I was important to that success. I don’t know if the other guys at the court had heard the 40-year olds compliment, or if this was just “game recognizing game,” but they put more trust in me as a teammate than usually occurs at the LA Fitness or rec center in my hometown. They didn’t avoid passing me the ball or deliberately tell the slowest, weakest, youngest, or least-skilled player to guard me. The only stereotypical reaction to some supposed “feminine fragility” occurred when I tripped over someone’s feet going after a ball and fell. The entire play stopped and everyone asked me if I was okay. In comparison, when another guy realized he was bleeding profusely from a deep scratch in his arm, play barely stopped enough for him to go wipe off the blood. If it had been one of the guys who fell, I doubt there would have been as much attention given to it.

The other thing I noticed in that playground was that the crowd playing basketball was distinctly more brown than any other environment I’ve seen since being in Berlin (except maybe around Freidrichschain). It was about a 50/50 split between people who looked white and people of color. A few looked to be African, a fair amount appeared to be Middle Eastern, and others could have been a mix of different things. Though the split in the U.S. more heavily favors African-Americans, it was similar to the pick-up scene I’m familiar with. The level of skill and athleticism was higher than I see at gyms in my hometown though the majority age group, 20s through early-30s men, was the same. However back home there is
always a fair number of older (as in 40s), slow, slightly overweight men and a crowd of young, high school players (here the younger age group was playing their own 3-on-3 against each other and away from the larger crowd at the ’main’ court). There were no other women playing on any of the courts; the only other female in the area was apparently a girlfriend of one of the players who left with him about halfway through my time at the court. All three courts had speakers playing rap/hip-hop music, a lot of which I recognized as American.

The only other trip I’ve taken outside of the United States was for a series of games last summer in Australia where we, Princeton Women’s Basketball, played against three semi-professional Australian women’s teams. The mood of these games was much more official (5 vs. 5, referees, a clock) and consequently the level of respect for the opponent was high as soon as we stepped on the court. By the end of the day here in Berlin I felt similar respect from these men playing pick-up. Still, though I assume these players haven’t had many opportunities to play against American college basketball players, they showed no special reverence for my being from the U.S., the birthplace of basketball, nor surprise that a woman knew the game. I was just a visitor to the neighborhood and a helpful addition to the team.

SYDNEY JORDAN
07/17/2017

JAM SESSION

On Friday night, after an incredible dinner and a long walk with Zartosht and John Benjamin, given that the Copenhagen Jazz Festival was in full swing (no pun intended) I decided to look for possible late night bar performances to attend. Unfortunately, Copenhagen is not Berlin, and by the time I got back to the room and started looking for shows at 11 PM, there was nothing interesting left. Most of the last shows had started at 9:30 of 10.

The only thing going on still was a jam session a 10-minute walk down the road. Apparently it could extend as late as 2:00 A.M. (when Berlin parties start) and I thought maybe there was a chance I’d get to play.

I arrived at about 11:30. The people playing at that point were my age and younger, and they were absolutely incredible. I had only seen kids with the kind of skill and finesse these ones had at intensive jazz camps I’ve attended in the States at places like NYU. I knew that if the skill onstage stuck to this caliber, I’d probably be too timid to play. At least I could listen and observe.

The first thing I noticed was that all of the songs that these kids were playing were from the 1950s and ’60s, songs originally written and pioneered by black jazz legends in America. All of these musicians were white Europeans, but I don’t consider this to be an inherent problem. That is to say, I don’t think the mere fact that white musicians were playing black music constitutes cultural appropriation by itself.

However, it was their improvisation techniques that did make me cringe. One of the reasons jazz is great is because you can in fact recycle old songs from the canon, but if you do, it is your responsibility to, during your solo, improvise with taste and originality that makes the song your own. In a way, it is respectful to artists of the past to make your solos entirely your own so as not to steal the unique creative sensibilities that went into creating the original artists’ solos.

These kids were not doing that at all. Sure, they were incredibly skilled at their “craft” but they were absolute copycats. If I closed my eyes during the first pianist’s solos I could have thought I was listening to a McCoy Tyner or Wynton Kelly solo off a record from 1959. Some musicians might take that as a compliment, but I absolutely would not. I couldn't shake the feeling that I was watching a bunch of privileged, Danish kids in an upscale jazz bar show off improvisational tropes that were created by working-class, genius black musicians 50 years ago who were speaking from the soul.
Perhaps I was being too harsh, but this wasn’t just a process of admonishment, it was also one of self-reflection. I thought, am I projecting these appropriative behaviors onto these innocent musicians? Maybe I’m just jealous. Or maybe this is exactly how I learned to play jazz. Thinking back to the intensive camps and workshops with famous musicians I was a part of when I was 16 and 17, I started to realize that, in all honesty, this type of copying was encouraged.

I’m proud to say that I certainly don’t engage in this kind of artistic plagiarism now, especially thanks to the creative leaps I’m forced to take as a member of Princeton’s jazz program. But would I be the musician I am today if I hadn’t at some point along the line lifted the bebop lines, transcriptions and harmonic interpretations of my heroes? Maybe not.

No matter what the answer, what I saw and heard at that jam session was troubling, and it will be in the back of my mind in most jazz contexts I find myself in for the near future.

WILLIAM GREAR
7/7/2017

CONNECTION? OR A LACK OF THEREOF?

In the second day of observation at Leopoldplatz with Raina and Sadie the square looked different. There were shop stands set up. People sold bags, food, shoes and random household items. It looked something like a flea market. We learned from a sign that it was a community market day. There were a lot more people sitting at the square than the first day of observation. “Yes!” I thought to myself. More people, more chances to find arabic speakers or english speakers. There were at least double the number of children jumping and playing in the square. Under the hot sun, the children escaped the heat as they jumped in the fountain to cool off, while their parents took shelter under the shade of trees around the square.

“Children playing and jumping around in Leopold Platz”
I saw one woman wearing the hijab sitting by herself facing the fountain where her daughter, of no more than five years of age, jumped and ran around. The woman looked in her mid-thirties. I walked past her and said “Salam Alaikum.” She replied, “Wa alaikum al salam,” I then proceeded to sit next to her. When I did, she scooted back immediately. I found her action very strange. When I sat down, I left at least a good five feet between us, so I was definitely not encroaching her personal space. I do not know if she found me threatening; I am of a small-build girl, and I get mistaken for a high school student all the time.

I introduced myself as a student from the US and that I am in Berlin for a few weeks to study the idea of foreignness. She simply looked at me with no reaction. I asked if I can ask her a few questions. She hesitated. Mumbling, she said that her husband was there in one of the shops, selling, and she is waiting for him and she is not really staying in the square for a long time. I responded: “oh okay, that’s fine! It’s no problem!”

Fearing that she may have been too bold (I think), she asked me what I wanted to ask her. I responded saying I wanted to ask her about her experience living in Germany.

(This conversation occurred in Arabic, but I will present here the translation in English)

Alaa: What has it been like living in Germany so far?
Woman, shrugging her shoulders: It has been fine.
Alaa: Have you experienced any kind of hostility because of you being a foreigner?
Woman: No.
Alaa: Have you experienced any because you visibly appear Muslim, wearing the hijab?
Woman: No. Uh like there are many muslims now.

The woman's daughter right then ran back towards her. The woman took her child close to her, and moved her to the other side away from where I was sitting. I stopped talking and murmured “Ahlan” (Hello), waved at the little girl. She shyly looked at me and then ran back to play in the fountain and splash the water. I turned back to the mother.

Alaa: How long have you been in Germany?
Woman: 16 years.
Alaa: Do you feel like a foreigner?
Woman: Umm no. Um. like there are a lot of different people.

She was really hesitant to talk throughout our conversation. She would take pauses and then respond with simple words. She shrugged her shoulders as if not knowing what to answer. I did not want to be forcing her to talk so I thanked her very much, wished her a good day and left.

I was taken aback by the woman's behavior. I expected her to be much friendlier and much more welcoming. I thought we could relate to each other and connect because we have something in common; We are both Arabs and we both wore the Muslim hijab. I thought we would have a connection like Arab strangers do in the US.

I moved to the United States six years ago from Egypt. Because Arabs and Muslims are such a small minority where I live, there is a connection when one meets another Arab or Muslim. This shows up in small random acts of kindness between one another. Like seeing a veiled muslim woman in a mall and greeting her with “Salam Alykom” and a big smile, in which she responds with “Wa Alykom Al Salam” and an even bigger smile. Like greeting the arab man on the food stands in Times Square and chatting about where one is from. And then he gives you extra meat on your plate and asks you for five dollars instead of the usual seven.

But this kind of connection is necessary in the US not in Germany. In the US you only personally know very few Arabs, and fewer Muslims outside of your family. There is a larger sense of foreignness, so you are open to meeting another Arab immigrant and relating to them. In Germany, as the woman mentioned, they are many Muslims and people of Arabic descent. I can imagine how that would make one feel less foreign.

I realized I was expecting too much from the woman. I was a stranger to her. She did not need to relate to me or be any friendlier than she would be with any stranger, especially since she has been in Germany for many long years and had not just arrived like many recent refugees who I talked to and connected with.

ALAA RAGAB
7/20/2017

FROM THERE TO HERE

Alexia, Sam and I approached an elderly moustached man sitting on a low concrete ledge, a few inches above the ground. He was leaning forward on his knees, resting. The sun was shining in his eyes, and he was squinting as he placidly surveyed the scene. He was dressed in dark business slacks, and a grey polo shirt which highlighted his thin, almost emaciated arms. His clothes were faded and well-worn, lending him a haggard look.

We made our way up to him.

‘Do you speak English?’ He smiled encouragingly, but shook his head.
‘Deutsch?’ We hazarded. Again, he smiled, but shook his head. ‘Arabisch.’
I hesitated for a moment, knowing that I was the only one who could communicate at all with him. (Translated from Arabic).

‘We’re students – university students from America. Can we ask you questions?’
He nodded.
‘Where are you from?’
‘Syria.’
‘Ah, ok. How long have you been here?’
‘Four months’.
‘Do you like it?’
He nodded again; he wasn’t talkative, but seemed to enjoy the interaction.
‘What did you do in Syria?’
‘A taxi driver. I drove people.’
‘Are you a taxi driver here too?’
He shook his head, smiling again. For a moment, I felt as if I were a well-meaning child who just wasn’t getting the question right. This, I found, was the essential difficulty with all interviews – finding the right questions. Trying to have the conversation in Arabic was especially challenging. It was frustrating because I couldn't ask the questions I wanted too, and definitely not with any degree of nuance. Yet, my juvenile Arabic forced me to ask him basic, simple questions which I probably wouldn't have bothered with, and therefore build his character a different way.

As it transpired, he was a Syrian Kurd, who had no family with him in Berlin. His children were still in Syria. I pictured a livelier, less detached version of himself taxiing tourists around Aleppo, haggling at the Souk, and eating Iftars with his family. I wondered what Iftars had been like for him this year. Lonely, I guess.

As the conversation progressed, I felt the power dynamic shift. As we approached him – a fairly feeble old man sitting below us as we loomed over him, we had controlled the situation. As the conversation evolved, he gained the power; Alexia and Sam receded into the background, and he helped me ask questions, supplying Arabic words when I couldn't remember them, and patiently waiting for me to summon up sentences. As he did, he gained more confidence. Yet, he was still depleted– he gave the impression of an emptied façade.

This feeling of empty foreignness stayed with me, and that night I went to a woman's house for drinks. She's an architect; a friend of a family friend, who had followed her then boyfriend to Berlin from Britain about 30 years ago, and had stayed (and married the boyfriend). Her flat was expansive, minimalistic, and modern; floor to ceiling windows, concrete floors, and a warm wooden kitchen. She was wearing floor length flowing blue trousers, and a red sleeveless shirt. She was tall, elegant, and striking.

She loves Berlin, she said. The grunge, the design, the art – it was exciting, and kept her on her toes; she finds inspiration in the movement around her. We chatted on her terrace over Parma ham, melon and olive oil crispbread for me - she eats a loosely paleo diet.

‘How has Berlin changed since you’ve been here?’
‘Oh, so much. It used to be much grungier. And a lot less diverse. It also wasn’t a sexy place to be living. People would ask me all the time – why are you living there?! Go somewhere cooler, trendier. Now, particularly in the design world, it’s the place to be.’
‘Does it feel like home, after all these years?’
‘Oh, God yes. I don’t have a German passport actually – I just haven’t gotten around to it. But now particularly after Brexit, I’ve got to finally do it. Berlin can feel like home to anyone to be honest. It’s not
Germany so to speak. I’m not a German. But is home London or Berlin? Berlin, certainly.’

Her accent remains staunchly English, with traces of an upper class upbringing, but her manner is all Berlin. None of her mannerisms speak to the stiff slightly uncomfortable Britishness I’m so accustomed to. She's reserved, but relaxed. Informal and direct – really, the characteristics I've come to associate with Berliners.

She seems to think of England as a place of the past – instead, she focuses on Berlin, and uses it as a launchpad for her architecture ventures in Asia and America. She had been at an event at the British Embassy the day before, she said and was startled by how antiquated she found the people. ‘Even people from London?’ I ask her, taking a slightly defensive tone. She smiled. ‘Look at the refugee situation. How many have England taken? Its negligible! And look how well Berlin is doing.’

‘Is it sustainable, though?’ I ask.

Her husband came through the front door, and began to hang his coat up. She shrugged. ‘We'll see. More wine?’

LEILA BEN HALIM
07/18/2017

LITTLE HITLER

On the plane home there was a woman who had a dog. This was quite odd as I have never seen a pet on a flight. The woman was arguing with the flight attendant about having the dog sit on her lap. The woman was arguing that the dog had a right to sit on her lap because it was a therapy dog. After the flight attendant left the woman made a joke about the flight attendant being a “little Hitler”. The flight attendant was German and the woman was Jewish and from California (I knew because she was eating kosher meals and had mentioned living there). I didn't think this was fair... the flight attendant was just going her job but it was definitely an interesting insult that packed an extra punch when applied to a German.

EMILY KUNKEL
7/29/17

INVASION

The last two days of Denmark were very eventful. Saturday began with breakfast at the hotel and then our guide took us to the city hall to visit an exhibit highlighting the stories of 100 different immigrants to Denmark.

The people featured in the refugee exhibit were chosen according to the demographic makeup of the refugee community in Denmark and showed a variety of stories about the path to Denmark and becoming part of life there. What was most interesting, and most frustrating, about the exhibit was how limited our glimpse was into these people's lives. The only question we knew every person had been asked was “How foreign do you feel?” which was answered differently by each respondent. But after that response, some of the individuals gave a history of how they ended up in Denmark or of their life back home or exclusively about their new life here, or sometimes just an explanation of the philosophies they lived by that may or may not relate to the topic of immigration. Consequently, there was so much more I wanted to know about each person. If they described the process of coming to Copenhagen, I wanted to know about their lives since arriving; if they described their lives since arriving, I wanted to know how it compared to the
lives they had left. Even an explanation of the people and objects they chose to include in their photos would have been much appreciated. Instead I found their demographic statistics, a picture, and a lot of unanswered questions.

Our next stop was a sort of halfway house for people navigating the asylum-seeking/integration process. The residents stayed here as they looked for housing and work of their own in their new city. Before we walked in, our guide reminded us that this was a home, not a zoo, and that we should be respectful of the people whose lives were centered in those apartments as we toured the space. I know she was only trying to give a gentle reminder, but after that warning I really did not want to go in. Even if she had said nothing, it would’ve been obvious as soon as we stepped through the doors and into the ground floor café with our painfully conspicuous 18-person group that we were strange and invasive. Just by taking the “tour” of the first floor we were acting as if this were a zoo or an exhibit rather than reality. I can’t imagine a group of French exchange students in the US going to a homeless shelter, not to volunteer or to donate clothes, but to simply stare and comment on how difficult the situation is. It felt disrespectful to objectify their lives while assuming a superior, condescending, and pitying position.

