

## What it means to be immigrant

In my *Leistungskurs S1* (winter term 2007) we have chosen one of the obligatory topics from the Hamburg syllabus: *Multicultural and Intercultural Relations*. So far we have focused on the UK and read two excerpts from Zadie Smith's best-selling novel *White Teeth* (2000). We related our readings to the famous *Chicken Tikka Massala* speech given in 2001 by Robin Cook, former British Foreign Secretary, twenty years after the severe riots in Britain that were closely linked with ethnic and social problems. Cook speaks about what is Britishness today saying, '*Coming to terms with multiculturalism as a positive force for our economy and society will have significant implications for our understanding of Britishness*' (published in Disselbeck et al., *New Context*. 1st ed., Berlin 2003; pp. 145, this quote p. 145). We also visited a British internet-scheme called *Moving here* ([www.movinghere.org.uk](http://www.movinghere.org.uk)) where immigrants of all generations publish their personal histories and how they feel living in the UK today. With this scheme we wish to link our activities.

Since there is only one 'native' German student in my course, I asked the students to write about their own biographies and experiences. They should especially try to determine their ethnic feeling today. Is there such a thing as a *unique third individual ethnic identity* in between cultures as Gisela Widing writes? The students' statements and essays published here will also appear in our Yearbook 2007 soon coming forth. Other students are also invited to submit their personal histories. - Thorsten-Michael Wulff

### Students with an Afghan background

*Pratik Raj writes:*

**M**y parents came from Afghanistan as refugees twenty years ago. At that time there was no future for us at all in our country. My family don't have the usual Afghan background. In Afghanistan are only six percent of such people who have got the same ethnic background and religion as we have. The difference is that we do not believe in Islam, our religion is Hinduism. We have got our own language and traditions but our lifestyle is quite the same as that of many of the other Afghan people, my parents also speaking the normal Afghan language. But I don't speak Afghan because I was born in Germany and it would be difficult for a child to learn German and our language and Farsi, so my parents decided it was enough to learn German and our own language.

Now thinking about my ethnic feeling I can say that I feel that Germany is like my home country because I was born here, all my friends live here and I have spent my whole life here. For my parents it was hard at the beginning but my mother and my father are both well educated so there were not so many problems, the only problem being to find a good job and learning the new German language. Hamburg is a multicultural city so you never feel strange because there are always people

with the same ethnic background. If you think about Afghanistan you

### We build a new society with a multicultural lifestyle.

will never feel like it is your home, because you have grown up in Germany and in Afghanistan there are different customs.

We, the immigrants' children, we build a new society with a multicultural lifestyle, a lifestyle between our countries on the one hand Afghanistan, the land from which our parents came as refugees, and on the other Germany, where I grew up and spent all my life. I'm not

only talking about Afghan people, I'm talking about all kinds of immigrants. We don't live in the same way as German people do but also not in the way of the Afghan people in Afghanistan; it's a mix of both of them. At least I can say that I'm trying my best not to lose tradition but also to fit in the German lifestyle as far as I can, although after twenty years in Germany it is quite easy to get along with the Germans, and also I and many of my co-ethnics feel as part of the German people.

*Wehid Rahimi writes:*

**I** was born in Germany and I grew up here but I don't feel like a German. My background is Afghanistan. Although I spent 98 p.c. of my life in Germany I haven't forgotten who I really am and where I'm from. I was much influenced by the German society and its traditions because I never knew what was going on in my own country, I mean in Afghanistan. All I ever heard was my family escaped from there because of the regime of the Taliban. I never imagined how it would be to live in Afghanistan.

When I grew up I could understand how bad it would be to live in a country that's my origin but occupied by people who rule the country with violence. There are two major groups living in Afghanistan. The Pashtunes and the Farsis. I'm one of the Pashtunes. My father told me stories about the past when the Pashtunes and the Farsis lived in harmony together. But when the war came to Afghanistan most of the Afghans escaped and almost all of them lived in Germany. When the war was over, many Afghans went back to Afghanistan or they turned to America to start a better life, but there are still many Afghans living in Germany.

Somehow not every Pashtune and Farsi understand each other.

