



Introduction

Multiculturalism can be both: a blessing and a curse, an aim and a problem at once. Opinions about it are always subjective, only depending on the individual point of view. Every one of us has made his/her own experiences with the widespread variety of ethnic groups in our society. It is essential to communicate those experiences in order to eliminate prejudice and misinterpretation of behaviour between cultures. For that reason we have written portraits about our life in a multicultural city, where it is an every day experience to live together in a melting pot of different traditions, confessions and mentalities.

There are about 650.000 inhabitants in Frankfurt; 150.000 of them have an immigrant background. From childhood on our generation has been used to living in a multicultural society. We are convinced that this situation reflects positively on our characters.

Especially "Otto-Hahn-Schule" is an excellent example which shows how young people cope with such circumstances. Every single pupil in our class feels fully integrated in the society we live in. We want to share our experiences in order to prevent racial discrimination. We think it could serve as a model for a largely successful integration in other social spheres, too.



The following questions were considered during the writing process our our portraits:

1. Which self-doubts can lead to an identity crisis?
2. How are my personal character traits influenced?
3. Why is my identity not constant?
4. What is unique in me?
5. Where are my roots?
6. Is class identity important to me?
7. How can I find my personal fulfilment?
8. What about my religious identity?
9. What problems might be caused by my racial identity?
10. Which role does the colour of my skin play in my life?
11. Am I fully integrated?
12. What is my political status / what are my political interests?
13. What about my schooling / education?
14. What are my personal values?
15. What is my political opinion?

This project was established by our former tutor and English teacher Angela Hirsch and is now supported by our current English teacher Dr. Gertrud Scholtes.



Antonia – German

Hello, my name is Antonia and I was born on 7th April 1989. My family is German and I live in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, which is a melting pot of cultures. To live in a multicultural society has never been a problem to me. I am used to this, so I cannot imagine how it would be if it were different. I was raised with the belief that every human being, no matter which social background or nationality someone belongs to, has to be accepted as a part of our society. Of course, there are many prejudices or stereotypes but I am sure that everyone should be given the chance to convince others of the truth.

In my life there has never been a difference between living in Germany as a German or, for example, as a Turk. As I see it a multicultural city like Frankfurt is more interesting than other cities with fewer immigrants. I attend a multicultural school in Frankfurt am Main and I am quite pleased to be there. I estimate that more than fifty percent of the students of our school have a multicultural background, so many of my friends are not German and there is no reason to make a difference between them and my German friends. Furthermore I have a large family that is really important to me. Some relatives of mine live in Canada, one of my thirteen aunts lives in Ireland.

Someday I want to travel around the world, to gain experiences, because I think we could all learn from other cultures. For me it is exciting to experience the world with its variety of lifestyles and languages. Another wish of mine is to emigrate to another country. I have not decided which country it will be yet, but of course I want to be accepted there. In my point of view a person who emigrates has not to give up his/her culture but I think people should adapt if they want to be accepted in a foreign society. This is the only condition I personally expect.



Burmese

My name is H.A. I have been living in Germany for four years and am attending the 2nd year of Senior College (Oberstufe) at Otto-Hahn-Schule in Frankfurt. I am used to living in a multicultural society with different nationalities and various ethnic groups.

My origin is Karen, one of the ethnic groups in Burma which has its own language, culture and tradition. I grew up and spent my childhood in a city called Yangon, the capital city of Burma. I am quite religious because my parents taught me to be a good Christian as well as a good Baptist. From our ancestors, we have been keeping our faith in God.

I am blessed to have a wonderful family which consists of my Dad, Mom and my younger sister. My parents didn't really bring me up too strictly. I was told to be polite, to respect others and always to give my best in my life. They also tried to let me make my own mistakes because they wanted me to be able to stand up for myself. I am convinced that being able to stand up for yourself, being independent and confident is important. You need to stand up for yourself in the world!

To my mind, class consciousness doesn't play an important role in my life. I believe that each of us is born with a unique set of DNA and has a unique background and upbringing, so everyone's personality is unique.

Like all other ambitious people, I also have a dream. I dream of becoming an excellent surgeon!

All in all, I am really pleased with the way I am and I will keep trying, in the future, to be a good example for other people.



Eritrean

My name is J.Y. I am seventeen years old and I attend the 11th grade of Otto-Hahn-School. I am an open-minded, kind and ambitious person. I am a Catholic, but I do not attend church regularly. My personal character traits are influenced by my upbringing, my multicultural background and my environment.

