(Moshtari Hilal) مشتری هلال
சிந்துஜன் வரதராஜா
(Sinthujan Varatharajah)

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Preface

The book before you, *English in Berlin*, should be read against the backdrop of its genesis. It concerns a text that originated in the spontaneity of direct discussion. Only afterwards was it transcribed, extended, edited and finally translated into English. Thus, *English in Berlin* also allows us to observe how an Instagram Live discussion may develop into a book.

The idea for the digital discussion series, to which the episode reproduced here also belongs, came to us both at the start of 2021. As is to be expected, it was starkly determined by the pandemic and the accompanying social distancing measures that rapidly accelerated the digitalisation of the world in 2020. During this time, interactions with each other shifted more and more online: one Instagram Live notification came after the other and email inboxes were properly inundated with Zoom invitations. When we went online with our Instagram Live format in Spring 2021, we could already observe a certain fatigue among many users. People were becoming increasingly aware of the limits and strains of the pandemic and the digital relations that came with it. And yet, in spite of the impending exodus from these communication media, we decided to use one of them to meet regularly for online discussions of up to 90 minutes. We committed ourselves to speaking about subjects that concerned us, as we used to do as friends, before the pandemic. We wanted to invite our Followers on Instagram to take part in the conversation.

Our series of discussions pursued the idea of breaking away from the dominant logic according to which the content, language and form of public debates about socially relevant issues are controlled and regulated by

so-called experts. We strived for other forms of speech, learning and exchange. We conceived our Instagram Live series as a kind of digital and decentralised talk show, in which knowledge and discourse would circulate less vertically than horizontally. A few days before each episode, we would invite our audience to process publicly available sources that were relevant to the subject with us, which we shared in a Google Doc in preparation for each discussion. We asked them to send us questions and comments and to take an active part in the conversation via Live Chat. In this way, the first discussion emerged as a direct critique and response to the WDR talk show *Die letzte Instanz*, which had revealed the racism of German television personalities and public broadcasting editors in January 2021. In our conversation, we argued for our own debates, which do not align with the whims, ignorance or arrogance of so-called mainstream culture and the majority society but rather centre and pursue their own questions and perspectives.

What does the text gain and what does it lose in the process of transcription? How does it change when it's transmitted and translated from one (plat)form that is met with distrust to another (plat)form that is institutionally privileged as a 'source'? How does the afterlife of a printed and edited text differ from that of unedited, spoken words? What influence does the form of exchange have on the limits and possibilities of its contents and to what extent does it determine its weight and reception?

Due to a technical error, which interestingly only appeared after the transcription of our live discussion, the original video of our conversation on Instagram froze. At the moment, it is not possible to play the video or hear us speaking about this subject in its initial form. The text is, however, available in this book and it now overwrites its origin, in a certain way. In this editorial process of transformation, we decided not to stick to the original. The present *English in Berlin* is therefore not wholly con-

gruent with the 77-minute-and-13-second conversation on Instagram. It is left to the reader to recognise where the spoken text ends and the written one takes over. *English in Berlin* has taken on a form that is no longer determined solely by politics or the arbitrariness of algorithms from the U.S. company Meta, even if the book market will impose its own politics and arbitrariness on the text.

The conversation is part of a global critique of elites that is anything but new, but which is rarely conducted in this way in the context of a metropolis in the so-called Global North. Our principal contribution here is the centring of the perspectives of those who have experienced biographical, linguistic or legal exclusion in Germany. On the basis of this experience, we look at conditions in Berlin and comment on them. These are partly observations that are rarely articulated in research or in conventional media reporting. That's why it seems all the more important to us as observers and participants of – as well as people affected by – these economic, political, social and cultural conditions and urban transformations, to speak about these issues and thereby bring them into focus. Through conversation we perceive, seek to understand and name tendencies, contrasts and contradictions. The extensions of the conversation partly take their cue from the work of Olúfémi O. Táíwò and Sarah Kunz, who critically examine the global, economic and colonial traditions behind questions of elite mobilities in their respective books *Elite Capture* (Haymarket Books, 2022) and *The Expatriate* (Manchester University Press, 2023).

Our series of discussions confirmed to us that it's possible to produce a counter-public for critical debates out of the relative periphery of everyday spaces like social media. Their broad, multifaceted and contradictory resonances helped us to see that other ways of speaking and reflecting, directed far from hierarchical

and exclusionary modes of knowledge production, are not only possible but also necessary. They are justified and they generate relevance, even if they are not taken up in dominant media, which, however, did happen in the case of our episode on the subject of Nazi legacies and Nazi backgrounds, which followed *English in Berlin*. The media scandalisation of this episode also led to other topics in our series being overshadowed. So, we were all the more pleased when Wirklichkeit Books took up *English in Berlin* a year later and wanted to publish it as a book. With this publication, we hope to give the criticism articulated in it an expanded life and new public sphere.

(Moshtari Hilal) مشتری هلال and சிந்துஜன் வரதராஜா (Sinthujan Varatharajah), August 2022

English in Berlin — Exclusions in a Cosmopolitan Society

M: Sinthujan, would you like to give an introduction?

S: Sure. The topic of our conversation today is English in Berlin. The idea came to me as I was walking around here in Wedding in February 2021 and I noticed some lettering on the exterior wall of a residential building, which read: 'My Culture is not a Costume.' I took a photo of this and posted it as a Story, asking who is speaking here, whom it's meant to address and who in fact understands it. That was the point of departure for our discussion. We wanted to posit this question, of what it means to speak English in Berlin. And we're trying to describe who it is that speaks English in Berlin. The central question here is, who is included by English in Berlin, and who is excluded.

M: Exactly. In preparation for the discussion, we put out a call on our Stories for people to send anecdotes or questions around this topic. We could start straight away with one comment from a follower and an anecdote that comes to mind, and then consider together how such a situation arises and what it means. I'll just read it out loud:

'Really cool that you're taking on this topic. I've always felt weird about the fact that in bars, for example, it's taken for granted that people speak English. But it was never an option to demand, 'Speak German!' because then I feel like I'm playing into this racist formula, that in Germany, you better speak German. Curious to see if you address this ambivalence.'

This fits with a story that I told you before: Recently I was in a shoe shop, and I asked whether they had a specific model in my size. To which the saleswoman answered irately in English: 'Oh, I don't speak German.' As though I had done something wrong. Then I apologised immediately, as a reflex, because I – like the person in the message – didn't want to appear as someone who insists on speaking German, as though it were the only legitimate language for public space. This moment felt really uncomfortable. But at the same time, I also thought to myself, 'Wow, you can work here without speaking German? My parents didn't get any work because they couldn't speak German! And this rule just doesn't apply to you all of a sudden?'

S: Yeah, Berlin is a textbook example for these kinds of encounters. You always experience these situations in certain districts, whether in shops, cafés, restaurants, galleries or other settings. There, you really do come across people who speak very little or even no German whatsoever, but who are still in direct contact with German-speaking clientele. They take on a representative role, and yet it doesn't seem to be required of them that they should speak German. That's quite a new development, especially for people like us, who went through the German asylum system in the 1980s and '90s. We grew up with parents who, for decades, were not offered German courses, and of whom it was nonetheless demanded that they speak German. Even in jobs where not a single word of German was ever required in order to perform the work, not to mention ever taking on a representative role.

M: It's not just the demands of the job market. Even for family reunification – when your partner moves from a non-EU country – one has to demonstrate a knowledge of German. That means for a lot of people, as for us and our families, that speaking German is not just a requirement to be allowed to work in this country but also to be allowed to exist here at all! People from the Global South who don't have any visa privileges are not granted residency permits without knowledge of German. This isn't just limited to basic spoken knowledge; they're supposed to be able to read and write in German shortly after they arrive, or even beforehand.

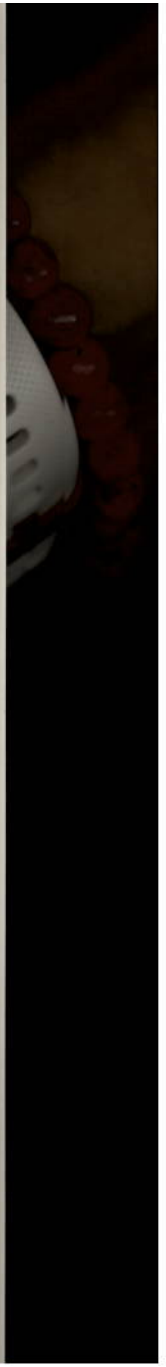
S: I know this from parts of my family in Germany. For three decades they've had no secure residency status here, and no claim to citizenship, because their knowledge of German is judged by the state as being too 'basic'. Because of this, my relatives ask me time and again to write to the German authorities in my 'good German', to ask for a passport in spite of their 'bad German'. And their German isn't even 'bad'! They just can't read or write well in German because, as refugees, they were never given access to language schools!

M: Oh wow, that's heart-breaking. As I'm sure you know, among these mechanisms of entitlement and disenfranchisement is also the issue of the recognition of educational qualifications. For many families who have generated a certain social and economic capital through their education in their countries of origin, the integration into the German system often comes with a decline

in social status. Of course, the loss of privileges presupposes that one must have possessed them at one time in another country. But the point I want to make is about the humiliation and disparagement that people experience because their qualifications are not recognised in Germany. Why? Because their educations didn't take place in German or English, but rather in a language that simply isn't acknowledged here. And I see these cases in direct contrast to those of people with a knowledge of English – even when this is the only language they know – who experience broader empowerment and more agency in Germany, especially in cities.

S: I don't know how it was for you, but for me it was the case that, in primary school in the 1990s, we were hounded through these remedial classes in order to learn German. It was German for Refugees and German for Resettlers (ethnic German immigrants from Eastern European countries), the equivalent of today's Welcome Classes. We didn't have a choice. Ice cold, we were split from the German children to be taught German separately, in another classroom. With this in mind, I find it astonishing and alarming that English-speaking people can live ten or more years in Berlin without being forced by Germans to speak 'sufficient' German.