That being said, the house employee who led us through the building offered a lot of interesting insight into the refugee experience. The house was comprehensive in the services it offered and the help it gave, but there were still issues of how long the entire integration process takes, how difficult it is to find housing, and how there are struggles both within and without the intermediate home to bridge the gap between languages and cultures. Specifically, someone asked about how the refugees saw the sexual freedom and particularly the homosexual freedom of Copenhagen. Our guide unequivocally said that those living in the house did not accept “that lifestyle” and only tolerated it as a symptom of Copenhagen’s different culture, something for “their” men and women to participate in but that would not be a part of the refugees’ own community and experience. I also learned about a lot of the rules that can make integration into Denmark difficult: the prohibition on working or the funneling into unpaid internships that exploit free labor to assimilate refugees to the workforce, the difficulty of finding and maintaining language instruction, etc. There was so much to consider helping people become a part of Copenhagen.

SYDNEY JORDAN
6/09/2017

NIGHT-LIFE

QUASIMODO

It was a Wednesday night in Berlin, and unlike every past Wednesday night spent in the dorms reading, completing the daily German homework and getting to know my roommate, this one was to be special for a couple reasons. The first was that I was finally to reconnect with a German friend I hadn’t seen or heard from in about three years. I originally met my friend Ben in the summer of 2008 at an intensive jazz camp for high school students at University of Rhode Island. We were both eleven, prodigies in our respective homes; he in the suburbs of Hamburg and I in southern New England. The awareness of being inexplicably talented at something like performance at such a young age is incredibly unhealthy for the ego, and the resulting superiority complex combined with the social alienation guaranteed that being four years younger than the youngest other campers gave us common ground to build our friendship. I’m not too proud of that, but I’m still glad it happened.

The last time I’d seen Ben after camp was when he and his dad were in the States visiting family three years ago; I was seventeen and looking at college options; his dad recommended I consider studying in Berlin, either at Freie Universität or Humboldt. Apparently they were great schools and had just become free for international students.

“Too bad,” I distinctly remember saying, thinking I’d never find myself traveling there, let alone for school.
“I don’t speak German.” Go figure.

This brings me to our reunion this Wednesday night, and the second reason it was so special. One of Ben’s favorite trios, The Bad Plus, was playing at Berlin’s most reputable jazz club, Quasimodo, and he asked me if I’d like to go. I said it sounded great, as I’d been to a Bad Plus show before and loved it, and was also really interested in checking out Berlin’s jazz scene, so I suggested we meet there an hour before show-time to chat and have a beer. We agreed to meet there at 9; the show was at 10 and about two hours long. After a few weeks on Berlin’s techno scene it was surprising to hear of any event starting before 1 or 2 in the morning, but if it meant a couple hours more sleep than normal I was down.

I showed up about 20 minutes late and upon arriving found myself a bit amused at Quasimodo’s design. It’s located in a commercial area near the Zoologischer Garten U-Bahn station, next door to a huge shopping mall. Its building isn’t designed much differently than others in the area, couldn’t be more than 50 years old and from the outside appears to have a few spacious stories. Despite this, the club is in the basement and features a very low ceiling, making it feel cramped and stuffy. It’s cool but contrived and a bit tacky; I can’t help but imagine the designers attempting to simulate the underground vibe of New York clubs like Village Vanguard, where the subterranean claustrophobia results from an actual lack of available space above ground, clearly not the case here.

I descended toward the downstairs entrance to face the door staff, and was immediately met with disdain. As soon as I was recognized as American and unable to speak German, the twenty-somethings taking tickets became visibly annoyed. To make matters worse for them, Ben had my ticket and he was already inside, so I had nothing to give them. It took me about five minutes to convince the receptionists to let me walk into the club to find him and come back with my ticket, and they followed me suspiciously as I looked. The whole encounter made me confused and perhaps a little offended; it seemed ironic to me to be met with such othering behavior as an American at an American-inspired club based on an originally American music form to see an American jazz trio.

Eventually I made it through, got a Guinness from the bar and started catching up with my friend. To sum up our small talk, Ben and I are both 20 now, on ever-diverging paths but we still share a love for playing and listening to live music. He told me he practices when he can, but hilariously warned me that he’s become nothing more than a boring, diligent medical school student and that I shouldn’t expect anything interesting from him anymore. I decided to take my chances.

Our most fascinating interactions came when, a couple beers in, mind you, I decided to ask him his thoughts on the refugee crisis. At first, what he said didn’t represent anything new to me. Like many Germans I’ve asked, the question seemed to take him aback as if it wasn’t something he’d thought about a lot, at least not lately. This used to surprise me but it’s become enough of a trend that it doesn’t anymore. He sat back pensively for perhaps half a minute, and when he got around to answering my question, without any investment or emotion in his response, said he thinks that refugees should be welcome in Germany and denounced the right-wing movement here and across Europe. These are quick, easy answers to give for any liberal millennial, informed or not, and he thought that would be good enough given to whom he was speaking.

Ben of course didn’t know that I’d been asking this question to Germans his age for almost a month by that Wednesday and was getting frustrated by the lack of depth of thought and introspection I was getting in response, so I pushed him further. We had been discussing in class that week the possibility and latent fantasy of a German leitkultur (lead culture), its disappearance and the reactions it evokes in Germans and non-Germans across the political spectrum. This is where I decided to push him.

I waited a couple minutes and asked, “So you’re OK with refugees and other migrants coming in, but do you think that at the least the influx is causing a loss of German culture?”

He furrowed his brow for a second and then cracked a small grin, knowing I had him, “Yes, I think it does, and that worries me.” Bombshell. Though the likely American liberal reading this might recognize and condemn this as crass, rightwing othering rhetoric, it’s no doubt a worry that rests within the minds of
even Germany's most globalized youth.

But he wasn't finished, and the rest of his answer was the most important part.

After seeing the look of validation on my face, he quickly said "But it isn't just refugees. People just move around Europe, even around Germany more than they used to. I come from a small town outside of Hamburg and its local culture can be destroyed even by other Germans. Most people in Berlin now aren't from Berlin and that might reduce its culture but you can't blame Muslims for that. People here are from everywhere."

This is easily the most illuminating idea I've heard from a German on the subject of cultural loss as it relates to xenophobia. If there is indeed a loss of culture in Germany, perhaps it is a result of the incredibly convoluted technological, corporate and political process of globalization that causes changes extending from the local to the international, rather than one specific demographic trend. Culture and the fear of its disappearance are concepts that many Germans like Ben identify with, but the far right understands that the mobilization of that fear into action is only possible through the projection of fantasy into Germans of a distinct, easily understood other: Muslims.

But even Ben is guilty of harboring some of that fantasy; just before the music started, I asked him, “Do you think that Muslim women should be allowed to wear the veil in public?”

“No,” he said, “Absolutely not.”

The music I heard that night was possibly the best live jazz I’ve ever heard. As I said before, jazz can be stupid and alienating, with the genre populated now by so many white men and their white male students reusing and recycling old tropes originally pioneered by legendary black musicians in the name of “purity,” all in front of elite white audiences.

This performance challenged that assessment. Though the men onstage were all young and white and the audience was likely the whitest one I’d ever seen, the show I witnessed was not appropriative, it was not boring and every note was innovative. What made it so special was its populist simplicity - the harmonies by the pianist mostly voiced in rock and pop triads, the easily decipherable but somehow still avant-garde beats driven by the bass and drums, and the repertoire accessible almost anyone, with covers of non-jazz songs and even pop crowd-favorites like Cyndi Lauper’s “Time After Time.” Yes, this was a jazz concert, but there was really no discernable base for the different sounds we were hearing. Sound familiar?

The Bernie-bro bassist made his politics known at the outset, constantly making comments in between songs about Germany’s better taxes, education, transportation and the like. Nice.

Looking out smiling at the respectful, attentive audience, I thought ironically to myself, “What nice, liberal white people I’ve found myself surrounded by tonight to listen to this open-minded nü-jazz.”

But after my conversation with Ben, I knew better. These were Germans. They had a culture, and as much as they might enjoy experiencing new, foreign, intersectional music for just a night, deep down they were all a little scared of losing what’s theirs.

WILLIAM GREAR
7/12/2017

HOLLYWOOD AND TRUMP

We go to a super cool bar in Mitte, I forget the name. We learned a word in German class today, “Schickimicki” which was described to us by John, our language instructor, as “arrogantly hip.” Melting candles sat on which of the crowded tables. The wall was half-wallpaper, half-exposed-brick, with dusty chandeliers reflecting in gaudy mirrors all over the wall. As we are waiting for our first round of drinks, a young man (probably mid-20s) leans over from his table and asks us where we are from. I am always
hesitant to engage with men at bars, for obvious reasons. The idea that he just wants to talk doesn't really cross my mind. “I'm from Los Angeles,” I say. “Wow! Los Angeles,” he laughs loudly, his English is the clipped English of native Germans. He then does this weird thing with his hands, where he curls them up and then “explodes” them outwards, like small fireworks. He makes a sound, “Boom, boom, boom!” with each small firework, and explains, laughing still, “You know, the stars! Lights! Cameras!” and I understand he is trying to simulate the flashing lights of Hollywood. I laugh, and join his gestures.

“Do you know anyone celebrity?” he asks.

“Yes, a few,” I laugh because this is always the question I am asked.

“Can you introduce me?”

My friend, J., says she is from D.C., and he asks her about Trump. This is something many Berliners ask about. J. gives a short laugh and answers, “Yeah, it isn't great” or something of that sort. The bar is too loud to have any sort of real conversation in. It is funny that my home, L.A., comes with a set of questions, and so does D.C. Celebrity and politics — funny how this is what America can be reduced down to.

He introduces us to two of his friends, one a woman and one a man. I am relieved when I see he is with a female friend. They are nice, and we talk to them for a bit, I don’t remember about what.

RAINIA SEYD
06/29/17

WELCOME

The night started around midnight. A group of us decided to go out and experience Berlin nightlife. We first went for drinks at a local bar and then headed to Warschauer St. where a bunch of clubs are. We were in a group of four. Myself, two black friends, and one muslim friend. Throughout the night the one thing I kept noticing was that my muslim friend got a lot of attention.

First, while on the U-Bahn, a random guy said assalamualaikum. This was interesting to me. It seemed that religion had created a silent, but strong connection between these two strangers. I could never imagine two christians greeting each other in such a manner based on the connection of religion, or even two jews; after all a jew and christian and even atheist are essentially indiscernible, unless wearing some sort of religious symbol, but that would only account for a very devout person. Regardless, I've never seen this kind of religious based greeting outside of a religious space in the US.

Once at the club these inter-muslim connections, and more, kept appearing. One man, arab in his mid to late twenties gave her two thumbs up. This was random and strange. My interpretation of it was that he was giving her some kind of approval for being in the club. Did this man feel that he had some sort of ownership of her in which his affirmation would actually matter?

The next few interactions were short but important. First, a German woman walked by her and said “you have to smile”. This seemed like a very misogynistic thing for someone to say. My association with this phrase is with men telling women to smile in a creepy cat calling way. Why was a woman then using the same sexist phrases? Secondly, periodically throughout the night we would see arab looking men pointing toward her. If these men were in fact muslim my interpretation would be that they felt they had some sort of claim on her or some sort of exotisization. These interactions reminded me of something a roommate had told me this past year. She's indian and one night when we were out another Indian boy said hello to her in passing. I asked if she knew him to which she responded, “no, indian boys just think they have claim on indian girls”. This idea of racial claim seemed to be present in the Berlin club culture that we were experiencing.

The next interaction was with a British boy about our age. First he tried to talk with her, but after she
declined and moved away he continued to persist. At this point I intervened.

Me: She doesn't want to talk to you
Him: I only want to talk to her
Me: She doesn't want to talk to you
Him: Why?

At this point it was clear that verbal pleas wouldn't do anything so we moved to a different area. This type of interaction is unfortunately pretty common for woman in a club, but in the context of all the attention that my friend had been getting, it seemed like something more significant that a normal creepy moment. Was the boy fetishizing her because she was muslim? Was he actually interested in her as a woman or as a muslim object?

Next, and perhaps the strangest interaction of the night was with a transgender woman. This woman, late twenties and looking very drunk, approached our group and reached her hand out to my muslim friend. In a very slow and condescending manner shook her hand and said “welcome”. The woman, it turned out, was from Spain so where was she welcoming her to? The club? The country? Nightlife in general? From what I could tell we had just as much basis to be welcoming this woman to somewhere then she had in “welcoming” my friend. This just seemed straight up offensive to me. She would never have said that to a muslim man in a club, nor do I think that she would have said that to another minority. This seemed like a moment built out of the perception of a muslim woman as reserved and submissive - qualities that normally wouldn't be present in a club.

Lastly, at the end of the night, some arab men yelled at my friend from across the street, “Hey you! The one with the Hijab” in arabic. Even outside the club she was still getting this inappropriate attention. But what would these men have said if she had responded? Were they just yelling at her for the sake of cat-calling or did they actually have something to say? Regardless, I think their intoxication had a lot to do with their “friendliness”.

Later that night my friend said something that gave me an insight to her perspective of the encounters.

Friend: “I kinda was trying not to appear to have too much fun, cause I didn't want people to think that I was buying into the club culture or that I'd had been drinking. I wanted to keep my appearance of modesty which is everything that club culture isn't.

Could this desire of modesty be why other hijabi woman weren't in the club? And further why others viewed her as such a unique presence? Regardless of the answers to these questions, the night showed me a disappointing and creepy side of Berlin's night culture that I wouldn't want to put my friend in again.

EMILY KUNKEL
6/23/17

GERMAN CULTURE
IN THREE WORDS:
BEER, CURRYWURST, AND MONEY

Perhaps the most interesting encounters I had ever experienced occurred on this night. As part of our observations for the collective document that the class had been assigned, my group and I decided to visit Warschauer Strasse in hopes of gaining new insights about foreignness and the German identity. We figured that people would be more willing to speak to us if they were drunk and didn't know that we were speaking to them for academic purposes. As we entered our first bar, we decided that the
approach taken at Leopoldplatz would not work. If I were drunk, I certainly wouldn’t want to spend my evening talking to a group of university students about highly-contested topics such as immigration and integration. To get around this we decided that, for the night, we were a group of friends visiting Berlin for the first time, who needed advice on the “typical” Berlin activities. The first people that we approached were a young couple on a date. The woman had fair skin, blonde hair, blue eyes, and almost immediately told us that she was from Russia. Her date, on the other hand, was very quiet and seemed almost angry about our presence at their table. Despite this, we began a conversation with the woman by asking her if there were any typical Berlin activities that we could do on a weekend. She made some suggestions but admitted to us that she was originally from Munich so she didn’t really know about the average Berlin experience. Frequently while she was speaking, she would turn to her date for the validation of her points but he would always remain silent and stare at her. I got the impression that he had lived in Berlin much longer than she did but was stubbornly unwilling to speak to us. Eventually, the Russian woman mentioned that when she was still living in Munich, she felt like a foreigner and this is the conversation that led up to this revelation:

Irina: Yeah, we’ve never been to Cologne, what is Cologne like?
Zartosht: Like you say that it has like a “German mentality.” What does that mean?
Woman: Well, that’s a great question. It’s hard to explain. They like beer but also currywurst. At the same time, this attitude of being German but also easy-going. See, Munich is not that easy-going. Berlin is too easy-going, too much. Both of them are exact opposites. Both of them are not really typical. Because both of them are different sides of extremes. Munich is extremely conservative and Berlin is extremely, you know, party, drugs, weed, everything like this.

Me: Do you think that Berlin is welcoming to like all types of people, like everyone?
Woman: Yeah, yeah Berlin is welcoming, and also Hamburg. Hamburg as well. Munich is not so much, no. I mean I’m actually not German. I am from Russia.

All of us, in sync: Russia?
Woman: Yes, yes. As a foreigner in Munich, I can tell...I can tell that they are not that open. You have to really be, you have to really try to be as German as you can possibly be when you’re in Munich. In Berlin, not that much. You can be a foreigner in Berlin, it’s okay.
Zartosht: Do you think of yourself as a foreigner?
She initially didn’t hear the question so Zartosht repeated the question and she still couldn’t quite answer so he rephrased the question:
Zartosht: So do you see yourself as a Russian when you’re in Munich?
Woman: I’ve been living in Germany for way too long. I think I’m something in between. I’m German-Russian, sort of because when I go back home they all tell me I’m too much German so I cannot say. I cannot tell anymore. It’s real difficult. I may be the wrong person to ask. But a typical German would be in the middle, I would say. Because the typical German is somebody who drinks beers, who eats currywurst, who has money, but also works for that money, you know what I mean? I don’t know it’s hard to tell.