In my leisure time I enjoy playing volleyball or table tennis and reading books. For the time being I am unsure about my choice of career but I ponder on my professional future.

I have a younger sister named Miriam, who also attends Otto-Hahn-School.

My parents originally come from Eritrea, a small country which lies in East Africa. The cause of their immigration to Germany was the independence war, in which Eritrea struggled for freedom and independence for thirty years. During this war my parents moved to Germany and built up a new life. My father moved to Germany almost thirty years ago and is a trained electrician, but now he works in the printing department of an advertising company. My mother moved to Germany twenty-two years ago and now works as a nursery-school teacher.

My parents keep themselves up-to-date with the situation in Eritrea and try to stay in touch with our relatives. They have chosen Germany for their new home mainly because Germany offers better future prospects and a life in political freedom and safety.

Even though my parents speak German very well, they usually talk among each other in our native language, which is called Tigrinya. I was not educated bilingually and therefore I cannot speak my mother tongue. With regard to my schooling or education I definitely do not feel disadvantaged in comparison to Germans. Furthermore, I never had any serious problems with racism or discrimination in Germany. I have German friends, but also friends with a multicultural background. The background of my parents does not affect me and I feel fully integrated. I feel more German than Eritrean, because I was born in Germany and have lived here all my life. Due to my upbringing in Germany I have different values and attitudes than people who have grown up in Eritrea.

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For me living in a multicultural city like Frankfurt is interesting, because different nationalities reside in Frankfurt, which gives me the possibility to meet people from all over the world.



German/African

Hello my name is M. and I am seventeen years old. I live in Frankfurt. At first I would like to describe my childhood. Although my lineage is a mix of African and German, I can only remember being brought up by my mother's family. My mother's origin is primarily German. Her ancestors were all primarily Germans and so are my grandparents. My origin never played an important role for me in the past. I knew I was different from others, particularly in society. However as soon as I retrace my past I can also state that I have experienced a lot of discrimination because my skin color is black. Moreover, a lot of people tend to think that I am a Want-to-be-German. Of course I did not know how to deal with issues like this.

Nevertheless, it never seemed to me as though it could occur that one day people would just treat me differently from others. I was trying to adjust to society, but it was tough and most people still would not accept me. They only noticed the fact that I have a double identity. I myself felt that I was never able to recognize where I belong to. It was my appearance that mattered most to people. Thus I was often insecure how to present myself in public. But what people did not see were my values or my self-awareness or my personal traits. Nevertheless, I think I should be glad and proud of whom I am and what I know. And secondly, what I would like to say about myself is that I am a really reliable and honest person. Moreover I do not have any problems with anybody which means that if you respect me I will respect you. In the end a double identity and living with a double identity also brings a lot of advantages.

I am not able to say that I have ever learned or seen or heard about my second origin, which would be my father's native country (and my second roots), South-Africa. My father immigrated to Germany to study here and to have a better job. Unfortunately, my dad left me and my mum when I was three years old. My grandparents also played a significant role for me, because they brought me up and they also taught me a lot of things. From an early age people would tell me that I was a very assertive child. But then nobody could say that he or she experienced the same things that I have been through. If you are insecure where you belong to, you might be leading yourself into an identity crisis. When you terrify yourself or doubt your own identity you put yourself in an identity crisis.



A lot of times I pondered what my ethnic background could have to do with my adjustment in my social sphere. I found out that it has a lot to do with the people I grew up with. I was influenced by the way people would treat or approach me. When I was six, my mum decided to move away from East Germany, to start a completely new life. So that is the reason why we chose Frankfurt. Over here we had better opportunities for me to integrate. Here in Frankfurt I ultimately realized that no matter where you come from, you are respected. I also made new friends quickly and integrated well in my new community.

Now I finally live in a multicultural neighborhood and nobody bothers me. Here I really feel that I belong somewhere. Besides, when we first moved to Frankfurt, I went to primary school. Due to the fact that my mother tongue is German I never had problems at school. In my spare time I was active in a sports club and later I did some martial arts. But most of all I adore music and dancing. My life really changed when I grew up. I have been through a lot and I can still not really say that I feel as a real German. But living in a multicultural society makes me feel more comfortable. I would like to find out more about my second origin (South-Africa). I would love to go there one time.