When the Farsis have done something bad or if they become rich in Germany but they don't help the Pashtunes, then there is the prejudice on the Pashtune side that they're renegades and egoists. And so it is with the Far-

sis. Just because the Pashtunes have other traditions than the Farsis do they say that the Pashtunes are 'Mountain Afghans!' The way I see it both sides talk a lot of rubbish. Do all the Afghans come to Germany to fight against each other just because someone is more successful than the other one? I'm convinced that this is not the reason why we escaped. As far as I'm concerned I ask myself and everyone else: 'Why don't we shake hands and leave it all at that?'

At last I want to say although many foreigners have problems with German politics and the German society, why do they develop problems against each other instead of solving their own problems?

In my opinion I would say that people are never safe neither in their own country nor in a foreign country. There will always be something or someone that breaks the harmony in life!

PS.: The translation of Afghanistan is 'Land of Pashtunes'!

*Khatera Naser writes:*

I am an Afghan girl born in western Afghanistan but I have been living in Hamburg since the age of two. I think I am more Afghan than German. I've grown up in Germany with a European style of thinking. But since I went for a holiday to my motherland and saw the city where I was born and the people with a completely different type of lifestyle, I have felt more accepted and at home. But I know that I still have a German identity within myself, which will never leave me. For one year I've been trying to learn reading and writing in my own language, in Farsi - with success - to understand my culture better, which makes me feel happy. The acceptance by the society I face there causes me to desire to go there again and even to think about living there as a citizen one day. Of course this depends on the situation of the country concerning the accommodation of human needs. When the war is over and people can at last live in peace and get back to a life that is absolutely ordinary, I may go there and settle down.

## In Afghanistan there is a warm welcome and a sincere hospitality.

If you visit Afghanistan as a foreigner and meet the common people, the first thing you will face is their warm welcome and sincere hospitality. They make you enjoy your stay there with respect and happiness. Respect for others is not only part of their habit but a very important property of the culture. It is almost a tradition to keep as well as possible good relationships within families, with friends and even foreigners in faithfulness and confidence. There is a great difference between the atmosphere I felt in Afghanistan as regards social behaviour and the way of life of the Afghan people and the atmosphere I am confronted with every day in Germany - a country where everything is comfortable, easy but also somehow cold-hearted. In the atmosphere over there you will rapidly get a feeling of community among the folk.

## Germany - a country where everything is comfortable, easy but also somehow cold-hearted.

I think this is what I miss in Germany. Although Hamburg is a multicultural city and there are lots of Afghan people in here, such an important and tangible spirit of community is lacking. Everybody has their own way, families are divided and nobody has got time to be with their family or friends. Everyone is busy with duties and their own desires. And so relationships between families and friends vanish after some time. In here, I feel like I am always alone although I am among people, which is absolutely not like when I am in Afghanistan. One soon

## A tangible spirit of community is lacking.

gets the feeling of a cold atmosphere in a bustling city full of opportunities; where people are busy and always around other people, which is contradictory because in this case they should be more aware of creating good relationships with each other. To me they are somehow robotic and as 'modern' as the entire world and its progress. But it seems to be that there is really no time to enjoy life for them. They are so terribly busy with the complex issues of life that they forget to conduct their lives just for their own happiness; just to enjoy and live with the simplicity God gave them to live in peace. In Afghanistan people are more peaceful but unfortunately the country itself has always been ravaged by war so they couldn't live in that peaceful society they had created centuries ago.

## In Afghanistan people are more peaceful but unfortunately the country itself has always been ravaged by war ...

I have just got one hypothesis about the problem of the cold atmosphere in Germany and Europe as a whole. The Europeans are not so pious as they were in the past. In Afghanistan people are very devout. I think this is one of the main points that may explain this difference. The people in Europe don't care much about the religious commandments they were given. They don't have much faith in the existence of a creator and almighty Lord who will listen to their voices if they pray to Him. And that makes them not fear Him and be careless with the worthy gift God gave them: life. They steal the lives of others; they don't care about other people's lives and don't appreciate the short time God might have given them to stay in this world. They have just forgotten what life means while being busy understanding life and this world, developing it and re-creating it into something else.

*Maksud Hiziz writes:*

I was born on December 8th, 1990 in Hamburg. Four days before my birth my family had come to Germany. I have three sisters and a brother, all are older than I am. They immigrated from Herat/Afghanistan be-

## I have never seen Afghanistan with my own eyes.

cause of the civil war (Taliban against Mujtahids) and because of the hope of a better future although the family of my mother and father were both popular, rich and known in Afghanistan. My father was an engineer and my mother a professor at a university. My grandfather is a nationally recognized professor of literature in Afghanistan. Streets are named after him. I have never seen Afghanistan with my own eyes. I was given my name by my grandfather. My culture is mixed with my Islamic background. I am a Sunni Muslim from the Hanafi Islamic school, but I don't like to distinguish between different groups and religions. At least my friends or my wife should fear God.

