

ART&THOUGHT



EDUCATION

GOETHE-INSTITUT

EDITORIAL

The argument about education is a cultural battle that every society is fighting, however poor or rich, advanced or unprogressive. Whoever makes decisions about education has power and influence over the next generation – or believes they do. This is the only explanation for the frequent confusion in the education systems described by our authors in this edition. We invite our readers on a virtual ‘educational trip’, from East to West.

Education and upbringing will decide our future. Only those with sufficient knowledge will be able to meet the challenges that await us all in the coming decades. And that is precisely the problem. Investing in education now will help to solve the problems of tomorrow, not those of today. And because the problems of today are already so great (possibly because too little was invested in education in the past?), people prefer to spend money on short-term, not very sustainable improvements to the current situation rather than on the education sector. Absurdly, this is as true of a rich country like Germany as it is of those countries that have actual existential problems.

But the education question is not only a financial one – it is also cultural. The argument about education is a cultural battle that every society is fighting, however poor or rich, advanced or unprogressive. Whoever makes decisions about education has power and influence over the next generation – or believes they do. This is the only explanation for the frequent confusion in the education systems described by our authors in this edition.

We invite our readers on a virtual ‘educational trip’, from East to West. We begin in Pakistan, where the oldest education system in the Islamic world, the madrasas, have become the focus of criticism – some of it justified, and some not, as we learn from the short story by **JAMAL MALIK** and **BUSHRA IQBAL**. In Afghanistan, on the other hand, it seems that the education sector is principally run by capitalism – but the Afghans have dealt with worse, and they are not losing heart.

Iran, meanwhile, has very different problems to address. It is a multi-ethnic state in which many languages are spoken in addition to Farsi: Arabic, Azeri-Turkish and Kurdish, for example. Yet the official education policy ignores this linguistic diversity – to the detriment of all, according to our editor **MANUTSCHEHR AMIRPUR**, who has been responsible for the Persian edition of *Fikrun wa Fann (Andishe ve Honar)* since 2002.

It’s no surprise that the education system in Syria has collapsed as a result of three years of civil war in the country. However, numerous private and international initiatives bear

witness to the Syrians’ keen desire for education, and they constitute an encouraging hope for the future. Palestine, meanwhile, struggles with adverse circumstances of a different kind, namely the Israeli occupation and blockade. Yet here, of all places, we find at least two positive examples for a creative, landmark approach to dealing with an apparently hopeless situation: theatre as a means of coping with the conflict, and the children’s library in Gaza.

In Egypt, on the other hand, as **HEIKE THEE** reports, the public education system, which is already stretched to the limit by the country’s high birth rate, has fallen victim to post-revolutionary power games. Yet **ANDREAS PFLITSCH** demonstrates that the programmatic book *The Future of Culture in Egypt* by the great Egyptian intellectual Taha Hussein could still serve today as a guide to help Egypt out of its identity crisis. And **AMIRA EL AHL** tells us how eager the Egyptians are for education – also and especially in the provinces, where the Robert Bosch Stiftung’s cultural managers are doing pioneering work. Photographs of pieces by the Egyptian artist **HUDA LUTFI** round off our look at the situation in Egypt, which continues to hold our attention.

By contrast, the education system in Germany is dealing with the challenge of integrating immigrants, particularly from the Islamic world. For this reason, as we read in the article by **RABEYA MÜLLER**, Islamic religious instruction is to be introduced in German schools: however, this presents greater difficulties than one would at first imagine. **DONJA AMIRPUR** finds that immigrants with disabled children are especially susceptible to discrimination. And in his text ‘What Does Hitler Have to Do with Me?’ **STANISŁAW STRASBURGER** explains how attempts to teach German history are perceived by pupils who come from a very different background.

Leading on from some of the pedagogical issues raised in the current edition, our next edition will address the topic of psychology.

We hope you will find the articles presented here instructive!

Stefan Weidner
Editor-in-Chief

■ **What are the worries and problems confronting the pupils of an Islamic madrasa in Pakistan? And why are there madrasas at all? This short story essays a literary approach to a highly complex phenomenon.**

THE DREAM OF A MADRASA A SHORT STORY FROM PAKISTAN

BY **JAMAL MALIK AND BUSHRA IQBAL**



Entrance to the courtyard of the madrasa Bou Inania in Fes, Morocco, one of the most splendid in the Islamic World. It was built in 1351-1356 by the Marinid ruler of Morocco, Abu Inan Faris. Photo: Stefan Weidner © Goethe-Institut

Salik woke with a start in the middle of the night, disturbed by muffled noises. Sweat stood out on his brow. What had happened? Loud footsteps and very bright lights had suddenly taken over his hostel. He paid no attention to the howling dogs and rattling rickshaws. Fearful, but driven by curiosity, he peered through the crack of the door of his first-floor room. Beyond the parapet that ran along his corridor he saw soldiers conducting a raid. Like bloodhounds they slunk across the wide courtyard, which was framed by the entry gate, freshly-painted walls, new doors on the rooms, the colonnades, and the mosque.

Confused, Salik recalled the scenes around the Red Mosque of Jamia Hafsa, which had seared themselves on his young

memory as an emblem of the Islamic resistance. But what was the reason for the military presence now?

Moments later the soldiers were already leading two of his comrades out of the corridors of the madrasa, which was one of the biggest in town: 'Izzat, his Turkmen friend from three storeys up, where the older students lived, and Masood, a pupil on his floor.

Uneasy, Salik woke his four roommates, all of whom were his own age, and told them what he had just seen. Frantically, they racked their brains to try to work out why this had happened. 'Abd al-Mustafa, a studious bookworm from a family of reputable merchants, speculated that they were being

subjected to disciplinary measures. Like Jamia Hafsa, which had been razed to the ground by the Allies of the 'war on terror', their madrasa, too, was increasingly becoming the focus of public attention, he said. Back then the military had powerfully demonstrated that, if it wanted to, it could march into private educational establishments, too. So there was obviously growing unease about religious schools – and not just in Pakistan, which had the second-highest Muslim population in the world. Their madrasa alone had more than one thousand pupils and students! But who or what was there to discipline here, Salik wondered, after listening to 'Abd al-Mustafa's speculations. He couldn't conceive of his madrasa as a terrorist stronghold.

After the ritual washing (*wudu'*) and the obligatory morning prayers, the five roommates said intercessions for their two comrades who had been arrested, then made their way to the nearby madrasa kitchen. Today, even the pupils who usually greedily devoured the meagre breakfast had difficulty swallowing their pieces of flatbread and watery yoghurt.

Soon, though, the teacher, Shah Nurani, clad in a grey *salwar kameez*, summoned them to class. His turban sat low on his forehead, his shoulders were covered by his traditional woollen scarf, and a few crumbs of bread from breakfast had got caught in his henna-coloured beard. The pupils sat cross-legged in front of him on straw mats typical of the region. The Koran stools (*rihal*) and low tables came from the carpenter's workshop next door. The teacher launched straight into the lesson as if nothing had happened, continuing the section on syntactical questions from the previous class. Madrasas placed a great deal of importance on mastering the language. Grammatical and syntactical rules helped the children to understand both logic, which was so important in Islamic law, and also the Koran itself. Looking around at his pupils, Shah Nurani ascertained that they were very uneasy. What did syntax and logic have to do with the raid in the night? their faces were asking. Was the school involved in some kind of plot?

Try as he might, Salik could not concentrate on the subject matter. He was thinking instead about 'Izzat – light-skinned, blond, gentle-faced 'Izzat. Salik had often observed him during class, hidden in the shadow of the colonnade that fringed the inner courtyard. And then he had gazed long and deep into his eyes. 'Izzat had enchanted him with verses by Abu Nuwas and 'Umar Khayyam, whispered into his ear. In secret – nobody knew. Salik had shared his woes, too, and exchanged them for affection. Like so many others, 'Izzat's father, a *mujahid*, fell in the Cold War in Afghanistan – back then, between 1986 and 1994, when US AID spent fifty million dollars helping to develop textbooks for madrasas to encourage the *jihad* against the Soviets. Since that time, some of the madrasa's pupils had found their way to Paradise from Kashmir and Bosnia as well.

After class, Salik found out that they were saying 'Izzat had planned an attack on the military academy in the nearby prohibited zone, and that he had found an ally in Masood, one of those Afghan Pashtuns who had been exposed to the 'war on terror'. But perhaps 'Izzat just wanted to avenge himself on the desecrators who had caused him so much pain. Perhaps he didn't have terrorist motives at all, or so Salik hoped.

He felt abandoned, and the next day he went to visit his father, an Ansari who, despite belonging to the weaver caste, claimed to be descended from the helpers (*ansar*) of the Prophet Mohammed in Medina. He had worked his way up to become a police officer's personal driver. When Salik entered the house, three of his brothers and sisters rushed to embrace him in relief. His mother greeted him by putting an amulet (*ta'wiz*) around his neck. They listened attentively to Salik's story.