At school: Right now I attend grade 11 at Otto-Hahn School and I aim at achieving my A-level after two more years. It is a really tough job to cope with the daily stress at school, because my parents (my mum and my step-dad) are expecting me to take care of my little sister while they are at work. You can imagine that there barely is any free time for me. Moreover my religion always had a significant influence on me, which increased through my grandparents. It has become exceedingly important to me to be a faithful Christian. My boyfriend is also one of the most important people in my life, because he always supports me.

My future prospects: All in all, I could imagine migrating to another country after school, presumably to the USA. My major goal would be to attain a highly esteemed diploma as a foreign language assistant working for the government. I have to add that I speak German, French (partly),

English and I am also learning Spanish. So far that is all that you should know about me.



Iranian

My name is S. I am 17 years old and I was born in Frankfurt. My parents are originally from Iran and I also got a younger brother. I have quite a good relationship to my family. I love them very much and I am very happy about having such a nice family, although there are also times when we argue and have different points of view. (But I think that is a normal process in every family...)

My father is a taxi driver and my mother is a staff nurse. We live in an apartment in Nieder-Eschbach, so I don't have to drive to school or go by bus. Every morning I walk to school with my best friend Dina (she is at the same school). My hobbies are shopping, spending time with my boyfriend and going out. I am very interested in fashion and music. I would describe myself as a shy, honest and cheerful person. My ethnic background has not influenced my personal character traits, because my parents brought me up in a way which would not be possible in Iran. Their wish was just to forget all the Persian methods of education and give me the chance to grow up in a European society without cultural or religious limitations. I have got a different mentality from the people in Iran, it is hard for me to comprehend their kind of thinking. I could not adjust there.

That is also one of the reasons, why my parents escaped from Iran. Their marriage was not arranged. My father was a friend of my uncle, so my mother and my father got to know each other bit by bit and after some time, they married. Both of them knew that they would not want to live in Iran anymore. Many things played a role for this serious decision; one of them was their families. They were always interfering in their privacy and my parents did not want that. Another important point was that my mother had a strict upbringing by her parents and that is why she had a strong urge for freedom and did not want to make the same mistakes like her parents did to her. My parents had the benefit that my aunt was already naturalised in Germany. She supported them a lot. My aunt cannot bear children, so she loved us very much. I remember, that she was taking care of me during my childhood. After the birth of my brother, my mother was occupied with him, so my aunt was like a mother to me. But it is not like my mother paid no attention to me. Me and my mother have a good relationship, she is



like a friend and a mother. That is a perfect mix.

For many years my aunt has suffered from a severe disease and that makes me really sad, because I love her very much and I do not want her to suffer, it really hurts me and I often pray for her to God. Meanwhile my parents are divorced, but they are good friends. Both of them wanted the divorce. My father has relatives in Canada, so he will try to immigrate to Canada in a few months. I can understand my parents' situation although it is hard for me, because I love both of them. But now I can just stay with my mother. In the past everything was so nice and at that time nobody would have thought that it would end like this. I guess it is just our destiny, but you should always count your blessings.

Oh well! It is not a problem for me to deal with the fact that Frankfurt is a multicultural city, far from it! I like it because you can always learn new things about different cultures, usages and morals. You can even learn words from them and expand your knowledge about different countries. It is varied. It is just fun!

To describe me as a religious person would be a little exaggerated, because I am not religious at all. I just believe in God and I pray to him in my way, therefore I do not need scriptures which include all the prayers. Moreover my parents never forced me to come out of the closet on religion.

My feelings about my background and about Germany are split. Though I think I feel more comfortable in Germany, because I just grew up here and everything. I connect the most important memories with Germany and that is why I just could not live in Iran (and because of the fact that, Iran is not a democratic country). One more reason, why I feel more comfortable in Germany is that women in Iran or in other oriental countries do not have the same rights as men, and that makes me furious. I would not get along with it.

Since I never had any problems just because of my ethnic background, it seems to me that I am fully integrated in German society. I can speak four languages: German (well), Persian (well), English (intermediate) and French (sufficiently). I have got many goals for the future. One of them is to get my A-levels. After that I want to immigrate to Canada with my boyfriend, but I am not quite sure about that, because my mother and my aunt

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would stay in Germany and I cannot live apart from them. Moreover I will try to study and find a good and safe job. I want to earn a lot of money so that my mother does not have to work any more. I just want me and my family to be and stay healthy and happy.