At home in the presence of my parents I speak only Farsi out of my respect for my parents. But when I'm alone with my brother or sisters, I speak German. In my opinion I can speak German well. I can also speak Farsi (Afghan) and Persian. I can read and write the language, too. I learned it when I was eight or nine years old and went to a Farsi school. I don't really know if I will feel at home in Afghanistan, for at first I have to visit it. I can say it after the autumn vacations, then I will fly to Afghanistan and see my whole family there for the first time. Presently, I feel at home in Germany, but I think this will change when I travel to Afghanistan, because there are my family, and my roots.

*Marina Ahmadi writes:*

**I**n my opinion I am an Afghan girl. I was born in Germany and brought up in a small village in North Frisia. My family was the only foreign family in this small village so we had only German friends. Since I could speak my parents have forced me to speak Dari at home and German at school and outside my home with my friends. For my family it was very important to keep our traditions and religion although we live in a Christian society. I always tried to act a little bit German when I was at school and with friends because I thought they wouldn't accept me if I didn't assimilate a little bit. At the age of twelve we moved to Norderstedt and I had new friends. It was the first time I was with other girls with a migratory background. When I am with them I don't have the feeling I have to act German. I know now that I feel more like an Afghan girl because I think and live as one, although I was born in Germany and brought up here.

### Students with a Turkish background

*Gül Yacin writes:*

**I** was born in Hamburg. My father grew up here, too. My mother does not speak German well because she came to Germany in the late eighties. That is why she speaks Turkish with me but I'm used to talking in German. I understand my mother's tongue but I cannot speak it very well. A few years ago my Turkish was so bad that I did not understand the most simple sentences.

This was not funny, just embarrassing. Later I slowly learned Turkish and now it is better than before. But I have to improve my pronunciation because it doesn't sound good. I still speak more German than I do my mother's language.

As a child I had not many Turkish friends, they were all from Germany or from other countries. My parents are very modern and easy-going, they seldom forbid me anything; for example, I'm allowed to have a boyfriend. Some people envy me because I have more freedom than other Turkish girls.

For me Germany is my homeland because I have everything here, my friends, my family and a chance for a better future than in Turkey. For that reason I do not want to live there someday.

*Cem Emir writes:*

**F**or 17 years I have been living in Hamburg, Germany. Although I was born here, I have never lost my Turkish identity and I had to learn to live like a German boy. About my own feeling I would say that I'm a little bit integrated and assimilated.

At first I had to learn the German language. In the sixth year of my life I began school with a good language ability and I had no problems with my German at school. So I got more and more of this important language and actually until today I speak very good German. I found new friends and have become more integrated in the German society. Seven years ago I got my German passport.

## In Hamburg every new immigrant is welcome.

Especially in Hamburg every new immigrant is welcome. Here I have my friends, my home and my school and the best thing in Germany is that everyone can represent their own religion without any argument, which I cannot do in my home country (Turkey) because there I belong among a minority. Here, no one says anything against my religion.

The standard of life in Germany is more difficult than in Turkey. Here you have plenty of chances to get a good education or a good job. In Turkey you must have a good graduation certificate to get any chance at a university or at a job.

I would never live in Turkey, although my whole family are there. Hamburg is my hometown and here you have a lot of chances to work in a good position. I would never leave Hamburg, because I have everything here in Germany. I wouldn't change my life. Maybe if I got ten million Euros.

*Lydia Pusunc writes:*

**A**n old lady enters the bakery. She wears glasses and is pretty small. She looks around and talks very silently. The shop assistant is 1.72m. She has got dark hair and brown eyes. She does not understand the old lady because of the sound. So she asks her: 'Pardon?' The old lady begins to point with her fingers

to a loaf of bread and makes very strange gestures. She says very slowly: 'THIS BREEAAD PLEEASE!' This shop assistant is me.

Situations like this one are no exceptions. Experiences like this one are part of our everyday life. In recent years we have heard a lot about those people who do not want to adapt or who do not speak German. We also hear about Islamic extremists and about societies in which women and children are oppressed, who could never live their lives as their German childhood friends do, because of their migratory background. We are hearing a lot of those people, but we do not hear anything about us. About those who have assimilated, about those who can actually speak German better than some Germans themselves do, about foreigners who came to Germany as so called guest workers about forty years ago.