He could tell from the threads of cigarette smoke hanging in the air that his father was at home. Salik went into the kitchen, where his father, a man in his mid-fifties, was in the midst of shaving in a pale mirror. Puffing on his cigarette, he declared that Salik would stay on at the madrasa! His studies would qualify him for the lower ranks in the military – the higher commissions only went to those fancy Oxbridge graduates, anyway. Salik's eldest brother couldn't be relied on: at the fee-paying state school he had gone off the rails and joined the drug scene, his father concluded morosely.

It was a blessing for him that Salik enjoyed free education – and, what was more, from teachers who in his opinion were morally beyond reproach. This bloody government was following quite different political aims, which they concealed behind pious words.

Salik was aware of the burden his father carried. Salik had three unmarried sisters, one of whom was already almost past marriageable age. Salik sensed that his father's expectations towards his son appalled him, and made him irritable. His thoughts flew to 'Izzat.

Eventually he trudged sullenly back to the madrasa. On the fringes of the colonnades he spotted Jalal al-Din, a teacher who gesticulated wildly, in the midst of a group of older boys. He caught words like justice (*insaf*) and oppression (*zulm*), mission (*da'wah*) and holy war (*jihad*), community (*jama'at*) and brigade (*jaish*). Jalal al-Din struck the little table with his clenched fist. When his fiery eyes spotted Salik, he fell silent. Not speaking was a form of communication, too, the boy thought. He became even more uneasy.

But shortly before evening prayer 'Izzat strolled into the courtyard, in his habitual outfit, gesturing in that way he had which was peculiar to him. Surprised, pupils and teachers

welcomed him, embraced him, thanked Allah for his blessing. Salik pushed his way through to him; his steps grew lighter, and he caught `Izzat's pleasant smell on the air.

During the *wudu`* the two boys huddled together. `Izzat's voice was obscured by the splashing of the water, but his quivering nostrils spoke of his outrage at the military, and he whispered to Salik that the government's incursions were intolerable and had to be combated. Shocked, Salik raised his head. What was that supposed to mean?

Salik and `Izzat said the prayers shoulder to shoulder with the other pupils. During the communal meal that followed, rice and lentils on tin plates, `Izzat drew curious stares. What were they thinking? Salik asked himself, as he rolled a little ball of rice and lentils between his thumb, index and middle fingers. If they could read `Izzat's thoughts, would they tremble as he did? Sleep did not come to Salik that night.

In the morning he went to class as usual. The red-bearded teacher Shah Nurani wiped his hands on his shawl and began the lesson with a story about his studies at the madrasa during the war in Afghanistan. The jihadists fell in this world, without pay, and as martyrs they had left behind orphans who today sat in the madrasas, he summarised pensively. Back then, he continued, his comrades had pressured him into fighting, but he had managed to return from the front in one piece. He wanted, he urged in conclusion, to fight with the pen and not the sword; and he held out his pen to his pupils.

Salik understood what the teacher wanted to tell them: that you could fight for a peaceable *jihad*, too. He looked over at the proud minaret. When you were that high up, you were closer to Allah, he thought. Already he felt a little better.

The next afternoon, underneath a tree in the garden outside the classroom, Salik saw Jalal al-Din and `Izzat huddled together with two other students, probably from another madrasa. The group quickly broke up when he called a greeting. Only `Izzat came over to Salik, with a friendly smile. Salik confided in him his curiosity and unease. Many insistent questions had come to mind the previous night. Salik wanted to know how long madrasas had actually existed. The imam of the nearby mosque would be able to answer that question, `Izzat assured him proudly, and took his young friend by the hand.

In the mosque, where they arrived a few minutes later, the imam explained that madrasas originated in the year 1067, in the Nizamiyya in Baghdad. The sciences taught there were intended to provide qualifications for administrative officials and judges. A science of disputation (*`ilm al-khilaf*) had also developed, and at the time it quickly became an indispensable part of legal training. However, whether it encouraged

peaceable coexistence or was intended rather for acquiring the opponent's argumentative weapons was a question the imam was unable to answer.

They came back in time for evening prayers. Salik's head was buzzing with questions. He cast himself down to pray.

He needed to clarify things. After some hesitation he ventured to seek out the head of the madrasa, Maulana Rizwi. Dressed in a black *sherwani*, when Salik entered the principal was poring over exam papers sent to him by the madrasa organisation. He sipped a glass of fresh pomegranate juice; the room was filled with the humming of the computer. He stroked his long grey beard with his right hand: his tired eyes had already seen many holy places. He contemplated Salik's questioning eyes, and answered that unfortunately *`ilm al-khilaf* had not succeeded in establishing itself. Very early on, the Nizamiyya was misused as a bulwark against the emergent Shiites and also against mu'tazilite 'heresies'. The computer fell silent. Power cut! Salik understood: madrasas served other purposes, too, as well as simply being purveyors of education.

The next day, as he continued his quest, he bumped into a pupil from another madrasa nearby, who teased him, calling him 'parrot of Paradise'. But why? He reached up and touched his green turban, and thought of the *Da'wat-e Islami*, its powerful missionary movement in the struggle for Muslim souls. One of the pupils tried to impress on him the view that traditional ways of life led people astray. Pilgrimages to holy sites (*ziyarat*) were corrupt innovations (*bida`*) that were just as despicable as intercessions for the dead (*shafa'at*). Salik broke out in a sweat: he certainly did not want to be branded a heretic (*murtadd*). But how was he supposed to know what was right?

He ran off as fast as he could. When he finally arrived breathless at his hostel he went up to his room and told his friend, the bookworm, what had happened to him. Denouncing people for apostasy (*takfir*) was nothing new, `Abd al-Mustafa answered dryly, as one could read for example in Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1327). There had long been passionate debates on the merits of simply imitating tradition (*taqlid*) versus independent reasoning (*ijtihad*). His eyes sparkled as he explained further. For us the Prophet is alive and omnipresent, he said. But for those who followed the tradition of the madrasa of Deoband near Delhi (founded in 1867), the Beloved of God died a natural death, and that was that. Salik was overwhelmed. What was he supposed to do now with this information?

Pondering this, he left the room. He began to walk faster when he spotted Maulana Rizwi, who was just locking up his office. He wanted to know whether Salik had been happy with his answer. Agitated, the boy told him about his discon-

certing encounter with the pupils from the other madrasa. The principal laid his kindly hand on Salik's shoulder. He spoke of the inner-Muslim conflicts that had grown increasingly violent since the 1980s, fuelled by the blasphemy law of 1986. The teacher sighed. Confrontations took place on occasions such as the ceremonies to mark the death of a Sufi (*'urs*), Shiite processions during the month of Muharram (*ta'ziya*), or the birthday of the beloved Prophet (*milad al-nabi*), peace be upon him. Salik hummed and hawed for a while before he finally managed to ask whether *'ilm al-khilaf* could have prevented these conflicts. Maulana stroked the boy's hair paternally and commented that he was an inquisitive student.

The sun was going down, streaking the sky with colour. A few boys were still playing with a shuttlecock in the madrasa park. The muezzin called to evening prayer. Up there birds were flying to their nests, while down below people hastened to the mosque.

The next day, after class, Salik was surprised to hear `Izzat's voice near the office of the principal, Maulana Rizwi. He peered cautiously into the room, and saw that Jalal al-Din was there, too. Salik was warmly welcomed; `Izzat gave him an encouraging look.

The Maulana recalled the *Muqaddima* of the medieval scholar Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), who subdivided the sciences into the transmitted (*naqliyyah*) and the rational (*'aqliyyah*), sacred (*diniyyah*) and profane (*dunyawiyyah*). Traditional sciences, he elaborated, owed their existence to divinely-inspired law, as it could be derived from the Koran and the Prophetic tradition: ancillary disciplines such as grammar and syntax also came under this heading. By contrast, rational sciences such as logic, philosophy, astronomy, medicine, mathematics and metaphysics were based on traditions from other, non-Islamic world-views.

Jalal al-Din cleared his throat nervously. Maulana Rizwi continued. The difference between the two traditions of knowledge lay principally in the source on which they were based, i.e. divine (Islamic) knowledge, or knowledge inspired by man. Salik scratched his as-yet-uncut beard and glanced up, eyebrows raised, at `Izzat, who was himself trying to catch Jalal al-Din's eye. Did that mean, Salik blurted out in surprise, that the madrasa next door taught only traditional sciences? `Izzat's riposte met with great approval from Jalal al-Din: Knowledge was based solely on the traditional sciences! Once again, Salik was baffled by these entirely opposing explanations.

