

5-3-2011

Is Multiculturalism Really Dead?: A Closer Look at the Multiculturalism Debate within the Context of Berlin's District of Kreuzberg

Molly Wolf

Grand Valley State University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/honorsprojects>

Recommended Citation

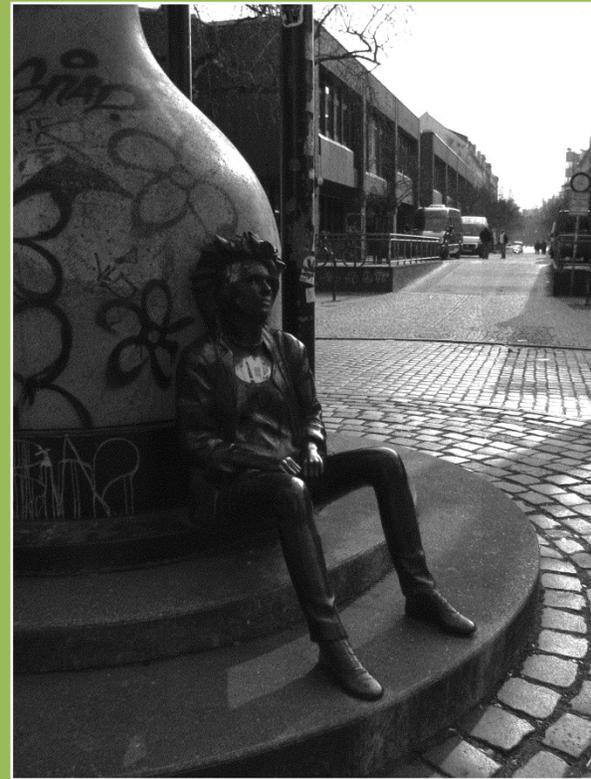
Wolf, Molly, "Is Multiculturalism Really Dead?: A Closer Look at the Multiculturalism Debate within the Context of Berlin's District of Kreuzberg" (2011). *Honors Projects*. 67.

<http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/honorsprojects/67>

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Research and Creative Practice at ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Projects by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

Is Multiculturalism Really Dead?:

A Closer Look at the Multiculturalism Debate within the
Context of Berlin's District of Kreuzberg



Sculpture of Kreuzberg punks on an hourglass on the
corner of Admiralstraße and Kohlfurter Straße

www.kreuzbergproject.com

Frederik Meijer Honors College
Grand Valley State University

Professor Donovan Anderson

May 3, 2011

At a conference in October of 2010, German Prime Minister, Angela Merkel, made the statement that German multiculturalism is dead. I wonder if Merkel has ever stepped foot into the city district of Kreuzberg, or even left her office in Berlin at all. Berlin is a city in which it is quite easy for one, in certain parts, to sometimes forget in which country one actually is. The U1 metro line, for example, starts in the district of Charlottenburg, which has a very typical upscale romantic European charm to it. The line then ends at Warschauer Straße, direct in the heart of Kreuzberg, and perhaps in a different world altogether. Here the charm is grittier, rougher, and more immediate, yet this world has a romance of its own. I once stepped off the train at Görlitzer Bahnhof, also in the heart of Kreuzberg, turned 360 degrees and saw signs not only in German, but also in Turkish, Arabic, Korean, and other languages I could not identify. Berlin's district of Kreuzberg has a reputation for cultural diversity, creativity, and liveliness. As Ed Meza puts it in his article "Berlin for Beginners":

Berlin is the San Francisco of Germany: a mecca for artists and musicians, writers and filmmakers, free-thinkers and vagabonds, all of whom have found a haven here in much the same way the beatniks and hippies found their space in Frisco in the 1950s and '60s" (Meza 2005).

In addition to several sub- and counter-culture movements, Kreuzberg is also home to a very large immigrant population, causing it to be nicknamed "Little Istanbul". However, according to Angela Merkel, the "multikulti" concept does not work in Germany. She stated, "...the approach [to build] a multicultural [society] and to live side by side and to enjoy each other...has failed, utterly failed" (quoted in Clark 2010). Merkel, however, did not elaborate on the nature or causes of this failure. Multiculturalism, for Merkel, requires the integration of immigrants into German society and their adaptation to German norms and values. Merkel

deems multiculturalism a failure because those with immigrant backgrounds are still seen as outsiders, rather than blending into society.

This paper seeks to explore the debate of multiculturalism by first addressing the different meanings the term has taken on as well as to explain how Germany came to be in the middle of this debate. It will then take a closer look at multiculturalism in the context of the district of Kreuzberg, following developments both before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Ultimately, it will argue that Kreuzberg is a good example for the success of multiculturalism and propose that it is merely the mindset of the German people which stands in the way of successful multiculturalism in other districts of the city.

In order to assess Merkel's statement about the death of multiculturalism, one must first explore the debate surrounding the concept of the term and how it came to be such a heated discussion in Germany.

Is multiculturalism only successful through the integration and/or assimilation of outsiders into the new culture? Or can parallel societies, where multiple cultures live side-by-side in the same city, also be prosperous? "For some, multiculturalism expresses the essence of a modern, liberal society. For others, it has helped create an anxious, fragmented nation" (Malik 2010). The debate concerning multiculturalism is definitely a multi-faceted argument and not so easily resolved, partially because multiculturalism is not so easily defined. According to dictionary.reference.com, multiculturalism is "the preservation of different cultures or cultural identities within a unified society, as a state or nation" and/or "the policy of maintaining a diversity of ethnic cultures within a community". To what extent, or how this should be done, however, remains vague and the term has seemed to have taken on new political connotations and is manipulated by different political parties to help achieve their aims.

Those who criticize multiculturalism argue that it accentuates social division, promotes segregation rather than integration, undermines national identity, legitimizes moral relativism, fosters tolerance of intolerance, and encourages a culture of victimhood that creates expectations of entitlement and special treatment (Lerman 2010; Modood 2007; Wilders 2011). In a speech made earlier this year, Dutch politician, Geert Wilders, spoke out strongly against multiculturalism, arguing that it is a dangerous threat to European society. He stated:

I use the term [multiculturalism] to refer to a specific political ideology. It advocates that all cultures are equal. If they are equal it follows that the state is not allowed to promote any specific cultural values as central and dominant. In other words: multiculturalism holds that the state should not promote a *Leitkultur*, which immigrants have to accept if they want to live in our midst... Indeed, the premise of the multiculturalist ideology is wrong. Cultures are not equal. They are different, because their roots are different. That is why the multiculturalists try to destroy our roots (Wilders 2011).