At this point, the conversation veered more in the direction of the false narrative that we had created for the night but I was still incredibly pleased with the amount of insight that we were able to gain from this woman. It’s interesting that she emphasized a difference between her experiences in Munich and Berlin which I had not considered. She also made it known that, in Berlin, the foreign identity is something that is embraced while at the same time, concluding that her foreignness is something that prevents her from being entirely German which I found to be an interesting contradiction. I was very surprised when she used the concept of wealth to characterize Germanness because I had began to view Berlin as middle-class city that had firmly rejected excessive and opulent showings of wealth with the large punk culture and insane amounts of graffiti. Furthermore, I think that many foreigners can relate to the feeling of being in a
limbo between two identities which she eventually calls German-Russian. With an ever-increasing number of migrants moving into Germany, it is time that the country starts to redefine its previous conceptions of culture in favor of one which is incorporative of all of the people living there.

APRIA PINKETT
07/20/2017

BERGHAIN

At the very end of our last class, contextualizing with a short reading from the introduction of Levi-Strauss’ “The Meaning of Myth and Science,” we touched on structuralism and emphasized the significance of binary oppositions as undergirding structuralist methodology. I was intrigued by the concept of binaries for the purpose of understanding our experiences and encounters and particularly in the ways we may watch binaries violently dissolve, negate each other or be strengthened. Of my adventures in Berlin, none speaks more to both the vitality and fragility of binaries than the weekend I spent at Berghain, the city’s famed and mysterious techno mecca.

EAST/WEST

Berghain is one of those Berlin institutions which continue to celebrate to this day the reunification of the former East and West sides by putting them in the same space and forcing people to grapple with their histories, rather than simply accepting Berlin as one. The name alone gives it away; “Berghain” is a play on the two neighborhoods it claims to be sandwiched between - Kreuzberg, the former frontier of West Berlin, and Friedrichshain, that of the East. What I find most fascinating here is that, in fact, Berghain is not in between Kreuzberg and Friedrichshain at all. That would be impossible, as the Spree runs straight between the two neighborhoods. Berghain is decidedly north of Ostbahnhof in Friedrichshain. I can’t help but be reminded of Berlin’s former location in the middle of East Germany since, though it was situated so clearly in one side’s territory, it existed as a confrontation between two equally powerful ideologies, making it sort of an island in an otherwise communist landscape. Post-reunification, many still describe Berlin as an island in Germany, now because it possesses so much international culture.

When I approach the abandoned East German power plant that today houses Berghain at about 12.30 AM, even as I step in line outside I feel as if on an island in the middle of Friedrichshain. The building, its snaking pathways and imposing fencing take up so much space that from any point in line I can see nothing else - no other buildings, no streets, nothing. There are no police, no passersby, nothing but the imposing building up the hill and the black-clad techno-worshippers to remind you you’re in Berlin at all. It is not just another club - it feels almost like a sovereign territory.

Of course, the East/West binary has already been violently disintegrated in a way by reunification, and this is exactly what “Berghain” evokes. The new binary I am perhaps suggesting is Berghain/Berlin as a model for Berlin/Germany. I see the position of Berghain from the outside not much differently than one might see the position of Berlin from the outside - as a cultural island.

inside/outside

The clearest divide at Berghain is between the inside and outside of the club. While this may sound obvious for any bar or nightclub, it is so distinct here because most people on the outside never see the inside of the club at all. No matter how long the line is on a particular night, morning, or afternoon, the steely-eyed bouncer, part-time professional photographer and original east Berliner Sven Marquardt rejects easily 80% of those who approach the door with hardly any discernible pattern, giving Berghain its coveted mystique.
The result of Marquardt’s selectivity on this particular night, and any night, is a tangible uneasiness which washes over the line and became ever-more intense as I got closer and closer to the door. Almost everyone is dressed entirely in black, some in fetish and leather and others in tamer goth. Nobody smiles, nobody dares take out their phone, some smoke but nobody drinks, there are no groups larger than three, conversation is kept to a minimum and ceases entirely when Marquardt and his colleagues come into view.

It truly does feel like a strict border crossing into some paradisiacal nation in the middle of the city. Like the hard line dividing the United States with Mexico, the space between the inside and outside of Berghain is in many ways artificial, arbitrary and manufactured simply to create a power dynamic. Berghain’s inside/outside is not just a binary, it is a literal superiority complex. On one side is the club, which like the United States economy, truly would not suffer by letting more people in. On the other are those hoping to be accepted, some of whom have been preparing for this moment for days or even weeks using sites like berghaintrainer.com to practice their body language and would likely consider admittance here the crowning achievement of their clubbing careers. All of them would be no doubt devastated to wait hours and have their nights ruined by rejection.

I wish I could say there is a science to how I got in, but there certainly is not. Sure, I had an interesting look - an old black sweatshirt, sweatpants rolled up to the knee, white vintage Adidas x Vespas and a single opal stud in my left earlobe. But Sven didn’t really look at my clothes; he simply stared into my eyes for about ten seconds, asked me my age (I lied and said I was 21), gruffly said “bitte” and pointed toward the door. If anything helped me at all, perhaps it was that my partner in crime that night, Nate, was wearing a white shirt with black floral accents and had just died his hair platinum blonde. Perhaps Sven liked the light-dark contrast, another little binary opposition.

Architecturally, the inside of Berghain absolutely lives up to the hype. It is interspersed with sleek, modern bars featuring colorful, ambient lighting. 30 meter ceilings loom over the massive techno dance floor fitted with one of the best sound systems in the world. Snaking, poured steel corridors and stairways lead to a smaller house dancefloor upstairs, lounges with window views of the city and dark rooms with strange delights to offer. The music is incredible, the staff is nice, the drinks are cheap; the inside is certainly a vast improvement over the outside.

BERLINER/OTHER
Where the inside/outside binary really breaks down is in who you end up finding inside the club. Part of the conclusions make from the outside, especially by those who don’t get in and to which I alluded by comparing the door to a national border, is that the club itself is racist and xenophobic.

On most levels I find this to be a false assessment. Sure, most of the people inside look unmistakably cool, with the piercings, tattoos and all-black that are apparently required, but this is the most ethnically diverse bar I’ve been to in Berlin, by far. Maybe half of the people I met there were Berliners, as this is still a local institution, despite the tourist hype. Of the other half, I met people of a multitude of nationalities, many blacks, many people of Asian decent, even some Latinos. There is also a wide age spectrum here; I saw some, but not many people as young as myself and spotted numerous men who could have easily been in their 50s or 60s. Of course, given that, like many Berlin clubs, Berghain developed from an originally gay fetish scene, many and perhaps even a majority of the men I saw here were gay. Put simply, the ridiculous feeling of exclusivity on the outside completely disappears on the inside. There is no guest list, no VIP, no bottle service, no private rooms, nothing of the sort. More than any other place I’ve been here at night, this feels like Berlin.

Two groups are conspicuously missing, though: Turks and Arabs. Though I swear I heard Turkish and Arabic being spoken multiple times while waiting in line, I did not hear it a single time inside the club. In this regard, I believe Berghain could certainly be considered xenophobic. I have seen people speaking near Eastern languages at every other club I have been to in Berlin, including Matrix, Tresor and Suicide Circus, which span multiple genres of electronic music. For some reason, though appearing not to follow a pattern when confronted with any other race or ethnicity, the staff here forces all Middle Easterners, and dare I say
Muslims, to continue to feel their entire group the other rather than just the portion of rejects as is the case with other groups. If Berghain in any way represents Berlin the way I have been suggesting, the connection connection is painfully accurate.

Berlin is a safe-haven, an island, for the meeting of nationalities, of languages, of sexual orientations and everything in between. Through the gruesome acceptance and rejection process, Berghain successfully demolishes the Berliner/other binary similarly to Berlin itself. But like Berlin, Berghain's relationship with the Middle East and more specifically Islam is complicated, and unfortunately its current coping mechanism is disgust.

**TENSION/RESOLUTION**

The music at Berghain is of course what makes it most famous. Besides operating a club, Berghain doubles as a techno label called Ostgut Ton, named after the itinerant Berlin gay party that inspired the current institution. Ostgut Ton has signed over its short history some of the most coveted underground DJs in the techno genre, including names like Ben Klock, Terrence Fixmer and Fiedel. On a normal Klubnacht the club brings in and celebrates DJs from a particular label or city, includes a couple miscellaneous others and throws in one or two of their own. Tonight the club has a few DJs from underground label Planet Rhythm, including Stranger, Eduardo de la Calle and Johnny Island. O-ton's contribution tonight is Berlin's own Fiedel.

I don't have too much to say about the sonic intricacies of techno music, as unfortunately this kind of music really isn't my expertise. While I certainly saw some techno die-hards this weekend, I got the sense that most of the people in the crowd were in the same position as me - there to have a good time but not to become connoisseurs. To us lay folk, techno exists in two distinct states: tension and resolution.

What's fascinating about the tension and resolution that I find in techno music is that, unlike in other forms of music like jazz, the tension really is not manufactured by the DJ himself. It exists in the imaginations of the audience. Here's how it happens:

A particular beat drags on for perhaps eight minutes without changing. At its start it feels new and fresh and dancing is easy and fun. As time passes, the beat doesn't change and eventually becomes stale. This is where tension arises. The audience begins to feel itself become bored, not having fun, but trying to force the fun to continue with drinks, drugs, sex and whatever else, since after all, we are at Berghain. Before anyone becomes too restless, a new beat resolutely drops in, people whistle and scream in excitement for the substance-free dopamine the new development has provided, and the process begins once again. After my brief experience with techno in Berlin, I've found that my favorite DJs are those who can let the tension simmer as long as possible before giving the people what they want.

The clearest way I watched this binary beautifully break down was through the temporal stress too much tension causes at a party lasting from midnight Saturday until late Monday morning. When Nate and I spent from about 1 AM to 7 AM at Berghain on Saturday night, these tensions and resolutions were always palpable. But when we returned for the same time frame on Sunday night, it was as if there was no tension at all. Beats were changing at an incredibly rapid rate, lighting schemes were enough to warrant epilepsy warnings, and everybody was generally going fucking crazy without breaks.

**STRAIGHT/QUEER**

I couldn't end an entry about Berghain without discussing at least briefly the way that the opposition between straight and queer completely disappeared for me upon entering Berghain, especially on Sunday night.

For starters, like I've already mentioned, most of the people there just weren't straight. I saw men together, women together, multiple women with multiple men, dom-sub couples, transgender women and a host of other gender and sexual identities that it would be ignorant of me to try to label. At Berghain, anything
goes, which is exactly why pictures are so strictly forbidden within the club, with the policy enforced by security officers who put pink stickers on your cell phone cameras. Nobody should be there to take pictures for their Instagr"mms, and as fake as people may seem in the queue at the club entrance, Sven somehow knows who he is picking. Everybody you meet in Berghain is there to be themselves, whatever that may be. 

Most of what I experienced at Berghain in this realm is very personal and reserved to my journal or maybe even just to my inner thoughts, but without going into details, I can say here that coming on this trip I was already starting to feel at the least unsure about my own sexuality, and especially through the projective identification I experienced through many of the gay men at Berghain, this weekend only exacerbated that insecurity.

I watched a lot of binaries break down at Berghain this weekend. Perhaps if I ever saw my own relationship with sexuality as a binary between myself and women, that was partially broken too.

WILLIAM GREAR
07/15/17

SOME TUESDAY NIGHT

A beggar walks up to a few of us in at the Hermannplatz station. I am talking to a girl from an American university, I forget where. When the beggar walks up to us, he says something in Spanish (interesting — this is the first Spanish I have heard in Berlin) and sticks out an old paper cup. I wave my hand and shake my head no. He lingers. I know he will eventually go away, and I'm really not bothered at all. The other girl, K., smiles at me and yells at him “POOR.” Gesturing her hand around the circle of students gathered in the station, she continues very loud and very drunk: “We are POOR.” He exhales and moves away. I mutter “Sorry” as he passes. I don't laugh or smile to K., who is very pleased with herself. I don't think it is funny. She continues to joke, “It's like, um, no hablo — or,” she laughs, “Como se dice 'poor’?” I feign a smile — maybe I should’ve said something, I don't know, It doesn't seem worthwhile, but I don't really want to talk to her anymore. Walking through the city, later, the group's noise (the chorus of 20 year olds drunkenly screaming at each other) makes me feel wildly unsafe. I am also painfully aware of our Americanness. I feel like we are reinforcing all the horrible stereotypes that exist — we are, after all, walking through Mitte in a group of ten, ten loud, annoying, selfish Americans. I hate us.

As we are exiting the U-Bahn, one the boys with us has his gold necklace ripped from his neck. And I don't have much sympathy. We were “asking for it” — I immediately hate myself for thinking this. I look at the boy, who is obviously and rightfully scared and upset. He carries around a huge handbag and wears heeled leather boots. He wears sunglasses inside. And he is drunk. He is an easy target. It still isn't his fault, I think to myself. I leave soon after that. I’m not used to dealing with any other “going out” situation than that of Princeton, and I am learning to just make decisions independent of others. Princeton is safe, easy, accessible and I can walk home alone at any time. Obviously, Berlin is a city — I can't do any of that.

RAINAI SEYD
6/26/17

THE GRINDR GRIND IN BERLIN

I met Martin on the gay dating app, Grindr, in the second week of the trip. Throughout this trip, he acted as my own personal guide, taking me out to dinners, clubs, malls, and long walks around the city.
He is in his mid-30s, and has housing both in Berlin and in Tel Aviv. In addition, he's lived in Japan, France, China, and America. His worldliness impressed me and complimented the sentiments shared by those we interviewed at Hermannplatz, who opined that Berliners are “free” and “cultured” in ways that other Germans aren’t. However, I also noticed that despite this appreciation and knowledge of different cultures, Martin tended to express negative attitudes towards refugees and Muslims (although if asked he’d vehemently deny such accusations).

According to Martin, the neighborhood surrounding the gay club SchwuZ and the crowd within it is more diverse than some other clubs like Berghain; I’d concur with this statement, although SchwuZ was still overwhelmingly white both times I went.

After enjoying a fun night there with Martin, we decided to leave while it was still dark outside to get back to his place; thus, the trains were not yet running. As we waited for a taxi one block away from the club, Martin asked me if I had keys I could use as a weapon in the event that we were attacked.

“No,” I replied. “Why, is this a bad neighborhood?”

“A lot of Muslims live around here.” He whispered. When I rolled my eyes, he implored me to drop the “façade” of my American political correctness and come to my senses.

This was not the first time I’d accused Martin of being Islamophobic. He jokingly referred to a Muslim in a club as a “terrorist,” and in soberer moments seemed intent on telling me in extraneous detail about recent terrorist attacks in Berlin enacted by Muslims and/or refugees.

“A refugee who didn’t get the job he was interviewing for came down to this station, and in his anger he pushed a German student in front of the train!” he told me once as we awaited our U-Bahn in the Pankow station.

Another time at an alternative gay bar owned by an Israeli couple called The Coven, featuring dim-red lighting and inexplicable mounted-animal-heads, Martin went on a rant about how gay men in the Middle East are being decapitated, executed, tortured, and thrown off of buildings “every week and every day!” As a liberal American is prone to do, I questioned how those killings correlated to “normal” Muslims in other parts of the world. Marcel was annoyed with me; I was annoyed with him; I threatened to leave. He told me that one of his friends teaches Muslim refugees English—this may have been a drunken attempt at a compromise or apology. I am not entirely sure, as I was fairly intoxicated at the time as well.

I also met Mike on Grindr, but later into the trip, once I’d found my footing in Berlin and had begun to look out for these problematic qualities in the gay men I met here. Mike is an actor in Berlin and has lived in Germany his whole life; he loves the nightlife here more than Martin and also seems more connected to Berlin than Martin, who was more of a world traveler; for example, Mike’s parents live a relatively short distance away in Potsdam. Mike told me that he does not like going to SchwuZ; instead, he prefers Berghain and KitKat, two fetish clubs popular among gay men. Inquiring into why he didn’t like SchwuZ, I asked him if he preferred the techno music or the darker atmosphere at the latter clubs to the former, which plays pop music and has a lighter mood. He shrugged and explained, “Too many refugees. They steal your stuff there.”