**People of the third generation, like me, know their grandparents' home country only from a holiday or not even that.**

To say that there are no foreigners who confirm the thoughts of such Germans is a lie, but it's also a lie that foreigners didn't want to assimilate and that they weren't interested in their homes - yes, home- Germany. Nowadays the third immigrant generation has grown up, like me, whose grandparents had been guest workers. They prefer to live in this country in which they have spent most of the time of their lives. People of the third generation, like me, know their grandparents' home country only from a holiday or not even that. I grew up never having the thought of returning someday. I do not know any place or person to go to.

**Our problem is fed from within this society.**

perfectly read and speak German, you, who are going to school and who have got a German passport, you who do the same things we do. You shouldn't have any problems. But the truth is we do! And our problem is not the fact that some stupid Neonazis do not ask if we have got a German passport before they bully us. Our problem is fed from within this society. Although having a passport, speaking German and keeping to the rules of this society, our looks won't change. Because of our outward appearance we are made foreigners and we are supposed to act like them.

There's no way for foreign women, including me, to do whatever we want to do at least what Germans think. First we would have to ask our huge clan, consisting of at least eight jealous brothers, forty uncles and a domineering father. Of course, I've forgotten to mention that we only feel secure among loads of Turks, because obviously, we prefer living without any Germans even though we wouldn't understand or speak Turkish. And I have also noticed that in restaurants or other food places, waiters tell us which food is with or without pork without being asked. I have often explained that I

So German people are saying, 'It's okay then. You, who have adapted, you, who can

am Aramäic, that I have no Muslim, but a Christian background. Still people suppose that I don't eat any pork, because of my alleged Muslim religion.

And how about our mentality? Since I have been promised to someone from birth, people seem confused that at my age when I am able to conceive I am not even married yet. Commonplace answers such as that I'm too young or I haven't found any partner yet, don't seem to be creditable to me. Wearing fashionably torn jeans I face the question: 'Oh, at home you're not allowed to wear those jeans, are you? Doesn't your father get mad? Sometimes I just want to ask one question: 'Are you out of your mind?'

I only want us to be accepted as the Germans that we have already become. I want to be treated as a German, but I feel this is impossible.

When I misbehave, I don't want to hear that I wouldn't dare to misbehave like that in my home country. Germany is my home country.

**I don't want to be regarded as a kebab seller, drug dealer or a maid.**

In the future I don't want to be regarded as a kebab seller, drug dealer or a maid. I want us as second or third generation descendants of guest worker families to be accepted as men and women of Germany, such as teachers, authors, managers, scientists and artists.

**Two students have got an Iranian background.**

*Ali Khorram writes:*

**M**y ethnic background is Persian. I came to Germany when I was five years old. I have spent a lot of time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions and customs. So my parents decided to take me to a Persian language school. At the same time I attend the German school. Every Saturday morning I went to the Persian language school, and during the week I went to the normal German school.

**Through the Persian school, I have got a clear sense of my ethnic background.**

I was active in organizations and social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group. So I was able to get into contact with other people of my own ethnic background. Through the Persian school, I have got a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means to me. One important thing that I have learned is that I am very proud of my own culture and country. For example Persia was the first world power before the Roman Empire. In order to learn more about my ethnic background I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group. On the one hand I have a strong sense of belonging among the Persians but on the other hand I feel like a German. In my childhood I had only German friends, because where I lived there were not many foreign people. So I grew up the German way and I am happy that it happened like that.

I feel good about my cultural background but I only know it from books. So I feel more German than Persian.

*Jahan writes:*

I left my homeland at seven years and moved to Germany, because there are a better standard of living, a democratic government, better learning and overall more promising conditions.

For about five years my mother and I lived near Leipzig in a village near that city. There I went to school for two years. I was the only foreign person and it was quite difficult for me to integrate and to become generally accepted by the others.

My father could not leave Iran with us at the same time because of security-reasons, but after six months he was able to move to Germany. Since my father had better chances of work and because of my grandparents, who had already been in Hamburg, he stayed on there.