Wilders claims that the multicultural society has “undermined [the] rule of common sense and decency”, which states, “If you move somewhere, you must adapt to the laws and customs of the land” (Wilders 2011). In his controversial speech, Wilders identifies Islam as an enemy seeking to invade and conquer all of Europe, and maintains that the tolerance promoted by multiculturalist policy acts like a deadly noose for the future of the European identity and society.

Wilders is not the only one who fears that multiculturalism breeds radical separatism. British Prime Minister David Cameron stated, “We have allowed the weakening of our collective identity under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live [...] apart from the mainstream” (quoted in Wilders 2011). In addition, Professor Paul Cliteur stated, in regards to multiculturalism, “What worries me about this relativistic – or rather, nihilistic – position is that it makes Western societies easy prey for the ideology of radical Islamism” (quoted in “European Multiculturalism”).

These fears, however, seem to be rooted in prejudices and stereotypes. It makes no sense that one would be against the interests of the country in which he has built his home or that he would not want to be connected to it in some way. Cultures must not be in conflict with one another. It is possible for one to maintain the traditions of one's own heritage while still adhering to the laws and values of the new country.

Wilders has been brought to court on charges of hate speech and blames that, too, on multiculturalism – “That is the paradox of the multicultural society. It claims to be pluralistic, but allows only one point of view of world affairs, namely that all cultures are equal and that they are all good” (Wilders 2011). In fact, it seems as though Wilders wants to blame any and every problem on this vague concept of multiculturalism:

Multiculturalism is a culture of repudiation of Europe's heritage and freedoms. It weakens the West day by day. It leads to the self-censorship of the media and academia, the collapse of the education system, the emasculation of the churches, the subversion of the nation-state, the break-down of our free society... The EU has fallen in the hands of a multiculturalist elite who by undermining national sovereignty destroy the capacity of the peoples of Europe to democratically decide their own future (Wilders 2011).

Wilders holds an extreme, almost apocalyptic, view of multiculturalism. But not all those who oppose multiculturalism do so with so much vehemence or even for the same reasons.

Kenan Malik takes a much more moderate approach and differentiates between the experience of multiculturalism and multiculturalism as a “political accommodation of post-immigrant minorities” (Modood 2007):

The experience of living in a society transformed by mass immigration, a society that is less insular, more vibrant and more cosmopolitan, is positive. As a political process, however, multiculturalism means something very different. It describes a set of policies, the aim of which is to manage diversity by putting people into ethnic boxes, defining individual needs and rights by virtue of the boxes into which people are put, and using those boxes to shape public policy... The irony of multiculturalism as a political process is that it undermines much of what is valuable about diversity as lived experience (Malik 2010).

For Malik, the diversity of multiculturalism is not the problem, but rather the threat which multiculturalist policy poses to diversity is. He argues that “multicultural policies tend to treat minority communities as homogenous wholes, ignoring class, religious, gender and other differences, and leaving many within those communities feeling misrepresented and, indeed, disenfranchised”. In attempting to minimize the conflicts of diversity by placing people into boxes and “policing the boundaries of those boxes in the name of tolerance and respect”, multiculturalists only “generate a new set of more destructive, less resolvable conflicts.” The policies of multiculturalism, which allocate political power and financial resources to specific ethnicities force individuals to define themselves within the constraints of that ethnicity alone, which in turn, according to Malik, has the danger of “setting off one group against the other”. He is not alone in his fear. Others have argued that “a society that embraces multiculturalism...is threatened to fall into divisive extremes, all of which would battle one another for political control on the one level of society or the other” (Hiscott 2005). Malik instead proposes that the debate about immigration and diversity be separated from that of multiculturalism – and that the former be promoted, whilst the latter be opposed (Malik 2010). Indeed, Andrew Anthony agrees with Malik as he states, “One of the shibboleths of multiculturalism was that different communities needed to be treated differently. Ultimately, though, the aim must be to be treated the same” (Anthony 2004)

Political theorist, Bhikhu Parekh, however, disagrees with Malik about the nature of multiculturalism:

Multiculturalism is not about safeguarding self-contained ethnic and cultural boxes but rather about intercultural fusion in which a culture freely borrows bits of others and creatively transforms both itself and them. Far from implying that each individual should remain rooted in his or her culture and flit between them, multiculturalism requires that they should open themselves up to the influence of

others and engage in a reflective and sometimes life enhancing dialogue with others. Multiculturalism is not ghettoization but a form of universalism, and represents one of the highest expressions of human freedom and self-creation (quoted in Baggini 2005).

But, perhaps, the debate between Malik and Parekh is merely a petty argument about semantics and the actualization of the multicultural concept, for both value diversity and promote fluidity between cultures. They both acknowledge the importance of the individual and the opportunity of self-definition beyond and/or between the confines of a specified culture or ethnicity. Political connotations aside, that is what multiculturalism should be – a valuing of diversity. Whether that means an immigrant chooses to maintain their culture and identity or completely adopt those of their new country does not matter. What matters is that this is done peacefully and that there is tolerance and respect among all peoples and adherence to the laws of the country. But, for some, questions still remain if a multicultural society can generate enough social, political, and cultural cohesion to avoid the dissolution of its mothering state as a distinct political entity.

The Oxford English Dictionary traces the word ‘multiculturalism’ back to the late 50s and early 60s, yet “the coexistence of cultural, ethnic and religious communities within one political society, within one state, has been the condition of European countries long before they knew of themselves as European...The 19th century in particular saw massive movement of people in Europe” (Raz 1998). However, the concept of multiculturalism did not arise until the 20th century. Joseph Raz ties the appearance of multiculturalism to the emergence of nationalism, which he defines as “the thought that only common ethnicity, a common language, and a common culture can constitute the cement which bonds a political community”; before nationalism became dominant, multiculturalism was the norm; therefore, there was no need to define it. Multiculturalism is the denial that common nationality is necessary for the viability of a political community; the European Union attests to that (Raz 1998). Multiculturalism, according

to Raz, encourages a new sensitivity, a new conception of one's society, which moves beyond understanding the universal in terms of oneself, and fosters and encourages the coexistence of distinct cultural identities within the same political society. Raz argues that "we should learn to think of our societies as consisting not of a majority and minorities, but as constituted by a plurality of culture groups." It is absurd to think that a country will automatically dissolve or fall into disarray without a single homogenous culture. Just look at the United States for example – it has survived for years as an ethnically and racially diverse "melting pot". Diversity, after all, is important for a society. It prevents stagnation and encourages innovation and progression through a plurality of alternatives.