“Oh… huh,” I replied, unsure whether or not I should ask him to qualify his claim. Were the refugees at SchwuZ a problem because of their status as refugees? Had he personally had items stolen there? Wouldn’t his items be susceptible to theft by local Germans as well? Mike had told me earlier that he was on his third iPhone of that year, because his other two had been stolen in the U-Bahn. He didn’t mention if he’d perceived those thieves as refugees or immigrants; if so, these thefts might also have contributed to Mike’s negative attitudes towards SchwuZ’s diversity.

I decided not to challenge his statement in that moment. I’d enjoyed spending time with Mike thus far and did not want to ruin my perception of him by discovering parts of him I would find ugly or mean.

On another occasion, Mike invited me to have a threesome in his apartment complex with another man who was black. The language he used in his proposal— “would you like to have a black dick as well?” —
bothered me because it seemed fetishistic and dehumanizing. Would this “black dick” be attached to a person? Does this person have a name? I wondered. Although this instance seemed like a cleaner cut case of a “problematic” no-no, some of the racist connotations to this statement might have been the unfortunate result of a language barrier. Mike's English was generally quite broken. However, that this man's blackness was so critical to point out early on does indicate that the racism within America's gay hookup culture is also present here in Berlin. Although physical appearance is an undeniable factor to consider when one is arranging a threesome, Mike also sent a face picture of the potential third guy after this message. Therefore, if Mike had felt that I would be turned off by his race or some other aspect of his physical appearance, he could have just let me see the picture and come to my own conclusion. Instead, he chose to stress the man's race. This leads me to believe that Mike felt his blackness would be a major factor in me choosing whether or not I wanted to participate.

In some ways, I’d compare my relationship with these two to that of a tourist and a city. I was the tourist and Mike and Martin—among some others—were the city. By this, I mean that, like a tourist, I didn’t want to go to the bad parts of this city, so instead I chose to recognize its nicer qualities and, more often than not, disregard its more problematic ones. Even examining my own analysis here, I seem to insist upon giving these men the benefit of the doubt since they were so friendly and personable to me. It must’ve been the language barrier; of course, he’s just making a joke.

Ironically, these men recognized this tendency within me, and used it to their own amusement. For example, Martin would frequently joke about how he hopes Ivanka Trump will be the next president with a wink. He considered my Americanness to signify political correctness and a discomfort with racial topics or jokes. In some ways, this is a sharp departure from the more traditional stereotypes American tourists face, like being Trump supporters or loud and insensitive.

NATE LAMBERT
07/28/17

FOOD

S melling Mexican Food and Dropping my Smørrebrød (Entry from Copenhagen)

In Copenhagen we went twice to a big market for lunch. It was almost overwhelming—the two big glass market houses tons of different stands that sold everything from artisanal chocolate to Vietnamese sandwiches. Each stand I passed smelled strongly of some different kind of spice or sauce. Also, in such a generally homogenous country, I was surprised to find that many different cultural cuisines were represented. There were a couple Mexican food stands—one of them even advertised their fresh tortilla machine which I could see working through the window, spitting out little corn tortillas. It was a weird little metal machine that turned around and around cutting the tortillas out of a large one like a cookie cutter. The glass panes on the stand were fogged up from the steam generated by cooking the vegetables and meats. I was briefly reminded of home while standing there. I felt like I could be standing in front of my favorite traditional Mexican food restaurant in Los Angeles, smelling the spicy, meaty steam waft out of the kitchen. Mexican food is such a staple in Los Angeles that I kind of identify it as a “food from home,” though it’s not actually an American food. Mexican food is so prevalent and of such high quality in Southern California and in parts of Texas that I find it hard to claim I tasted a difference in quality when I ate Mexican food in Cancun. However, food tied to culture and culture is tied to nationality, which is tied to territory. Mexican food made in America can’t really be considered Mexican because it simply was not made in Mexico. The actual difference in quality may be negligible, but the boundary between the countries still plays an important role in the identity of the food. Yet, Mexican food still reminds me of my home in Los Angeles instead of Cancun, though I’m not Mexican, nor have I ever lived there. In that way, a little piece of Mexican culture has been detached from the physical land of Mexico and
reassigned to Los Angeles, for me personally. It’s complicated, but I think that the customer defines cuisine. Each person has different experiences and imaginations associated with specific tastes and smells. The borders of a land no longer limit the experience of a cuisine.

The importance of food’s connection to a culture, a nation, and a land, only became more clear as I continued to wander through the market. I had decided to eat something Danish—in my 48 hours here I wanted to properly experience the culture, of which food is obviously an important part. Having read How to Be Danish, by the British journalist Patrick Kingsley, I knew that one of the signature Danish foods is the Smørrebrød, which is essentially an open-faced sandwich. I passed a stand tucked away in the corner of one of the market buildings, and they had an array of different Smørrebrød in a glass display case. They all looked incredible—the dark brown bread could barely be seen under the mounds of toppings, which ranged from shrimp to tomatoes to whole halves of meatballs. The range of colors was spectacular and (as can be seen in the picture) they looked more like little works of art than something I should be eating.

“There were trays and trays of Smørrebrød like this, all lined up in precise order. All of the ingredients looks fresh—you could tell even through the glass—and they featured combinations of ingredients that were very foreign to me, like the radish and cheese on top of the roast beef, all on top of the brown bread, as can be seen on the top shelf in the picture.”

I was also overwhelmed with the prospect of choosing one because they all looked fresh and delicious. I thought I would strike up a conversation with the man serving the Smørrebrød. Here is the interaction I had with him. Keep in mind that I did not record him so his words may not be exact but I tried to be as accurate as possible.

Me: Hi, could you tell me what’s on all of these sandwiches?
Man: They are Smørrebrød, not sandwiches.

The man really didn’t seem very friendly. He had rough, dark blonde hair and startlingly light blue eyes and he didn’t even come close to smiling during the whole interaction. His remarks, like the one above, were quick and kind of terse, as if I were preventing him from getting to something very important by talking to him (though there were no other customers nearby).
Me: Oh okay, sorry. They are very typical Danish food, right?
Man: Yes of course—for lunch very typical. Everybody Danish eats this.
Me: Which kind is the most popular here in Denmark?
Man (shrugging): I don't know what kind...the shrimp one is most popular here in this market I think.
I ordered one of the shrimp ones. It was piled high with a creamy sauce, herbs, some egg, and a ton of tiny little shrimp and it smelled incredible. It looked like a feat to even hold the thing in one hand, but the man behind the counter seemed to do so with ease.
Me: It looks very hard to eat, no?
The man actually almost smiled at me this time, but in a condescending was that seemed to say “oh that's cute”.
Man: Not hard to eat for me, I have everyday.
It was becoming apparent that this guy was kind of an asshole, but it was fine I just wanted my food. I picked the plate up off the counter and eagerly began to pick it up to take my first bite, but it was piled so high and was so difficult to balance. As I moved it towards my mouth, one small shrimp started to fall from the top of the cream mound towards the edge. In an effort to save my little shrimp, I shifted my hand wildly, but this threw my whole balancing act off and the Smørrebrød fell, in slow motion, towards the floor, where it landed face down. The man was watching the whole thing. I apologized to him, stammering and bending down to scoop the sad eggs and custard off the floor.
Man (laughing to himself….not in a nice way): It's okay, you are not Danish you are tourist you do not know how to eat.
First of all, I was furious because my clumsy inability to eat the damn Smørrebrød had nothing to do with my status as a tourist and an American and, secondly, I was mortified that I had given him reason to look down on me (literally, as I was on the ground scooping up shrimp). Sure, Smørrebrød is a culturally Danish food and, in that one moment, I happened to horrifically embarrass myself while trying to eat it, but by no means does that relate to whether I am Danish or not. To be fair, the man I had this interaction with may have been particularly rude, but it still made me think about how absurd it sometimes is to tie a culture to a specific food without any flexibility. What if a Japanese person simply could not manage to use chopsticks to eat sushi? Or an Indian person hated spices? These are stereotypes, yes, but that is my point. Is it fair to make assumptions that tie food and culture together so strongly and so immutably? I may be a tourist and I may not be Danish, but this experience definitely made me consider that perhaps the answer is no.

ELENA ANAMOS
07/8/2017

AN ENCOUNTER OVER ICE CREAM
IN LEOPOLDPLATZ

While exiting the U-Bahn station, Apria, Zartosht and I discuss the interesting encounter we just had with the boy at the strawberry stand. As Zartosht is translating the encounter for us, the ice cream roll kiosk catches Apria’s eye. She immediately gasps with excitement. On our previous trip to Dresden, we were entranced by the roll ice cream but did not have time to wait. This time we were sure to take advantage of the short wait and put off entering Leopoldplatz for a few minutes.

As we approached the stand, I noticed three young women standing in the line. Two of them wore the
hijab, and they were all speaking in German. I noticed the two girls closest to me because I admired their fashion sense. I had become really interested in the modest fashion industry for my own wardrobe, so when I spotted the neutral, loose cotton pants, fashion sneakers and loose plain tops, I was immediately interested in them.

The three of us determined that it would be best if Apria and I approached them while Zartosht stayed at a distance to document the encounter. Initially, I assumed that the girls would feel uncomfortable if Zartosht was with us and I wanted the interaction to be as natural as possible. After working up some courage I greeted them with “Assalaamu Alaykum” which literally means peace be upon you but is used as a common greeting within Islam. Initially the two veiled girls turned around and looked startled while the unveiled girl greeted me back. “Sprechen Sie Englisch?” I asked with a smile. Once they affirmed that they knew English, I asked “Do you have a few minutes to speak with us? We are students doing research in Berlin.” “Yes we do, but can we order our ice cream first?” The unveiled girl stated, pointing to the stand. “Oh yes of course, thank you!” I affirmed. As we waited in line behind them, Apria and I discussed the type of ice cream she should get. I debated whether or not I should continue speaking with the girls as we waited but decided against it. For a few minutes we stood in close proximity but held different conversations. As two of the girls get their ice cream, they turn and ask me: “Do you like Berlin?”
“Yes! I’m from a small town in America so Berlin is very exciting for me,” I responded.

When they laughed, I immediately followed up with: “I’m vegan and there’s a lot of vegan food here. There’s more here than in the U.S. or where I live.”

The two veiled girls nodded and agreed, while the unveiled girl immediately affirmed me and said, “Yes that’s true! They love meat and big burgers [in America]. My cousins tell me... They are in Berlin now and they really like it here. They’re in Leipzig right now.”

I laughed when she mentioned the burgers in relation to the U.S. The mention of another German city reminded me of my visit earlier to Dresden.

“I was in Dresden a few days ago. It’s very pretty.”

“Smaller than here,” the unveiled girl said.

“Yes, much smaller, but it looks very old and I like that” I agreed.

One of the veiled girls turned to Apria and asked her if she had to wait longer, since it seemed like she was turned away from the stand. She said yes, they ran out of the milk used to create the ice cream. The girls sighed, sadly, acknowledging solidarity with her for the extended wait.

“If you want, you can taste some of mine,” the girl with the blue scarf offered to Apria.

“Oh sure! I would love to,” she responded in an elated tone.

“Just take a... Spoon!” the other girl with the brown scarf responded, as we all chuckled.

Admittedly, their ice cream looked quite good. It was served in the trendy new manner in which cream is poured on a cold surface and you watch the ingredients blend together as the worker mashes it up for you. I’ve only seen this on the internet prior to the first encounter in Dresden. I find it quite interesting that the first time I see a chic stand like this in Berlin, it is in a heavily populated immigrant area.
The girls tell us that they are architecture students at a nearby university and we share that we are studying immigrants in Berlin for the summer.

“Do you feel German?” I ask.

I received a collective “No” from the group, despite that the two veiled girls were born in Germany.

“Is it because of how you feel or how others treat you?”

At this moment the unveiled girl received a phone call and had to leave the conversation.

“Both.” The girl with the brown scarf chimed, “For example, in Turkey, they say you are German but here they say you are Turkish so I don’t really know.”

“How have you had any bad experience with other Germans?” I followed.

The girl with the blue scarf chimes in now, “I personally have not had such experiences. I’ve seen so many cases in Berlin, though, but this area is quite multicultural so it is not very difficult [for us].”

The girl with the brown scarf adds, “sometimes when you have to search for jobs, they ask for a picture. If you do not send one and you come to the interview, they say ‘Oh you wear a headscarf. I think you have to take it off when you are working.’

She then adds her own experience, “One day, I think three years ago, a bus driver told me that I speak very good German. When I told him that I was born here, he said oh! … So they are very confused.”

When I ask what it means to be German for them, the girl with the blue scarf responds: “I guess, as soon as you speak good German and you’ve been here a while, it’s enough”

The girl with the brown scarf chimes in: “Their first impression is always that you are not a German if you wear a hijab.”

The unveiled girl joins the conversation again. “I don’t feel German at all. I feel that I am in two different worlds. Here I feel that I am not German and that I do not belong here. But when I go home to my country, I miss Germany… I think we live better than anyone in this world… like people that live on the streets” she states.

She continues with: “there are people that can’t accept you even if you are born here… even if you say I feel German.”

The other girls now chime in stating reasons why Germans cannot accept someone such as “your skin color, your parents, your dress, your religion.”

“No one speaks about it and they don’t really care,” concluded the unveiled girl.

“What do you think about refugees?” I ask the group.

While the unveiled girl disclosed that she was a refugee from Iraq, the girl with the blue scarf felt that the title of refugee holds more permanence than it should, adding: “As soon as you speak fluent German or you marry a German, you are German and no longer a refugee… they will be German soon.”

“I hate this word … we often say newcomers instead of refugees,” concluded the unveiled girl.

Noticing that they had already finished their ice cream, I thanked the girls for having a conversation with us and asked if they would be willing to have their photo taken, which they happily obliged.
Reflecting upon the recording of the conversation, I noticed long pauses between some of their answers and my following questions when the unveiled girl left the conversation. I wondered as to why the conversation seemed to flow better when I spoke with the unveiled girl. She seemed to be much more eccentric with her answers. I wondered whether her refugee status within Germany made her more passionate about issues of foreignness, while the two other girls, both born in Berlin, created a strange sense of foreignness of which they seemed not fully conscious. However, this also does not seem entirely plausible, because they also shared the same sentiment: of being in a strange gray space between the cultures of their family’s origin and Germany. Furthermore, the two veiled girls may feel less inclined to discuss issues of foreignness because their hijabs already act as such strong signs of what Germans would consider foreign in both culture and religion. I believe the beginning of the conversation where I approached them with a Muslim greeting set up a promising dynamic. They were both startled and quiet, while the unveiled girl responded, which seemed to foreshadow how the conversation developed.

I found the connection to American food made in the beginning of my conversation with the unveiled girl quite amusing. It seems that food can serve as a strong cultural symbol and when I did not fit her archetype for a typical American diet, she found my comment that it was easier to eat vegan in Berlin as confirmation of the stereotypical eating habits of Americans.

The presence of the food stand and their stylish outfits created a colorful scene when I looked back at the photos I took, especially because the stand reminded me of the major gentrification that the city has undergone recently. On reflection, the photos juxtapose us from others as seemingly privileged and stylish young women enjoying ice cream rolls while discussing the major discrimination these girls faced.

At times it seemed to me that they had begun to internalize the rhetoric surrounding refugees, especially with the comment that being a refugee ends once you adopt the language or marry someone who is
German. The refugee within the group even stated that she hated the term and preferred newcomer, which could just happen to be a preference. But the reasoning the girls gave for accepting refugees was much more rooted in reasoning that refugee experiences and status are only temporary, and that they can in fact become completely German. However, based on our conversation, it is obvious that they understand foreignness from a German perspective is complicated because some Germans are unable to accept them—regardless of place of birth, language competency, or marriage to a German—as one of them.

IRMA QAVOLLI
07/17/2017

I felt right at home. I jokingly said to those around me from the class, “Ah, my people!” and chuckled. As we sat on our table we saw a list, in Arabic, of what had been ordered for us (by the Syrian refugee who had visited our class). I took it upon myself to read it out loud and explain to the others what the food was.

“Fattoush! This is like a salad with pieces of crunchy bread. Very good!”

“Oooh, Tabbouleh!” I exclaimed with excitement. “This is a salad-like dish made with parsley, tomatoes and onions with a bit of mint and lemon juice! It is the one some of us made in the cooking class with refugees.”

“Baba Ghanoush is a dipping like Humus but it is made of eggplants!”