We lived in Leipzig in so called homes for foreigners and the conditions there were very bad, because we didn't get any monthly money but merely vouchers for food and clothing, which we had to cash. These homes consisted of one, at most two rooms, according to the number of people. A big problem in Leipzig was also neo-fascism: As a foreigner, it was nearly impossible to feel safe outdoors, because there are Nazis everywhere. Especially in homes for foreigners Nazis entered the building in which we lived and devastated them. Their victims, who were mostly foreigners with black hair, also got badly hurt or were killed. Thank God, however, we lived on the fifth floor, which sometimes calmed me. After we were given our permit to stay, my mother and I moved to Hamburg and we have lived here since then.

**One student has got an Indonesian background.**

*Cynthia Halim writes:*

I cannot answer the question how I feel as a foreign person in Germany because I was born here and my mother is German, too. I do not have any immigration background. My father is from Indonesia but I have been there only three times in my life and I cannot even speak the language, so I feel more like a German than an Indonesian. True, if you look at me you can see that I am not a genuine German. But there have never been any big problems because of my origin in my life. As a child I did not even notice that there were differences between the people who were living here and me. To me everyone who lived in Germany was German. Here in Hamburg there are so many different cultures living together, there are only a few racist persons who do not accept people of a specific ethnic group. But I have noticed that most of them only say they hate people of a specific culture and have prejudices against them but nevertheless they have friends who descend from there.

So far I have to say that I know more foreigners than Germans and that there has never been a person who treated me wrong or did not accept me because of my

ethnic rules. Neither have I any problems with Germans

nor with foreigners. The only remarkable thing that bothers me sometimes is when I am among some friends of the same origin and they are speaking their language, so that I do not understand anything of what they say. The bottom line is that I feel good among people of different cultures, I do not have any problems and I am accepted by Germans, Indonesians and other foreigners as well.

**One student has got a Syrian-Arab background.**

*Nadin Koudmani writes:*

In the following I shall describe and analyse my ethnic identity as a young girl who was born and has been brought up in Germany but who is of Arab origin.

First of all, I would like to say that it is quite difficult for me to decide whether I am German or Arab, because you can see both parts represented in my personality. To illustrate this point I would like to say that the Muslim-Arab upbringing of my parents influences me a lot and consequently I feel as a real Arab, but to the people and to my family in my 'homeland' Syria I appear too German in my behaviour and in my habits. Hence I am not integrated enough in the Syrian society to call myself an Arab.

**My national and cultural identity is Arab and German. ... I define 'identity' in general as a strong feeling of belonging among a specific group.**

Also I grew up only with German kids at nursery school and at school so that I may almost say I belong among Germans, and in addition my grandmother is German. Nevertheless I often felt discriminated against and not tolerated because of my dark hair, my second name etc. Hence I am not integrated enough in the German society to call myself a German. Therefore I claim that my national and cultural identity is Arab and German. But on the other hand, there is the important aspect that I define 'identity' in general as a strong feeling of belonging among a specific group. Thus I would say that my real identity is Muslim, because I think that Muslims are the only group I belong among completely. So, all in all, I come to the result that my identity is a mix of Arab, German and Muslim.

**One student has got a Brazilian background.**

*Giseal Widing writes:*

My father is German, my mother Brazilian. I was born in Brazil and came to Germany when I was only three months old. Two years later my parents got divorced and I went back to Brazil with my mother. She couldn't speak German well, so she wasn't able to teach me the language. I grew up

**I feel good among people of different cultures.**

## Someone who lives between two cultures and lifestyles will never be satisfied with only one of them.

speaking only Portuguese, since we couldn't afford a German school. My father came to visit me sometimes in Brazil, but he spoke Portuguese too, so I didn't get the chance to learn German.

I always kept in touch with my father and the rest of my family but I never really felt connected with Germany. For me it was a world far away from mine and I knew too little about it, even though I had been there twice on holiday.

When I was thirteen my mother got a job offer and decided to move to Germany, so I'd have the chance to get to know my family, the German language and culture more closely. At the beginning I missed Brazil a lot and couldn't stand the German cold winter. After a few months I went to school for the first time in Germany. My class was only for foreigners and we learned German intensively. Nowadays I speak German fluently and I think it is the most important thing to feel integrated somewhere.

I feel perfectly integrated and I'm very happy here. I have made friends and built up my life, there's no way I couldn't feel at home in Hamburg. But I can't say I'm a normal German girl, even if I have got a German passport. I speak Portuguese at home, I think in Portuguese and most of my friends are Brazilians. I don't try to be with people of my country, but somehow it just happens that we come together, which means we feel we have things in common.