It is obvious that the discussion of multiculturalism is multi-faceted and that there is little consensus as to how one might even define multiculturalism or how a multicultural society should be conceived. "Both terms are, however, closely connected with the concept of ethnicity as well as national identity and they function as descriptive-analytic tools as well as prescriptive categories" (von Dirke 1994). The term 'multiculturalism' has moved far beyond its basic definition and taken on strong political connotations, which hinder the success of its original intent: diversity. To better understand the multiculturalism debate in Germany, it is important to understand how Germany got there in the first place.

Traditionally, Germans were defined strictly by blood and ethnicity, but the introduction of the guest worker program in the 1960s raised questions about what defines a German. Increased immigration has brought German identity into question and the country has been facing many challenges in adjusting to the increasing multiethnicity:

It is the confrontation with their foreign residents which has forced the Germans to rethink who they are and to reconceptualize their society today and for the future. This process of self-definition results in different projections of a

collective identity for which the concept of the nation is still the main point of reference (von Dirke 1994).

Following the Second World War, Germany was in short of able-bodied male workers and in the face of an unexpected industrial boom and economic miracle, West Germany began the policy of importing foreign workers. Following the erection of the Berlin Wall in August of 1961, Germany lost even more of its labor force. In addition, several changes in the West German social structure intensified the labor shortage. For example: better pension plans led to earlier retirement, education reforms kept young adults in school longer and out of the work force, required military service was lengthened, and average working hours per week decreased. In face of this extreme demand for more workers, West Germany initiated labor agreements throughout the 1950s and 60s with the poor countries of Europe and on the Mediterranean rim including Italy, Turkey, Greece, Yugoslavia, Spain, and Portugal. The Gastarbeiter, or guest worker, program was intended to bring workers in as just that – guests (Chin 2002; Schneider 2005). This term “reduced their [foreign laborers’] presence to pure economic contribution and insisted on the temporary nature of their stay” (Chin 2002). The labor agreements were built around the principle of rotation, in which each imported worker would receive a two-year, nonrenewable work and resident permit. After completing their two years, they were expected to return home. However, the negative effects of rotation were soon uncovered as industry leaders realized it cost more money to bring in and train new workers so often. Since the rotation system rendered itself unprofitable, the government began granting workers extensions, virtually allowing them to stay in Germany for as long as they liked.

At the beginning of the recruitment program, Turks constituted only a small percentage of all imported labor, but soon became the dominant group of guest workers. In fact, as the number of workers from other countries began to decrease after 1971, those coming from Turkey

increased, thus leading to a mentality which treated Turks and guest workers as one in the same (Chin 2002).

The economic recession between 1972 and 1973 brought Germany's economic boom to a fast stop and unemployment skyrocketed. As more and more Germans found themselves jobless, the public began to demand restrictions on imported labor, leading the government to institute the Anwerbestopp, or the official halt to all foreign labor recruitment, on November 23, 1973 (Chin 2002). The guest workers, however, did not leave. As Merkel, in her aforementioned speech, remarked, "At the beginning of the 1960s our country called the foreign workers to come to Germany and now they live in our country. We kidded ourselves a while. We said: 'They won't stay, [after some time] they will be gone,' but this isn't reality" (quoted in Clark 2010). In fact, many have even been joined by their families, built a new life in Germany, and have no intention of returning to their previous countries.

Germany pronounced for many years that it is not a country of immigration. However, the mass amounts of guest workers who never left – and, furthermore, brought their families with them – has dramatically altered the demographics of German society. These new demographics are especially apparent in the capital city of Berlin, which is now home to the largest Turkish population in Europe outside of Istanbul. Berlin, alone, has about 300,000 Muslim immigrants, most of who reside in the districts of Neukölln, Wedding, and Kreuzberg. The district of Neukölln is home to citizens of 165 different nations. About 40 percent of these are Turks and Kurds, and Arabs constitute the second largest group. Kreuzberg is home to 184 different nationalities, and in the Kottbusser Tor neighborhood of Kreuzberg, non-German citizens comprise over half of the population (Kil and Silver 2006; von Dirke 1994; Wedekind 2009).

Although Germany remains reluctant about describing itself as an immigrant country - a position contributing to the general perception of the foreigners as illegitimate intruders and a threat to German culture (von Dirke 1994) - it can no longer deny the existence of a large immigrant population and must make adjustments to accommodate its evolving society. “Germans’ confidence that their nation can continue as it had been – integrating immigrants without an integration policy, remaining true to the traditional German identity, preserving the reassuring post-1945 chronology of advancing modernism – is on the line” (Schneider 2005).

One of Germany’s greatest fears in confronting multiculturalism is that of parallel societies. Social scientist, Wilhelm Heitmeyer, coined the term *Parallelgesellschaften* in 1996 to describe a form of voluntary cultural segregation from mainstream society (Hiscott 2005). The term ‘parallel society’ has developed an extremely negative connotation in Germany and the leading fascist party in the country, the National Democratic Party, has redefined and employed it in their own propaganda against immigration:

Parallel societies... are ethnic and socially-structured groups and family units or clan structures with a partially direct relationship to organized crime. They segregate themselves from the German laws and handle their internal disputes through Islamic preachers or violent fights... Socially, these groups are visible as underclasses, they are non-educated and have little access to the labour market... We call for an end to the immigration of waste and the fair return of those persons who do not contribute to the common good to their homeland” (quoted in Hiscott 2005).

The term has escalated from ‘parallel’ to ‘opposing’ societies, which encourages more polarization within the debate (Hiscott 2005). But it is to be expected that in a country traditionally opposed to immigration and reluctant to incorporate immigrants into society, that the immigrants themselves might be reluctant to invest in the society (Pötzl 2008). Klaus Bade, a migrant researcher, however, criticizes the misuse of the term ‘parallel society’ in regards to Germany:

Classical parallel societies do not exist in Germany. For them to exist, a number of points have to come together: a monocultural identity, a voluntary and conscious retreat in both community and everyday life, an extensive economic segregation and a doubling of the institutions of the state. [In Germany,] the immigrant neighborhoods are mostly ethnically-mixed, the retreat is out of social reasons and a doubling of the institutions is lacking. Parallel societies exist in the heads of those who fear them... The situation can only get worse when the simple and dangerous talk about parallel societies continues. This kind of talk is not part of the solution, but rather part of the problem (quoted in Hiscott 2005).