“Kofte is long piece of beef that is grilled! You dip it in the hummus or Baba Ghanoush!”

I mentioned which dishes had meat and which dishes were vegetarian. I admitted when I did not know what a dish was, “I never had that before in Egypt!”

After the food started to come out and we all had our first bites, I was ecstatic. Arabic food is abundant with flavor in every bite. Like Indian or Thai food, Arabic food loves spices, so it is impossible to have a bland or a savorless dish. I grew up in Alexandria, Egypt, so Arabic food is no news to me. I asked around the table if everyone loved it as much I did. “Yes!” was the answer I received from most.
When we did not have utensils, I took it upon myself to ask the waiters for them. “Momken Showak wa Ma’alk, law Samaht” (Can we have forks and spoons, please?) “Hader” (Yes), the waiter responded.

When we needed extra water, I asked “Momken Mayah, low samaht?” (Can we have water please?) “Akeed!” (of course), the waiter responded.

I noticed I was not the only one going out of their way and playing host. The young refugee who accompanied us, who was sitting on the other table, was also going back and forth, rushing to get the attention of the waiters, asking for more food and drinks. The only way I could explain my behavior that day, as well as his, is that each of us wanted the class to leave with a good impression and experience of the culture. The food was somehow a representation of the Arabic culture of which we were proud. I find it fascinating how food could make such a connection.
Alaa and I walked down the now all-too-familiar Bergmannstrasse trying to pick a restaurant. Our struggle was to decide between a safer option that would for sure make our stomachs happy, or a restaurant that we hadn’t experienced. My friends and I had already frequented quite a few food places on this lively street. Rice noodle soup from the vegan restaurant Good Morning Vietnam, curry rice from the Thai kitchen Pagode, chicken nuggets from Louis’ Burgers, fruits from the supermarket Edeka, … and the CIEE-recommended gym at the end around the corner, to appease the guilt at the end of the day. Instead of a Google street view, a food map of Bergmannstrasse unfolded in my mind, allowing me to browse through our options of the night. Finally, we decided to try something new.

We sat down at a Japanese restaurant called Aki Tatsu. With the adventurous spirit high, we both decided to try an interesting combination we had never tasted before: rice noodle soup with salmon. Beginning our adventure was however harder than we thought. The waiter, a middle-aged Japanese man, brushed past our table multiple times, but we never managed to get his attention. The responsibility of getting him to come over fell on me, as I was facing the entrance where he came in and out. My tactic was to follow him with a steady gaze, but it did not seem to work. Our empty stomachs made the waiting time seem even more prolonged. We were both impatient, and Alaa suggested closing our menus so it seemed like we were truly, fully ready to order. After throwing all these “hints” around without getting a response, I gave up on subtleties. The next time the waiter came near, I simply made a hand gesture and said out loud, “Wir würden bestellen. (We would like to order.) ” We also both got drinks, Lychee Lassi and Mango Lassi.

After spending at least ten minutes trying to place our orders, getting our drinks in less than five minutes was truly a solace. It suddenly came to my mind that I often got drinks because I wanted something to alleviate the distress of waiting for “real food.” I remembered being told how German restaurants profited on drinks a lot more than dishes. I shared my thought with Alaa, and we joked about how “snaky” these restaurants were to keep us waiting, tempting us to spend money on all the Lassis in the world that we didn’t really need.

“I would say this was worth the wait!”
Our salmon rice noodle soups came, and I liked its novel, refreshing taste. As we ate, talked and laughed, I realized that the waiting was not that bad after all. I was not used to the waiting because in Beijing, ordering and then getting food at most restaurants is a super efficient, easy and almost formulaic process. With impeccable wifi connections, electronic ordering systems and the social norm of stopping any waiter that pass by to make a request, restaurants in Beijing actually provide a more isolating eating experience. People tend to look at their phones, eat, and then look back at their phones during meals together.

Here in Germany, the eating experience has been so different for me. At casual sit-down restaurants like Aki Tatsu, eating becomes a social experience as well. The waiting time provides an opportunity for people eating together - like Alaa and I on that night - to share a period of time together. The bad wifi situation makes us less susceptible to burying our heads in smartphone screens. In my mind I contrast restaurants like Good Morning Vietnam or Aki Tatsu, where you tend to go with friends because of the waiting, with the Thai kitchen Pagode, where you always wait for no more than three minutes for anything. The food at the Thai kitchen is tasty, and I go there a lot because the place is so within my comfort zone. In a nutshell, the easiness and convenience of it resemble my eating experience at home. However, the downside to this comfort is that eating there is not a social experience at all. With a bar for ordering, a few small tables and people standing waiting for their takeaways, the whole place has a more transitory mood to it.

Exploring the restaurant culture in Berlin either with friends or led by Professor Borneman, I have come to appreciate a kind of eating experience different from the Beijing one or the Pagode one. When I am back in Beijing eating out with my friends, I might actually put my phone on airplane mode and ask them to do the same. I will be more patient with waiting, because I realized in Berlin that as much as preparing food is a process, eating should be a process as well.

YANG SHAO
07/14/2017

BERGMANN BURGER:
THERE’S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

The decision to eat at Bergmann Burger was made on a whim after I had passed at least ten restaurants and found none of them appealing at the moment. It was my first week in Berlin and I still had not adjusted to being in a different country so the last thing that I wanted to do in that moment was experiment with my food. Luckily, I happened to catch sight of the sign with bright letters and words eerily similar to English. As I scanned the menu, two things stuck out to me: mozzarella sticks and chicken wings, my favorite snacks. Instantly, I made the decision to enter this tiny restaurant that is incredibly easy to miss if you aren't looking very hard. The entryway leading to the restaurant was small and narrow and I had to duck my head so I didn't hit it on the overhang. In my direct line of vision was a refrigerator with drinks like Coke, Nestea Ice Tea, and of course, beer. To my left, there were two tiny tables and the counter where I was supposed to order my food.

I waited in line anxiously hoping that the man behind the counter would understand my attempts to communicate with him. I noticed that in the background, American pop music was playing which slightly comforted me. Irma was in front of me in line so I watched her interaction with the man. She simply asked “Auf Englisch?” since that was as much as we had learned in German at that point and he responded, “Yes!” with an astounding clarity. When I finally got to the front of the line, I was able to get a better view of the person behind the counter. He was short and appeared to be in his early to mid-thirties. His face was very intimidating to me because it was void of any signs of happiness. My interaction with him was uneventful. I ended up ordering the chicken wings, fries, and a Coke. After I paid for my order, he simply pointed in the direction of the refrigerator so that I could grab the drink that I purchased. Initially,
I interpreted this as a dismissive action. I figured that he was eager to get rid of another tourist who had stumbled upon his store but upon reflection, that was clearly my insecurity regarding other people’s perceptions of me talking. Sydney, Irma, and I sat at the tiny table near the door and waited for our food. When my food arrived it looked like this:

At first glance, the chicken wings didn’t look the most appetizing but I was incredibly eager to try them. As mentioned before, this was during my first week in Berlin and I was seeking comfort in the form of food. Thankfully, Bergmann Burger did not let me down. When I took my first bite, I was surprised that I recognized the taste almost immediately. I really, really love chicken wings so at home, I’m always buying them from the freezer section in the grocery store. I know a Tyson wing when I see one or, in this case, taste one. Usually, I prepare my Tyson wings in the oven but at Bergmann Burger, they were deep-fried. I think I prefer their method. As we were eating our food, the man looks over at us with a phone in his hand and says, “the bottle opener is on the refrigerator.” Sydney, Irma, and I were all very puzzled until he began speaking again and said to us, “how do I explain where the bottle opener is for the drinks?” We offered a slight variation of the first sentence he suggested and said, “the bottle opener is on the handle of the refrigerator.” He smiled at us, said thank you, and put his phone away. I realized that he was using his phone to look up the English phrases so that he could properly communicate with us about the location of the bottle opener and in addition, that I had clearly misjudged him when he simply pointed at the refrigerator earlier. I really appreciated the fact that he wanted to communicate with us in spite of the language. I vowed to return again. A couple of days later, I ended up at Bergmann Burger again for some unknown reason. I assumed that he would recognize me because I was there just two days earlier but he gave no indication of having any idea who I was. I ordered chicken wings again but this time, I got curly fries. This visit was pretty uneventful.

In the following weeks, I explored the dining options of the other places in Kreuzberg and various other neighborhoods so Bergmann Burger was not on my radar. However, in the fifth week, I ended up on Bergmannstrasse, desperately searching for an ATM because the Thai restaurant that I wanted to get a quick lunch at only accepted cash. When I finally found a place to take out money, I realized that I was really close to Mehringdamm which meant that at that point, Bergmann Burger was much closer to me than Pagoda. I was hungry and I hadn’t been there in a while so I figured that I might as well visit the place
that acted as the closest reminder of home. I kept walking until I reached the sign with the familiar bright lettering and began my descent down the narrow stairs while simultaneously ducking my head so that I wouldn't hit it on the overhang. I had the routine down by that point. I was in autopilot as I walked up to the counter. The same familiar music was playing in the background and it seemed like another uneventful visit was in the making but I was incredibly surprised when the man began speaking to me before I could give my order.

HIM: CHICKEN WINGS?
I was so shocked that he remembered my order that I didn’t even respond initially. My face reflected my surprise for a few seconds before I responded with, “You remembered!” and a laugh. Then, he said, “plain fries or curly?” which surprised me yet again because I had assumed that he didn’t recognize me the second time I came to the restaurant. Then, I added a Coke to my order and he ended the interaction with a flourish by saying, “the bottle opener is on the handle of the refrigerator!” In that moment, I realized that of all of the places in Berlin that I’ve visited, Bergmann Burger is the one that will stick with me forever. I initially sought this restaurant out as refuge from my feelings of apprehension and homesickness tied to being in a new place for the first time. I liked Bergmann Burger, at first, because it represented a place that transported me away from Berlin-to a place similar to my home. However, now as I head back to New Jersey, I recognize that Bergmann Burger is a place that could not exist without Bergmannstrasse, without Berlin. When I return to my experiences at this restaurant, it will be because it is in Berlin.

APRIA PINKETT
6/23/17, 6/25/17, 7/20/17

MAKING CONTACT

Today Alaa, Emily, Apria, and I went to Tropical Islands, the largest waterpark in Europe, located in an old aircraft hangar about an hour and a half outside of Berlin. The place as a concept is exciting, but in the middle of the summer when (it seems) every family in a 50-mile radius wants to hang out by a beach, the place was ridiculously overcrowded. Despite the rowdy atmosphere that the people created and the ‘tropical’ surroundings, the park itself was decidedly dreary. Part of this was the bad lighting of a naturally lit space on a cloudy day. But moreover, the structures and decorations looked run down and well-used instead of shiny and new and exciting as they had appeared in pictures on the website. The “Tropical Island” illusion of the park—the murals on the wall, the sand, and the flora and fauna (there were palm trees, flowers, flamingos, fish, turtles and a cage of snakes and tarantulas)—was disappointing, despite its detail, in person.

It was an opportunity though for me to observe interactions between German children and preteens which are fascinating in their similarity to those between American adolescents. I don’t know in what ways I had expected them to behave differently, but to my surprise they were enjoying the slides and pools in the same way that I would have a few years ago. Even without understanding the words they were speaking, I feel that I generally have a good sense of the kind of conversations they’re having and how they’re enjoying themselves. I guess it is because their body language and things like the pitch and volume of their voices I recognize from how I’ve seen kids in America interact. Despite the language difference, I could easily imagine the little ones as students at the kindergarten I worked for last summer.

We left Tropical Island in the mid-afternoon and came back to CIEE so that we could attend a cooking class, along with our other classmates, at “Uber Den Tellerand," a non-profit that provides opportunities for refugees and Berlin natives to come together around something everyone loves: food. The experience was eye opening, less because of the food (though the cooking was informative and fun and the eating delicious), and more because it was the first time I had met someone who was a refugee from Syria.
Back in the U.S., everything about the refugee crisis is so hypothetical: “Well, what if they are like this or that?” “Where will these people go and what will they do?” Here, I was standing face to face with a person who had spent months traveling from Syria to Germany; someone who openly and unabashedly talked about obtaining his fake passport from a cousin and trying therefore to illegally enter other countries; someone who had been robbed of $1000 or so by a “guide” who left him and a few companions stranded for 8 days without food as they walked toward an unknown border. He talked about the fears and strategy of planes vs. trains, about his parents coming later and it being easier for them. He spoke so matter of factually that Aleppo was not a safe place to live anymore, how the places he remembered were now destroyed. He wasn’t a statistic; he was a real person. And it made me think about all the hypothetical fears we focus on about refugees coming to the U.S. and other Western countries (the extremism they might bring or terrorism that might follow) as compared to and coupled with the real and, most importantly, urgent fears of the refugees themselves. He wasn’t running from a one-in-a-million chance of being attacked by a terrorist. He was running from the reality of bombs dropping in his city.

After dinner, I played foosball with the main speaker and “head chef” who had taken over teaching us how to cook and then later how to dance. At one point in the game when we scored, (though really, he did all the work) we high-fived and it was strange, that moment of contact, because it made everything seem so much more real. He is flesh and blood like me, a person who wants to live like me, a person who wants things for himself and for his life like me. I know this is such an elitist perspective to have, to only recognize problems, suffering, or crises when you can immediately see them. But for the sake of honesty, I must acknowledge how seeing and speaking, however briefly, with someone who had immediately experienced the refugee crisis broke down so many borders and walls and miles of removal I had set up between myself and people who seem so very far away when all I see are a few Facebook posts or Tweets about their situation on odd days.

SYDNEY JORDAN
6/30/2017

LANGUAGE: CHANGE IN GLOBAL SEMINARS

As I look back on my third Princeton Global Seminar in Berlin, I am struck by how much has changed. Though I now feel much more at home in Berlin, it has developed into what feels like an entirely new place: Corporate offices, arenas, and malls occupy what were empty overgrown lots; English, the dominant second language, now rivals German in wide-reaching areas; and a city marked by its closed pasts of the 20th century now feels as cosmopolitan as any other world capital. While my role as language instructor, counselor, concierge, pseudo-local, and even—I’d like to think—friend to the students has remained the same across the three Princeton trips, little else feels static. Beyond the city itself, I have also seen changes in how students navigate it. Whereas earlier groups relied on written guides, must-see lists, and occasionally me for advice, the current students used social media and their smartphones as they would at home to look for places to go and things to do. Paper transit maps? Nope, Google Maps. For them, Berlin was certainly a new and exciting place, but not necessarily in the same way that I, or previous groups, had experienced it.

This year’s seminar was also unique. While previous programs dealt with monuments, museums, and the city’s architecture, this year’s course focused on the residents of Berlin, their interactions, and their personal, interpersonal, and collective motivations. The home base for these experiences was a cosmopolitan community, the Bergmannkiez, full of food, music, and people from around the world. The makeup of our group itself mirrored the diversity of both Berlin and the neighborhood, expanding the
available perspectives for students’ analyses. On the whole, this year’s program represented a wholly fresh experience, with a new group of students exploring a changed city in novel ways with unique goals.

Nevertheless, from beneath one of my hats, that of language instructor, I have noticed one thing that never changes: the frustration and joy experienced while grappling with the German language. Whether it was exasperation at its difficulty, or elation at the ability to hold brief conversations in restaurants, the language has always played a decisive role in Berlin experiences. On the first day of this year’s program, most students could barely utter a “danke” or a “bitte.” A week later, one student quietly asked how to pronounce our subway stop—Gneisenaustraße—because she wanted to be confident of the way home. By the time we arrived Copenhagen, some students could understand the meanings of Danish street signs and the names of fruits and vegetables at the Torvehallerne market using their German knowledge. By the end of the seminar, students had learned enough to effectively narrate their experiences interacting with the people of Berlin during their seminar observations. Some even asked their interlocutors basic questions in German, errors be damned. Looking back at my first trip to Berlin as a student in 2003, I was terrified of the confusion of a foreign tongue and culture. Somehow though, I managed to piece things together and get by. Some things never change.