## People who live between two cultures create a third, very personal one of their own. And I am one of them.

In 2004 I went to Brazil for a holiday and I was really glad to be in my country and to see part of my family again, but after six weeks I was already missing some things of Germany. Then I realized that I'd be always missing something. In Germany I miss the Brazilian sun, the people and the food, in Brazil I miss the security, the social organization and also the people in Germany. This doesn't mean I'm depressed and unhappy no matter where I am, but I think someone who lives between two cultures and lifestyles will never be satisfied with only one of them. That's because every culture has its good and bad things. Of course, it would be perfect to live only with the good things of both but unfortunately it is not possible. I do think that those people who live between two cultures create a third, very personal one of their own. And I am one of them. Although I feel more Brazilian, since Brazil is a historically multicultural country, I can't deny I'm a little German too! Maybe I'll go back to Brazil some

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day or even somewhere else. I don't think it would be difficult for me because I left everything behind once and so I learned to let go. But no matter what happens I'll always feel connected with both countries.

I think the best thing for me is to stop trying to

**I just enjoy being unique!**

define my ethnic identity and just be who I am. It is actually quite difficult to define it, since my mother has Portuguese, Italian and African origins and my father Jewish and German ones. So I just enjoy being unique!

### Students with a Polish background

*Sandra Niedzielska writes:*

**A**t the age of nine I came to Germany together with my one-year-younger sister and my mother to start a better life here. Until then we had lived in Poland but as my parents divorced when I was four it became much more difficult for my mother to care for two little children on her own. Because of huge unemployment in Poland my mother decided to try her luck in Germany and it worked out!

My mother found a new job in Hamburg and we started a new period in our life. At first it was very difficult for me and my sister, because we did not know the German language and it was hard to find friends and to communicate with others. That is why we were very shy. We wanted to go back to our country, to Poland, but we could not. When boarding school began we met other foreigners who also did not know the language, so we realized we were not the only ones! Slowly we got used to this situation, but we always felt as strangers, because many of the children at school laughed at those ones who could not speak German well. That is why at first we hated Germany. We just did not feel at home here, and we could not change that! We had to cope with this situation.

**In my opinion it does not matter where you come from or where you live, but how you are.**

As often as we could we went to Poland to meet our family and friends. Now I am 18 years old and I have learned to live in Germany. I have also got my friends here and I feel very good now, but Poland still takes a big space in my life. I must say that Germany has become like a second home for me, because I have got everything I need here. I also think that I have got more possibilities here than in Poland. Most people here are also foreign and accept each other. So I meet people who come from all over the world and I learned to accept others the way they are; to accept other cultures, views of life and religions just as they accept mine. In my opinion it does not matter where you come from or where you live, but how you are. Every country has got its own traditions, and I respect them.

At home we still speak Polish not to forget it. I can also read and write in Polish, but I cannot imagine moving back there and living there now, because I have spent

half of my life in Germany and have got used to it. I still have my Polish habits and familiar traditions that German people do not have. Maybe I also have another way of thinking, but my personality developed because of Germany and I cannot imagine moving out here. I do not feel like a stranger here anymore, because Germany is a multicultural country and most of the people here are *istrangersi*. That is what we all here have in common.

*Marek Bruski writes:*

In this essay I try to express my ethnic feeling, considering my experiences of different treatment by others, my view of the German society as related to integration nowadays and of course my personal feeling. I was born on October 5, 1988 in Gdansk (Poland), and I have been living here in Hamburg (Germany) for about 17 years. At the age of ten months, my parents, my older brother and I moved to Hamburg. Because I was so young, I couldn't realize how it is living in Poland.

## We all assimilate unwittingly because it is a steady and common process in our lives.

My parents decided to stay in Germany, to establish more opportunities for myself and my brother. They attached great importance to integrating fast in the German culture, so they set a high value on me and my brother learning the language. That is why I cannot speak Polish perfectly and never had problems to communicate in Germany. Actually most people think I'm fully German, when they meet me the first time.

In school I never had the feeling to be an outsider, because I went to a Catholic school, where half of the students were of Polish origin. Anyway, we mostly spoke German, because the majority of the Polish children, including myself, spoke better German than Polish. Also in school I have no problems, because the majority is foreign. In my neighbourhood I had no problems either, because there were many foreign kids. So I think I grew up multiculturally and that is why I never had to really assimilate, because it was normal not to be born in Germany. We all assimilate unwittingly because it is a steady and common process in our lives. I have never had really bad experiences because of my origin.