If the term ‘parallel societies’ is to be used in such a loose way to describe the Turkish-dominated districts of Berlin, then it should also be applied to other districts such as Zehlendorf, where wealthy Germans exclude themselves from Berlin’s ‘ghettos’, or Hellersdorf, which still maintains a very ‘East German’ identity (Hiscott 2005). And when understood in such a loose context, parallel societies are not necessarily a negative thing:

Only primitive societies that allow no differences of any kind, and dictatorships, which control all aspects of life, are free of parallel societies... In flexible, changing populations, parallel societies are almost inevitable... Indeed, it would seem that only Germans have difficulties realizing that parallel societies are unavoidable and perhaps even desirable and useful. They give people the feeling of belonging to something that they can grasp – provide the kind of security that society at large cannot. And they reflect society’s diversity, an asset that even Germany cannot live without (Broder 2010).

Broder’s view supports Raz’s argument that we should view societies as consisting not of a majority and minorities, but as constituted by a plurality of culture groups. This diversity should be embraced and viewed as a positive asset to society. Germany must let go of the myth that it can maintain a homogenous culture in an ever increasingly globalized society.

The rest of this paper will be focused on Kreuzberg, a district of Berlin which has a reputation for being one of the most diverse areas of the city. In the context of this discussion, I will use the term multiculturalism loosely to signify a diversity in cultures as well as to include sub- and counter-culture movements. I plan to explore the factors that made Kreuzberg so appealing to immigrants as well as a breeding ground for sub- and counter- culture movements. I

will then trace the developments following the fall of the Berlin Wall and explain how reunification has led to some gentrification of the district and dispersal of the subgroups into the surrounding areas. In conclusion, I will explore the debate of parallel societies in relation to Kreuzberg to answer the question if a multicultural society can successfully exist in Germany.

“Kreuzberg – kein anderer Stadtteil in Deutschland ist so bunt, bizarr, verrückt, so unfaßbar. Fast ein ferner Planet”¹ (quoted in Lang 1998). This quotation, taken from an interview with a Kreuzberg resident, sums up the district beautifully. It really does have a completely different atmosphere; a sort of vitality and comforting chaos to it. “Hier fanden sie einen Freiraum, in dem sie all jene Bedürfnisse und Ideen ausleben konnten... Hier fanden aber auch einen Leerraum, in dem die unzähligen Bemühungen um alternative Lebens- und Arbeitsformen realisiert werden konnten...”² (Lang 1998). Kreuzberg is a place where you can see a Muslim woman in a headscarf and a young man with technicolor dreadlocks standing in the same line. Kreuzberg was the home of the Bohemian movement in the 60s (nicknamed Berliner Montmartre during this time), the alternative culture in the 70s, and the Protest and ‘Null Bock’³ in the 80s; it has always retained the identity of ‘the other’.

With the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, Kreuzberg suddenly found itself on the urban fringe. Until reunification, Kreuzberg was located on the eastern border of West Berlin and was surrounded on three sides by the Wall, cutting it off and isolating it from the rest of the city. Kreuzberg itself was divided into two separate districts according to old postal codes: ‘Kreuzberg 61’, which represented a distinguished, bourgeois section and the south eastern

¹ “Kreuzberg – no other district in Germany is so colorful, bizarre, crazy, so incomprehensible. Almost a remote Planet!”

² “Here they found a free space, in which they could live out all their wants and ideas... Here they found also an empty space, in which all the countless endeavors of alternative life- and work-forms could be realized.”

³ ‘Couldn’t care less’ generation; disaffected youth

section 'SO36'. SO36 is the section most often referred to in discussions of Kreuzberg (Lang 1998).

In the 60s artists came to Kreuzberg and then convinced their fellow artists that "...Kreuzberg der richtige Ort wäre, Kunst aus den ästhetischen Zirkeln herauszuholen und sozial fruchtbar zu machen"⁴ (Düspohl 2009). The Bohemian movement in Kreuzberg became a flourishing subculture and turned the district into a lively and innovative center. This 'Montmartre' period lasted until about 1974 when it was replaced by a period of 'umherschweifenden Haschrebelln'⁵.

The 70s gave birth to an influx of students into the Kreuzberg district, who established *Wohngemeinschaften*⁶, which they furnished with furniture from the trash. They came to Kreuzberg to discover new freedom, a life outside of conventional boundaries and societal regulations, and to experiment with new lifestyles. Not unlike the Hippie movement that took place in the United States during the 60s, "Ihren Alltag bestimmten Musik, Kunst, freie Liebe und Marihuana, später auch härtere Drogen. Ihre Wohnungstüren standen meist offen, der Kühlschrankinhalt war Allgemeingut"⁷(Düspohl 2009). The student movement also harvested a wild leftist theater scene, centered in the Theater am Halleschen Ufer. In addition to theater and music movements, small centers were created for modern dance in Kreuzberg. Tanzfabrik, for example, was founded during this time (Grésillon 1999).

1979 marked the beginning of the squatter movement in Kreuzberg. By 1981, 86 buildings in Kreuzberg were occupied by non-rent paying residents. People were not only using

⁴ "Kreuzberg would be the right place to withdraw art from aesthetic circles and to make it socially prolific."

⁵ 'vagabond hash-rebels'

⁶ Flat sharing communities

⁷ "Their everyday life consisted of music, art, free love and marijuana, later also hard drugs. Their apartment doors were almost always open, and the contents of the refrigerator were common property."

these buildings to live in, but were also transforming them into spaces for social projects. For example, a woman's center was created as well as a day care center and a health center, and the KuKuCK⁸ - Kreuzberg's own center for art and culture – was founded. The years of 1980 and 1981, however, were marked by the chaos of street riots and fighting as police attempted to hinder the occupation of abandoned buildings. The activists, however, won the fight in the summer of 1983, as Cuvrystraße 25 became the first legalized squat (Düspohl 2009; Lang 1998).