I think our analysis of the language requirements – for us as children, who are forced; for our parents, who are denied forms of access; and for expats, from whom no one expects a willingness to integrate by way of language acquisition – has nothing to do with the motivation or means of conservatives and the right-wing, who fervently deflect this debate towards national populism. The difference between



us and those Germans with a Nazi background and/or a colonial background who engage in these discussions is precisely that we don't make the claim to be defending the German. For us it is absolutely not about ensuring the supremacy of the German language in public spaces. German is, and remains for us, an imperialist language that has been and still is violent. Instead, we'd like to address the hypocrisy of the double standards behind it and bring to the forefront of the debate the classist and racist conduct that these developments enable.

M: Yes, for us it's not about speaking German, but about why speaking English is accepted as the legitimate alternative in some spaces and places. And why an anglophone infrastructure can exist so self-evidently, without being seen as a parallel society. Because, when parallel societies are talked about in Germany, the people being referred to are not usually those we call expats in this discussion.

S: We began our initial discussions with the question of whether English is inclusive or exclusive.

M: Yes. And what do you think?

S: I would say that it can be inclusive, depending on the context, but then it can also exclude. I think, in

Berlin, it is a language that predominantly marginalises. And herein lies the problem of understanding that we have with so many English-speaking people, who always feel alienated when we voice this critique.

M: We'd also spoken about the different English dialects that exist, and which collide in certain spaces. When we talk about English in Berlin, which English are we talking about?

S: You've also lived in Neukölln, where you weren't far from Weserstraße, which, through gentrification, has become the 'party mile' in the past years. When you walked along Weserstraße, what kind of English did you hear there?

M: Hmm. American English.

S: Not British English?

M: More rarely. I have to add that I had a lot to do with North Americans in Neukölln, who all lived among each other in a kind of parallel society. But I believe, or I know where you want to go with this: they are native speakers, or people ... what did we call it again? ... Exactly, people who speak

International School English. An English that you have to be able to afford. It's primarily affluent families who can afford to send their children to renowned and very expensive schools with internationally compatible qualifications that are valid in the West. It's rare that you hear an English in Weserstraße that doesn't sound native or academic.

S: Yeah. Even people who come from the so-called Global South and live here in Berlin don't usually speak the 'average English' of their countries of origin. It's more often a case of International School English, which is of course better than our English, learned in the German educational system. That shouldn't be taken as surprising or strange. Contrary to what Europeans assume and successfully promulgate around the world, European educational systems are not better than non-European ones. What I actually want to say with this is that you explicitly notice which class they probably come from in the 'Global South', or rather, from which forms of access they might benefit. These people may come from the so-called Global South, but indeed, from its rich areas. They come from urban, bourgeois and academic households, which actually have much more in common economically and socially with the so-called Global North than with the clichéd and particularly class-ignorant conceptions of these areas outside of Europe, which exist here. Class-specific distinctions are almost never made in these observations. Of course, it's the mobile classes of the so-called Global South who gain most from this, who can subsequently act as though they were the representatives of another world. But they're not.

M: Oh yeah, I also know a few who stretch this into a career model.

S: Recently, when I ordered something to eat from Lieferando, a delivery man came who could only speak 'broken' English and absolutely no German. After a short conversation, I found out that he came from India. By now there are many people from the Indian subcontinent in Berlin, in numbers there never were here before. Many of them work under very precarious job conditions, for example as drivers for delivery service start-ups. That is a relatively new development, which alters the image of Berlin as a city. Today you see, for example, men with Sikh turbans on electric bicycles riding through the city, as they simultaneously speak Punjabi or Hindi into their phones and navigate through the city. That was, until recently, an image and a soundscape that you were more likely to know from the colonial metropolis of London.

This group of racialised workers, who have suddenly become so visible on an everyday basis on the streets of Berlin, but who nonetheless remain so invisible in discussions and in the perception of labour migration, experiences a totally different reality here from those we encounter so prominently in our artistic and creative milieus. The latter are, however, those who loudly proclaim that they represent *the* Global South. As they do so, debates that are relevant for all racialised people are not conducted in the English of the delivery driver from India but in International School English, the language of the capital-rich elites.

M: Yes. It seems to me that, in these discussions, racialised expats stand in direct competition with us as racialised people who grew up here. This is a competition that arises from the artificial scarcity of representation of non-white people in Germany. In contrast to those who grew up here, expats often have totally other backgrounds and are therefore immediately more attractive for the culture industry. They tend to come from social contexts in which the society's approach to diversity is much more advanced than in Germany. They experience other forms of mobility, visibility, and potentials for speaking, thinking and feeling.

In London, for example, there is a totally different treatment of people who have experienced racism, as the discourse there has developed over several generations and colonial histories are much more immediately present – both on the streets and in discourses. Our self-conception is often different. Some of those people who move from London to Berlin as racialised creative workers are children from the second or third generation of immigrants or refugees, whose parents have experienced other forms of mobility in Great Britain than our parents have in Germany. Their parents often speak more English than our parents do German. There's a system and a history to this. Many of the racialised people there come from former British colonies, where they were of course differently exposed to the English language.

S: The colonial educational systems, in British colonies in particular, were taken over with few modifications, even after supposed independence.

M: Exactly. People with these biographies move through the culture industry with another self-conception entirely. They come with CVs in the bag that are not at all comparable with our educational qualifications and our attempts to find internships and jobs in Germany.

S: In Great Britain there are, from my observations, also more opportunities for racialised people and people from working class backgrounds to progress than there are here. The educational system there is more open for people from non-academic families. In Germany, conversely, the educational inequalities are manifestly awful. The selection process here already begins with children and continues into adulthood. After my *Abitur* (equivalent of A Levels in the UK) I also went straight to London to study, because of the gloomy prospects that I saw in Germany. In the countryside, where I was forced to grow up, it was even worse than in the city. You also did a year abroad in London later, right?

M: Yes, I did a year of studies there. That was really eye-opening for me, to see how homogenous and uncritical my educational trajectory was and how many opportunities are taken from people like us through the many social exclusions that are still wholly accepted here. In London, racialised people move much more self-evidently through different milieus and their living conditions are significantly more varied. Generally, they are much more visible and their histories and realities in the country are more present in the public sphere.

S: They often even feel British!

M: Yeah, because they've contributed to writing British history and their struggles and their cultures have also altered the country, and that can't be put into question. During my time in school in Germany we were still discussing whether this was a country of immigration. Here there are so few non-white people active in politics that we relativise right-wing and neoliberal content in our desire for diversity, just because the up-and-coming politicians have names from somewhere else.

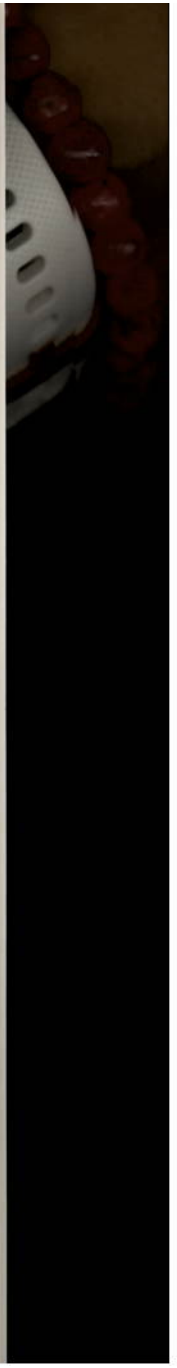
We were ourselves in the role of expats in other countries then too. I can imagine that the local population in London or Jordan perceived me that way when I lived there as an international student. I think that's a role that you can fall into more quickly than you might think if you don't actively consider the structures in which you operate. At my university in London, for example, many British students studied only part-time and had jobs on the side, in order to be able to afford their studies at all. The university was not interested in expanding scholarships to cover the local students, because they had enough demand through the international students from rich households and through foreign scholarships. I too was in London on a German scholarship. That was an interesting experience, to stand on the other side of the 'import economy'.

S: I don't know if the term expat really makes sense in my case. I didn't spend a year abroad there, nor did

I arrive with a scholarship or any other financial support but rather I had to struggle for ten years at my own expense, aside from *BAföG* (German federal student grant). Beyond that, I had to take a student loan in order to pay my tuition fees. Just like the students from the working class there. So, I *really* lived in London. It was the only place 'abroad' that I could have afforded during those ten years of my life. Just physically being in that very expensive city was such a huge financial challenge for me and my family, that I couldn't afford a holiday or a semester abroad during that time. While it felt like my schoolfriends from Germany at that time were travelling during every break and doing Erasmus programmes here and there, I had to make sure that I wasn't homeless in London. The Germans I met there at the universities were also often from academic families and mostly came with scholarships. They were usually only there temporarily. For them it was a year abroad among many others that jazzed up their CVs, made them appear 'more international', and which were maybe followed by periods in Berkeley or Monash. It wasn't like that for me. London was my second exile. My British exile from the German exile, from my family's exile from 'Sri Lankan'-occupied Eelam.

Unlike expats here, there I was neither especially cool or desirable, nor in any way more mobile than others with similar starting conditions to mine. My social capital functioned differently there. I had many more economic and emotional insecurities because – unlike the other Eelam Tamils, for example, who grew up in London – I had no family there who earned in Sterling, or who could help me out in emergencies.

As a non-expat in Berlin, being friends with expats has something to do with status. It translates into an expression of social and cultural capital. For many, it changes their external and internal percep-



tion, and you acquire international relationships – not just places to stay overnight but also networks that could potentially take you further in your career. A circle of expat friends makes you cosmopolitan, which is to say, globally 'more relevant'. My presence in London didn't have the same effect. There I was just one of hundreds of thousands of people from abroad, who came and went. The people there were more confused and fascinated by my biography and my accent. In London I was even described as a double FoB by other non-white people. That was not positive.