At this point, I come to my view of the German society as related to integration nowadays, as far as I notice it here in Hamburg. Because of the several cultures in the big cities in Germany, like Hamburg or Berlin, there are two sides of multicultural integration. On the one side it is easier for the German society, because they get used to foreigners and their culture, and so reduce prejudices. It is also easier for the willing foreigner, because he does not feel 'alone' in the new country. On the other side there arise subcultures in which the foreigners live among each other. So they don't learn the German language, because they don't need it in their everyday-life.

On top of that German youths are considered boring, weak and dishonourable by those foreign youths living in Germany. So a process is running, which separates the German and the foreign youths in Germany. These outlandish youths will have problems to assimilate in the 'real' society, when they have grown up. On the other hand I think that both parts accept each other.

In consideration of my view, I turn to my personal feeling of being a foreigner or

**My being has very much 'German influence'.**

not. I feel I am partly Polish and partly German. I think I am Polish because I am 'living outlandishly'. My circle of friends is full of foreigners and we make jokes about the prejudices of our home countries. The fact that most people call me a Polish guy and treat me this way supports my feeling. I also have the feeling I can get along better with foreign guys than with German ones. I think it is because of their mentality. In my opinion, the German mentality stands out from most of the outlandish ones, while the various foreign mentalities are similar to each other. On the other hand I think I am partly German, because I know that I grew up here, and I have lived here nearly all my life. So I have to say that my being has very much 'German influence'. When I am in Poland, the others treat me like a German, so I think I am in between the two cultures. In consideration of that I can't deny being partly German, which doesn't make me feel bad. I just think it is a mixture of both cultures. I can also identify with Germany, because its culture and religious thinking is comparable to the Polish one. So I can say I feel Polish and German, whereas my Polish side prevails.

*Dagmar Bieluta writes:*

I feel a bit strange when I say I am a German girl, but I also feel strange when I say I'm a Polish girl. My grandparents live in Poland. But when they were born the area where they lived in (Silesia) was Germany. After six years the Hitler-regime ended and Silesia became Polish again. So my grandparents are somewhat German. After a few years they forgot their German culture and turned a typical Polish family. So my parents were born in Poland and after their wedding they moved to Germany to start a better life. They thought in Germany everybody had got a lot of money, but nowadays we know better. Then, after a few years I was born here in Germany. So I feel more German than Polish. But the problem is some people do not treat me as a German. They treat me like a foreign girl. They look at me for example and say: 'What nationality are you? Russian...?' Then I say: 'No, I am from Poland.' And then the prejudices begin: 'Oh no, keep your things, your bags and money near your body, she is from Poland, she steals everything!' Even if it is a joke, sometimes I think I am one way or another not accepted by the others. Here in Germany, when you are a foreigner it is more negative than positive. For example, when I am in Poland everybody is im-

pressed because I am from Germany. I visit my family every holiday. When I am there I feel at home but something is missing. And that is the same problem when I am in Germany. There is always something missing, too. But most of my friends are also not from Germany, so it is easier for me, when I have somebody to talk to. Though I miss my family from Poland and in spite of the prejudices of others, I never think of returning to Poland, there are no prospects for the future. You have to stay strong and to tolerate the others, maybe someday they will tolerate you.

*Sebastian Halemba writes:*

I came to Germany 17 years ago and lived in a village in southern Germany, Bavaria. I was almost the only one from Poland. Most of the children there hadn't got any sympathies for this country. Ten years later, we moved to the north, unsuspecting what would come to us. I was surprised, how multicultural Hamburg was.

**I was accepted right from the start. But here is a whiff of racism, too.**

You could say my geographical experience expanded. The schools here are a bit easier and not that strict as in the south. I haven't got any problems here with my ethnic identity. I was accepted right from the start. But here is a whiff of racism, too. So I had a few conflicts based on racial motives. We have some courses here in school, where the Germans are the minority and not the immigrants.

**I don't need hope, I need knowledge.**

After school, I will try to explore more of the world. But my headquarters will remain in Hamburg I think. I won't forget where I come from, but nowadays I won't say I'm a German, either. I grew up in a catholic environment, but since I have been in Hamburg I have stopped going to church. My life isn't determined by religious interests. I don't need hope, I need knowledge.