By the mid-eighties, Kreuzberg had become dominated by a rowdy punk and anarchist movement. May 1, 1987 marks the first annual May Day riot, in which 'revolutionaries' and the police battled in the streets for 12 hours (Lang 1998).. May Day riots have since died down in intensity, and a counter-movement street festival, called MyFest, was established in 2003 as a peaceful alternative to the violent riots. I recently had the pleasure of attending the May Day celebrations in Kreuzberg, which stretched throughout a large portion of the district. Along every street there was a variety of food vendors and large groups of people dancing to every different style of music. The music itself was a fusion of diversity including hip-hop, both modern and traditional Turkish music, and even reggae remixes of Michael Jackson and Snoop Dogg songs, just to name a few. I saw people from every walk of life and of every age - from small children to grandparents – all celebrating together. The atmosphere was festive and joyous - sangria was being served from shopping carts, people were throwing confetti, and I was even able to engage groups of police officers in conversation. But most noticeable of all was a grand sense of unity, as if we were all one giant family. Perhaps if Angela Merkel started attending more events like this, she would change her opinions on multiculturalism.

⁸ Das Kunst- und Kultur-Centrum Kreuzberg

Amidst all the developments and evolving trends of Kreuzberg's youth, a steady stream of immigrants was continuously pouring in. The 'border' position and its isolation made Kreuzberg an ideal space to house foreign guest workers, since the German government had no intention of integrating them. In addition, Kreuzberg was full of empty buildings waiting to be torn down as part of reconstruction plans. In the post-War years, West Berlin undertook many new housing projects and constructed new residential areas. Between 1948 and 1987, nearly 550,000 housing units were constructed in West Berlin. As Germans moved into the new housing, they left behind many old, large substandard buildings in the peripheral region of Kreuzberg. In addition, rents remained under government regulation, which made investing in this area unattractive. When guest workers first started arriving in the 60s, they were housed in factory-provided homes and boarding houses, but as more and more immigrants began bringing their families to Germany, they were forced to find more permanent accommodations. They focused their attention in the sub-sector of 'downgraded' social housing (Düspohl 2009; Kemper 1998). Rent was cheap in Kreuzberg, there was less competition from Germans, and less discrimination from landlords (Kil and Silver 2006).

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Kreuzberg suddenly went from being an isolated border district along the Wall, to being in the center of a reunified city. The headlines proclaiming the gentrification of Kreuzberg started rolling in:

‘Das Mekka der Alternativen in Wandel zum exklusiven Yuppie-Viertel’;
 ‘Kreuzberg, der Anziehungspunkt für >Aussteiger< ist zur guten Adresse für
 >Einsteiger< geworden’; ‘Kreuzberg, das Armeleutenviertel (...) wird schick und
 zieht neue Bewohner an’; ‘keine Fassade, die nicht erneuert würde. Kein
 Hinterhof, der nicht völlig umgestaltet würde’⁹ (Lang 1998).

⁹ ‘The Mecca of the Alternative in Transition to an Exclusive Yuppie-District’; ‘Kreuzberg, the Center of Attraction for the >Escapist< has Become a Good Address for the >Newcomer<’; ‘Kreuzberg, the Poor People District (...) is

New inhabitants from different economic standings began moving into the districts. Old buildings were renovated and modernized, causing higher rents that the previous inhabitants could no longer afford (Lang 1998). This, however, was not as widespread as thought. In fact, Kreuzberg became poorer (Düspohl 2009).

Most of the gentrification was happening in districts of the former East, like Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg. As people moved from the East to the West, they left behind poorer quality, but cheap housing, encouraging a new influx of inhabitants to replace them. As housing regulations became decentralized and properties privatized, new opportunities for affordable housing arose (Kemper 1998). Following reunification, new cultural places, such as small theaters, jazz and rock clubs, and art galleries began sprouting up all over Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg, fostering new alternative scenes. The districts of East Berlin became gentrified by students and artists as well as a trendy café culture (Grésillon 1999).

Fighting against this gentrification was a new wave of squatters. Several buildings were abandoned in the East without seeming to have a rightful owner, opening a new market for squats which had virtually disappeared in Kreuzberg by this time (Anonymous 2011). The squatters, however, did not win this time. In recent years, handfuls of squatted clubs and bars have been forced out of business to make way for new upmarket venues (Meza 2005).

Kreuzberg has lost neither its diversity nor its edge. It has simply evolved from *the* center for alternative lifestyles, to *one of the* centers. The fall of the Wall brought Kreuzberg's isolation to an end, encouraging more movement from and to the area. It continues to be a district which

attracts young people and retains an environment which is conducive to experimentation and innovation. Statistically, Kreuzberg has one of the youngest populations of all European city districts, meaning also that it has a high turnover rate and an ever-evolving atmosphere. “In der Tendenz ist Kreuzberg also ein Durchgangsbezirk. Die Verweilzeiten sind dabei teils kürzer, teils länger. In Kreuzberg probiert man etwas aus, genießt die Vielfalt der Optionen, die das Leben hier bietet – oder man scheitert daran”¹⁰ (Düspohl 2009). Two movies, which take place in Kreuzberg, seem to exemplify this idea of Kreuzberg as a liminal place beautifully: Gregor Schnitzler’s *Was tun, wenn’s brennt?* and Leander Haußmann’s *Herr Lehmann*. Both films have main characters which represent two distinct countercultural movements in Kreuzberg, yet the development of the characters is strikingly similar. Both films embody the idea of Kreuzberg as a safe haven for alternative lifestyles, but not as a place of permanence or continuity.

Was tun, wenn’s brennt? begins with a mock homemade film from 1987 showing the SO36 Collective, a group of six anarchist squatters, constructing a bomb and then leaving it in a villa in the outskirts of Berlin. The bomb, however, does not go off until 12 years later and the friends, who have all gone separate ways, must come back together to protect themselves from the legal ramifications. Two members of the group, Tim and Hotte, have remained true to their political anarchist convictions and are in constant conflict with the police, who are trying to kick them out of their squat. The other members of the group have all given in to a more mainstream lifestyle; one is a timid lawyer, another a greedy public relations manager milking capitalism for all its worth, one a single mother devoted to her children, and the other is the arm candy of her well-off fiancée. At the film’s end, Hotte decides to join the mainstream as he states his desires to, perhaps, study computers and hopefully find a real job to become a functioning member of

¹⁰“Kreuzberg has the tendency to be a transitional district. The dwelling time is sometimes shorter, sometimes longer. In Kreuzberg, one tries things out, enjoys the diversity of options that life here offers - or one fails at it.”

society, thus leaving the Kreuzberg of his anarchist youth behind and abandoning idealism. It has become apparent to Hotte, that he is fighting a battle that no longer exists and that he is clinging nostalgically to the past. In order to survive, he must learn to adapt to the changing times.