His gaze shifting to the public medical practice that was part of the madrasa next door, the Maulana went on to say that these rational sciences had established themselves during the period of empire-building. Elated, he slid his prayer

beads across his wrinkled fingers. It took more than the Koran alone to convince millions of Hindus, he said. For far-reaching processes of cultural integration the *'aqliyyat*, the rational sciences, were required. Jalal al-Din, however, hurried to take his leave. `Izzat followed him, leaving a disappointed Salik behind.

Maulana Rizwi straightened his waistband under his knee-length shirt and continued. So to a certain extent, he said, the same books were studied in all three of the great Muslim empires – the Ottoman, the Persian and the Mughal: primarily, works of philosophy, scholasticism and mathematics. For a moment Salik lowered his eyes and thought of `Izzat. The Maulana gave a discreet little cough. Salik should prepare well for the exams, he said. The main focus was not on the texts of well-known recorders of tradition from the early days: rather, commentaries and glosses had repeatedly been added to these canonical texts. These secondary texts facilitated speedy access to the central idea and discussed the typical issues of specific times and places. Salik was too confused to be able to follow what the teacher was saying. He said his goodbyes and left the room.

Outside in the courtyard he came across `Izzat, who anxiously exhorted Salik not to meet so often with Maulana Rizwi. Caught up in his avalanche of words, Salik was no longer able to tell him about the wonderful treasures the Maulana had described to him of the scholarly tradition of Iran and Central Asia in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. All Salik managed to mumble was that the Maulana wanted to restore the madrasa to its former glory. Did he want to play into the hands of Pervez Musharraf, who had launched a campaign against the madrasas at the USA's insistence? growled `Izzat crossly. Then he turned on his heels and walked off. Salik's head was swimming. What on earth was wrong with `Izzat?

The next morning, Salik's lessons consisted of a lecture on Aristotelian logic with reference to the *al-Mirqat al-mizaniyyah* by Fadl-e Imam Khairabadi (d. 1244/1828) – a summary of *al-Risala al-shamsiyya fi al-qawa'id al-mantiqiyya and Tahdhib fi 'ilm al-mantiq*, thirteenth-century textbooks on logic and (philosophical) theology. `Izzat was there as well. The pupils listened carefully; the lesson was not intended as an exchange of views. Salik fidgeted uneasily on his mat. Finally, he interrupted the sermon to ask whether the recent raid had been a response to the inter-denominational riots? He received the terse reply that there were differences between the kinds of logic used in the madrasas, and that the government had a logic of its own. Despite `Izzat's angry gaze, Salik's curiosity demanded more answers.

Fraught with tension, immediately after the lesson he hurried to Maulana Rizwi again. He knocked, opened the door, and, coming straight to the point, asked whether there had

been comparable developments in the madrasas after the fourteenth century, and what the situation was like today. The old man looked down at him with the pride of a father observing his growing son, and told Salik about *dars-e nizami*. This did not originate in the Nizamiyya in Baghdad, but with Mullah Nizam al-Din of Lucknow (d. 1748). The Mullah had compiled this syllabus against a background of political upheaval, when new groups with a patriotic focus appeared on the scene and not only promoted their own beliefs but also pushed through centralised tax systems and standardised their own languages. In short, they created their own areas of government, and for this they needed an appropriate system of education.

The next day, clutching the curriculum in his hands, Salik came across Jalal al-Din. He asked him why the madrasa education had such a bad reputation in the media, and what could be done about it. Jalal al-Din waved him away and sent him to the madrasa library. The librarian there gave him a book in which it was written that, as a result of the colonial invasions and the introduction of new education systems in the second half of the nineteenth century, madrasas had, at that time, almost completely ceased to be the general educational establishments.

The so-called civilising mission of the colonial rulers was intended to spread 'global ethics', he read. Anyone who didn't submit to it ended up being excluded. Ever since, madrasas had been referred to as *dini madaris* (religious schools). He remembered Ibn Khaldun's separation of *diniyyah* and *dunya-wiyyah*. It was really complicated, Salik observed, and scratched his head thoughtfully.

Shortly afterwards `Abd al-Mustafa entered the library with a bundle of books. At least the thirty thousand or so madrasas in the country provided a large part of the population with knowledge, he said casually, as if reading Salik's thoughts. That way they compensated for the missing or overpriced state schools, and offered education to many people, not just the penniless, in the spirit of Islamic compassion. Behind `Abd al-Mustafa, `Izzat too entered the room. He picked the book *Clash of Civilizations* off a shelf, and declared firmly that it was scarcely possible for the numerous schools of thought that had developed since the colonial era to be reconciled with each other. Their rivalries could only be overcome through true Islam.

Meanwhile, troubled by what was going on in the madrasa, Maulana Rizwi had called a teachers' conference. Salik was to serve as tea boy.

Surrounded by his assembled colleagues, the Maulana gazed at the madrasa's monthly booklet, which lay before him, fresh from the printer, ready for the month of fasting. Income from voluntary alms-giving (*sadaqa*, *khairat*), both

from the neighbourhood and from the merchant networks, was stagnating, he said. However, they would soon be able to rely on high obligatory alms donations (*zakat*) from the numerous workers returning from the Gulf region. And since 1980 the religious schools had been receiving *zakat* via the state. The assignment of these additional finances could, in fact, constitute up to about a third of their annual income.

On hearing this, Salik thought with reverence of the splendid madrasa building, but with revulsion of the monotony of their daily meals. His mind turned to Eid al-Adha, the Feast of the Sacrifice. It was still a long way off, but the thought alone was enough to scent all over the town the blood of the freshly-skinned hides the madrasa pupils would collect from the roadside. Then they would be allowed to eat plenty of meat again. His stomach growled.

Now a teacher was complaining that in Muslim countries the nationalisation of Islamic foundations (*waqf*) was to blame for the economic plight of the madrasas. True, the *'ulama*, the Islamic scholars, had joined forces as a result. But they had not managed to make sustainable reforms to their education system. Their disagreements had been too great, and these were increasingly expressed in the teaching and in class, sometimes encouraged by religious-political parties that recruited their members from the madrasas.

Maulana Rizwi coughed approvingly and stroked his tired face with his right hand. He started, however, when a colleague remarked that madrasas were embedded in their environment; that they took in the majority of the drop-outs, those who would never otherwise stand a chance in society. The mosques attached to the madrasas – of which there were, after all, about a million in Pakistan – were important centres of mobilisation.

Salik was rudely awakened from his culinary dreams. Had he really just heard that? Only last week he had once again, in the sermon (*khutbah*), heard a preacher calling for political agitation and denunciation, for declaring Muslims with divergent opinions infidels. As a result, religion classes and the Friday sermon were the subject of fierce dispute. His teachers were obviously fighting about it too – and on different fronts, thought Salik, with a queasy feeling in his stomach.

Global modernisation was trying to enforce a universal code, and in so doing was provoking the religious resistance of local forces, said the red-bearded teacher, making his presence felt. One side's proposals aimed to extend the hegemony of the state. The others insisted on cultural and political independence. Numerous madrasas were fighting against the state, or were competing with each other for scarce resources.

In response, Maulana Rizwi rose to intervene. His voice was

stern. In the years since its foundation, his madrasa had developed into an exemplary educational institution, and he would do everything in his power to keep it that way. Young people needed progressive education and perspectives. He rubbed his tired eyes, hidden beneath his bushy eyebrows, and added with conviction that civilisation and reform (*islah*) could not, however, deliver a reformed syllabus by themselves. The teaching too must change!

Salik saw that Jalal al-Din was visibly indignant. What on earth was wrong with him?, Salik asked himself – but blocked the possible answer out of his head.

Access to the job market was a big problem for young graduates, the Maulana continued. In addition, there was a growing Salafist ideology that expressed itself in the styles of beard and clothing of the Gulf returnees. And now, with the help of their hard-earned capital from the years of work in the Gulf, these returning emigrants were carving out a place for themselves in those branches of industry that had hitherto been occupied by other social groups. He viewed the escalating clashes between Sunnis and Shiites as evidence of this. It was common knowledge that these attacks were fuelled by foreign masterminds.

By now, Maulana Rizwi was bright red in the face. The matter was complicated, he declared accusingly, by laymen who were leading these resistance movements and using the theological arguments of respected Islamic scholars to justify their actions. Often, criminals too were able to work their way up, and while this was not welcomed by the madrasas, it was sometimes tolerated – because they helped to pay the bills.

Jalal al-Din had already visibly broken out in a sweat when the Maulana quoted from an English book. Yes, even traditional loyalty structures like family, tribes, and networks of scholarly tradition could be undermined, he said. And more than that: if the state failed in its role as guarantor of freedom, prosperity and justice, these criminals could justify the attacks on religious grounds – as if they were in a position to claim to be the sole representatives of Islam. And for this they also made use of innocent madrasa pupils! This cannot be tolerated, the Maulana said, his voice breaking as he straightened his turban.

