IT'S ABOUT EDUCATION, STUPID

Filmmaker and author Güner Balcı argues that Germany is neglecting its immigrant children. A polemic

he misgivings harbored by many Germans with regard to migrants are steadfast and long-standing. This will not come as a surprise to anyone who has taken the time to examine the state of migrant integration in German society over the past decades. What is alarming, however, is the number of Germans who judge the failed integration of migrants and their children more harshly than they do the failings of their fellow Germans. It's not only those on the right who see every criminal with Turkish, Iraqi or Tunisian roots as an opportunity to demonize all migrants; they are not the only ones who sneer at "Kanake" talk, a derogatory term used to describe the German spoken among migrant youths that often comprises crude colloquialisms and expressions in their native tongues. In fact, no matter where they stand on the political spectrum, people who are quick to criticize migrants inevitably have one thing in common: a

false sense of superiority. Many of us in Germany have yet to learn how to share our lives with people who are "other." This seems to be a value and an approach to life that we rarely strive to achieve. Few people in Germany seem to even have the ability to view "strangers"

as equals. Today, this inability is creating an even greater rift in German society. All too often, public debate on integration is characterized by a willingness to focus solely on the shortcomings of "others."

Indeed, it would seem that for years no one has been prepared to take the social and political responsibility needed to be able to seek out and find new solutions. How else can we account for the fact that over several decades, large numbers of youth socialized in a Muslim context in Germany have consistently lost out in terms of education? How else can we explain why Germany's current government has not been able to fill a single cabinet post with a person with a "migration background"? And even after nearly 60 years of recruitment agreements, the prospect of having a head of state with Arab or Turkish roots remains wholly inconceivable.

A recent TV program examined the conditions at a school in the Berlin district of Neukölln where almost all students come from immigrant families, including socalled problem students, that is, those whose families depend on welfare funds (Hartz IV). The report begins by stating that 18 of the 24 students in the class arrive late for first period. We

are told that many parents fail to wake up in time to get their kids to school on time. According to the report, these kids are often made to attend school only to render their parents eligible for Kindergeld (child benefits a social security payout for all parents and guardians). A teacher with a thick Eastern European accent - a man who thinks the plural of "crisis" is "crisises" – is seen lamenting the lack of interest in education among his students. The film them shows close-ups of children who, though they appear self-conscious, are nevertheless proud to be the object of media attention. Although most of these students were born in Germany, not a single one of them can deliver a grammatically correct sentence in German. Scenes such as these should be

enough to warrant a thorough analysis of how and where things went wrong. How is it possible that huge numbers of children circumvent the legal obligation to attend school? How can this happen in a country that had a €48.1 billion GDP surplus in the first two quarters of 2018 alone. And what's wrong with the students themselves? Can it be possible that all their problems are related to their oft-cited "migration background"? In all honesty, do we even want them



to be mixed in with the major- kids, the Muslim ghetto is their ity of students? Should they lead "normal" lives, where they attend the state actually carries out its supervisory duty with regard to mothers and fathers who are overwhelmed by their circumstances? These children live marginalized lives in districts that many nonmigrants actively avoid; and they are cared for and receive their education in kindergartens and schools that are widely known to be problematic.

Kids like these can be found throughout Germany, especially in areas where large numbers of immigrants reside. From a statistical perspective, they are the "losers" of German society. After all, the cold hard reality is that access to education is directly related to a child's social and economic background. For these

only place of influence, a place where the often romanticized traschool regularly, that is, where ditional values of their grandparents' culture become the benchmark for their lives in Germany.

By the end of the TV report, attentive viewers will have begun to notice - almost accidentally the longings and hardships etched into the heart and mind of one particular pimply-faced teenage boy. This boy with Turkish roots sits down and begins to play a piece on the piano – something he taught himself to do. His teacher admits that all these years, she's never known he could play piano.

It goes without saying that we cannot single out teachers as being solely responsible for the thousands of students who leave school every year without attaining their degree or with a certificate that condemns them to

dead-end jobs. This state of affairs is a consequence of massive political neglect, as well. In fact, the school featured in the TV report was slated to be shut down due to declining student numbers – a fact that was left unmentioned by the producers of the program, which was broadcast on German public television. Instead, the school became a repository for students who were not accepted elsewhere. Now, with an increased budget and new friendly-sounding support programs, the school has become an institution for those who are more or less biding time before a likely adulthood spent on Hartz IV or in prison. I guess it didn't occur to anyone to put the few remaining students into a different school.

Instead of disrupting a classroom populated by the children of the ambitious middle class, these children are left to fend for themselves, causing more strain on weary teachers and creating fertile terrain for Islamists in search of new souls. These are clearly not the goals of integration.

GÜNER BALCI

is a documentary film maker, journalist and author. Her latest novel Das Mädchen und der Gotteskrieger (The girl and the holy warrior) was published in

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Berg for decades feel displaced in places like Reinickendorf or Hohenschönhausen, especially when they haven't moved there voluntarily.

For decades, the poor in Berlin had always had a roof over their heads and a lock on their door. They have now become much more visible. Many people with precarious employment - and there are many in Berlin - who rely on the dole or are raising children alone are afraid of losing their homes and having to live on the street. I will never forget the moment when my almost 90-yearold neighbor came down the stairs crying, a note in her hand informing her that her lease was being terminated because her landlord wanted to move into the apartment himself. But where to go if Berlin is the only place that gives you life, where no one gives a hoot if your hat's on crooked, your belly is big and round or your skin is dark? To live in abandoned shacks, allotment gardens or tents?

The number of born-Berliners who still live there is dwindling. At present the figure is 47 percent, while in Berlin Mitte, the city's most central and most gentrified district, it's only 34 percent.

As has always been the case, young people without a penny to their name are moving to Berlin to try their luck. They come from Brandenburg, Hamburg, from Dresden and from the Ruhr Valley, and despite the cliché, not so much from Swabia. In terms of non-Germans, most newcomers are from Poland, followed by Turkey, Russia, Syria and Bulgaria. In the past five years, Berlin has become a Noah's Ark, not only for refugees from Syria and Afghanistan, but for artists and intellectuals from Hungary, Poland, Turkey, Croatia and

even Great Britain, who cannot tolerate the rise of new nationalism in their countries or have lost their work prospects for political reasons. They are all forming communities that are more or less mixed, but often exist in parallel as well.

Most of the older generation of born Berliners is relatively composed in facing these changes. Their city has always reinvented itself anew, even during the time of the Wall, when it served as center stage for the Cold War.

Imagine, if you will, that all those who moved to the city over the past 30 years disappeared

for just 10 minutes, and with them their habits and customs, the tables lining the sidewalks in front of cafés, the late-night convenience stores, the fruits, spices and meals, and the ways of walking, dressing, dancing, working and raising families. Even the most parochial born-Berliners wouldn't wait a minute before screaming: "Enough of this nonsense!"

ANNETT GRÖSCHNER is a novelist and journalism professor at the University

of the Arts Berlin.