Although Kreuzberg offers an environment for alternative lifestyles, it does not lend itself to stagnation. Counterculture movements thrive in the district, but only for a limited period of time before they are replaced by new ones.

Herr Lehmann follows a similar belated coming of age plot. But rather than representing the radical politics of the late eighties, this film portrays the extreme apathy of the ‘Null Bock’ generation. The film is centered around the everyday life of Herr Lehmann, a 29 year old bartender in Kreuzberg “who embodies anti-consumerist and anti-establishment politics through apathy” (Mennel 2007). The viewer watches him work, hang out with friends, drink, fall in love, and other unspectacular things. He fights with his love interest about his job; she tells him that one cannot possibly live a fulfilling life being a bartender. He is reluctant to believe this, but makes a life changing decision when his friend has a nervous breakdown, which happens to occur on November 9th, 1989 - the day of Herr Lehmann’s 30th birthday and the day of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Perhaps it was the words of the doctor who treated his friend, which enlightened Herr Lehmann:

So eine Mischung aus Depression und Nervenzusammenbruch. Das haben wir hier [in Kreuzberg] öfter. Sie haben gesagt, er ist Künstler. Aber er arbeitet seit zehn Jahren oder so in einer Kneipe. Aber nicht jeder kommt damit klar... Es ist ein leichtes Leben hier in der Gegend, wenn man jung ist. Ein bisschen Arbeit, billige Wohnung, viel Spaß. Aber viele brauchen noch irgendetwas, um alles zu legitimieren.¹¹

¹¹ “A mixture of depression and nervous breakdown. We have it here [in Kreuzberg] more often. You said he is an artist. But he has worked for ten years or so in a bar. But not everyone can come to terms with it ... It is an easy life around here, when you're young. A bit of work, cheap housing, lots of fun. But many still need something else in order to legitimize it all.”

Both male characters in *Was tun, wenn's brennt?* and *Herr Lehmann* leave behind the Kreuzberg idealized through “celebrating the immaterial values of friendship, antibourgeois utopian living contexts, nonhierarchical working relationships, sexual liberation, and anticonsumerism” (Mennel 2007). The characters’ newfound desire to join the productive labor force signifies their coming of age and maturity. Indeed, it would seem that an anti-working mentality has continued into recent years. Stefan Wirner cites this mentality as the very thing which threatens the vitality of Kreuzberg: “Das Problem besteht darin, dass die Kreuzberger nicht definieren können, was “Arbeit” bedeutet. In ihrer Sprache gibt es dafür kein Wort”¹² (Wirner 2005). But this laissez faire attitude is also part of what makes Kreuzberg so attractive to those desiring to live an alternative lifestyle: “In Kreuzberg schert sich niemand darum, wer du bist und was du machst”¹³ (quoted in Wedekind 2009).

Kreuzberg continues to be one of the ‘most happening’ districts of Berlin, although some of its sub- and counter-culture movements have spread into the former Eastern districts of Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg. The relatively low rents and diversity continue to attract young creative and progressive people to the area. (Bernstein 2005).

In contrast to the waves of different alternative lifestyles - which evolved throughout history according to the youth generation of any given time – the immigrant community in Kreuzberg has established a permanent identity. Although the districts of Wedding and Neukölln have seen a dramatic increase in immigrant numbers in recent years, Kreuzberg still remains the center of Turkish immigrant life in Berlin.

¹² “The problem is that the Kreuzberger cannot define what constitutes “work”. In their language there is no word for it.”

¹³ “In Kreuzberg no one cares about who you are or about what you do.”

Kreuzberg has become a ‘diasporic space’ with its own institutions. Ethnic businesses in the area include: Turkish internet cafes, television stations, newspapers, and travel agencies. Political and social institutions have been established as part of the community. Some examples of these are “Mothers without Borders”, a campaign founded by a Turkish-German social worker to combat drug dealing in Kreuzberg and AKARSU, an organization which provides job preparation and training for migrant women in medical care and health advising for migrants. In Kreuzberg, alone, there are over forty organizations like these focused on serving immigrants. (Kil and Silver 2006).

Returning, now to the debate about parallel societies, it would seem that those opposed to multiculturalism and immigration have ignored the evidence of successful integration:

Politically speaking, over 50,000 Turks and Kurds have naturalized and a dozen have been elected to the Berlin Senate... Economically, Kreuzberg is also benefiting from new investment in ethnic businesses. There were about 5,000 to 6,000 Turkish enterprises in Berlin in 1998, employing some 20,000 people, out of 22,000 to 24,000 non-German enterprises in the city (Kil and Silver 2006).

A 2010 report from the Open Society Institute (OSI) titled “Muslims in Berlin”, in fact, concludes that “the district of Kreuzberg is a shining example of different cultures and different values co-existing successfully” (quoted in Dowling 2010). This report is part of the “At Home in Europe Project” – a study which focuses on European cities with large Muslim populations in an attempt to protect and improve marginalized communities. The researchers spent two years interviewing 100 Muslims and 100 non-Muslims living in Kreuzberg about various issues. The study found that most residents of Kreuzberg share the same concerns whether they are Muslim or non-Muslim and that there is a deep sense of community and trust within the neighborhood: “Sixty-five per cent of Muslims and almost 90 per cent of non-Muslims said that people in their

neighborhood were trustworthy. Even higher proportions felt that people in their area were willing to help their neighbours (Muslims 80; non-Muslims: 88)” (OSI 2010). The study stressed the importance which *Kiezdenken*¹⁴ plays in the lives of the Muslim interviewees, but, “interestingly the *Kiezdenken* here does not refer to a culturally homogenous area, but to an ethnically and culturally diverse one, where the cohabitation with ethnic Germans is appreciated and separation is regretted” (OSI 2010).

Muslim and non-Muslim respondents have different reasons for moving to Kreuzberg – Muslims were mostly brought to the area through familial ties, whereas non-Muslims were drawn to the district because of its “charm, reputation, and multicultural character”. This diversity is valued by both groups. Kreuzberg provides a safe haven for Muslims, allowing them to blend into the diversity. Many expressed fears of leaving the district because of “concerns about safety and fears of being ‘otherised’ or viewed as different in less ethnically mixed areas... People in Kreuzberg are perceived as having a similar lifestyle, or have at least become familiar and comfortable with such differences” (OSI 2010). The expressed desire of the Muslim group “not to live in an ethnically or religiously homogenous area” along with the fact both groups have frequent contact with each other and there is a high level of cooperation between local politicians and Muslim organizations, pretty much dispels the parallel society postulation that radical separatist groups are going to start cropping up in Kreuzberg. On the contrary, the OSI study produced “an image of Muslims who are striving to establish good relations with their neighbors and participation in their local community while battling discrimination in the job market and at school because of their religion and ethnic background” (Dowling 2010).