M: FoB, as in Fresh off the Boat.

S: Exactly. London is in fact set up differently than Berlin, politically and economically speaking. For decades, actually for centuries, it has attracted tens of thousands of people every year, as a hyper-capitalist, colonial metropole.

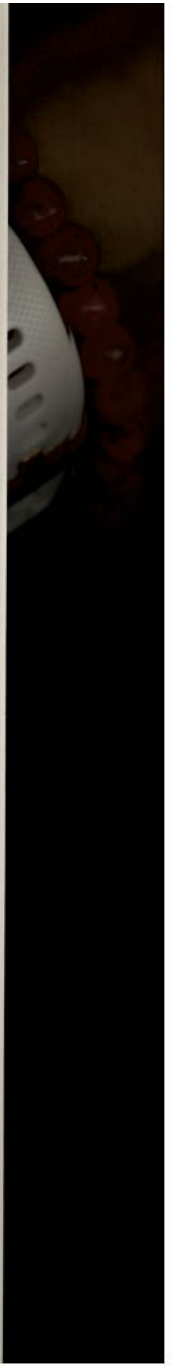
Asylum seekers who arrived in divided Berlin, like my family back then, often had little interest in staying here, as the city didn't possess a strong economy and it was cut off from the rest of Western Europe. Berlin is indeed still one of the poorest and, at the same time, cheapest Western European capital cities; and there is a widespread view among many ethnic minorities in the old federal states that Berlin is a dirty and regressive city that offers no future to people like us. Accordingly, my parents were anything but glad about me moving from

London to Berlin. For them it was a socioeconomic regression of which they couldn't make sense, and which didn't advance me but rather set me back in terms of opportunities and development. They still tell me that I should go back to London (laughs).

M: Yeah. London has this reputation, that there are more chances for migrants to further themselves there. The dynamic is more neoliberal. Berlin, however, is known for being a city you move to in order to slow down. Expats come to Berlin to avoid the economic pressure of other cities; you can survive here on a significantly lower income than in Paris, New York or London. Those who can afford it come here to switch off and enjoy their lives, to drink a beer at 11am by the Spree or a flat white in one of the many cafés. But with what you're telling me, it doesn't sound like it was your chosen home.

S: Our families had very little choice when they came to Germany. They were fleeing genocides and wars when they came to this country. And even once they'd entered the asylum system, they had very little freedom to make decisions. Hence, we were driven out of one camp into the next, literally out of the cities – including Berlin – and with that, out of white people's sight.

M: Here, you only have to listen to the stories of racialised people who were socialised in Germany, who were rejected from art, acting and film schools, for example, and with what kinds of racist arguments they were turned



away. Many of these talents were subsequently welcomed with open arms in renowned institutions abroad.

S: And it's usually institutions in those very same countries, from which expats are coming to Berlin, that people like us flee to.

M: Those who can afford it forego the racist, homogenous course of education in Germany. Are you using the word 'flee' intentionally? In my experience abroad I didn't consider myself fleeing but rather trying to avoid this one reality, or to add something to it.

S: Yes, I mean fleeing. At least in the context of my family and my people. It's a flight from the structural exclusions in Germany, which violently keep those who are poor and racialised from social advancement.

And if these people already come from refugee contexts, they are merely continuing this flight with the aim of fulfilling that which they had hoped for in Germany, but which was denied to them there: an improvement in living standards, which is quite rare for many in Germany, at least socio-economically speaking, particularly for the first generation. There's much less mobility here. Socioeconomic background determines your whole life. Germany has often been criticised for this by the UN. The ceiling is kept artificially low, and people like us reach it pretty quickly. To say that people like us flee Germany is for many controversial, not because it's factually incorrect but because this way of talking

about flight brings up a lot of unpleasant questions. Do people still flee Germany? The acknowledgment of this fact will certainly have a bitter aftertaste.

These continued flights to refuge are also made manifest in the fact that, at the beginning of the 2000s, approximately ¼ of the Eelam Tamil community in Germany moved to Greater London, because they saw more chance of survival for themselves there. There are also similar patterns among Somalis and Eritreans, and even Pakistanis. For various reasons, many of them got stuck in Germany when they fled their homelands. These protracted flights, which happen slowly and over a number of steps, don't appear in German statistics, nor in discussions.

M: As I mentioned, I had a scholarship when I was studying in London. And all the racialised Germans with whom I came into contact at my university had scholarships too. Otherwise, none of us could have afforded it. During the selection process for the scholarships that I received during my studies, I was often one of very few, if not the only person, in the room who was not white. When, in spite of all the obstacles, you're sitting on the other side of the world in a language class, it does feel like you've broken through a dead-end. Especially when you want to study humanities, cultural studies or social sciences, it's very hard for you to do so in Germany if you're not white and middle-class. They're not courses or careers that are especially well structured or in which there exists any demand for workers at all. You have to fight for your own relevance. And developing this self-confidence to go up against a German canon is something you're more likely to do abroad than here.

With all the exclusions and financial insecurities here, many who have these dreams become disparaged and never take up careers in these fields, because the reality in Germany is just so depressing for people like us. And it's all the more depressing when you see that, in discussions around subjects like racism, the views of people who have experienced the prevailing conditions here from a young age are often replaced by anglophone, expat perspectives. The debates, discourses and the people are imported, and then they stand in a distorted contrast to the local context. Statements are made, like, 'It's still better in Germany than in the US,' or 'Berlin doesn't feel like Germany at all. You don't experience much racism at all.' Those who are speaking are not at all familiar enough with the German context to make such claims. They're socialised totally differently, and they have a totally different relationship to German mainstream society, the German government and history.

S: Yeah, analyses come about that are articulated to us very self-assuredly, almost arrogantly. Many racialised, English-speaking expats would indeed like to understand local racism, insofar as they want to contextualise and, to a certain extent, historicise it. But in their attempts at explanation you can often see, in my opinion, that they lack an understanding of the idiosyncrasies of the German context. This context is not, as many Germans would very proudly like to proclaim, 'more special' than other histories. White supremacy, you know. But, as in any other context, a linguistic approach is necessary. It allows us to understand the cultural nuances of a history, a place and a society.

M: Expats rarely do this.

S: Exactly, most English-speaking expats, whether white or racialised, don't speak German because they can have a good life here without even a superficial knowledge of German. Nevertheless, as residents they have opinions on this city and this country, understandably. But they often come to conclusions that derive from a Western, globalised, American or British perspective, but which do not necessarily cohere with the prevailing conditions here. As you say, debates are imported and exposed to the local context, although you don't do the realities here any justice that way.

The body measurements that the Nazis and their many race researchers conducted created local realities with which we are still struggling. But they also created other gradations of distinction than in France, for instance. Here, as a German, you don't actually have to have another skin colour to qualify as being 'of Color': many forms of racial exclusion here are not based on perceptible differences in skin tones, but rather on other forms of racial markers. In an anglophone setting, due to the respective turns of colonial histories, more diverse societies exist that are skin-colour-specific. And yet we strenuously try to find meaning, as we orientate ourselves to patterns of analysis, speech and action that come from there. That's why we're also trying, in this discussion, to find a mode of speech that can take place independently of their analyses, which were propagated elsewhere and thus exist in different relations, histories and languages.

I also believe that English often works as a shortcut that we feel tempted to take. Of course, because a large part of the knowledge that we garner online and offline, in universities and libraries, is only available in English. And often, we don't even perform the translation work that is actually necessary. At the same time, German institutions also have no interest in performing this work of translation. They're much more interested in putting capital in racialised people who are socialised outside of Germany than in those whose experience is fashioned by the racism of German society and who verbalise this experience in German. It's much more convenient – and controllable! – for them and the many neoliberal diversity programmes that they prescribe for the purpose of the capitalist subsumption of struggles for social and economic justice.

M: ... and it's more efficient, because in the same move they're not only talking about racism but they're able to show how open-minded and well networked they are. Within this logic, it's always more profitable for institutions to invite people who can serve several functions. Accordingly, a racialised person who, for example, was born and raised in Essen, can say less about their supposed origins, otherness or whatever particular identity is superficially associated with them. That's why it is of course more interesting for a curator to invite someone from somewhere seemingly far away, abroad or whatever, who not only makes an exhibition programme appear more diverse but also more international at the same time.

Instead of bringing more people with different biographies into their teams and thereby impelling substantial change in the configuration of employ-

ers, art institutions that want to be more diverse direct their focus towards the way they're perceived from the outside: which names, topics and identities can we incorporate as quickly and efficiently as possible into our programmes in order to stay relevant? Whose portfolio, CV or even appearance enriches our image as a globally networked and relevant institution: the racialised person from Essen or the one from New York, Mexico City or New Delhi? Even when I, personally, wouldn't see the person from Essen as competing with the one from New York, they do come into competition in this context of restricted openness within German cultural programmes. As there's only so many places, slots and attention for 'the others'. That sounds calculating and tasteless, but decisions are often made, consciously or unconsciously, according to these criteria. That's the principle behind tokenism. Only superficial or symbolic efforts are made in the interest of inclusion, diversity or anti-racism, for example. Through the engagement of a small number from underrepresented groups or even just individuals, the institution is supposed to appear altogether more egalitarian.