Returning to his room, Salik shared his confused impressions with his comrades. It was a restless night. Several times Salik went to the door and looked out because he thought he heard a noise. Suddenly, in the darkness of the night, he spotted a few fleeting shapes. Wrapped in shawls, caps pulled down low, they hurried across the courtyard and out into the street. Salik thought he recognised the gestures of a young man who was hastily waving people on. Another

shadow reminded him of Jalal al-Din. No sooner was the courtyard empty again than he heard the noise of engines outside, in front of the madrasa, quickly mingling with the sound of dogs howling and the rattle of passing rickshaws.

The next morning, `Izzat was missing from the courtyard. Instead, Salik's uneasy gaze fell on `Abd al-Mustafa, who was agitatedly holding a newspaper item under his nose. There had been another attack on a military base – many people had died. Salik's heart plummeted into his boots. `Abd al-Mustafa's attempted to cheer him up with the thought that Salik himself preferred to go to the library rather than hang around with people like `Izzat, but it wasn't much help.

And so the next day he was all the more relieved when his bleary eyes caught sight of `Izzat in the madrasa. They only exchanged a brief glance; `Izzat appeared to be deep in thought. A moment later the senior clerk called Salik over. He had received a letter from his father. Salik quickly opened the letter and read it. He rejoiced to read the first few lines, but as he read on he grew increasingly upset.

Overcome with despondency and alone with his burden, Salik wandered around aimlessly. It was only towards evening, shortly before prayers, that `Izzat found him and enquired why he was in such a state. He cared, he said, even if they were worlds apart. Salik held out the letter. His father had written that his eldest daughter had finally received a proposal of marriage, and he was very keen to marry her off now, as fast as possible. `Izzat responded with a raise of his chin. The problem, Salik went on, was that the party who had made the proposal was demanding a very, very high dowry. Probably because of her advanced age. He, Salik, had another four years to study before he would be able to help his father. By then his sister would no longer be marriageable, and the other sisters ...

`Izzat dried Salik's tears, clasped him close and whispered in his ear: There are all sorts of ways of getting your hands on a lot of money quickly. Speechless, Salik stared at `Izzat. A touch of hope flickered in his sorrowful eyes.

Salik went up to his room and stretched out on his bed. He ignored his comrades' voices and fixed his eyes on the ceiling, which couldn't set him any boundaries. He stared through it, out into emptiness. Images of his father, his sister, of Maulana Rizwi and his dream of a madrasa went round in circles in his head. What remained was his father's hopeless face – his father, who didn't know which way to turn. His dreams dissolved into tears.

He crept out into the darkness, up to the third floor, and knocked on `Izzat's door ...

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Pak Women Writers Forum

<http://masrah-theater.net/>

de, en

■ **The Afghan university system faces some unenviable problems. In the near future the field of academic education will struggle to cope with the consequences of a huge rise in the country's birth rate. Two-thirds of the Afghan population are under the age of twenty-five. This means that, every year, more and more schoolchildren are competing for places at institutions of higher education. Can the Afghan education system handle it?**

PROGRESS AGAINST ALL ODDS UNIVERSITIES IN AFGHANISTAN

BY **MARTIN GERNER**

The development over recent years is as remarkable as it is problematic. In 2002, various sources registered a total of 8,000 students across the country. In 2009 the number was 62,000. By the end of 2013, it was around 120,000. We read that there are around 70,000 to 80,000 higher education places within the state system for an estimated 300,000 school leavers. Even if a degree of scepticism is called for when confronted with these kinds of figures in the context of Afghanistan, fair access to higher education and equal opportunities are already a growing challenge for the Afghan state.

For example: every year, around the time of the *concours* – the written entrance exam for the state universities – there are the usual intrigues, bribery and greasing of palms. 'There's a tradition of fraud in the majority of faculties,' says one Kabul lecturer. 'The ministerial bureaucracy itself is involved. And there's not much point in demanding equality of opportunity from a judiciary that's not independent.' Some accusations and complaints also end up on television and in the media. So far, this has not resolved the problem. There is great resistance at all levels. Insiders report that it is frequently wealthy or influential families who succeed in shoehorning their children onto medicine or engineering courses in this way, even when there are others who have better results.

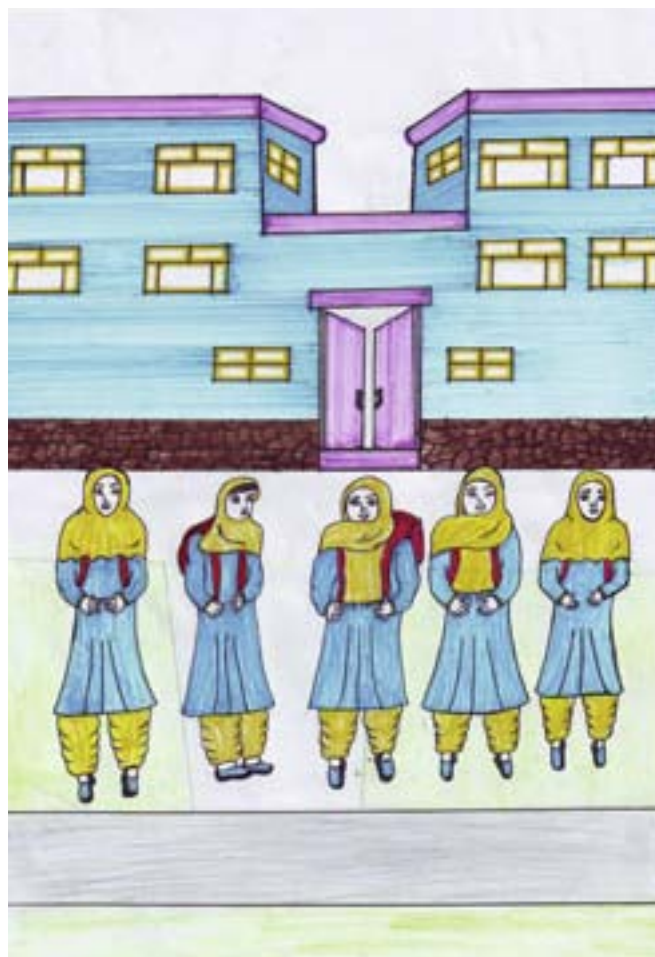
THREE-TIER EDUCATION

From a student's point of view, the landscape of Afghan higher education is degenerating into a three-tier society. The small social group that manages to snare the lucrative foreign scholarships to study in Europe, the US or Australia has the best chance. Since 2002, for example, the German Academic Exchange Service's 'Afghanistan Stability Pact', financed by

the German Foreign Office, has enabled numerous scholars to study for a master's degree or a Ph.D. in Germany. The idea is that the returning scholars will become lecturers and teachers, form the nucleus of newly-equipped faculties, and raise them up to an international academic level. All scholars must, incidentally, sign a statement that they will return to their homeland on finishing their studies. In the past, not all of them have done so.

The second group are those students who win a place at one

Drawing
from the book
*Es war einmal
oder nicht.*
*Afghanische Kinder
und ihre Welt*
*(Once Upon A Time
Or Maybe Not At All:
Afghan Children
and Their World)*
by Roger Willemsen.
S. Fischer Verlag,
Frankfurt, 2013.



of Afghanistan's 26 state universities. The syllabus and administration are often outdated, the equipment rudimentary by international standards, and the establishments run in a spirit that is sometimes reminiscent of a disciplinary institution: but a place at a state university does still open doors, if only to further studies in neighbouring India or Pakistan.

The third group – the estimated 50,000 to 70,000 young men and women who fail the *concours*, or who are defeated by the system – can resort to one of around 75 private universities. Over the past six years these institutes have been shooting up like mushrooms. Competition among them is fierce. They do not receive state funding, and all are vying for the students' – or their parents' – favour and money, placing conspicuous billboards on Kabul's main squares and banners on Internet websites. This has had consequences that one is tempted to describe as typically Afghan. Successful Afghan businessmen have, for example, founded institutes of higher education – but political agents, including governors, converted warlords and even former Taliban have also got involved. All of these are included among the founders or co-founders of new private institutes. In this way they hope to be able to exert long-term influence over Afghan society and its youth. The strictly conservative, Saudi-friendly Mujaheddin leader Abdul Salam Sayyaf has given more than just the name to Dawat University, while Ariya private university is seen as belonging to Mazar's governor Atta Noor – and these are just two examples of many.

PROFIT OVER ENTRANCE EXAMS

The crux of the private universities: 'There are no entrance exams. This means that all students are accepted. But that way the standard doesn't go up – it remains consistently low,' criticises Ali Amiri, a lecturer and co-founder of Ibn Sina private university in Kabul. Over the past two years, he says, the number of students there has risen from 400 to 1,400 – at least a third of whom are women. 'The university makes around one million US dollars a year from study fees alone,' Amiri calculates. The institution wants to use this income over the next decade to buy land and build a bigger campus outside the city gates. Other private universities are seeking more short-term profits, which seems to be symptomatic of the unbridled capitalism that characterises the Afghan economy.