Russian

Hello, my name is H. I am 17 years old and at the moment I live together with my family in Frankfurt, Germany. I attend Otto-Hahn-School in Frankfurt, a comprehensive school /senior college. At present I am in 11th grade and my main goal is to pass my A-levels with the best possible results. I have not really decided on my future plans yet. But of course I have my personal ambitions, which help me to reach my goals. My life may sometimes get very busy, that is unavoidable, but since I was 13 years old, I knew that I was going to strive for a successful job and a great private life.

I would like to have a fulfilled life together with my family in the future. My biggest ambition is to be once a great role model for my children - like my parents are to me! I also have two elder sisters, who always support and encourage me. In my leisure time I like to play basketball and to meet my friends, but I like to dance and to go out as well!

Well, there is also a lot to say about my origin. I was born in Kazakhstan and I spent most of my childhood in Karaganda, a big city in the West - Asian country. Kazakhstan contains various regions with highly different temperatures. So it may get very hot in summer and very cold in winter. The temperature always rises and falls between +40° and - 40° degrees and it is hard to live in some territories of Kazakhstan! But there are also enough regions which are very beautiful with their deserts, huge mountains and wonderful savannas.

My ethnic identity is German, but maternally I am also half Russian. This mixture of Germans and Russians has originated during the Second World War, when my grandparents had to move away from Germany to Kazakhstan. Later, when my parents had married, they moved together with their three young daughters back to Germany, directly to Frankfurt! All in all we have been living here for about twelve years now and to my mind it is a great experience to live in such a highly multicultural city as Frankfurt. Firstly, here I learn a lot about other traditions and religions and secondly, it is interesting to belong to a multicultural society. I am happy to find multicultural friends here, who have also moved away from their country to Germany.



I can tell you something about my religion and our family traditions, too. I am a Christian and I would say that I am a religious person. I have already been confirmed at the age of fourteen and to me religion plays a big role in various situations.

In the end I consider that my family and me do not really live with those typically German or Russian traditions, or even with only one of those cultures. I strongly believe that we have created our own traditions and our own culture, which is definitely influenced by our roots!

Finally I would describe myself as an ambitious and determined person, who is sometimes a little absent-minded. So mainly this is me and my life and I hope you have now got an impression of me!



Russian

My name is A. and I was born on July 23rd in 1986 in Ust-Kamenogorsk (now Öskemen), Kazakhstan. My family roots are spread far across the former USSR. My grandmother originally came from Siberia and my grandfather from Tschimkent, Kazakhstan. Both met in the late fifties in Ust-Kamenogorsk where my mother was born in 1964. (Ust-Kamenogorsk was founded as a mail and military station in 1720 and was given to Kazakhstan (former Kazakh SSR) during the Fifties under the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev).

My mother, a Russian, married a Kazakh in 1981. Later she began to work for Sony Corporation and was the manager of the first Sony Store in the Kazakh SSR. This was the second time that I learned something about different cultures. In that case it was Japan. The first time was as my parents disagreed about my confession because my mother's family is Christian and my father's is Muslim. In 1989, after my parents' divorce, we, my mother, my grandmother and I went to Alma-Ata (now Almaty), the capital city of Kazakhstan. I grew up with my grandmother and saw my mother about four or five times a month because of her work. I attended the first and second grade at a primary school in Almaty.

In 1991 my mother met her new husband, a half German and we migrated to Schwetzingen (a small town between Heidelberg and Mannheim), Germany, in September 1995. Without any command of the language I started the third grade in Schwetzingen. (Finally I had to repeat the class). After a short time I felt fully integrated, due to the fact that I learned German very quickly and simply because Schwetzingen does not have a high immigrant rate, compared to Frankfurt. I finished my O-Levels ("Realschulabschluss") in 2005 and visited Kazakhstan twice during these 10 years.

In summer 2005 we finally moved to Frankfurt where I'm trying to do my A-Levels now. In fact I feel fully integrated in both cultures, in Germany as well as in Russia more than

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ever. Unfortunately I can not fully identify myself with Kazakh culture, because I had no really close relationship to my father and his family.

But I can say that I have lived through the biggest change in my mother country. I saw communism and the beginning of democracy in a state which had not been independent for 55 years. Kazakhstan is more beautiful than ever and it has got about 130 ethnic groups and confessions which all live in peace together. I grew up with Russian people and I learned a lot from different cultures influenced by my parents, by work, by school, Frankfurt, Schwetzingen and the cultural diversity of both states.

At Secondary School I started to learn French and Spanish and I hope, one day, I will be able to speak more than two or three languages fluently.