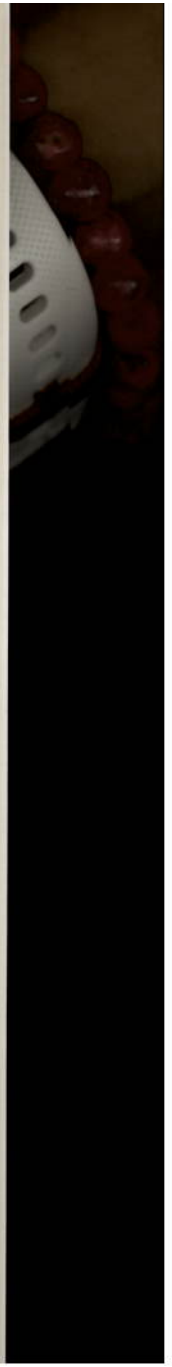
S: It affects them even less! This occurred to me a long time ago at an event for refugees and white aid and solidarity workers: a comedian with refugee experience talked in English about how he came to Germany. And as he did so, he kept using the term 'white people' and the whole room, which was predominantly white, laughed at his stories. I asked myself the whole time whether these people would still be laughing if the comedian were talking about '*weiße Menschen*'. Would the audience be just as

amused if he said 'Germans' instead? If he talked about people with a Nazi or colonial background? I don't think so. People with Nazi and colonial backgrounds get on much better with the term 'white people' because they can move away from a clear designation with it, and conversely, they can take away from us the possibility of making a clear designation. Because we are that which is uncomfortable for both sides. We are unpleasant for a mainstream society that doesn't want to hear us speak but would at the same time pretend to be inclusive and diverse. In order to maintain this self-image, people from other contexts are imported into this country who don't address Germany's most intimate escapades, because these are foreign to them and perhaps not so important. On the other hand, we compete, as you say, in a battle for resources that is regulated from above, against artists, academics and freelancers who get shuttled with a priority ticket onto the country's big, institutional platforms, which we would sometimes need 20 years or more to get to. Platforms that only exist because of the racialised and economically exploited people who toiled and fought for them for so long. People who still clean these platforms, only to be eventually replaced by racialised elites from abroad who then presume to speak on their behalf. The great 'subaltern'!

M: That also takes us to the subject of how helpful English is as a language of protest. How far does it make sense to convey and analyse our own experiences of discrimination and marginalisation in English, particularly in the context of German history? Your example with the audience that doesn't feel addressed by the term 'white

people', while it's highly likely that they would by the term *'weiße Menschen'*, makes an impression here. And along with this comes the question regarding the extent to which the self-designation 'of Color' is at all meaningful as a concept for the racism and the demographics in Germany. I too was politicised by English texts and the anglophone Internet, in particular the American reckoning with racism by Black and Indigenous peoples. It is an incredible act of translation that must be performed in order to transfer all of this onto a local context, which may be intimately connected with the colonialization of the Americas, but which is, at the same time, different. So again, American imperialism concerns me as an Afghani in a very different way to others who live in Germany. Add to this the fact that many – and I include myself here, I still have a lot to catch up on – still know very little about the history of resistance by non-white Germans. I'm now using the term 'non-white Germans' so that we can draw a clear line between white Germans in Nazi Germany and the rest ... although the wording raises the question of how far we include people in the resistance, such as communists ... Hmm ...

S: Just say people without a Nazi background (laughs).[1]



M: The line between Germans with and without a Nazi background (laughs).

S: I've already read in the chat that everyone finds the term pretty great.

M: Since our initial conversation on Instagram Live in February 2021 some things have developed structurally and discursively, and in some parts of the texts you can recognise that we have allowed ourselves extensions, additions and reworkings. One such development came with a term that we use here today and which, in the next conversation the following week – on Nazi legacies – struck up its entire own debate. Here we use 'Nazi background' to find a common language for a power relation that we perceive, and which continues to exert its effects in today's society. The denomination of material continuities in German art and cultural spaces then led many people, and especially the German press, to react especially defensively and indeed aggressively. Looking back on this moment in the conversation is kind of amusing, isn't it?

S: Yeah, for sure! I had actually already put the term in a Story in November 2020, but this debate only took off in February 2021. In hindsight, it confirms precisely what I mean here when I say that people can evade critique when they don't feel addressed by

the designation; when the designations don't apply to them, when they get stuck in translation loops and with that, remain abstract. They are, in certain respects, forms of non-mentions, which do the least for those who are adversely affected. On the contrary: they drive them into a psychological and emotional dilemma. In this kind of societal and political context, if we call something by its name, everyone flips out. We saw this with the press' subsequent debate around us, which wasn't a debate in the proper sense, but a defensive reaction from people who would rather approach this history abstractly and theoretically than personally. Because then the aggression isn't directed at the problems that are actually being dealt with, but at the people who have dared to disturb this questionable cooperation that has been the logic of state and society in Germany since the capitulation of 1945. With this, I find that it becomes clear just how important the conceptual work is that is being done by people who – with or without imports – are prepared to develop something here that corresponds to the history and context and responds to them.

M: I mean, we also lack knowledge on some histories and local voices. Almost everyone knows American activists, academics and cultural producers, maybe also British ones, but do we know of German equivalents? Or others from closer proximity, for example, from France or the Netherlands? The cultural imperialism of the USA and the anglophone world leads, generally speaking, to more interest in histories of others than in your own. I'm caught up in this too, as I sometimes passively follow debates around the US Supreme Court more intensively than comparable debates

in the *Bundestag*. It's the media that I consume on a regular basis, which is produced in the USA and accessible worldwide. It's also processed into memes, tweets, TikTok videos and it dominates our social media feeds.

When you think about how familiar the latest political developments in the USA appear to us, and how foreign parliamentary debates from Poland or Turkey appear in comparison, although they affect more people in Germany more directly, then the cultural dominance of anglophone discourses becomes more apparent. The media sometimes comes to us in translation or dubbed, but – thanks to the normalisation of the English linguistic hegemony – now also increasingly in the original language. We often grow up more sensitive to stories from there than to the stories that play out beyond the English-speaking world. The stories that take place in front of our own front doors are not so cool, don't go so viral, and they remain only of local interest. Maybe we know a bit more about them in our cultural-political and social-critical circles because a lot is being done there to amplify these voices within Germany, to make their poetry and texts more visible in the German culture of remembrance, as in the case of Semra Ertan. But these are quite rare and novel developments, and above all they take place beyond the institutionalisation and canonisation of German memory. Even today, you learn almost nothing about these people in schools or from other sources in mainstream society.

S: I would like to come back to what you said at the beginning, about our language of protest. Since, in the specific context of Berlin, you have to consider

who actually lives here. What are the population's majorities and minorities? In 2019, the Federal Office for Statistics published new figures on this. According to these statistics, more than a third of population living in Berlin is constituted by people without a Nazi background. That also includes people who have one parent without a Nazi background, which is why the image is a little distorted. The largest groups that are not ethnically German are, they say, Polish-, Turkish-, Arabic- and Russian-speaking people. These figures have to be considered in the discussion around expats, or the dominant, Western-privileged, English-speaking demographic groups. Because the majority of people who are categorised as so-called foreigners don't speak English as their mother tongue or as a second language. It's other languages: Polish, Russian, Turkish, Kurdish or Arabic. I think this fact is often left unsaid, nor is it considered in public administration. When, for example, information is communicated in public space, it's usually in German and English, instead of being translated into Polish, Kurdish or Turkish. Certain demographic groups just get sidestepped in this development. Because this phenomenon, that we keep hearing more and more English on the streets of Berlin, is actually still a relatively recent one.

The experience of this was especially stark in the first phase of the Corona pandemic. I experienced this very consciously in Wedding, a district of Berlin that, along with Gesundbrunnen, has the highest quota of 'people from abroad'; 54% of the population here is not ethnically German or has at least one parent who is not ethnically German. That's more than in Neukölln, and the majority of them are, of course, not English-speaking. Nevertheless, since the outbreak of the pandemic, in the so-called system-relevant shops – such as chemists, where dis-

infectants and masks are sold – the hygiene displays were written in English, after they were initially pinned up in German. That means that a large part of the local population was not involved linguistically at all. I find that very tragic. It really took a few days until this was adjusted. The same happened in information media like *Spiegel Online*, until they began reporting in Turkish.

What is also interesting in this context is that the *Berliner Zeitung* has had for a few years now not, for example, a Turkish- but rather an English-language segment. It's really prominent and it serves as one of a handful of significant, local news sources for expats, because there is very consciously no paywall. So, you see what kind of patrons are meant to be acquired here, who the readers should be, who clicks on their adverts. *The Local* is another site that serves as an information portal for city-related news among English-speaking expats.

The official Berlin city website also follows a similar selection and exclusion policy to the *Berliner Zeitung*. It offers no information in Kurdish, Arabic, Turkish, Polish or Russian but does in English, French and Italian. That shows that a majority population which doesn't communicate in English or any other imperial language at home is not only not being addressed but actively ignored.

I also observe this phenomenon at protests sometimes: there, for one, you have obviously the protest of people without Nazi backgrounds, which is directed towards the majority population and must therefore take place in German. But then, at the same time, we can see how English asserts itself more and more, how English slogans from protest movements in the so-called United States, Great Britain and other anglophone countries are taken up, one to one, although they're supposed to address

and engage the German context. Who understands this, though? Who are these posters and placards for? Are they for the passers-by and residents in the immediate vicinity or for consumers of social media in English-speaking countries abroad?

M: Straight away, we can take as examples the protests around Black Lives Matter and George Floyd, but also the protests around anti-Asian racism, abortion rights, prison abolitionism or gun violence. We often borrow our knowledge and our language about these political problems from debates and activism in the USA. We can better explain and problematise the prison system or police violence with examples from American institutions than if we do so in relation to local, German institutions. With the example of Black Lives Matter and alongside this, how the protests in Berlin and the reporting in German were aligned with them, you could see how, not only the language, but also the subjects and cases being referred to were taken from the USA. As if there were no racist police violence here, as though there were no fatalities of German police violence. Of course, a global, anti-racist solidarity movement is important, and I do also take to the streets for George Floyd. But it's perplexing to see the masses of people in Germany who felt addressed by this and took to the streets, but who stayed away when it concerned the murder of Oury Jalloh or Hanau – cases in Germany that demonstrated symbolic watersheds for anti-racist work.

S: Or NSU!

M: Or NSU!