In the midst of all this new academic confusion, one university seems to be in a league of its own: the American University of Kabul, established and supported by powerful associations, from the government to US universities to well-off individuals. The fees, in US dollars, for one year of study are well into the realms of four figures. Only a few of the new Kabul and Afghan elite can afford this, which is why the university is seen as a forge for the careers of the children of government ministers and ministerial officials.

The private universities may have one advantage: this is where you will find relatively young and flexible staff, such as dedicated young women working as lecturers on freelance contracts. Some have studied at elite universities in the US and Europe; they prefer to work outside the old government-run structures, and are well-connected.

NOT WITHOUT OPTIMISM

'At the state universities, it's not unusual for older lecturers to block the transition into the new era. Some of them refuse to make way for the next generation, even though they were officially pensioned off years ago and the younger lecturers are better qualified,' observes Niamatullah Ibrahim. Nonetheless, it seems that the young generation is not giving up. 'In our faculty in Kabul in 2002, only around ten percent of the lecturers used to have a Master's degree. Now it's around eighty percent,' one former overseas scholar comments optimistically. He reels off a list: more and better English textbooks, a well-appointed lab, new microscopes and 36 teaching staff. The faculty is changing. And those who don't land one of the coveted foreign scholarships for Europe, Australia or the United States turn their attention instead to Afghanistan's neighbours: India, Pakistan, or Tajikistan. 'Several Kabul University lecturers are there at the moment doing their Master's degrees,' says a member of staff at the Faculty of Fine Arts. The tuition is affordable, he explains; visas are easy to obtain, and performance standards are not too high. And they speak Persian there, too.

It is as so often in Afghanistan: there's more than one way of looking at things. What the system really needs is an immediate, fundamental reform. Yet at the same time things are starting to move forwards, sometimes quite substantially, despite all warnings to the contrary.

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Translated by Charlotte Collins · Copyright: Goethe-Institut e. V., Fikrun wa Fann, June 2014

■ Iran is a state of many ethnicities where over a dozen languages are spoken, including, among others, Persian, Baluchi, Luri, Arabic, and Turkish. Unfortunately, the country's education policy does not take account of this linguistic diversity.

LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY AS OPPORTUNITY MOTHER-TONGUE INSTRUCTION IN MULTI-ETHNIC IRAN

BY MANUTSCHEHR AMIRPUR



The Islamic Republic of Iran has continued the policy of the old regime in that it only permits the learning of the country's official language (Persian), even though this contradicts the obligations set out in the constitution. The widespread tradition of 'one country, one language', which lives on across the Middle East despite the fact that reality is very different, is also alive and well in Iran. A glance at the situation in neighbouring states highlights the problem. The country that has been known as the Republic of Turkey since the end of the First World War justifies its existence by the doctrine that the population of Asia Minor has only one language and one religion. This doctrine completely ignores the Kurds and the Alevi. Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine – countries that were practically created on the drawing board by the French and English mandate powers after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the wake of the First World War without any thought to ethnic or historical borders – also adhere to this policy. In fact, this policy, which is based on the principle of 'that which must not, cannot be', is one of the reasons behind the civil wars in Turkey and Iraq.

THE MISUSE OF IMPORTED CONCEPTS

The whole situation becomes complicated when both sides start to use new, imported concepts in their disputes with each other: concepts for which they have not even coined real words in their own languages. For example, they begin to accuse each other of chauvinism, pan-Turkism, pan-Arabism and fascism, and speak about nations, nationality, nation states and such like. While the states of Europe are trying to rid themselves of the virus of ideologies after a number of long and bloody wars, and to come together in the form of economic and political communities and communities of values, the politicians of the Near and Middle East are insisting on nationalism with reference to their actual or imagined size and are trying to revive the failed European tradition in another form on their own soil.

Female students at the private IT-University Dibagaran Tehran in Tehran. Photo: Markus Kirchgessner
© Goethe-Institute

There is a certain tradition of misusing such imported concepts. The discovery by German archeologists and linguists of Iran's 'glorious' past was a pretext for exporting the virus of racism to Iran. Iran's neighbours were not

spared this fate, either. Atatürk's famous saying, 'Happy the man who calls himself a Turk', is one such a statement. In Turkey, it is the kind of thing recited in school every morning by a boy and a girl after the singing of the national anthem and before classes as a kind of oath that is repeated by all other pupils. Today, however, because the Turkish government is seeking reconciliation with the Kurds, it claims that the quotation refers solely to citizenship and not to the Turkish people.

In the dispute about mother-tongue instruction in Iran, both academic and unfounded assertions are made. These ultimately lead to violence and counter-violence between representatives of the regime and the activists. The ethnic groups that are not allowed to learn their mother tongue accuse the 'Persians' of chauvinism and say that they are suppressing the Turkish, Kurdish, Baluchi 'nations or nationality'. For their part, the Persian-speakers accuse these ethnic groups of separatism, pan-Turkism, and pan-Arabism. Referring to Middle Persian Azeri, they say that Azerbaijanis are not Turks and Arabs are not Arabs, because Khuzestan – which once stretched deep into modern-day Iraq – has always been part of Iranian territory, and Ctesiphon, the capital city of the Parthians and the Sasanians, was situated close to what is now Baghdad. But these wars of words have nothing to do with the actual situation today.

WHAT IS A 'PERSIAN' ANYWAY?

Iran knows no such ethnic group as the Persians. Does the word refer to the people in the province of Fars? What kind of power does this group have to determine Iran's language policy? Or does it refer to the Persian-speaking provinces of Khorasan, Kerman, Isfahan, etc.? Hardly. After all, these people refer to themselves as Khorasanis, Kermanis, and Isfahanis and nothing else. And even if such an ethnic group did ever exist, when did it ever rule over the entire country, such that it can now impose its rule on Iran? After the collapse of the Sasanian Empire and two hundred years under Arab rule, the country was predominantly governed by Iranians of Turkish and Mongolian origin. These last two ethnic groups fostered the Persian language not only in Iran, but also in Asia Minor, the Caucasus, Central Asia and India. For example, the language of the court of the Seljuks of Rum in eastern Anatolia was Persian; their capital city, Konya, was a hub of Persian literature and home to Mawlana Rumi, a giant among Persian poets. The Mongolian Timurids made Persian the language of the court in India, fostered it and kept it alive, even though their original language was Chagatai-Turkish. They didn't do this for love of a specific ethnic group or out of solidarity with it; they were attracted by the power of the Persian language, the language of Ferdowsi, and not by the power of the Iranian people, whom they had already vanquished. The English language exerts the same pull in today's world, even in those places where people harbour anti-American sentiments.

The allegation of separatism from the other side is historically unfounded. It is correct to say that there have been and still are separatist movements in Iran. However, these come from outside and not from inside the country. The oldest of these were the efforts made by the Ottoman Empire to separate Turkish-speaking Azerbaijan from Iran, a policy that continued until the First World War. On occasion, the Ottoman army was successful. It occupied Azerbaijan and was repulsed with great loss of life to the Azeris and the Kizilbash (the majority of whom hailed from Anatolia). Both sides often left scorched earth in their wake. Another attempt to conquer was made by the Russian Empire: it led to the annexation of seventeen Iranian cities in Transcaucasia, and to the Treaty of Gulistan and the Treaty of Turkmenchay, which the Iranians describe as 'disgraceful'. The next attempt to separate Azerbaijan completely from Iran was launched during the Second World War when the Allied Forces occupied Iran. Unlike the Russian Empire, however, the Bolsheviks were unable to get what they wanted: this time, the major powers were not playing ball. Besides, the people were not on their side. The last unsuccessful attempt in this respect was the war started by Saddam Hussein in an attempt to annex Khuzestan. Here too, the Khuzestani Arabs, who today are being accused of separatism, fought on the front line to defend the integrity of their country (modern-day Iran). To do so, they had no need of ethnic ideologies and concepts such as 'nation' or 'nation state'. Since the time of the Achaemenids, Iran has always been a state of many ethnicities, and has remained in existence even without such imported concepts.

Reasoning that the Azeris are not Turks, just Turkic-speaking, because in bygone days a language was spoken there that is part of the Middle Persian spectrum, or that the Kurds are the descendents of the Medes, the first Aryan people to rule Iran, does not solve the problem. Reasoning such as this is reminiscent of the way the Kemalists referred to the Kurds as Mountain Turks. These are subliminally racist remarks that are of no help to these ethnic groups. Today, they speak Turkish, Kurdish, or Arabic, and want their children to be taught at school in their own language as well.