¹⁴ Strong identification with one’s district

Perhaps the real reason some Germans fear the diversity of cultures so much is because German national identity is still in the process of being established. “No single dominant image of the new Berlin has been constructed for the city since 1990” and Germany continues to have trouble reinventing a common identity which transcends its past (Cochrane and Jonas 1999). Time and time again, Germans have blamed the high levels of unemployment and poverty in immigrant communities on the immigrants themselves, claiming that they are reluctant to integrate. But it is the Germans’ reluctance to reformulate a national identity which includes minority cultures that perpetuates this discrimination and disparity. Germans must let go of the attempt to preserve a homogenous society. And they are slowly taking steps towards a broader definition of what it means to be German.

*Jus sanguinis*¹⁵ was established as the principle element of the German citizenship law in 1913 through the *Reichs- und Staatsangehörigkeitsgesetz*¹⁶. The traditional definition of a German based on blood lineage prevailed through two empires and two republics (Göktürk, Gramling and Kaes 2007). It was not until 1999 with the reform of the State Citizenship Law that this definition finally expanded beyond ethnicity and towards a more modern understanding of the nation. “The concept of the nation as it developed out of the French Revolution is inclusive, because it defines itself as a political entity – essentially a republic – open to anybody who is willing to accept the rules of this particular nation” (von Dirke 1994). The reform provided about 900,000 Turkish guest workers a streamlined naturalization process and allowed for dual citizenship until one’s 23rd birthday. Many people called this a revolutionary breakthrough (Gottschlich 2007) and an end to Germany’s “guest-worker ideology” (Göktürk, Gramling and Kaes 2007).

¹⁵ Right of blood

¹⁶ Imperial and Nationality Act

Upon arrival in Germany, Turkish guest-workers and their families were defined by the social type of the “stranger”. Georg Simmel defines the stranger as a “potential wanderer... the person who comes today and stays to morrow”. The stranger’s position is “determined by the fact that he has not belonged to it from the beginning” in the same way that Turks were new to German society (Simmel 1950). Just as the stranger is neither here nor there, Turks became caught in the dilemma of being neither completely Turkish nor completely German and, as they settled down in the place of their activity, they stood out even more starkly (Simmel 1950). During the guest worker program with Turkey in the 1960s, integration “was defined in contradictory terms as preserving the home-land culture of a minority in order to facilitate re-migration, but also contained an expectation that non-German minorities should adapt to the culture of the host country Germany” (Kürsat-Ahlers 1996). Though progressive, the reform of the State Citizenship Law still did not end the grouping of Turks as strangers nor promote the social cohesion it intended.

The naturalization process is laborious and time consuming. Zafer Şenocak, an author from Turkey now living in Germany, describes the procedure as “absurdly demeaning and bureaucratic”. It requires extensive paperwork and the prerequisites are often ambiguous and prohibitive. The applicant must demonstrate unequivocal moral character, solvency and fastidious financial planning – this criterion is not clearly demarcated (Göktürk, Gramling and Kaes 2007). The process takes, on average, nine months plus the additional time required for the homeland to revoke citizenship and the entrance fee is about three-fourths of one’s monthly income (Wernicke 2007).

In 2001, the Independent Commission on Immigration effectively closed the twenty-year-old debate on Germany’s status as an immigration country by finally stating that immigration

must be recognized as a structural feature of Germany's society and economy (Göktürk, Gramling and Kaes 2007). Increasing globalization offers new economic opportunities but also places new demands on a nation. Demographically, Germany desperately needs immigrants to make up its workforce. Germany's birthrate is declining, their population is aging, and the number of employable people is shrinking. Without immigrants to supplement their work force, Germany could face economic decline. (Connolly 2010; Süßmuth 2007).

Though steps have been taken away from the German tradition of ethnically defined citizenship, it still needs to let go of the desire for a homogenous society and admit that "a common culture does not mean a common religion, and it does not mean membership of a common ethnic or racial group. It does not even mean a common language..." (Raz 1998). It is not necessary for a society to have these things in common in order for it to be successful. There are other ways for people to relate to one another and there are common bonds beyond these basic identity markers. "A civil society does not try to erase differences and conflict via homogenization or exclusion, but instead spells out exactly what is permissible and what not, or, in other words, which differences can be expressed culturally without disrupting social cohesion" (von Dirke 1994). Successful integration does not mean assimilation. One must not give up one's traditions and try at all costs to blend into the new society in order to be a productive member.

Integration, rather, is dependent on social acceptance. Before successful integration can take place, there needs to be intensive promotion of societal acceptance of many "other" and new German citizens (Brenner 2007). This raises the question of how a culture is even defined. What makes a Turk - a Turk or a German - a German? Are the Soviet migrants with German heritage but no language skills, who were given citizenship, really German? Are they more German than third generation Turks, who have no citizenship rights even though they were born and raised in

Germany and speak only German? The notions of German identity are especially frustrating to second and third generation immigrants. The attempt to become German legally underscores the fact that many already think of themselves as German both socially and culturally – even when native Germans do not (Chin 2002).

Perhaps the reason diversity is so successful in Kreuzberg, is because the ‘other’ is the norm there. Difference is embraced, and it is these differences, along with a mutual respect, that constitute the common identity. Those like Angela Merkel, who argue that multiculturalism is failing, are only encouraging it to do so by maintaining the conception of the immigrant as the outsider. Minorities have identified with German society and have integrated themselves into it, while still maintaining their unique cultures. It is merely the mindset of the Germans who wish to maintain a homogenous society that needs to be overcome. It is this mindset that is killing multiculturalism and perpetuating its failure. Kreuzberg is a great example of what German society could look like once Germans accept to broaden their conception of national identity.

Kreuzberg is a district in which sub- and counter-cultures have flourished and which is home to a diversity of backgrounds, lifestyles, religions, and political views – all living, for the most part, quite peacefully with one another in a constantly evolving and adapting environment. Of course, it is not without instances of conflict, prejudice, and discrimination, but the world is not perfect. It never can nor will be. However, adopting the mindset of the inhabitants of Kreuzberg, who value and treasure differences and diversity, rather than fearing them, could be a step in the right direction for the German nation.