JOHN BENJAMIN
LANGUAGE INSTRUCTOR, PHD STUDENT, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS, AUSTIN
9/5/17

THE LANGUAGE BARRIER IN HERMANNPLATZ

I have passed through the Hermannplatz U Bahn station almost every day here in Berlin without ever stopping to consider what the square itself might look like. In my mind, I envisioned a bustling square like the ones I have seen in America and the rest of Europe—crowds of people covered by loud chatter and a sprinkling of different musics from shops, radios and street performers. What I was confronted with when I stepped out of the station was decidedly bleak by comparison. It might have been the gray weather or the fact that people in Berlin generally speak quietly, but the square seemed muted and lifeless. Though some nice wooden tables were set out, most people were sitting on the low concrete blocks that lined the square, huddled together in pairs, speaking in low voices. This made it significantly harder to go up to strangers and speak to them—the low energy infiltrated me immediately and affected my whole attitude, which had been one of eagerness until my moment of arrival. Also I found that nobody in the square looked particularly happy. There was not a smile in sight, and nobody moved through the square with the quick, energetic pace indicative of curiosity and excitement. Most people looked serious or sad as they sat smoking a cigarette, or bored as they stood at their stand, waiting for the next fleeting tourist wave to wash through their market stand.

With a rising feeling of horrible awkwardness, I approached a pair of young Arab-looking men sitting at a table. They were the first people I noticed who were actually smiling and laughing as they spoke to each other. With a rising feeling of dread and awkwardness I shuffled over to them. Just as I opened my mouth I felt a huge wave of shame. In the split second before the words “Do you speak English?” left my mouth, I fell into a nightmarish imagination of what it would be like if they didn't understand me: I could see their faces laughing loudly at me, the whole square turning to see the stupid American girl who just assumed somebody would speak English to her. I imagined them waving me away in slow motion, horrified by my assumption.

When I snapped back into reality the words tumbled out of my mouth gracelessly towards the two guys and they met me with a blank stare. They definitely couldn't understand me at all, but the reality of their reaction was so different from the version in my imagination; I could see in their eyes that they were just as embarrassed by the encounter as I was, and they stumbled over their words just as awkwardly when they
“The preferred place to sit seemed to me the concrete blocks on the side of the square. Everything seemed kind of dark and gray in Hermannplatz, and there was trash littered all over, especially near the concrete blocks.”

“There weren’t many people in the square. It was a little depressing. A lot of people were just kind of sitting on their own, eating with their head down, or they were standing at their respective food stands, silent.”
tried to explain to me that they didn’t understand. They gestured just as desperately with their hands and their eyes shifted just as wildly. I realized in that moment that I felt some comfort in our mutual shame at our inability to understand each other—the interaction ended with all of us breaking into sort of sheepish, childish giggles. I felt like we had formed a small connection in our struggle to deal with the language barrier, which made my fantasy of humiliation seem far less real and frightening. I realized that language has been the single most important contributor to my feeling of foreignness here in Berlin, and I have a much less frequent need to use the language than a refugee—who might be trying to find a job or set up housing—might have.

The next person we approached also didn’t speak English, but the tone of the encounter was significantly different. We approached two young men who were sitting on a concrete block smoking cigarettes. Will asked, “Halo, do you guys speak English”. The man on the left leapt to his feet. He was tall and lanky, dressed in worn blue jeans and a oversized plain red T-shirt. He shook his head vigorously to indicate that he didn’t speak English, and then beckoned for us to follow him. Something about his enthusiasm and his smile made me trust that he was trying to help us, though I had met the man thirty seconds ago and he hadn't yet said a single word to us. It’s amazing that friendliness and trust can be felt without language at all. He walked briskly—almost jogged, really—across the courtyard as we trailed behind, struggling to keep up. He ran up to a man who was working in one of the food truck stands and beckoned to us again, with impatient excitement. We asked the working man if he spoke English and he said “Yes, a little,” but when we explained our project to him and asked for a minute of his time he waved us away. Our friend in the red shirt looked disappointed, but his energy picked up again as he led us (still jogging) to a nearby flea market stand and pointed to one of the workers. The same scene played out—the man had no interest in having a conversation with us. The third person the red-shirt man led us to finally seemed to agree to talk to us, and our friend looked visibly content with his success. “Al is gut!” he said, and then left as quickly as he had appeared to continue smoking his cigarette. It turned out that this third man didn't actually have any time to talk to us, but I didn't really feel like it was a huge loss...I had learned something from the man who had led us on a wild goose chase around the square. Though he didn't speak our language at all, he gave us far more of his time than any of his English-speaking friends in the square. He offered us far more help, without saying a word. I even refer to him in the above sentences as a “friend,” though I don't even know his name. Instead of awkwardly cutting off the interaction when we realized we couldn't speak the same language, he proceeded to try and help us anyways—he recognized us as the same as him, rather than an “other”, and treated us accordingly. The language barrier didn't draw a line between us, as I think it often does between people. Perhaps if we didn't consider language such an indicator of identity and, consequently, a partition between groups of people, we would be able to befriend and help each other with this ease.

ELENA ANAMOS
7/18/2017

ICH SPRECHE ENGLISCH

I was very insecure about intruding into Berlin on the first day. Despite my countless hours of online research, the perceptions that I had of Berlin still managed to be entirely wrong. For instance, I had this irrational fear that I would be the only black person in the area and that every time I left the building, I would feel everyone’s eyes staring at me. I quickly got over my fear of staring when I realized that everyone here does it and that most times, if you stare back, the German will look away sheepishly. Additionally, I quickly learned that, while the black population isn’t as large as I’m used to, I was far from the only black person in Berlin.

After reaching CIEE and putting away my luggage, Irma and I went on a quest to find food. We ended up on a street immediately perpendicular to Gneisenaustrasse and internally, I panicked. As I looked ahead,
I could see many Germans milling around in front of the restaurants and sitting at the tables with their cigarettes and beer bottles, talking with friends and staring at those who passed by. We had spotted a restaurant in the distance and made our way down the street. I held my breath each time I felt a new pair of eyes drilling into my back until eventually we reached our desired destination. When we walked in, we noticed two women sitting at a table in the corner but an otherwise empty restaurant, with everyone else sitting outside. We waited patiently for an employee to approach us and offer to seat us before we looked around discretely and realized that we were supposed to seat ourselves. This was a cultural difference that the internet had not prepared me for. At that point, I became even more anxious about me being in this place that I clearly knew nothing about. To make matters worse, when the waitress finally had noticed our presence in the restaurant, she approached our table and began speaking to us in German. I had never been more afraid to announce that I was an English-speaker in my entire life - not because the waitress seemed xenophobic, but because at that point, my insecurities about being in a place so different from what I was used to scared me. Not to mention, it was my first time abroad so I legitimately had no idea how to behave or react. I ordered rice noodle soup with chicken and by the end of my meal, I had already began to adjust to being in Berlin.

After some reflection, I realized that the language barrier was what bothered me most about my interactions with people on the first day. As I walked down the street and felt eyes on me, I felt insecure about the fact that the German people had probably already marked me as foreign in their minds and the fact that I didn't speak the language enforced this. My hesitance to speak up to the waiter stemmed from the feelings of shame I felt for being an outsider who didn't understand or speak the language of the country I was visiting. In my interactions following this one, I realized that I refused to speak English in my interactions with the German people unless necessary, because I was utterly ashamed of the fact that I could only speak English. I felt like a true foreigner. Eventually in German class, we got to a point where we could order food at restaurants and our assignment for that weekend was to visit a restaurant and to order entirely in German. I picked a random place on Bergmannstrasse and set out to put my new vocabulary into good use. I was incredibly excited because it had finally started to seem like language wouldn't be as big of a barrier for me. But, this is how my interaction with the waiter went:

Waiter: Hallo! Was trinken sie?
Me: Hallo! Ich möchte eine Cola, bitte.
Waiter: And what would you like to eat?
Me: Ich nehme ein Hamburger mit Pommes frites, danke.
Waiter: You're welcome!

When I began speaking German, the waiter immediately recognized that I was not a native German speaker. However, instead of humoring my attempts at speaking German, he chose to respond to me in English and that was incredibly disheartening. I had assumed that if I was speaking German that people would be less likely to project their ideas of foreignness onto me but that was not the case. Instead, my English-speaking and inability to understand German probably reinforced many of their ideas regarding foreigners and the true German identity. After repeated incidents of me speaking German in a restaurant and the waiter/waitress responding to me in English, I began to feel less ashamed of my inability to speak the language. I learned that people would project their ideas of foreignness onto me regardless of whether or not I was speaking German. Furthermore, the burden should not be on me to dispel their preconceived notions of what a foreigner is and what a foreigner looks like in Berlin. It is the responsibility of the German people to address their attitudes towards people who don't look or behave or speak like a "typical" German and in addition, it is their responsibility to change the conceptions of what a "typical" German is suppose to look, behave, or talk like.

APRIA PINKETT
6/17/2017
“HEY, CHINA! CHING CHONG!”

After dinner, I walked around at the Bergmannstrasse Festival with Alaa and Emily. After watching the music for a bit, we walked on to check out food stands and shops along the street. From magnet bookmarks hand-painted by a local Berlin artist, ice cream labeled “American,” to Chinese buns that resemble Brotchen more than the “Baozi” that I grew up eating, I stepped into an expo of different cultures and backgrounds unified by this space in the city.

As we stopped at a stand that sells Bohemian-looking scarves and cloths, the owner of the shop, a Turkish-looking man in his twenties or thirties started talking to us. “Where are you from?” The classic existential question that we ask each other as we encounter strangers in lands that to some feel foreign, and to others mean home. Our exchange with him, however, did not fall into the cliché. The man did not give us time to answer his question. Instead, he bluntly announced that he would guess our origins. “America,” He said to Emily. I forgot his guess at Alaa’s origin, but both of them ended up telling him where specifically in America they are from at his further request.

Then he turned to me. “China,” he presented his guess with confidence. “I am from China,” I said in English, unnecessarily confirming his guess. My response’s content agreed with him, but the tone did not. “Yeah, I said China,” he nodded with confusion.

I walked away with my friends and could not help wondering why I reacted that way. It was hard to describe my feeling at the moment of being called out. I was not positively, but negatively surprised at being recognized as whom I was. I realized that I was instinctively cringing away from the pronunciation of “China” in German – “chee-nah.” The man pronounced the “chee” part especially strongly. The term “(zhi na)” that Japanese used to derogate Chinese people as pigs in the first half of the 20th century, and radical Taiwanese still use to insult Mainlanders as “inferior animals,” sounds incredibly similar to “chee-nah.” It is a sound that, growing up, I had been taught to attach incredible stigma to. When I say “China” in German, I try to avoid the “ch-” sound but make it more like “Hee-nah,” which sounds infinitely more comfortable. I know that the term “支那” existed long before it became a racial slur, which is probably why its linguistic family branched out into German. However, at that moment as a Chinese person in a Berlin street festival, like James Baldwin in the Swiss village, I could not help hearing the thousand echoes raised by “Chee-nah” within me that the man across from me could never begin to understand.

I also realized that as I placed my gaze on the “cultures” present at the street festival, I myself presented a “culture” being guessed at and gazed upon. I wonder who I was in the perception of the man that owned the stand. Why was I Chinese, not Korean or Japanese? Why was I not American, when my American accent was reportedly deceiving? I will never know, but I am still curious.

7/13/2017

Irma, Apria, Sydney and I were going out. We realized that we had not eaten since 4pm and should have some food in our stomachs before drinking. Naturally we went to the kebab place across the street from CIEE. I paid for my usual chicken kebab. I served as translator for Irma to express her wish for no cheese in her Durum. I then joined the others on the bench nearby to finish my food.

Irma’s food was too spicy, so she needed a drink. I must have decided that I wanted one too, because I joined her in the line again to get drinks. As we were waiting, for no reason at all, the Turkish man in his forties or fifties making the kebabs shouted “China.” It took me seconds to realize that he was shouting at me. It took me by surprise, and I did not know what or how to respond. He shouted again and made a salute. I thought he said “hello, China.” The other customers in line laughed. I could not find the joke funny.

I did not end up getting my iced tea. As we were walking to the night bus, I asked Sydney if I was overreacting. “No, no way,” she said. The others agreed too. They pointed out that when he was doing the salute, he was saying “hello, ching chong” instead of “hello, China.”
“Ohhh. That’s even worse. I am never going back there again.” I said. I was angry because out of all the people who waited there, he picked me. I was the only one speaking German in our group. I was the least “foreign” by that standard, but somehow I still deserved to be called out and labeled “China,” and had a derogatory racial slur thrown into my face when I was just waiting to get a drink and leave. I am proudly Chinese, but what bothers me was that I could have been Japanese, Korean, American… but somehow in his eyes I had to be Chinese.

I am also disappointed that the other people waiting in line laughed. I am trying to stand in their shoes and understand how they perceived the scene. As Germans, they saw a Turkish man making fun of an Asian girl. Why did they find it funny? Were they laughing at the man’s ignorance and racial stereotyping, or did they genuinely find the joke funny? There must have been some comical effect to seeing one foreigner attack another. I wouldn't characterize the laughing as completely malicious, but it was a bystander's laugh that both angered and intrigued me.

ANALYSIS:
In the first instance, I felt like someone trapped in an isolated linguistic context. My sensitivity to the pure sound of “China (Chee-nah)” in German was unique to my Chinese identity and the collective national memory that came with it. I know that my reaction had nothing to do with the shop owner’s intent, which I am sure was not bad at all. I also know that what had been evoked in me was, in Anderson's words, only “imagined” national memories that I had never experienced. Knowing all of this, I was all the more amazed by my instinctive reaction. I defensively restated the shop owner’s definition of me, but what was I defending? For one second after I heard him snap “China,” I felt vulnerable and alone for something much bigger than I was. Language was only one of the many aspects in which I was inextricably linked to my culture and nationality. Although I could rationally see why nationalism could be no more than an imagined sentiment, I could never be fully emotionally detached from my cultural and national identities.

The second instance made me reflect on the power of a racial slur like “ching chong.” “Ching chong” reduces the profound beauty of Chinese language to a comical pair of clanging sounds. The coining of this term makes no sense to a native speaker like me, because it does not sound at all like the language that I know and love. I did not even realize that the man said it until my friends told me. With “hey, ching chong!” and the salute, the man was seemingly communicating with me. However, he was actually communicating with the other people in line - presumably some girls he was flirting with - by making me a spectacle through ridiculing my language, which, ridiculously enough, I had not even spoken a word of that night. This incident made me realize that as important as clothes, food and ritual, language is also an aspect of culture in which one can exploit another by appropriation and mistreatment. Racial slurs like “ching chong” are truly a form of othering made tangible in language, as they reflects nothing about the language itself but only the West’s conception of its strangeness.

YANG SHAO
7/1/2017

SO LOUD

Raina, Will, Elena, and I are sitting in a low-key bar in Kopenhagen. Raina hadn’t wanted to go to a club, and I was, as always, on board for a more chilled social setting. We found a grungy, dim-lit bar, with large candles and a few empty tables. We talk. We are relaxed. But we keep finding ourselves pausing to turn around and look, to listen, to observe. Our conversation doesn’t find a groove. We feel overpowered by the conversations of others. It feels strange.

Often, when you sit at a large table with a large group, conversations quickly split into small crowds. At a table of 12, for instance, conversations often tend to split into 2 conversations of 6, or 3 conversations
of 4. Sometimes, when the conversation next to you is filled with laughter, or when someone is telling an enthralling story, your conversation dies, and you listen to the conversation of others. You are sitting too far away to join in (and can you even join in at this time?), so you just listen. This is what this felt like. Every conversation around our table felt more exciting, more fascinating than ours. Why?

It took us a while to figure out, but then it hit us. Danish people were louder than us. For the past weeks, we had gotten used to being the loudest people in every U-Bahn, restaurant, or social setting we found ourselves in. Quickly, we had stopped being embarrassed by the fact that we Americans were simply louder, and had almost started enjoying catching the stare of people watching our conversations. Yeah, we WERE loud. We had tried to be quiet, but whenever we tried to police our volume, the conversation quickly died.

But here, in Kopenhagen, Danish volumes dominated our volume. We felt overpowered. We felt boring. At a nearby table, a woman loudly fakes the sound a person makes when they are being assaulted. People don’t bat an eye. A man at another table screams, seemingly as loud as he could. We felt small, boring, socially inept. The confidence that had picked us up in Berlin, quickly died here. In Berlin, we looked normal. Here, we were too dark, too short, not muscular enough. Danish people dominated us in any social standing, simply based on their physical features and the volume of their conversations.