THE POLITICISATION OF A BASIC RIGHT

Lumping mother-tongue instruction and separatism together is simply using deceptive ideas to politicise a basic right. The right to one's mother tongue is a human right, one that has been affirmed in numerous international conventions. The constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran has paved the way for mother-tongue instruction. Article 15 of the constitution states: 'The official language and script of Iran, the *lingua franca* of its people, is Persian. Official documents, correspondence, and texts, as well as text-books, must be in this language and script. However, the use of regional and tribal languages in the press and mass media, as well as for teach-

ing of their literature in schools, is allowed in addition to Persian.' This article is not unambiguous. What is meant by 'teaching of their literature in schools'? Literature in the original language? If so, then pupils must acquire reading and writing skills in that language in order to be able to read literature in the original language and understand it. If so, why is there no explicit mention of mother-tongue instruction? If, however, it refers to the translated literature, this will not lead to the learning of a language. And what does 'is allowed' mean in the context of teaching these languages? Is mother-tongue instruction an elective subject, or is it only one of the subjects that should be taught on a private basis? Who bears the costs? Who is responsible for the textbooks, teacher training, and the hiring of teaching staff? These are problems which past governments have had neither the ways nor the means of solving.

These are problems that are only addressed by presidential candidates in the run-up to elections. As soon as elections are announced, the candidates come to Tabriz, the city with the largest population of minorities, and promise to solve the mother-tongue question as soon as they get into office. The latest president is no exception to this rule. 'Teaching of Iranians' mother tongue will be officially implemented at school and university level in full implementation of Article 15 of the constitution and to strengthen the culture and literature of the Iranian peoples and to avoid their decline,' was one of Rouhani's key pledges. He even went a step further and said that an Academy of the Language and Literature of Azerbaijan would be opened in Tabriz. Amazed listeners must have been asking themselves how that could be managed, especially as no one had thus far managed to organise language instruction in schools. But Rouhani's words were effective and the votes he received in those provinces where these ethnic groups make up the majority were above the national average. The school year began, but nothing more was said about mother-tongue instruction or even about a draft plan for its introduction. Experts quite rightly point out that there are no books and no teachers to tackle such a mammoth task. There is no point in wondering why, over the course of the past thirty-five years since the adoption of the constitution, no efforts were made to create the conditions needed to implement this aspect of the constitution. And whenever anyone points out that these languages are being taught in neighbouring countries, the response is that there was a desire to avoid importing the separatist attitudes of these countries

along with the language. There it is again: the fear of separatism.

FEAR OF THE VIRUS OF SEPARATISM

Meanwhile, the Kurds of Iraq have achieved their goal. In the autonomous region of Kurdistan, pupils can not only learn their mother tongue in school, they can also be taught other subjects in this language. Moreover, since 2013, after protracted wars and disputes, the Kurdish mother tongue is now available as an elective subject in schools in Turkey.

The Arabic, Azerbaijani and Turkmen languages have been taught in the schools of Iran's neighbouring countries for many years now. Those in Iran who, despite the shortage of books and teachers for these languages, are reluctant to cooperate with these countries because of a fear of separatism either lack belief in themselves or are reading history backwards. Which of these countries exerts such a strong democratic attraction that any part of Iran would want to annex itself to it? Never mind the fact that parts of these countries used to be part of Iran and were annexed by the Ottomans and the Russians. If anyone did have annexation aspirations – which is very definitely not the case – it would be more a case of them annexing themselves to Iran. Quite apart from that, there should be no place in today's world for thoughts of redrawing borders. At a time when the countries of the European Union are aligning themselves more closely with each other in terms of foreign, economic and culture policy, while at the same time considering their borders inviolable, all talk of redrawing borders is absurd and nothing more than an excuse. Those people who are still afraid of the idea that borders will be redrawn should consider the following fact: today, after several decades of civil war and invasions, the only things keeping the culture of Afghanistan alive are Iranian books. Were it not for this intellectual blood transfusion, this venerable culture would have faded away. Why shouldn't Iran now grasp the similar cross-border opportunities in respect of Arabic, Turkish, Turkmen, and Baluchi and reinforce the diversity of languages and literatures within its own borders? Why should the country voluntarily forgo this rich capital? If the first Muslims had shown such reticence in their first encounters with the Greek, Iranian, Syrian, Egyptian and Indian cultures, they would never have been able to bring forth such great minds as Alkindus, Alfarabus, Avicenna, Razi, Ibn Khaldun, and Averroes.

MANUTSCHEHR AMIRPUR worked for many years as a simultaneous interpreter for Persian and German and is now responsible for the Persian-language version of *Fikrun wa Fann / Art & Thought (Andishe ve Honar)*.

Translated by Aingeal Flanagan · Copyright: Goethe-Institut e. V., *Fikrun wa Fann*, June 2014

■ **Despite the difficult situation in Palestine and the harassment of the Israeli occupation, there are an astonishing number of active cultural centres there, and artistic work is done with children and young people in the majority of the refugee camps.**

Theatre and theatrical means are a key element of this.

There is therefore promising scope for theatre education in Palestine.

THEATRE AS MEDICINE - OR A WEAPON PALESTINE AS A MODEL OF THEATRE EDUCATION IN CRISIS REGIONS

BY **MIRIAM LEMDJADI**



Syrian theatre writer
Mohamed al-Attar in the
house of Egyptian
theatre writer
Laila Soliman in Cairo
in December 2012.
Photo: Stefan Weidner
© Goethe-Institut

Under the slogan 'The occupiers can take everything from us, but not our culture', many young Palestinians are immersing themselves in cultural and social activities. They are learning to play traditional instruments, and are increasingly orientating themselves towards Palestinian music, poets and painters, with the aim of preserving Palestinian culture and maintaining their Palestinian identity, which is bound up with it. In this way a movement is emerging that is practising resistance through the medium of art, conscious that education and creativity can be a way of reacting to the occupation. Many Palestinians are turning away from those who consider violence to be the only solution, and the only response to violence. More and more often, theatrical means are being deployed – at demonstrations, for example, in order to organise a peaceful protest that delivers powerful visual imagery. We may, for example, see protesters in handcuffs, blindfolded or

gagged, following the demonstration in silence. With the help of social media, these images then travel around the world and raise awareness of the Palestinian cause. Foreign aid and peace organisations support this movement; they may even have contributed to its development. They finance numerous projects, and encourage theatre education work with children and young people.

APPLICATION OF THEATRE EDUCATION

The political, economic and social situation in Germany is a very different one, but here too there is growing interest in theatre education, and it is increasingly recognised. In the social sector in particular, as well as in educational establishments, theatre work is appreciated more and more. Theatre is used as a medium for language development, therapy, re-

search, and communicative processes. In some federal states, Performing Arts is taught as a subject in schools and can now even be studied as part of the school leaving certificate. Many summer camps that offer successful courses in 'German Through Theatre' have been highly praised by education ministers. These summer camps encourage integration: children from immigrant backgrounds are supported in their speaking and writing of German through a combination of daily theatre work and the performance of a play at the end of the project. Theatre work is now found everywhere: in prisons, in businesses, in hospitals, old people's homes, in deprived areas, in women's refuges, in some asylum seekers' accommodation centres, and in city councils. Theatres themselves, both city and state, could no longer imagine not having their own theatre education department, which is responsible for dialogue with schools and with the young audience.

Theatre education, which focuses on work with people of various ages, various backgrounds, and with the most varied of careers – i.e. with so-called 'non-professionals' – is often criticised by fellow actors and directors, who complain that not enough attention is paid to the artistic work, and that the focus on the process rather than the product affects the quality of the result. But why shouldn't a product that develops by way of a good process be all the better for it? The work of theatre education is a constant balancing act between artistic and pedagogical work, whereby 'pedagogical' in this context signifies encouraging social skills, interaction within the group and the capacity for reflection and conflict management.

THE ROLE OF BERTOLT BRECHT

Bertolt Brecht was the most famous theatre practitioner who, alongside his activities as a dramatist, poet and director, also worked with theatre pedagogy. He wrote texts in the form of a *Lehrstück* (teaching play) which were intended to contribute to political education. One of the most famous of these *Lehrstücke* is *The Measures Taken (Die Maßnahme)*. As in most of the *Lehrstücke*, the idea was to bring together people from various different levels of power and, through them, to examine social structures, invert and even reshape them. Brecht, for example, made apprentices in a factory the protagonists of a *Lehrstück*: they were then able to put themselves in the position of either a boss or an underling. The play used theatrical means to promote self-reflection and to play with reality. The actor thus left the theatre with valuable insights into the theatre of his own experience. The idea of the 'role' also took on a new significance. It is not only the actor on stage who plays a role: every one of us slips into various different roles according to the situation in which we find ourselves.