S: But let's go back to a really foundational question: where do people speak English in Berlin? In my experience, we encounter the English language mostly in districts like Mitte, Neukölln or Kreuzberg. So, in the especially gentrification-happy or heavily gentrified parts of the city. There, you have places like cafés, cultural sites, museums, creative spaces, galleries, hip restaurants ...

M: Everything that's somehow hip.

S: Start-ups!

M: Exactly, start-ups. But also, in clothing or bookstores, according to where you go shopping.

S: Among the bookstores I can think of: She Said (Kreuzkölln), Hopscotsch (Schöneberg), Motto (Kreuzberg), a.p. (Wedding) and do you read me?! (Mitte) – a bookshop that I really love! But when you go on the do you read me?! website, almost everything is given in English. And that's a problem. As a business in Germany, you first have to be able to afford to do that: in a majority non-English-speaking context, to take on the financial risk of ignoring the language of the market majority and its customers!

Additionally, we should talk about the fact that these bookstores are also active protagonists of a classist politics, which is never named as such, because you actually only want to speak positively about these businesses. But also, of course, because they attract a critical customer base with the sale of books with leftist contents, and with that, they generate an image that doesn't necessarily draw this critique. Although they, too, are often expressions of urban gentrification processes, they also sell books about precisely those urban development processes. Beyond that, they host events in which those political and sociological developments are regarded critically – as though they were neutral and not involved. It's all a bit schizophrenic. The gentrifiers are always the others, not oneself. But we know this from questions about prosperity, racism, sexism and Nazism.

And I think we're also unwilling to concern ourselves with this, because it's uncomfortable, since it's our own milieu. The people who shop and work there are not so far from us. I also shop in these stores, and I like spending time there. But then it's all the more important to address the exclusive language policies of these bookstores that see themselves as progressive. If the entire Instagram page is run in English – including every possible notice

about Corona – there's a problem here. It's alienating, excluding and classist, and it even has racist connotations in the end. Because the people who are consciously shut out here, because of their class background, often have certain ethnic origins too, which we all know ... access to education and with that, of course, knowledge of English, are directly dependent on socioeconomic factors in this country.

M: You've basically just given an answer to the question put forward at the outset, of whether English is inclusive. In the case of these bookstores, you would say no, that it serves to exclude?

S: Yes. But we shouldn't forget that English is amenable to capital, which means that, behinds its presence and spread, there are capitalist interests. The way in which Berlin markets itself on a global market is based on its desire to establish itself as a world city, as it apparently once was, 100 years ago in a largely colonised world. That's why Berlin has an interest in start-ups, artists and freelancers, who come to the city and give it an image that leads to Berlin being able to acquire more capital, and thus the investment budget of the city multiplies. For this reason, there is not only acceptance but promotion of conditions that continue to normalise speaking in English, even in parts of the city like Wedding. Berlin is supposed to be perceived as a metropolis where you can also manage everyday life in English, precisely to attract this solvent clientele: people who would describe themselves as digital nomads, who set themselves up here for two or three years before they move on to Tel Aviv, New York, London or Barcelona.

I think you also have to hold the state responsible for this. Because this expat-isation, which is promoted by Berlin and Germany, is an important aspect of the gentrification of poor districts. At the same time, expats remove themselves from these discussions. They often don't need to think along local lines at all, because their whole existence in the city is only temporary.

This policy of outsider perception is also manifested in the way the Goethe Institut or even the Foreign Office use the 'hip', 'cool', almost "un-German" image of Berlin as a brand to promote the city and Germany in general. The soft power behind this shouldn't be trivialised. 'Poor but sexy' might sound funny, but it's actually quite a duplicitous PR strategy, which has functioned very successfully for Berlin since 2003.

The whole club culture, and especially the Berghain image of the city, which in 2015 even managed to find its way to the Ellen DeGeneres talk show in the so-called USA, is part of a clever marketing concept, which projects Berlin outward and invests the city with an international profile. It creates new associations, where once there was only the Wall, the Nazi regime and stiff Germans. And if this alternative image of the scene leads to an inevitable increase in drug consumption and alcoholism among young people, which even led to the drug-related death of a young tourist from the so-called USA in 2018: all of this is part of the formula. This policy is attractive for the city, because in the end, it brings a certain class of people into the city who are also prepared to consume in a certain way, and with that they become economically useful to the city and the country.

Berghain has become a poster child for Berlin and Germany. In Berlin, the club scene is also linked

to capitalist interests, indeed, to state interests, in spite of its alternative image. The Berlin Senate declared clubs as cultural sites in 2020. One year later, the Federal Government did something similar. Clubs are thus on a par with established, bourgeois cultural spaces, and are considered from a state perspective to be especially worthy of protection. Since the 2000s, there has been a kind of club lobby, which was especially active during the high point of the pandemic, and which represented the interests of club owners and visitors pretty successfully. In the end, it was rarely clubs that disappeared from the map because of the pandemic. Although the club lobby often protested the loudest, it was mostly other, smaller individual businesses without any lobbies at all that had to fight for their interests. They weren't deemed particularly necessary to protect or 'productive' for the desired urban development. Many neighbourhood shops, off licenses, teahouses, bakeries, hairdressers, older cafés and other stores had to close their doors during the lockdown. The death of these establishments affected many racialised people in particular, who had begun in the previous years to operate as sole traders in order to secure their right of abode in Germany and to shield themselves from discrimination in the workplace.

M: Let's look into a comment that's just been posted in the chat: here it's been noted that English is a colonial language, which sits in a hierarchical position in relation to other languages. Accordingly, people who also speak this language are valorised differently. There's a higher value to mastering English than, let's say, five other languages, of which not a single one is a colonial language. We've already spoken about the culture

sector, which lives from a cosmopolitan image. Here, for instance, cosmopolitan material is happily confused with anti-racist themes.

I think, at this point, it's appropriate to think about what cosmopolitan even means. Cosmopolitanism is, in other ways, an ideology of so-called world citizenship. A view on the world that people take up who can move geographically without restrictions, and who see the entire world as their home or accessible to them. Cosmopolites have often lived in different places around the world and belong to a mobile class, which actually moves beyond the regime of borders and linguistic barriers but is able to settle. Cosmopolites have to be able to speak English and they hold almost exclusively passports from Western, industrial nations, although as individuals, they see themselves as the antithesis of the nationalism or provincialism of their countries of origin. You could say, however, that the cosmopolitan bubbles are also mobile provinces in themselves, in which most probably share the same friends on Facebook, bumping into and meeting up with each other in similar cafés and restaurants. These self-appointed, uprooted people with their decontextualised interests are better situated economically, and as such also represent an attractive target group, as in the example of Berlin's marketing strategy. When we talk here about Berlin as a supposedly cosmopolitan city, or about expats, then this is the context that we're sketching out as our backdrop. I think it's important once again to define this, because the term 'cosmopolitan' has been differently connotated and utilised at different times. While it was positively connotated in the Enlightenment and at the height of European colonialism, during Nazism as well as under Stalin it was

used as a reproach, in order to discredit Jews and to accuse them of conspiring against the nation. In the context of ethnonationalist state ideology, uprooting becomes an accusation of treason.

I find this especially interesting, if you look at contemporary debates around German dual citizenship, for example. Similar accusations are made here. The credibility and 'loyalty' of these people are put into question. How trustworthy are these foreigners if they carry other identities with them or have sympathies and attachments aside from Germany? This test of convictions begins early, when for example, migrant children in kindergarten or in school speak other languages among one another and the teachers are the first to react allergically, as though they were conspiring against the group and the authority of the teacher. The accusation of conspiracy against mainstream society, against the status quo, is also inherent to the German fear of parallel societies.

So, if we speak about something being cosmopolitan, as children of refugees, we don't refer to this uprooting as a reproach – fuck loyalty to state constructs! I think we're questioning the performance of open-mindedness and uprooting by privileged people. It is fitting that a large number of the events in exhibition spaces such as SAVVY Contemporary in Wedding or other art spaces are exclusively in English ...

S: ... and only publicised in English.

M: Here you have to ask what funds are flowing into these places and what roles are assigned to them. It's already a problem that there are so few progressive and anti-racist places, or else places that work explicitly with decolonial approaches. And when they do exist, they reproduce the linguistic hegemony that excludes the local population, and then bring in themes from outside this space, failing to integrate their own neighbours.

This is also a symptom of the fact that local racism, local structural problems are simply less attractive than those that you import into these spaces from the outside. Imported themes remain abstract, they remain subject matter, while immediate political conflicts in the neighbourhood affect one's own day-to-day work, the funding bodies and the visitors. The phenomenon of mobile classes, enticed by and settled into a certain infrastructure, like UFOs which then lift off and disappear, is indeed even more pronounced in the development sector.

In a certain way, Berlin was initially considered as a development hotspot, with its low rents and its homogenous cultural landscape, which is why so many settled here. However, I think this economy finds its concrete culmination in places like Kabul. Here, you really had the peak of the expat economy, mobile classes of people who are totally isolated from the local population: enticed by subventions, they come and then just as quickly disappear again as soon as it's not worth it anymore. In the case of Afghanistan, it was development aid, in the case of Berlin it's tax money.

S: I'd like to underline your point about funds at this point. Since it's public money that many of

these institutions receive, as in tax money, which they invest in projects and programmes that largely exclude the local population.

SAVVY is a good example, as is the Berlin Biennale and other institutions that engage with contemporary art in the city. They all demonstrate similar patterns. You have to be aware of them: It's tax money that's used to create spaces and support milieus that don't necessarily involve the people who live in the immediate vicinity of these institutions. Quite the opposite. These institutions often expand within poor neighbourhoods because rents there are lower, due to this poverty. They are coveted by landlords because they accelerate social change and thereby drive up the value of rental properties. They help profits and are probably still represented in some statistics as being beneficial for the neighbourhood. Yet they do little for the people themselves. They profit from the poverty of the local population and at the same time contribute to the displacement of that very same population.
Something comparable already happened with Columbia University in Harlem, or the university campus in the new Queen Elizabeth Park in East London. Similar to SAVVY, both began advertising with references to these places that were registered in the middle-class mindset as being decrepit. 'Right in Harlem!', 'In the middle of Wedding!' So cool! It's so perverse.