Works Cited

- Anonymous. "Europe: German Gentrification; Communes in Berlin." *The Economist* 398.8720 (2011): 59.
- Anthony, Andrew. "Multiculturalism Is Dead. Hurrah?" *The Guardian*. 8 Apr. 2004.
- Baggini, Julian. "The Curry House Waiter and Other Problems." *The Guardian*. 1 Aug. 2005.
- Bernstein, Richard. "Berlin: Go West, Young Clubgoers." *The New York Times*. 30 Oct. 2005.
- Brenner, Michael. "Rewarded for Good Behavior." Gökürk, Deniz, David Gramling and Anton Kaes. *Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration, 1955-2005*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. 176-177.
- Broder, Henryk M. "What's So Bad About Parallel Societies?" *Spiegel Online*. 20 Oct. 2010.
- Chin, R. C.-K. "Imagining a German Multiculturalism: Aras Oren and the Contested Meanings of the "Guest Worker," 1955-1980." *Radical History Review* 2002.83 (2002): 44-72.
- Clark, Matthew. "Germany's Angela Merkel: Multiculturalism Has 'utterly Failed'" Web log post. *Global News Blog*. The Christian Science Monitor, 17 Oct. 2010.
- Cochrane, A., and A. Jonas. "Reimagining Berlin: World City, National Capital or Ordinary Place?" *European Urban and Regional Studies* 6.2 (1999): 145-64.
- Connolly, Kate. "Angela Merkel Declares Death of German Multiculturalism." *Guardian.co.uk*. 17 Oct. 2010.
- Dowling, Siobhan. "Are Berlin's Muslims a Model for Integration." *Spiegel Online*. 28 Apr. 2010.
- Düspohl, Martin. *Kleine Kreuzberg-Geschichte*. Berlin: Berlin Story Verlag, 2009.
- "European Multiculturalism." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 53.26 (2007): B4.
- Goddard, Jeannette. "Women – An Impediment for Naturalization." Gökürk, Deniz, David Gramling and Anton Kaes. *Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration, 1955-2005*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. 170-173.
- Gottschlich, Jürgen. "Bravo Almania!" Gökürk, Deniz, David Gramling, and Anton Kaes. *Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration, 1955-2005*. Berkeley: University of California, 2007. 168-69.
- Grésillon, B. "Berlin, Cultural Metropolis: Changes in the Cultural Geography of Berlin since Reunification." *Ecumene* 6.3 (1999): 284-94.

- Herr Lehmann*. Dir. Leander Haußmann. Perf. Christian Ulman. Boje Buck Produktion, 2003. DVD.
- Hiscott, William. "'Parallel Societies' - A Neologism Gone Bad." *Multicultural Center Prague* (2005). *Migrationonline.cz*.
- Kemper, Franz-Josef. "Restructuring of Housing and Ethnic Segregation: Recent Developments in Berlin." *Urban Studies* 35.10 (1998): 1765-789.
- Kil, Wolfgang, and Hilary Silver. "From Kreuzberg to Marzahn: New Migrant Communities in Berlin." *German Politics & Society* 24.4 (2006): 95-121.
- Kürsat-Ahlers, Elçin. "The Turkish Minority in German Society." Horrocks, David, and Eva Kolinsky. *Turkish Culture in German Society Today*. Providence: Berghahn Books, 1996. 113-129.
- Lang, Barbara. *Mythos Kreuzberg: Ethnographie Eines Stadtteils (1961-1995)*. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1998.
- Lerman, Antony. "In Defence of Multiculturalism." *The Guardian*. 22 Mar. 2010.
- Malik, Kenan. "Multiculturalism Undermines Diversity." *The Guardian*. 17 Mar. 2010.
- Mennel, Barbara. "Political Nostalgia and Local Memory: The Kreuzberg of the 1980s in Contemporary German Film." *The Germanic Review* 82.1 (2007): 54-77.
- Modood, Tariq. "Multiculturalism, Citizenship and National Identity." *OpenDemocracy*. 16 May 2007.
- Meza, Ed. "Berlin for Beginners: German Capital Hides Guilty Secrets and Pleasures." *Variety.com*. 7 Feb. 2005.
- "Muslims in Berlin." *At Home in Europe Project*. Open Society Institute. 2010.
- Pötzl, Norbert. "Life in a Parallel Society." *Spiegel Online*. 16 Apr. 2008.
- Raz, Joseph. "Multiculturalism." *Ratio Juris* 11.3 (1998): 193-205.
- Ross, Jan. "Con: One Passport." Göktürk, Deniz, David Gramling and Anton Kaes. *Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration, 1955-2005*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. 175-176.
- Schneider, Peter. "The New Berlin Wall." *The New York Times Magazine*. 4 Dec. 2005.
- Simmel, Georg. "The Stranger." Wolff, Kurt. *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. New York: Free Press, 1950, pp. 402-408.

Süssmuth, Rita. "Report of the Independent Commission on Immigration." Göktürk, Deniz, David Gramling and Anton Kaes. *Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration, 1955-2005*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. 182-184.

Von Dirke, Sabine. "Multikulti: The German Debate on Multiculturalism." *German Studies Review* 17.3 (1994): 513-36.

Was Tun, Wenn's Brennt? Dir. Gregor Schnitzler. Perf. Til Schweiger. Claussen & Wöbke Filmproduktion GmbH, 2002. DVD.

Wedekind, Beate. "Kreuzberg Ist Eine Weltstadt." *Berliner Morgenpost*. 30 June 2009.

Wernicke, Christian. "The Long Road to the German Passport." Göktürk, Deniz, David Gramling and Anton Kaes. *Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration, 1955-2005*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. 156-159.

"What is a German?" Göktürk, Deniz, David Gramling and Anton Kaes. *Germany in Transit : Nation and Migration, 1955-2005*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. 151-153.

Wilders, Geert. "The Failure of Multiculturalism and How to Turn the Tide." Speech. Annual Lecture at the Magna Carta Foundation. Rome. 25 Mar. 2011. *Front Page Magazine*. 28 Mar. 2011.

Wirner, Stefan. "Die Stellung Kreuzbergs Im Universum." *Die Tageszeitung*. 4 Apr. 2005.