Inspired by Brecht, the theatre practitioner Augusto Boal developed this form further with, among other things, the 'Theatre of the Oppressed' in Rio de Janeiro. This is characterised by the lack of separation between stage and audience, and its

aim is to work on finding social and political solutions using theatrical means. One of Boal's best-known projects was the 'Legislative Theatre', which he developed during his time as member of the city parliament for the Workers Party, between 1992 and 1996. He worked with an affiliation of artists and judiciary officials to promote the active participation of the population in politics and its decision processes.

Boal adapted his concept to the requirements of his working environment. In Europe he found other forms of oppression, and became more interested in working in therapeutic institutions. The 'visible' conflicts around social and political oppression increasingly faded into the background, to be replaced by the 'invisible conflicts' that take place in each individual. This was in keeping with the *zeitgeist*, which was less interested in the community and far more focussed on the individual. Thus contemporary theatre pedagogy is primarily concerned with promoting personal development and free expression, and the visual appeal of theatre is also coming to the fore once again. Many today are of the opinion that theatre work can only claim to be educational and emancipatory if it is an aesthetic experience that also entertains.

The development of theatre education with its many approaches and possible applications shows that theatre has sufficient scope and potential to tackle forms of oppression. Re-enacting a situation enables people to test different ways of dealing with it: one can examine one's own role models, analyse the interplay of victim and perpetrator, and recognise patterns. This theatre is also called 'forum theatre' or 'prevention and intervention theatre'. The project 'My Body Belongs to Me' is one such project: it is invited to schools all over Germany to educate pupils about sexual violence towards children.

POLITICAL THEATRE

When politics, society and theatre can coexist so closely, it is no surprise that not only is a lot of theatre work being done in Palestine, but that it is also almost always political. In turn, this political dimension of theatre constitutes a problem for some contemporary Palestinian filmmakers. Their criticism is that aesthetics are often neglected and the theatrical aspect greatly diminished: they complain that the emphasis on the political message means the work often lacks imagination and zaniness, and that humour and the aesthetic experience tend to take a back seat. Yet we are seeing more and more theatre practitioners who do succeed in uniting politics and aesthetics, and who are thus successfully working to promote the development of Palestinian theatre.

In Palestine, we see that theatre education is primarily focussed on work with children and young people. Theatre education work is done with refugee children in many refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The intention is to enable the children to process their experiences by theatrical

means, and to express their grief, fear and anger. Another important aspect of the work is to give the children and young people fresh perspectives and offer them a leisure activity where they get to receive attention and recognition and can allow their personalities to develop in a safe space, removed from frustration and religious or political radicalisation.

FREEDOM THEATRE

The Freedom Theatre in Jenin, which evolved out of artistic and educational work in a refugee camp, is probably the best-known theatre in Palestine. It is famous even beyond the borders of Palestine because it regularly tours throughout Europe. It was founded as the 'Stone Theatre' in the Jenin refugee camp in 1988, during the first intifada, by the Jewish activist Arna Mer-Khamis. Her son Juliano Mer-Khamis took over the theatre in 2006 and worked there as a director and actor. Many people, both Palestinians and Israelis, were unable to deal with the fact that Juliano and his mother were, on the one hand, practising Jews, who, on the other, clearly stood up for the Palestinians. In 2011 Juliano Mer-Khamis was shot in the street outside his theatre. His killer has still not been identified. After this tragic event, Nabil Al Raei took over the theatre, but in the wake of Juliano Mer-Khamis' death the Israeli authorities prevented the new director and his staff from doing their theatre work: among other things, Nabil Al Raei was imprisoned on absurd charges in 2012.

The film *Arna's Children*, directed by J. Mer-Khamis and D. Danniell, was released in 2004. It shows the beginnings of the theatre education movement in Palestine, as exemplified by the Stone Theatre, focussing primarily on what motivated the work, how the children dealt with the new opportunity, and whether it helped them forget their daily lives that were blighted by war. In the film, Juliano Mer-Khamis documents both the work he and his mother did and the development of the children involved in their theatre group, following them into early adulthood. The children and their families live through the first and second intifadas; many lose their homes, bombed out by the Israeli army. Arna Mer-Khamis wants to open up new horizons for the children through the medium of culture, to enable them to use art as a way of expressing their grief; she wants to use theatre to rebuild their sense of self-worth and bring colour back to their conflict-riven daily lives.

The children and young people are interviewed, and asked what the theatre and Arna Mer-Khamis' organisation mean to them. One boy says that when he stands on stage he feels strong and proud; that it gives him the same feeling as when he throws stones, when he throws Molotov cocktails. When Arna dies of cancer, Juliano leaves Palestine. He returns five years later, but the situation he comes back to is very sobering. Some of the youngsters, now young adults, have died in Israeli attacks. One boy from the theatre group became a suicide bomber and blew himself up. Juliano sets out to track them down, accompanying several of the young men engaged

in armed resistance. The question naturally arises as to whether the work made any difference at all, or whether it would have made a difference if it had carried on after Arna Mer-Khamis died.

DAR AL KALIMA IN BETHLEHEM

Many courses and events also take place on the premises of the cultural centre Dar Al Kalima in Bethlehem. Its annual programme ranges from film festivals, numerous art exhibitions and regular music and theatre courses, to courses providing information on health problems affecting older people.

Dyar Dance Theatre meets several evenings a week at Dar Al Kalima to rehearse. It takes its devised shows on tour inside Palestine and in Europe. These pieces are a mixture of classical theatre, Palestinian folk dance, and traditional music and song. What's special about this theatre group is that, in addition to their passion for theatre, all the participants have a separate career, are at school, or studying, or looking for work. The co-founder and leader of the group, Rami Khader, has worked to create a professional *Tanztheater* group that is intended, through this particular, very physical and emotional artistic style, to give young Palestinians a platform to express themselves and to critically examine political and social issues, such as gender inequality or unemployment in their society. In turn, this examination, distilled into an artistic performance, is taken out into society with the aim of prompting people to think about these issues.

The Dar Al Kalima organisation, which was founded by the priest Dr. Mitri Raheb (winner of the 2008 Aachen Peace Prize and the 2011 German Media Prize) and is supported by the Lutheran congregation, has also established the Dar al Kalima College and a health centre in Bethlehem, in addition to the cultural centre. Since 2010 the college has been offering people the opportunity to study subjects such as music, theatre, arts and crafts, or documentary filmmaking. It is thus the first institute of secondary education in the Middle East to concentrate on the fields of art, tourism, multimedia and communication. The theatre department is affiliated, via a university twinning programme, with the University of Osnabrück's theatre education course, and there are regular exchange visits to discuss the work of both lecturers and students.

There are also a lot of cultural opportunities in the Aida Refugee Camp in Bethlehem, including theatre education. For example, it offers theatre courses for children and young people of all ages, who meet for acting classes on a weekly basis. You can see various theatrical performances here, such as a play with a cast of young girls aged between seven and twelve that reflects the girls' own experiences of living under the occupation. The violence of the army, which searches their houses, tears their families apart and turns them into refugees, is translated on stage into simple imagery. The play

is about a powerful person who oppresses and humiliates all those around him, yet the people remain steadfast and defend themselves peacefully by simply being there and sticking together.

The energy and seriousness of the young actresses is moving, and appears authentic. Nonetheless, it is questionable whether the girls would themselves have come up with the idea of taking these difficult memories as their subject, or whether they are trained to be constantly making political statements and theatre has become a means exploited to this end. The themes of occupation, oppression and injustice are indubitably part of their lives: however, the aspects of those lives in which they are ordinary girls, who perhaps also long to be carefree children, to play, have fun and indulge their imaginations, are forgotten. Instrumentalising children for political ends does not correspond to the emancipatory endeavours of theatre education, which consists above all in teaching people to use theatre as a means of reflecting on themselves and their environment.

THEATRE WITHOUT AN AUDIENCE?

In Germany, people are very interested in theatre from crisis regions such as Palestine. Guest companies are invited to give performances, and there are possibilities of sponsorship. Theatre that becomes existentially important to the artist because it puts him in danger, because he subjects the existing regime to critical scrutiny and his theatre can perhaps only continue to exist in exile – this is exciting to the German public, because in many German theatres the necessity of theatre

is no longer apparent. The over-professionalisation of theatre makers and actors means that they are very distanced from the problems depicted in the plays, and art for art's sake often towers over the socio-cultural aspect of theatre. Theatre no longer, or too seldom, touches people, and it often reaches only a highly-cultivated minority of the population. Many theatre makers are currently trying to address this problem, arguing that theatre is insufficiently rooted in society and lacks social and political weight.

In Palestine, on the other hand, people complain of a lack of professionalism and trained personnel. There is a lack of lecturers with academic backgrounds, for example, and the next generation in academic theatre fields – those who study theatre-pedagogical practice and are able, in their turn, to teach students in various fields – is very thin on the ground. Although they have many professional opportunities, some young theatre practitioners cannot see a future for themselves in Palestine because the political situation makes their work exponentially harder. There are, however, enough creative artists who use foreign tours and co-operation with artists from other countries to detach themselves from their difficult everyday situation, get to know other cultures, and further develop their work in theatre.