In 2020, I walked past SAVVY, for example. There I saw a whole range of posters stuck on the large windowfronts of the former casino that were only in English. The posters revolved around themes of solidarity and community and the like. When I posted this on my Instagram Story, addressing it, I immediately received comments from the SAVVY team, who were shocked by my focus on their ex-

clusionary and elitist linguistic conduct in the neighbourhood. I even got an email from the director of SAVVY himself, in which he wrote a long complaint about my critique. Almost as if it were the first time that they'd been confronted with this. Apparently, they'd never given this any thought – or had never had to. Their naïve assumption up to that point had been that they were supporting the neighbourhood. After my Story, SAVVY seemed to be worried that their self-image and role as a 'socially critical exhibition space' in Wedding could be thrown into question. And that this critique could be seen by the 'important' people. They didn't want to hear this critique, and above all, they didn't want to see it in public. Because that would be bad PR.

Here I think: there's nothing new about this. These patterns of behaviour apply to big museums, universities, galleries, as well as small ones – precisely those that sell themselves as being 'decolonial' and claim to be 'radical'. The funds that support this kind of art communication are mostly public. This country invests a lot in culture and art. I find that we have to pay much more attention to our rights and be mindful of how public funds are used, for whom they're used and who is supported by them. As people who form part of this society, we have a right to co-determination and to demand that we and our families, who live and work here, are considered in the conception of these spaces. But it seems to be totally fine in Berlin, in the middle of Wedding, to host an event that's completely in English, without translations, without texts in German, without German information booklets, or the like. This is what so frustrates me about the climate in this city.

I was involved in forming a collective a few years ago that was concerned with food and politics. I left precisely for this reason. It was just too much

for me, to sit in Kreuzberg, do a few things, the contents of which were indeed interesting, but which simultaneously failed to think with the neighbourhood. Theoretically, people from the neighbourhood could have come along, it was just that the space was not conceived to meet their language needs. I believe we have to be more honest with each other at this point, and say, 'It just doesn't work this way. English isn't actually the language spoken by most people here.'

And the German language also has a system and a political history: up until 1919, as one of many European colonial languages, German was still forcibly inserted into the world and criminally imposed on many colonised peoples. After 1945, it was the 'foreigners' who came as workers or refugees to this former colonial metropolis who were once again forcefully told, 'Here you speak German!' Hence, German is connected with a lot of violence for people like us. Many of us were attacked when speaking a language in public that was neither German nor another European colonial language. These are everyday realities that don't remain in the past but still occur in the present. My parents still warn me against speaking Tamil in public. They're scared that we'll encounter violence, as was the case in the past. Do you believe that anyone is really scared to speak English on the street? Scared that they might be physically attacked? Against this background, the rapid acceptance of English and English speakers reveals very clearly a racist and classist societal structure in the German public sphere.

Back to SAVVY: They've since (2022) implemented parts of my critique. Their posts these days are sometimes bilingual, now they even offer multilingual tours! It does work! Do you reckon they credited me for this? Did they make it transparent

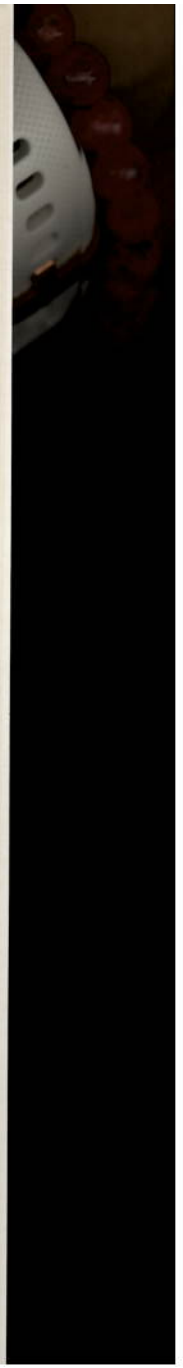
how it came to this curatorial and linguistic-political change?

M: Probably not.

S: Yeah! Free consulting from me, then (laughs)!

M: As this point, we should reiterate that we see the problem primarily in the fact that English is used as a shortcut to inclusivity, that it's just an illusion of inclusivity. With this, we don't want to say that everything should take place in German because we happen to be in Germany. That isn't the argumentation we're pursuing. Rather, we want to draw attention to a flaw in reasoning, to a lazy way of approaching inclusivity and marginalisation. Those who use English don't actually have to concern themselves with local hierarchies.

For us, it's not about giving the right to participate in the cultural sector solely to those who grew up in Germany either. But we want to make it apparent that, willingly or not, one is in direct competition with others. Because the English-speaking expat position often puts everything else in the shade. In relation to this, I experience on a regular basis that I am marked as an English-speaking person as soon as I enter a cultural institution. The same happens in hip spaces, as we



described them at the beginning. Our bodies are marked as being cosmopolitan as soon as they present a certain style of dress, a certain self-assuredness, a certain aesthetic that's read as being cultivated. Because Germans are used to thinking that their fellow, non-white citizens must be poor, and therefore won't be found in spaces like museums, galleries and theatres in the first place. As soon as the categories of 'not white' and 'in the culture sector' overlap, in their eyes you must be an expat.

S: I think here we have to make a more precise distinction. For example, in my case, people speak to me in English in everyday spaces. And that's obviously due to my skin colour, to the fact that my body is apparently incompatible with this country, its history and language. This "impossibility" of the body seems to be so stark for some that, even in the most banal situations, like in the bike shop or the supermarket, I'm addressed in English even when I reply in German. I have this experience in common with many Black and Tamil people, who are melanin-rich and thus, for many pale people, appear all the more foreign in this melanin-dead land. I believe there's little awareness of this, even among the racialised populations with light skin, which still make up the majority. Because we experience racism from all pale populations, and that can also mean pale so-called foreigners.

Our realities do intersect in certain situations, but they also differ from each other significantly. Melanin-rich people experience other forms of dehumanisation, which happen more persistently, go deeper and irrespectively of climate or location. For white Europeans, our bodies appear less

human than those of the various melanin-dead groups of non-European origin, which are more negotiable and therefore able to progress quicker into representative positions than we are. The way in which we are mentally catapulted and held back from these spheres is, again, different. I would say it's more extreme. We can't be imagined in this context, which is why we're faced as an impossibility in this country, this landscape and this language. In my case, there's no 'broken German' with which to address me, I am immediately addressed in another language. And that's already a distinction that is not afforded enough attention. With me, there is always a switch to English, because it's unthinkable that someone with this skin colour could speak German. The emphasis here is on *skin* colour, and not on other racist biological characteristics.

Germans, by the way, often see this switch of language as a gesture of good will. It happens time and again that liberal, academicized Germans think they're doing me a favour by speaking to me in English, and each time I have to think, 'Hey, your Denglish is really shitty. You can just speak to me in German, then you'd be doing us both a favour.' Even in Wedding, you can't avoid these situations. Not even in one of the poorest districts in the whole of Germany. I find that really bizarre.

M: In this context, let's talk about the Instagram meme page that we looked at beforehand. From this you can understand the difference between expats and immigrants quite well. The page is called berlinauslandermemes. Through memes, it gives a very self-deprecating take on problems with the immigration office (*Ausländerbehörde*): for example, when you're not registered in your

apartment in Berlin or can't speak German at your appointment with a German official – a predicament that's not at all comparable to the situation of those who go through the same system, but who are threatened with deportation to a war zone.

For me and my friends, who also grew up as refugee children in Germany, there's a lot of trauma connected to the immigration office. I remember having to go to there regularly as a four- or five-year-old, in order to extend our suspension of deportation or our residency permit, which was always only valid for a short time. We waited there a whole day in these packed rooms, with crying babies and hardly any space to sit, only to be shuffled around and treated unsympathetically by disrespectful and overworked officials. I associate the immigration office with fear and humiliation. To this day, I believe I'm going to be deported or deprived of my rights when I enter these spaces, even when I'm just translating for someone else.

So, when I look at the memes on berlinauslandermemes, I do get, as it's so nicely put, triggered. It seems not to matter to the makers that the term *'Ausländer'* is not just a legal designation but also an insult. *'Ausländer'* is an exclusionary category that's not only about lacking a German passport but also the degree of racialisation and marginalisation you experience. The page claims to curate Berlin-related inside jokes for so-called *'Ausländer*innen'* (foreigners of all gender expressions), but their memes reveal much more about which classes of people they themselves belong to and how little they actually have to do with the lived realities of people who have traditionally been castigated as *'Scheißausländer'* (fucking foreigners). Although both the makers are white

expats from South Africa and Austria, they take on a term and a role that cannot easily be disconnected from those who have to be *'Ausländer'*. Being a foreigner is not an inconvenience, an annoying anecdote, but for many people it's a violent, even potentially deadly expulsion from this society.

S: Yes, I also wanted to talk about this exact staging of a supposed precariat of foreigners. By now, the page has over 200,000 followers, so it's really popular. I was also blocked by them for over a year, by the way, after I criticised them for this online multiple times. Their main clientele are expats in Berlin, of whom I know many, as well as people who are involved with expats and hence move in similar milieus, and therefore understand the codes and inside jokes. The memes are being shared constantly by these people. A lot of people in my circle do it too.

M: I also know a lot of people who share the page's content.

S: So, we're like "native insiders", though not natives, just insiders (laughs). On these memes that stage the threat to one's residency status: I've been observing this for a few years now, how expats – whether white or not – keep churning out their stories from the immigration office on Instagram, with which they want to generate empathy and often even ask

for support in a way that explicitly centres their desperation. As though they were really being threatened with deportation to an impossible living situation and not to some suburb of Portland or Sydney. And in the end – what a surprise! – in 100% of cases, they get a three-year visa or a residence permit for five years, straight away. The happy ending to this drama is always pre-programmed and yet people still wallow in self-pity, implying a kind of emergency that is not that at all.