Due to my background, I don't believe in the statement that people in USA are more open. Of course, they have another lifestyle, but it depends on the region where you live. Hamburg, for example, has an airport and a harbour which enable people from all over the world to come here.

The KKK is in USA, isn't it? In some cities in Poland, there are big groups of hooligans, too, but not everywhere. So I think that in most countries in the world it depends on the region of the country and on your behaviour whether you'll be accepted or not.

**One student has got a Russian background.**

*Katja Volkova writes:*

I was born in St Petersburg. I lived there for nine years. I went to school and had lot of friends. Then my mother decided to leave Russia and to move here to Germany. She hoped that we would get a better education here and a better future than in Russia.

When I arrived in Germany, I couldn't speak any German. The first two or three months were very difficult but then I started school and there I found some friends and learned German. After one and a half year I started in the fifth grade at Gymnasium Hamm.

I don't know how I should describe my feelings now. I can't say that I'm a German girl because my roots are in Russia. I have been never discriminated against, maybe because I don't look like a foreigner or maybe because most of my friends are foreign too. But I heard a lot of stories of my friends being discriminated against. I have always been treated well by the German people so I never had the feeling that I didn't belong to Germany. I don't know which country I should call my home. In each country I have spent half of my life. But when I visit Russia I feel strange because I speak German much better than Russian. I don't know where I belong but I'm happy to know that I have two countries that I can call my home.

**One student has a partly French background.**

*Lili Klösel writes.*

I feel as a German girl even if my Dad comes from France. I was born here so I cannot even think of living somewhere else.

do not really have any problem with foreigners, it is just one thing I do not like. I often noticed that they made jokes about Germany or German people. My point is that many foreign people, especially in Germany, behave very disrespectfully towards us Germans. Actually they do not appreciate the way we treat them. I mean they come from other countries and it is normal that our culture is different to their culture but that is not a reason to call us things like, 'German people are boring people!', 'Germans are too egoistic!' or, 'They do not really practise any religion, in any case it's only a few.' These are some prejudices foreigners have against us. But this is just the way it goes here in Germany. Most of us put much concentration on their jobs because you have no other choice. Otherwise you will not get enough money. That does not mean that this is not the case in other countries. Well, I have to add that not all German people are employed. Many just apply for social benefit. Another example is that foreigners often feel offended when someone asks them if he or she is a German person. They do not want to be a German and then they say something like, 'Oh, I am not a German. Oh my God, do I look like one?' I feel confused when I hear things like that because I think: 'They live in Germany. Why do they say such things in such a disgusted way? If Germany is such a bad place for them why do they not go back to their hometown?'

Anyway, it is more difficult then just that. On the one hand we all live together here in Germany very peacefully and on the other hand there are many things not talked out.

Furthermore, I really think that the problem of foreigners is bigger than we often thought it was. They do not know from where they are or where to go. They even do

not know who they really are.

In Germany they are foreigners and in their home countries they are received as foreigners, too. By the way, we German people do have a lot of prejudices against them, too.

Another problem is that foreign people often say they are very strict in what they do according to their religion. For example, during 'Ramadan' Muslims are not allowed to drink alcohol or eat food during the day. So why can I see them next to me during 'Ramadan' dancing and drinking alcohol?

Somehow I can understand their feelings. They learned to live their religion. But that is not easy while German teenagers drink and go to parties. They want to do the same things. So it is hard to come up to their parents'

expectations. Otherwise they should not wonder if we German people do not take them seriously in their way of life while they say they are religious but do not act accordingly.

Most of my friends are foreigners and I like them. I can learn much about languages, other cultures and different people. It is even more interesting to live here in Germany where so many cultures can live together as a big community.

Finally, we all have different problems in religion, culture, relationships etc. These things are important to all of us in order to live together in a peaceful way. We do not have to love each other but respect is something that we all should exercise. Otherwise there will be no future for us all together.



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## FRIEND

by *Olivia Matuszak, S1*

Written with a pen, sealed with a kiss.  
If you are my friend, answer me this:  
Are we friends, or are we not?  
You told me once, but I forgot.  
So tell me now, and tell me true,  
then I can say, 'I'm here for you.'

Of all the friends I've ever met  
you're the one I won't forget.  
And if I die before you do,  
I'll go to heaven and wait for you.  
I'll give the angels back their wings  
and risk the loss of everything.  
There isn't a thing I wouldn't do  
to have a friend just like you!