We decide to go home early, we don’t enjoy our experience.

ZARTOSHT AHLERS
7/8/17

HERMANNPLATZ ENCOUNTERS: DAY ONE

Alexia, Leila, and I left the Hermannstraße station with little certainty about who we should approach and what precisely we should ask. We knew that the topic was foreignness, but we did not write down any questions beforehand because facilitating conversation, rather than going through a list, seemed the best way to collect honest opinions and experiences. In other words, too much planning risked narrowing our focus and distracting us from whatever truths folks reveal in casual conversation.
But who would we have these casual conversations with? We did not want to talk to only those who we assumed to be foreigners based solely on their race, gender, or age. Yet we were also mindful of these differences because, if one's identity affects how one perceives society and one's position in it, then a diverse subject-base would be the most representative of these varying viewpoints. So, if we thought that we were neglecting any category, we could seek out more from this group without making it the determinative factor of who we spoke with. Having said that, we mainly chose to speak with those who looked the least busy and most willing to talk—in short, anyone sitting down not already talking with someone else, which happened to be many people.

I initially felt somewhat confident about selecting our subjects because I could speak German well enough and, based on what I heard from other groups, finding English speakers was difficult. My language skills, after a long period of disuse thanks to the ubiquity of the English proficiency of the native German speakers who I encountered in my daily interactions, had the potential for renewed relevance. The encounters for the day, however, would frustrate this hopeful picture.

We briefly wandered about, eyeing possible subjects, until we spotted two middle-aged men sitting together and eating on a concrete stoop. For several minutes, we lingered around as we tried to gather ourselves and come up with the best way to attack this first encounter. We decided that we should find out what language they speak before anything else, so we finally approached them.

“Hi, sorry to bother you, but do you speak English?”

“Yes, we can speak English.”

Good news, though I had been looking forward to using German. Alexia quickly explained who we were and what we were doing and asked if they had time for some questions.

“We're about to go somewhere, but we can talk for a few minutes.”

We ran through the basic questions: where are you from? How long have you been in Berlin? What are you doing here? And so on.

They told us that they were from Norway and that they had been in Berlin for nearly a month doing theater work. They were planning to leave in a few weeks.

“So you think that Berlin is more diverse than Norway?”

“Oh yes, certainly” one of them said. Speaking for himself and his friend, he also told us that even with the greater diversity, they still felt at home in Berlin because they “look like Germans” and could speak German.

I thought this was interesting, though I didn't press the issue. Looking back at this response, I found it ironic in one sense and puzzling in another. Language is undoubtedly a central way through which people fit into larger groups, so I thought it was amusing to hear from them in English about how their ability to speak German helped them comfortably belong in Berlin, an ethnically and linguistically diverse cosmopolis.

Because Berlin is so diverse, I was also a bit puzzled about why they felt that looking “like Germans” (which I presume means being white) was any cause of comfort. This comment implied that those who are not white may not feel as though they belong in Berlin, despite its multiracial character. Perhaps coming from Norway, which in their own words is less diverse, prompted this statement; they might have already formed ideas about how racial minorities are treated and assume people replicate these patterns in all spaces, even international ones like Berlin.

In any case, they had to head out so we said goodbye and began recording the details of the conversation in Alexia’s notebook.

Failing to find a German speaker for this interaction disappointed me, and I would be continually disappointed as our time at Hermannplatz continued.

Anyone who I approached using German (asking “Sprechen Sie Deutsch?” and, if yes, following with
“Haben Sie Zeit zu reden?” or “Können wir ein paar Fragen stellen?”) had no desire for conversation. An Asian woman with a child at a fish stand, an elderly man sitting alone near the station entrance, and a Muslim woman sitting alone at the opposite end of the square all rejected my German invitations. We did, however, have separate conversations with a German woman and two Austrian interrailers who all spoke English (apparently, my German was of no use even with the German speakers who were willing to talk with us).

Thinking about what the Norwegian men said, my situation seems even more curious. Not only did I look German, I had the language to match. Both of them together, however, evidently was not enough to get anyone’s attention. If, according to the Norwegian men, these things helped one fit into a larger group, then I would hate to see the response I would have gotten without them.

SAM VALLE
7/18/2017

TEN YEARS IN BERLIN

For my ethnographic observations, I was assigned to Leopoldplatz, a sunny square in the far north of Berlin. After arriving via the subway on a warm Monday afternoon, I walked around the circle of benches once, stopping to sit and listen to people speak, trying to understand the environment before approaching anyone. As I passed by, I heard the young African couple with a baby girl arguing in French. I sat down a few benches away, then decided to approach them. I informed Raina and Alaa, who said they wanted to come with me, although they don’t speak French. I approached them first, and asked in French if they spoke French. Yes, said the young woman confidently, with a bright smile on her face. She seemed to be in her late twenties or early thirties, and was wearing black skinny jeans and a sunflower-yellow top. Her hair was on top of her head in a bun. Her partner, who was holding the baby, was dressed in black jeans and a black tee-shirt, with a baseball cap. He seemed less enthusiastic to speak to me. I introduced myself as an American student, told them I was studying foreignness in Berlin and asked if I could ask them a few questions.

Sadie: Excuse-moi, est-ce-que vous parlez français ?

S: Excuse me, do you speak French?

Woman : Oui !
W: Yes!

She seemed visibly excited to hear me speaking French. This was a radically different response than I had gotten when I had approached people asking if they spoke English, although she also could have been responding to the greater comfort I was displaying in French, since I already knew that they spoke and were comfortable using French, as opposed to when I asked people if they spoke English, when I was asking them to change languages for me. It felt like less of a burden on the interviewee to use a language they were familiar with.

Man : Moi, je ne parle pas français.
M: I don’t speak French.

W : Si, tu le parles.
W: Yes, you do.

I found this small interaction to be curious, given that I had heard them speaking French together before I had approached. I suspect that it depends on his definition of “speaking” a language, he may feel that because he doesn’t speak “correct” or perfect French, that he can’t claim to speak it at all, or it may have just
been an excuse to not speak to me.

S: Ah, d'accord ! Je suis une étudiante de les États-Unis, et je suis ici pour étudier l’étranger en Berlin. Est-ce-que je peux vous demander quelques questions sur votre expérience ?

S: Oh, okay! I'm a student from the United States, and I'm here to study the stranger in Berlin. Could I ask you a few questions about your experience?

W: D'accord, tu peux parler avec moi, lui il va pas parler.

W: Okay, you can speak with me, but he isn't going to talk.

Overall the woman was much more open and friendly, sitting forward, smiling, and responding easily to my questions, while her partner sat behind her, holding the baby and leaning farther away from me.

S: OK, Depuis combien de temps êtes-vous ici en Berlin?

S: Okay, how long have you been in Berlin?

W: Moi, ça fait dix ans que je suis ici, et lui aussi. (Montrant son mari du doit)

W: I've been here for ten years, and so has he.

S: Et vous êtes d’où originalement?

S: And where are you from originally?

W: Nous sommes de la Guinée.

W: We're from Guinea.

S: Et est-ce-que vous vous sentez à l'aise ici?

S: And do you feel comfortable here?

W: Oui, oui, je me sens à l'aise

W: Yes, yes, I feel comfortable.

She seemed very confident in this response.

S: Est-ce que vous vous sentez Allemand?

S: And do you feel German?

W: *En rirent* Ahh, ça c'est difficile. (à son partenaire) qu'est-ce que tu penses?

W: *Laughing* Oh, that's hard. (to her partner) what do you think?

It was interesting to watch her deflect the “difficult” question to her taciturn partner.

M: Quoi?

M: What?
S: Qu'est-ce que c'est d'être Allemand?
S: What does it mean to be German?
M: C'est de travailler, de respecter les autres, oui, de travailler…
M: It's working, respecting others, yes, working
The obvious question is whether he had a job, which I didn't ask.
S: Et est-ce-que vous parlez l'Allemand?
S: And do you speak German?
W: Non, on ne le parle pas.
W: No, we don't.
It surprised me to learn that after ten years in Berlin, they didn't speak German, especially given their youth. Again, this may be a question of the definition of speaking- they may speak enough to get around without feeling like they've mastered the language.
S: Comment est-ce-que vous communiquez avec les Allemands? Est-ce qu'ils parlent français ?
S: How do you communicate with Germans? Do they speak French?
W: Non, non, c'est une grande problème, ils ne veulent parle parlez les autres langues.
W: No, no, it's a big problem, Germans don't want to speak other languages
Interestingly, she defined the problem as a lack of German volition to speak other languages, not that Germans didn't know other languages. This perhaps implies that she perceives Germany to possess a closed, non-accepting culture.
S: Donc comment faites-vous?
S: So what do you do?
W: On ne parle pas avec les Allemands.
W: We don't speak to Germans.
M: Les Allemands ne sont pas gentils.
M: The Germans aren't nice.
This was the most animated portion of the conversation- it was obvious that they resented the German's lack of openness towards other languages. This response seems slightly at odds with their seeming acceptance of Germaneness and their positive definition of what it means to be German. Then again, I found that I could understand what they meant, as every person I approached in English didn't want to talk to me, even if they spoke English. “We're just about to leave,” they would say, or “we're busy.”
W : *En riant* Oui, c'est vrai.
W: *Laughing* Yes, it's true.
S: Est-ce-que vous avez des amis Allemands? Ou vos amis sont de la Guinée ?
S: And do you have German friends? Or are you friends from Guinea?
W: Non, nos amis sont de la Guinée.
W: No, our friends are from Guinea.
S: Bon, merci, c'était très gentil de m'avoir parler.
S: Well, thank you, it was very kind of you to speak with me.
W: Et vous, vous êtes ici depuis combien de temps?
W: And you, how long have you been here for?

This was perhaps a polite attempt at conversation, or a reciprocation of interest in me given that I, unlike the Germans, was speaking French with her. It did not, however, lead to a longer conversation. Perhaps, because of my status as a very temporary foreigner, she felt no connection to my experience in Berlin.

S: Je suis ici seulement pour six semaines, juste pour étudier.

S: I'm only here for six weeks, just to study.

W: Ah, je vois.

W: Oh, I see.

S: Bon, merci beaucoup, au revoir!

S: Well, thank you very much, goodbye!

The thread of the importance of language ran throughout my conversation with them. Initially, it was my familiarity with French that allowed us to have an instant connection and created a comfortable atmosphere for my questions. When I contrasted this with the other people I had approached in English, I felt what they had mentioned in their interview, that Germans were closed-off to speaking other languages, unwilling to engage with a stranger in English. Of course I don't know if they would have been willing to engage had I spoken German.

Secondly, the definition of what it means to speak a language came up several times in our conversation. What languages can you claim, and under what circumstances? The woman was comfortable claiming French, whereas the man was not. Neither wanted to claim they spoke German, despite saying that they feel German sometimes. Were they perhaps unwilling to say they spoke German because their foreignness has been projected onto them by Germans? Their definition of Germanness seemed to be non-linguistic, allowing them to feel a sense of belonging despite their linguistic alienation.

The interaction also revealed my own changing attitude towards language, specifically French. I learned French in France, and I have a distinctly Parisian accent. When I first encountered sub-Saharan African French-speakers, back in my native city of Denver, I found their accent incredibly difficult to understand. Encouraged by my mother to use my French whenever possible, thirteen-year old me would shy away from the strange rolling of their words, the elongated vowels and unfamiliar slang that I labeled as “bad” French. As I grew older, I learned to reassociate my disdain for non-French French-speakers as a remnant of colonialist superiority, an impulse, whether learned in France or innate, that I needed to unlearn. Learning to use my French in different context, whether in French-colonized Morocco or in my own home with my Cameroonian brother and his friends, gave me a new ability to understand different French dialects, and erased my discomfort with switching between them, although my French accent remains Parisian. My definition of what proper French was expanded, allowing me to just as comfortably interact with a Parisian baker, a Moroccan classmate, or a young Guinean couple on the streets of Berlin.
As I was walking back around the square with Raina, she pointed out a sign on the side of the metro station. We bent closer to it to try to interpret. It was advertising an intercultural soccer tournament, but intercultural seemed to mean sub-Saharan African, as the pictures were all of black youths. Scrawled across the poster was written in crayon “Grenzen zu Schluss mit Asyl,” which translates roughly to “close the borders to refugees.” AFD, die Alternative für Deutschland, the initials of the right-wing anti-immigration German political party, was also written on the sign several times. This made me pause and reevaluate the conversation I had just had. I could imagine walking by the sign as a sub-Saharan African in Berlin, seeing both the effort at inclusion and the anti-immigrant slogans on the same sign, and perhaps feeling less welcome and more targeted as a result. It made me wonder if the young couple had seen the sign, if they would have understood the German slogans written across it or how they would have reacted. In the midst of a surprisingly multi-cultural square, representing the multi-ethnic population of Berlin, the sign was a reminder of the backlash against such openness and the barriers to acceptance that many immigrants still face.

SADIE VAN VRANKEN
7/17/2017

GETTING STARTED IN BERLIN

My flight landed at Frankfurt Airport at 9:45 this morning—thirty minutes ahead of schedule, incidentally—which immediately recalled the stereotype of German efficiency as the plane taxied to the parking area.

At the terminal, I was relieved (although not entirely surprised) to discover that the signs were in both German and English. Even though I had already taken several German courses over the past two semesters, the thought of navigating the airport in anything other than my native language left me a bit anxious—especially because of the short layover time—so its inclusion eased my fears.

Disappointment, however, caught up to me at customs. Thankfully, the airport security didn’t paw through my bag and/or force me to send my shoes through a metal detector like they do in the States. Instead, the process was quick and painless (there’s that German efficiency, again), in part thanks to the English fluency of the customs officer. But this fluency is precisely what disappointed me. Without a doubt, I welcomed the English signs, but the idea of communicating in German with native speakers in their home country partly inspired me to apply for this class. Sure, I could never find my way around in English, much less in German. I hoped, however, that at least I could effectively talk with others in German, that is if my performance in German class meant anything.

The language trouble with the customs officer was not an isolated experience, either. The following day (June 18) I went with my roommate to a small coffee shop down the street for breakfast. I knew the basics of ordering in German (for example, I could use the phrase ich hätte gern and so on) but I had a limited vocabulary in food words. Ironically, I discredited my fluency in the exchange with the word “croissant;” obviously unaware that the word was the same in German, I looked at the cashier intensely (or stupidly) and enunciated “croissant” in the most American accent I’ve ever managed to conjure in my life, hoping that she would understand the word better if I said it in good English rather than bad German. Despite this one departure, I spoke German for the rest of the order. The damage, however, was done and from this point forward the cashier dealt with me entirely in English.

On June 19 I went to the grocery store and again could get only English from the cashiers. But on this occasion, I didn’t stumble over unknown words to reveal my lack of German experience. I can only speculate about the reasons these folks switched to English when we interacted. Perhaps they assumed
from my accent or vocabulary difficulties that I was a foreigner and for consideration of either me or the people in the back of the line, they figured that servicing me in my own language was the best route to go. Of course, they did so despite my clear intention to communicate otherwise, as I initiated the conversations auf Deutsch.

SAM VALLE
6/17/2017

EAST VERSUS WEST;
DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES
AND STEREOTYPES

Today our anthropology class got to hear from a fascinating pair of guest lecturers: a stereotypically German-looking, older gentleman from East Germany, versus a middle-aged German West Berliner with an immigrant background.

Sitting to the left was the East German man, Mr. L. Mr. L looks around 70 years old, wears a loose button down, has a little white hair left on his head and has a white/greying mustache. He speaks only German with his gruff voice, perhaps from age, and a translator relays back and forth from him to us. Mr. L looks like he’s seen a lot of history occur in the nation, with a wealth of experience and stories inside of him.

Mr. L narrated about how normalized the constant surveillance and invasions of privacy became, as well as the prevalence of Stasi members constantly walking around. He said there was a Stasi member who openly and frequently visited his family to ask questions. Further, if we were able to go back in time and we walked around the streets with him, he could have even pointed out to us people who were Stasi members. Finally, he ended with a story about night rendezvous with one of his partners on the border of the East and West.

While Mr. L had the perspective of someone who experienced East Germany in the middle of the 1900s, around the 50s-70s, the gentleman to his right is a German who lived in West Berlin and could speak a lot to the times in the 80s and 90s.