M: Yes! The threat that the immigration office poses to refugees is in another category entirely to the inconvenient bureaucracy that it presents to expats.

S: Of course, every visa regime is based on the exclusion of other people. That means that the mobility of these people goes hand in hand with the immobility, the exclusion and the marginalisation of the majority of other people. I think this absolutely must be said. Those who are churning out their immigration office dramas on Instagram and then getting us involved as they stage some kind of emergency or state of exception don't consider this at all. And nor do they consider what the immigration office means for us. The fear that you're talking about, when you enter the immigration office, I can understand this so well. How many of us were actually stuck in immigration offices, really threatened with deportation, and what's more, deportation into war zones or lives of poverty, and so on. I find this truly appalling. Someone should point out to these people that the immigration office is not a game.

I believe that the appointment at the immigration office is the only moment in which all the non-German-speaking expats from Western countries require a translator. There are no bi- or trilingual forms because the immigration office is not primarily processing their cases but rather those of our families. The state doesn't want to put in any resources for this, of course, which would be necessary in order to offer another language. But I can well imagine that – as long as the number of expats and with that, the prominence of their lobby increases – we're going to see English being included, though not Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic or the language of another demographic of people who are deported in large numbers and who have a lot to do with the immigration office. These circumstances are often trivialised, but it's based on a really awful system linked with colonialism; with classist, exploitative, capitalist structures, which still oppress billions of people.

Against this backdrop, I find it especially terrible when racialised expats from the West pander to or even reproduce this way of speaking, acting and thinking. Most expats I have anything to do with are in fact racialised people, and I can also observe this behaviour from them. I find this terrible, because I know that they're very sensitive and perceptible when it concerns their own context. Then there's a kind of sensibility with which they worry about the Bronx or Central Los Angeles being gentrified, that something has happened in Barcelona or East London. But they fail to see themselves here in the same frame of action, the same mechanism of action, in the same patterns that they deplore in the cities they came from. Almost as if what happens here were less real than what's happening in Queens or Cabbagetown.

M: What happens here is that a cosmopolitan, mobile class catapults itself into local contexts, as its mobility is already assured by the prevailing global migration and border system. They then enter into local contexts that function for them like stage sets, with which they don't need to get involved. The ignorance of the mobile classes has so much to do with these conditions. It is a privilege – and that's something we have to acknowledge – when local, structural problems don't concern you at all.

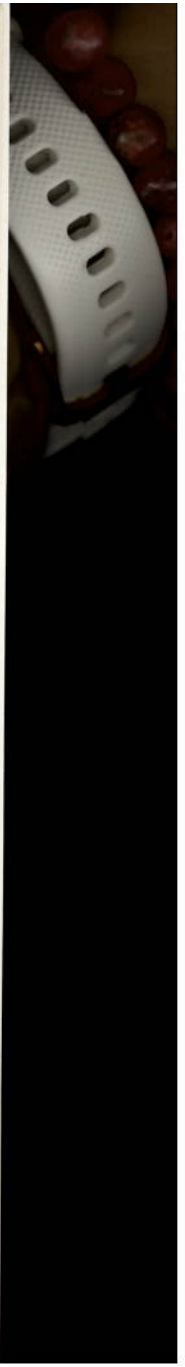
I'll never forget this one moment in Berlin, when a wealthy person from Lebanon looked someone over from afar who was coming towards us and said: 'She's not FoB, is she?' – as in, having arrived in Germany fresh off a refugee ship. On what basis had he permitted himself this categorisation; what was his analysis based on? He judges her habitus, how she's dressed, the self-confidence with which she moves through Berlin. That was one of the moments in which it became clear to me that this description 'of Color' fails to include many things entirely. With such terms, we fall into a superficial representation culture, for which we also end up fighting, but which makes us replaceable for the aforementioned cultural institutions and the City of Berlin. The praxis of institutions that makes use of this vocabulary creates a totally other reality to that which it promises. Since, instead of actually bringing their own populations from the precarious margins into the centre, or to the place where capital, representation and access are, they'd rather import people who already have capital to hand.

We can't grasp this problem properly without bringing in class. I believe it's central to this discussion. Here, I'm thinking about those people

who are expelled and repressed in applications for state-subsidised cultural programmes by their language and content. If we were to curate and organise more pointedly on the basis of an analysis of class and locality, totally different programmes and spaces would emerge than with abstract concepts and anglophone identity constructions, with which most people outside of our bubbles are not even familiar, let alone ever consciously identify. Sometimes I walk down Sonnenallee and wonder how many people here identify as foreigners, rather than 'of Color'. What does this judgment mean for our political or curatorial practice?

S: I think what you've addressed here is really important. Berlin is like Disneyland for many adults of capital-rich and/or Western expat circumstances. Since 2015, the city has often been declared the exile capital of the Arab world in different media, from CNN to Al Jazeera. And even here, class relations are not considered. Who comes to Berlin? Whose cultures are valued here? Whose cultural production is put to use here, and in which ways?

For example, that there is one Arabic film festival, or since relatively recently, Arabic poetry nights with Syrian or other Levantine literatures, shows that here only certain cultures are acknowledged and supported by German institutions. These things didn't exist in the same measure when Palestinian refugees twice over fled the war in Lebanon in large numbers to come to Berlin in the 70s and 80s. They weren't worth it because the majority were not part of a bourgeois or academic class. Here, you see that distinctions between various non-European cultures and classes are being made. A distinction is



made between those who are recognised as "cultural types" and promoted accordingly, but who actually try to adorn themselves with this label, and those who are neither regarded as culturally valuable nor understood as being necessarily worthy of promotion. This happens on the basis of both cultural and racial markers. For example, you'll find little to nothing in terms of Tigrinya literature and film funding in Berlin, although Tigrinya-speaking people from Eritrea make up one of the largest groups of asylum seekers in the last decade. The same applies for Somali-speaking people. These are hierarchical relations that are racist, classist and colonial. In the end, this is about cultural production that, here or elsewhere, is mostly created and sustained by elites.

I'm always fascinated by the fact that people – from rich districts of Cairo, for instance – come here and live out their creative and perhaps queer lives, declare themselves People of Color and peddle this identity, getting riled up with all kinds of Germans with a Nazi background, without distinguishing between the rich and those who come from poor backgrounds and live somewhere on the outskirts of Berlin or in poor housing within the city. Something gets lost here! It's a really distorted and decontextualised way of going about things. It's based on a way of thinking that has a lot to do with the language we use. On this point, we have to keep making it clear that this language you mentioned earlier – the People-of-Color language – produces a simplification, a reduction, which homogenises us and makes us into one mass, with no regard for our relation to capital, our status, our histories, interests or even our pain. That also means that we inevitably end up competing with people who come from completely other milieus, with whom we can never keep up. These people have lived here for perhaps two years,

but they've already overtaken us by two or more generations. They may be part of the dominant classes and castes elsewhere, even in the places where our families' stories began. Even if none of us here is German, there was still never any possibility for us to keep up with this group of people without a Nazi background. Since, in the struggle for resources, the people who were socialised here are disadvantaged from the outset: to be socialised here and a person without a Nazi background often, though perhaps not always, means that you grew up poor and working class. Accordingly, the starting conditions are usually not in our favour. This applies to the education system as well as to the labour market and, of course, to the housing market too.

This leads me to another really astonishing phenomenon. When I'm on Instagram, I see that apartment and spare room announcements in Berlin are now posted almost exclusively in English. There isn't even a German translation! There, I ask myself: What is this? Whom are you speaking to? Whom do you want to live with? Who's the main tenant here, and who isn't? I find this really terrifying, but at the same time, from an analytical perspective, quite fascinating. I think to myself: how does it come to this, that suddenly even the people who move here from other cities or rural regions of Germany feel emboldened to broadcast their search for an apartment entirely in English, hoping – and it's not that unlikely – to find an apartment in this city by doing so? It's just such a unique dynamic; these are market relations that are very new, and they lead us back to questions about language and capital. I see this in my own networks especially, and each time I'm once again both confused and fascinated.

M: Yeah, that's why we're addressing this subject, because these are things that we experience within our own bubbles. If you only paint the big conflict between the evil Nazis on the one side and us on the other, there's no space for what we're referring to here. As soon as you endeavour to make really complex observations, it becomes apparent. In particular, you notice this when others compulsively and artificially associate you with whatever categories – which, based on everything we've mentioned, you have nothing to do with – and invite you to exhibitions or discussions as their representatives. I find it outrageous how many people who don't come from privileged backgrounds speak about their circumstances, reflect on them very clearly and position themselves within these discussions. But people from rich backgrounds ...

S: ... keep quiet about it.

M: ... they keep quiet about it!
Don't discuss it.

S: Because it's uncomfortable!

M: Or because it's improper to talk about money. I'm constantly talking about money, because sometimes I just don't have any and then I have to be careful with what I'm spending money on. Certain people don't like talking about their material conditions because then the differences really become visible. And with property, the question arises very quickly about where this money came from. Especially those who have money with Nazi or colonial origins don't want to talk about this. Elites from the Global South are also reluctant to talk about the origins of their wealth in this context.

S: Those who are rich keep quiet about wealth. You were saying before that Berlin is a hotspot for development. I totally agree with this. I also wanted to point out something else: it's always said that Berlin is not Germany and Germany is not Berlin. That somehow maintains a fascination that there is a distinction to be made between a true and a false Germany. And in this flippant statement, there is also a certain reality. I believe there's tension here to do with the fact that Germany registers as an economically and infrastructurally developed country, while Berlin does not correspond to the traditional image of a capital city – neither economically nor infrastructurally. In fact, the German capital is a city of development. Accordingly, certain social dynamics in Berlin often resemble those of metropolises in so-called developing countries. You can recognise this in particular in places where, and in the ways that, the English language is implemented. In a city like Colombo, the capital of "Sri Lanka", English is treated very similarly to the way it is here, for example.

The historic division of Berlin and the separation of Berlin from the surrounding country created specific material and psychological realities with which we're still living today. Because the capital of the Federal Republic of Germany, which it only became once again in the 1990s, still has to establish itself as such. The capital city of one of the richest countries in the West still has to engage in a kind of game whereby it must prove that it's at all worthy of being the capital city of one of the richest countries in the West. But this isn't unusual. Historic capitals, especially colonial metropolises like Paris and London that didn't experience such a historical and violent break, don't have to go through this. They just exist, as though they were museums. Berlin is no museum but a construction site. It still has to invent itself. And in this process of invention, Berlin also wants to acquire capital, of course. To do so, it must establish itself as a centre in Germany, Europe and even beyond. This centralisation process began in the 1990s as Berlin became the Federal Republic of Germany's capital city and seat of government, and continues with the consolidation of the start-up industry and the infrastructures of global players like Amazon, Zalando and Google, etc.

The forced internationalisation is equally part of this. And the visa regime, which welcomes freelancers from the creative industry. Berlin facilitates residency for artists and media creators with a specifically regional interpretation of the laws of residency, as it proceeds from an 'overriding economic interest in Berlin as a capital of art and film'. With this, the visa regulations that enable many expats from abroad to stay in Berlin are tailored to people from so-called developed countries (for example, the USA, Japan, Israel, Canada, Australia, and so on). They can arrive without visas, and

then they go through a simplified process thanks to their freelance status in the art and media sectors.

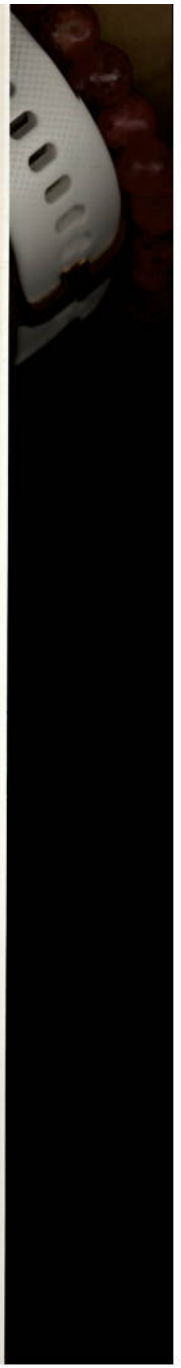
So, in order to acquire capital, Berlin has come up with a timely strategy: build up cultural production, bring artists and freelancers over who keep the mythology of the city alive and make it attractive to the start-up industry and platform capitalism, for which infrastructural measures are then financed in turn.

Berlin wants to push, realise and bring this image into line with the material reality, accordingly. With that, we shouldn't forget that all that is part of a huge PR machinery, it's a propaganda machinery about which we've already spoken. Just as the so-called German Summer's Tale of the 2006 football World Cup was a branding strategy that was drawn up and for which a PR agency was paid, here there's also a branding strategy put in place by the German state and the city, in order to make Berlin into what it ought to be in their eyes. And that isn't the Berlin that is kind to people like us, or those who grew up in impoverished conditions here, but rather it's a Berlin that promotes, takes in and welcomes people with capital. These are the people who have jobs that we will probably never get. Because, in the end, we look the way we look, our social economies are as they are, and our bank accounts have the balance that capitalists want for people like us.

M: In the end it's about people – with or without a Nazi background – who are so socially precarious that they may never be able to move beyond their own city districts, who are pushed out of their local contexts through gentrification and excluded from this city. It's this injustice for which we'd like to find a critical language through

this discussion. All the globalised terms used to speak about marginalisation and racism are meaningless if we don't speak about mobility, locality and class at the same time, as well as the ways they work together. Only on this basis can we demand the social responsibility of public institutions, that they involve the local populations in their programmes and spaces, instead of talking past the majority of people.

1: The term 'people with a Nazi background' or *'Menschen mit Nazihintergrund'* is a play on the ubiquitous phrase *'Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund'* in German, or 'people with a migration background'. The latter is used in everyday parlance to refer to many, diverse demographic groups, from Germans who are not white to people whose recent immigration to Germany becomes their defining feature (though not so-called expats). To refer to 'people with a Nazi background' is to invent an ironic counterpart to this artificial category, which includes the majority of white Germans, all of whom have, directly or indirectly, benefited from the legacies of Nazism in Germany.



(Moshtari Hilal) مشتری هلال
சிந்துஜன் வரதராஜா
(Sinthujan Varatharajah)

Englis(c)h in Berlin
Ausgrenzungen in einer kosmopolitischen Gesellschaft /
Exclusions in a Cosmopolitan Society

Herausgeber / Editor:
Jonas von Lenthe

Übersetzung / Translation:
Miriam Stoney

Lektorat / Copyediting:
Elisa Barth

Korrektorat / Proofreading:
Elisa Barth
Bram Opstelten

Gestaltung / Graphic Design:
Rana Karan

Typeface:
ABC Diatype
GT Alpina

Druck / Printing:
Printon AS, Tallinn

Erschienen im Verlag / Published by:
Wirklichkeit Books, Berlin
info@wirklichkeitbooks.com
www.wirklichkeitbooks.com

ISBN 978-3-948200-14-5
Printed in the EU

DE

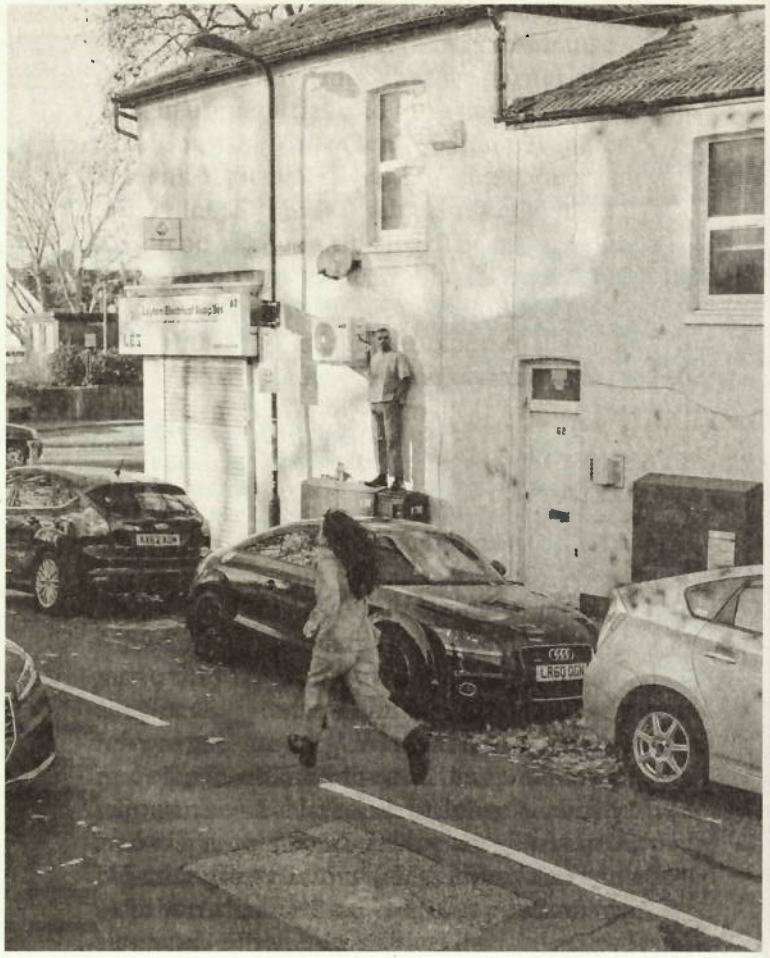
(Moshtari Hilal) مشتری هلال ist Künstlerin, Forscherin und Kuratorin und lebt in Hamburg. Sie ist Mitbegründerin des Kollektivs AVAH (Afghan Visual Arts and History) und des Forschungsprojekts CCC (Curating Through Conflict with Care). In Ihrer Arbeit, die künstlerische ebenso wie diskursive Formate beinhaltet, beschäftigt sie sich mit Schönheit, Hässlichkeit, Scham und Macht. Hilal hat Islamwissenschaft studiert mit einem Fokus auf Gender, dekoloniale Studien und Kulturwissenschaft in Hamburg, Berlin und London.

சிந்துஜன் வரதராஜா (Sinthujan Varatharajah) lebt als freie*r Wissenschaftler*in und Essayist*in in Berlin. Sie*er studierte Politische Geographie und arbeitet zu den Themen Staatenlosigkeit, Mobilitäten und (Ohn-)Machtsgeographien mit einem besonderen Fokus auf Infrastrukturen und Architekturen. Varatharajah war über mehrere Jahre hinweg für verschiedene Menschenrechtsorganisationen in London und Berlin tätig. Im September erscheint ihr*sein Debütroman *an alle orte, die hinter uns liegen* im Hanser Verlag.

EN

(Moshtari Hilal) مشتری هلال is an artist, researcher and curator who lives in Hamburg. She is a co-founder of the collective AVAH (Afghan Visual Arts and History) and the research project CCC (Curating Through Conflict with Care). In her work, which encompasses both artistic and discursive formats, she is concerned with beauty, ugliness, shame and power. Hilal studied Islamic Studies with a focus on gender, decolonial studies and Cultural Studies in Hamburg, Berlin and London.

சிந்துஜன் வரதராஜா (Sinthujan Varatharajah) lives in Berlin as an independent researcher and essayist. They studied Political Geography and works on the subjects of statelessness, mobilities and geographies of power(lessness) with a particular focus on infrastructures and architectures. For several years, Varatharajah was also engaged with various human rights organisations in London and Berlin. In September their debut novel *an alle orte, die hinter uns liegen* (to all the places that lie behind us) will be published by Hanser Verlag.



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