The West Berliner, Mr. F, gave an account of what I thought was a much more “normal” life without constant surveillance and government regulations. He lived in a city that was economically well off, open, and more diverse. Still, as someone with an Iranian background and visibly darker skin, Mr. F distinctly recalls classmates puzzling about him, claiming to be a native German (which he was), yet not “looking” German and having a “foreign” last name.

Finally, the guest lecturers shared with us some more German stereotypes, this time pitting East Germaners versus West Germaners. We learned that in Germany, often Western stereotypes thought that Easterners were backwards and dirty. Meanwhile the Germany’s Eastern stereotypes thought of the West as arrogant and spoiled (the sentiment was even stronger against Berliners).

It was interesting to think about the residue of these stereotypes, how they distort current perceptions, and any historical reality they might even be getting at, even after the physical wall between the East and West fell.

ALEXIA MARTINEZ
06/27/2017
O ut of the three of us interviewing in Hermannplatz I was given the “initiation” task. It was very awkward at first to do this. I really had to get out of my comfort zone. For each person we talked with, I would walk up to them and ask, “Sprechen sie englisch?” The response was either a slightly disappointed shake of the head or a skeptical “yes”. Skeptical in the sense of “why would three young americans be approaching someone”. More often than not the people that responded “yes” we’re young and majority white. After reflecting on this aspect of our subject pool, we tried to even out our demographics and get a more diverse group of people. We asked older people. We asked Middle Eastern people. We asked a black man, an asian man. However, no matter how hard we tried, we essentially failed. Almost every non-white person we asked didn’t speak english. Additionally, I felt like I was profiling the people we chose to ask based on who I thought would speak English. I didn't like seeing myself doing this. I quickly observed that it was more likely for younger white people to speak English. Further I felt more comfortable talking to women so we ended up talking to a lot of young white women which really skewed our responses and also defeated the purpose of being in hermannplatz as an Arab neighborhood. After each encounter, I would usually end the conversation with a simple, “Danke”, but for one couple the conversation continued. The couple was somewhere between 30 and 40. The man wore a tank top and had visible tattoos and a crooked smile with a missing tooth. Both of them seemed Hispanic, based off the fact that they were speaking Spanish to each other and their skin tone. We unfortunately didn't ask where they were from. The conversation was a mix of linguistic attempts; them trying to speak english, me trying to speak spanish - all in all, not great. The main thing we got out of it was when we asked “how do you think immigrants are treated in Berlin”, the woman, who hadn't said anything up to this point, interjected by almost screaming “CATASTROPHE”. The woman seemed to speak no english and was unable to follow up on her own statement. The man produced an answer that was barely intelligible between the three of
us. He said anything from “strong” to “strong ties” to “the people are strong.” Having no idea what he was trying to convey and all other languages failing, we wrapped up the conversation.

Though at first this may have seemed like a wash, upon reflection there were a few big things we got out of it. For one, it struck me as significant that this couple spoke Spanish. In the US Spanish is almost second nature. It’s hard to go to a city and not see or hear some type of Spanish. It wasn’t until we talked with this couple that I realized that I hadn’t heard any Spanish while in Berlin (or seen any written beyond the food realm). This wasn’t wholly surprising, Germany just doesn’t have a large hispanic or spanish. What struck me was the fact that it was Spanish speaking immigrants, not turkish or arab immigrants, that had such a strong reaction to our question. The woman had essentially screamed “CATASTROPHE”. Is this link significant I wondered? The Turkish immigrant we had interviewed seemed very neutral or even positive about the German immigration system. Could this mean that the German immigration system or Berlin as a city is more biased or accepting to a certain origin of immigrant? Unfortunately our language barrier continued to prevent us from investigating this further by talking with more turks and arabs.

The second thing I retained from this interaction was that this couple really wanted to communicate with us. They tried incredibly hard, more so than anyone else that didn’t speak English to communicate with us. This tells me that they had something to say. A story to tell. They felt passionately about the issue and wanted to tell us why. This only made the inability to communicate even more frustrating. I almost felt irresponsible for having entered this whole interview process not speaking German. Thinking about all the perspectives we missed out on because of this language barrier was disheartening. And made it clear that in the future I should speak the language of the country I’m interviewing in.

PART II - RESTAURANTS: A LINGUISTIC CONFIDENCE BOOST

After waiting for about five minute, my friend Alaa and I walked up to the counter. The cashier looked at me and threw out a generic “Guten Tag” followed by some indiscernible German most likely asking what I wanted to order. The restaurant was on Badstrasse also known as “The Arab Street”. A little enclave of Arab culture located off of Hermannplatz, where Arabic was the prinalinga and your typical looking white German was far and few. I turned to Alaa and motioned for her to order for us. Her Arabic was fluent and my German was essentially non-existent so it only made sense for her to order. After a bit of a wait we enjoyed a delicious chicken dinner surrounded by a bustling hum of Arabic chatter and music.
Later that night I couldn't help but think back to the instance with the cashier. Why had he spoken directly to me first? Why had he chosen to use German? Addressing the later question, it can be safely assumed that my whiteness influenced the language of choice. An arabic speaking white women isn't your everyday interaction. The prior question is a little more complex. I might surmise that the cashier assumed that Alaa and I were ordering separately. But is that because it is uncommon for a white german to be friends with a hijabi egyptian? Or simply because it's more common for non families to order separately? Would be assuming anything more than the second explanation point to some sort of bias? Could I possibly be secretly wanting to find instances of bias for the sake of my writing?

This instance sparked another inquiry; what would have happened if I had ordered the meal in arabic. In order to answer this question, I went back and tried just that. This time without Alaa. My arabic skills are not what you might call "good", especially considering my having taken two years of the language at school, but never the less I was curious to see what would happen. Would they even understand me? Would they show signs of shock? Surprise? Annoyance? I felt I owed it to myself and to the whole point of the class. I was supposed to put myself in potentially embarrassing or awkward situations in order to talk to as many people from as many backgrounds as I could. Further, I wanted to prove to myself that my two years of arabic study hadn't been a complete waste. This time I went back to the restaurant across the street, the one that we had been to as a class, Aldemasci. I walked up to the counter and started to order.

Emily: Wahid shawarma dejej min fadlick, mesh huna (one chicken shawarma please to go)
Cashier: L’huno ow mesh hona? (For here, or for not here?), he clarified.

My arabic had been a bit jumbled. He seemed to be confused but a slight smile or chuckle peeked through his befuddlement.

Emily: Mesh Huna (not here)

As the conversation continued he began to add german after his arabic
Cashier: Hamsa...funf (five...five)

I smiled as confirmation that I understood the arabic and handed him some money. Just as the transaction was about to finish, he asked, some version of either "why are you speaking arabic" or "how do you know arabic". My level of comprehension couldn't tell the difference.

Emily: darastu fi jamia walaykin atakelm laysa jiid (I studied in university but I don't speak well)
Cashier: faqat darasa (Just studied)

He smiled and I handed him five euros. I frantically searched my brain for some sort of response in order to continue the conversation, but as I hesitated he motioned to the side of the cashier and told me to wait there for my food.

As I waited for my food and thought about the interaction. From a linguistic standpoint I had succeeded. I had taken my little arabic and gotten food out of it. This was validating. From an anthropological standpoint I learned that my speaking arabic elicited smiles and curiosity. The cashier could have easily not taken part in my linguistic attempts and replied in german. The man was happy that I was trying to partake in their language and culture. Beyond this happiness, his surprise was evident too. It was almost as if every time he looked he had to remind himself that he was talking with a young white women. It was at this moment that he would repeat his statement in german.

From a personal standpoint I saw this as a success. I could've just easily not have gone back to the restaurant or have broken down and spoken german instead. Very rarely, especially when caught up in the business of student life, do I find myself going out of the way for the sake of my own intellectual curiosity. It made me happy that I wanted to do this. It made me happier that I got such positive results. And it made me more likely to do it again.

EMILY KUNKEL
7/13/17, 7/20/17 & 7/25/17
My friend – an Irish girl from Princeton, living in London from the summer – came to visit for a few nights on the weekend. It was relaxed and fun, and I had that comfortably superior feeling of showing someone around areas that I feel are mine to show. Down to that stone museum filled with bold, bright modern art pieces I knew she would love, across to the cosy nook of a bar hidden in a courtyard.

As we sat down to one of our many brunches that weekend, in a high ceilinged café with Provencal blue and white tiles covering the walls, the waiter began to talk to her in German. She stammered, confused. I took over, and in my broken German ordered our assortment of eggs, buttered toast, creamy bircher muesli, and coffee. As he left, she gave me a quizzical, surprised look. ‘You speak German?’ ‘No! Of course not’ was my immediate, unthinking reaction. ‘He seemed to think you could’ she said, unfazed.

It was true – the waiter hadn’t switched into English, or corrected my German. He had nodded, written down our orders, and continued onto the next boisterous table of young Germans. ‘Five weeks in, and you’re German!’ she teased. I felt suddenly self-conscious, as if I would be caught out masquerading as a German. Momentarily, I wondered how much I wanted people to perceive me as German. I entirely do, I decided. I’m not sure if I just wanted to blend in, or for a moment be perceived as truly belonging in any one place. I’ve become tired of being constantly assessed and put into a ‘foreigner’ category. The same kind of tiredness I experienced after just a weekend in Copenhagen. But Berlin is different from Copenhagen – not everybody looks the same. In Berlin, there are small dark moustached men with briefcases and tall blonde women with backpacks sitting next to each other on their morning U-Bahn commute, and when they open their mouths, the same incomprehensible German jumble flows out. There is no difference. Or is there?

I’ve always considered myself an expert chameleon – equally comfortable sipping sweetened, dense Turkish coffee in a loudening buzz of Arabic at my grandparents’ home as I am cheering the English Olympic team on from a rowdy London pub. People tell me I look diverse – exotic. From some un-
nameable, far off place. I use it as a skin, to slip in and out of different environments, and belong in all. In Berlin, I expected to continue using that anonymous, mysterious privilege that diversity brings. And in a way – I did. After all, the waiter didn't question how and why I could be German – he didn't care. And why should he? But I experienced a new self-conscious, a twinge of insecurity. I had a new voice in my head – of course I'm not German. My dark, hair, eyes and olive skin can't translate to your stereotypical pretzel eating, Dirndl-ed, German.

Of course, that doesn't have to be true. It's not the rational, calm thinking that I try to have. Surely in this seminar of all places, I've learned that's not what German is – there are infinite definitions for what German is. The only definition that matters, really, is your own.

But despite knowing this, I was still uncomfortable that my friend thought that I was trying to be German – something I am so intractably not, and cannot see a way to be. Theoretically, I am liberal and welcoming. Anyone can be German, I'll say. Just like anyone can be English or American. Any suggestion otherwise suggests to me a deep rooted insecurity – that you cannot sustain yourself if you are touched by others. That any exposure to otherness, and your own identity will be crippled. If that's the case, then your identity was not be sturdy in the first place. Yet, I seem to be at my most illiberal when talking to myself. Perhaps this is common insecurity - everybody has a weakness, and perhaps mine is the confusing, contradictory feeling of always fitting in but never belonging.

Could I become German? Could anyone become German? The answer, I believe, should be a resounding yes - but it's not always.

LEILA BEN HALIM
07/23/17

INFRASTRUCTURE

OUR BVG - ENCOUNTERS IN THE BERLIN SUBWAY

While most others were in German class, I decided to take the subway to a brunch place called “House of Small Wonder” near U Oranienburger Tor. As I sat on the bench waiting to transfer from U7 to U6 at U-Bhf Mehringdamm, I realized how familiar the station had become to me. Looking at the passengers on the other side made it feel looking into a mirror. I realized that quite a few encounters I had in Berlin, some lovely while some bizarre, had happened in subway cars. I made a mental note to record them when I got back.

“In the two minutes before my train arrived, I snapped this photo of the Mehringdamm station.”
I had warm encounters in the subway. On my way to U Zoologischer Garten, an old lady that reminded me of my grandma had smiled and complimented my dress. We had a small talk, exchanging where we were from and what we were doing in Berlin before she left the train. Another time on our way to the book award event, a baby in a stroller kept reaching out his little hand to play with the rim of my yellow dress. I smiled at him and he looked up at me with clear, curious eyes that melted my heart. Apria said she thought he liked me. His mom joked that he was improving his flirting skills. These small instances in the subway had made my days.

I also had bizarre observations on the subway. On our way back to CIEE late at night, Irma, Apria and I rode in a car full of debris - broken wine glasses and a pair of broken female sunglasses — from a fight that just ended. In fact, before we entered the car we saw a black man barge out, cursing while hitting an innocent old lady with his bike. I stared at the broken glass pieces on the subway car floor with amazement. Sensing my shock, a man of Latino descent tried to explain to me the situation in German: “ein Afrikanischer Mann und eine Fraue …” meaning that an African man and a woman were involved in the fight. I asked, “aber warum?” But why? The man shrugged, and we finished the rest of our ride in silence. Apart from this fight, I had also seen different kinds of marginalized people in the subway car. There were a homeless couple rapping and singing with the newspaper “Motz” in their hands, which I later found out to be the biggest homeless newspaper in Berlin. Having known that, I found their lyrics commenting on Taggeschau and other German medias to be bizarre and funny. I had seen a homeless guy pushing a shopping cart around in a subway car, asking for food and money. I had seen a mentally unstable man shouting “Ruhe (Quiet)!” consecutively at the top of his lungs.

I have been impressed by how convenient the Berlin public transport system is. The subway is like the microcosm of the city on the flow. Because I go anywhere by subway (only U-Bahn, also the S-Bahn, Strassenbahn street car, underground, above ground, bus?—list the types you have taken), I have gotten to observe and even encounter completely different facets of Berlin society in the bubble of a subway car. Strangers usually keep quiet and distanced from each other in that bubble, which makes the few times when I actually interacted with people in the subway seem all the more precious.

YANG SHAO
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IMPRESSIONS OF MUSEUM SPACES IN BERLIN

The Jewish Museum had a set-up that conveyed a lot of meanings. The first floor had an “Axis of Exile” and an “Axis of Holocaust” that crossed each other with corresponding exhibits and supporting texts along the way. On the wall of the former were printed names of cities that had become the Jewish people’s refuges. On the wall of the holocaust axis, there were names of concentration camps. I was really surprised to find “Shanghai” on the wall of exile. I had heard snippets about Shanghai’s role as a refuge for the Jewish diaspora community in World War 2. I knew that the Israeli Embassy in China once made a video thanking Shanghai for the historical goodwill a couple of years ago. However, I was still struck by the name of a major Chinese city on that wall in the Jewish Museum. Two cultures and communities once came in contact with each other in that city. Now, two historical narratives— one of the legendary wartime Shanghai and another of the persecuted Jewish people — came together in my mind. Two spaces in the museum left me particularly strong impressions. Coming out of the axis into the Garden of Exile, I immediately had a feeling of uncomfortable disorientation. The grey blocks that resembled those of the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe were rooted in the ground, but they were tilted. The ground was tilted as well. I found it really hard to walk completely
straight and steadily in that space. The strange thing was that neither the ground nor the blocks were more than slightly tilted. I could not figure out if I was really experiencing motion sickness… or was I just suggesting that effect to myself? I felt very confused and insecure. But wasn't this what the exile experience was supposed to feel like? The blocks looked like they were firmly rooted and only slightly tilted. Likewise, the Jewish diaspora – the ones that escaped – were perceived as lucky. However, under the surface of their life and within the garden, the sense of disorientation and helplessness was in fact drowning. The life of exile might be the better option in the cruel multiple choice question of history, but it must have been far from an easy one. I had never thought of this before entering that garden. A powerful space could convey as many messages as a thousand images, and I appreciated that this space made me recognize this other side of the history.

The other space was called Memory Void. It was a suffocatingly grey and dark space, with a bit of light coming in from a crack above. On the ground there were a thousand or so metal faces. They were flat and distorted, anonymous and faceless. They covered the ground, so I had to step over them as everyone else despite feeling uncomfortable about it. As visitors walked around the space, the metal faces made clinging sounds under our footsteps. They were like the speechless cries from the depths of history. The soundscape of the space made me realize that spaces like this could break the language barriers between visitors and the exhibits. The scene of a thousand human faces reduced to pieces of metal and a thousand human stories reduced to metallic sounds — they did not require understanding of any human language.

YANG SHAO
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