Like society in general, and theatre in particular, theatre education too is in constant flux. Networking and the lively exchange taking place in theatre work on an international level allow differences between individual countries to fade into the background – and the work itself is enriched by the mutual exchange.

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Translated by Charlotte Collins · Copyright: Goethe-Institut e. V., Fikrun wa Fann, June 2014

The Freedom Theatre

<http://www.thefreedomtheatre.org/who-we-are/>
de, en

■ **The idea behind the Qattan Centre for the Child was to provide a cultural oasis for Palestinian children in the city of Gaza and the surrounding areas, through a library that would be the largest of its kind in Palestine, specialising in the cultural needs of children up to the age of fifteen, while also serving their families and professionals who work with children.**

THE CHILDREN OF GAZA A WORLD OF PASSION

BY REEM ABU JABER

The Qattan Centre for the Child has a programme for reaching out to children in marginalised areas, computer labs and rooms for various forms of artistic expression, such as music, painting and drawing, sculpture, acting and the performance arts. The centre also has a special programme to promote culture within the family and to help families play their role as the primary teachers of children. I have always been very proud of the basic objective of the centre: to encourage the love of reading. I had long wondered how I could make anyone love anything, let alone make children love books. At that time many people thought it was 'mission impossible' in an age when technology and media were expanding rapidly and irresistibly, and when the formal education system, which was closely associated with books, was deteriorating and in deep trouble.

CULTURE FOR CHILDREN

The centre cost millions of dollars to build, but that was the easiest part because the Qattan family did everything necessary to arrange the funding for the construction. The start of building work coincided with the outbreak of the Palestinian Intifada in 2000, and the task of initiating cultural activities for children in Gaza faced innumerable obstacles, such as road closures and bans on taking building materials into Gaza - bans that sometimes lasted months and even years, and some of which continue till today. Then there were the problems bringing in printed material and other library supplies, as well as the special types of furniture suitable for a children's library. For some kinds of furniture there was a two-year delay between placing the orders and the goods arriving in Gaza. But the Qattan Centre for the Child has set a new standard for cultural services to children and families, not just in the Gaza Strip but in the whole Arab world and internationally.

Many of the professionals who work with children worried about how enthusiastic the children would be about books

and were sceptical that the idea would succeed, especially as the centre offers its services for free to all children and their families without distinction. The process of training those who were going to work with the children did not go according to the initial plan because no members of the team were able to travel or receive international trainers to work with them. That may have made them more determined to carry out the project as fully as possible and to try to make it the best centre in the world. That's what in fact happened, and the centre opened in 2005 - the start of a new stage in working with children face to face and putting all our theories into practice.



Qattan Centre
for the child,
Gaza, Palestine.
Photo:
Stefan Weidner
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It was one of the most exhausting and enjoyable periods of my life by far. The children took us completely by surprise. It was as if, in their childish way, they were sticking out their tongues at us, at our theories and our beliefs about their reactions and their interests. On the first day, when we were still in the preparatory phase and arranging the books on the shelves in the library (we hadn't yet opened the doors to the public), three girls who were not yet nine years old came walking past. 'What's that?' they asked me, innocently pointing at the centre. I remember asking them, 'Would you like to see it?' Young Saha took my hand in response and followed. As long as I live I'll never forget the amazement in the eyes of the children at everything they saw that day. The next day, with absolutely no preparation on our part, we were surprised to find hundreds of children coming to see the centre. Who needs a publicity campaign for a children's centre? Thousands of Gaza children had joined the centre within a few years, and the children continued to amaze us with their talents and their strong will to live, even as conditions in Gaza grew worse. The children's comments that impressed me most were: 'Why isn't our school like this?' and 'Now we're in touch with the world.' The children used technology interactively, and for those who don't live in Gaza, it's important to understand that the Internet is the only form of communication for everyone when everything else is cut off and humanity is in short supply.

SURPRISE IN THE CHILDREN'S EYES

The children read avidly and took a keen interest in writing and reading, in creative activities and the arts, and although there was plenty on offer for the children to choose from, the demand always outstripped what the centre could provide. I still remember clearly the surprise in the children's eyes and how much their behaviour and their personalities changed, although there was no programme specifically designed to bring about such changes. I still remember Mansour, the deaf boy who came to the centre every day even though he couldn't read, and the complaints that he behaved rather roughly when he first joined. But after all the love that our colleague Tahani showed him, Mansour started teaching all of us what love and being human meant. He managed to build up a network of relationships with the other children in the centre. In fact, he even started to help the other children and sometimes those working at the centre.

Mona, a nine-year-old girl, put an excellent suggestion to the centre management, saying she wanted to arrange a meeting for the children at the centre on children's rights. It was very moving: she gathered all the relevant material from the library, brought the children together and then all she did was write out each right on a board in front of the children. She followed that up by asking, 'Do you have this right?' The response of the children was amazing. Each of them told stories from their own experience about violations of their rights, for example that their elder siblings couldn't leave Gaza to go to

university, that sick people couldn't travel for treatment and many, many other stories. Mona made me ask myself many questions, most importantly: 'How can we ensure that these children have an oasis of freedom where they can live life as they wish, and not as we adults wish?' They have more creativity, honesty and passion and a greater sense of wonder than we adults have. Maybe it's time for us professionals who work with children to keep quiet more, and listen more and think hard about new mechanisms for working with them.

We who work with children sometimes need to admit that, wittingly or unwittingly, we offer the children cultural activities that suit our own ideas and beliefs. This is not the time or place for me to judge those ideas and beliefs, but I would be very worried if we were creating a cultural environment through which we inadvertently teach children to like what we like and dislike what we dislike. Wouldn't that be worrying?

Throughout my experience as director of the Qattan Centre for the Child, which lasted more than twelve enjoyable years, I was often aware of what I called at the time 'professional isolation'. That's because the centre was the first of its kind in Palestine and the Arab world and was operating in a rapidly changing environment – changing usually for the worse – and it was completely impossible to plan for the changes when Gaza was under blockade and there were constant closures and almost everything was banned. We didn't have access to professional resources to answer the questions that often arose when we were at work; everything depended on the team doing its own research and thinking, and on plenty of debate and uncertainty as well.

I must admit that this wasn't totally bad, because our ability to handle unexpected circumstances became highly refined: we learned how to make plans we knew we probably wouldn't be carrying out, and so we also made alternative plans to back up the original plans. I must also admit that somehow or other the intense effort and the very tiring work was a form of therapy that spared us from thinking about the reality of Gaza, which was very often impossible. This was clearly evident in the most difficult times, when we sometimes tried to compensate by producing even more material for the children, far more than we had planned, and I noticed this clearly while preparing the monthly report. We also became highly skilled at identifying the voices of our colleagues working in the same foundation in the West Bank, whom we hadn't met for years because the Israelis refused to give them permits to enter or leave Gaza. On top of that, we even learned to tell over the phone whether they were well or not.

I visited the Qattan Foundation several times in the first four months of my work, but after that visits came to an end because of the Israeli ban on permits. We met in Jordan or London almost every year but my second visit to the foundation itself had to wait for another ten straight years.

POSITIVE CHANGES

Living conditions in Gaza, which have been deteriorating for many years, have had both negative and positive effects on working in education there, either formal or informal. On the one hand these conditions encouraged children to take more interest in the library, to take advantage of the diverse cultural activities and to switch from painting to music to singing to creative writing and theatre and computer literacy and other things. It encouraged their families to understand the importance of such activities for the healthy development of their children, especially when they saw positive changes (not intended but doubtless welcome) in their children. The changes took various forms: for example, according to their mothers, children who came to the centre were less rough when they were playing and some of them became more responsible towards their families and their younger siblings. Their academic performance improved at school and the families felt that their children were seriously interested in what the centre had to offer, and this was a great comfort to the families, especially in light of the constant political influences and changes.

The centre also gave the children, the families and the professionals working with the children a breathing space to meet and take part in activities, not just as an audience but also as organisers and participants, and by saying what they thought of the activities before they were offered to the children and sometimes by actually providing them to the children.

The centre set the general framework for activities by adopting a system of themes. We noticed through the statistics at the end of every month that the children read widely in the field of fiction and entertainment, which is natural, whereas scientific subjects were of less interest to them, perhaps because they seemed too dry and heavy and directly connected with school. As an experiment we set aside three months for science: the centre focused its activities on science in an entertaining, accessible and interactive way, coordinated

with all the related activities such as reading stories, drama, art exhibitions, trips, and of course computers and technology. At the end of the first month the number of science books taken out of the library on loan had risen by 25 percent, and at the end of the second month by 75 percent. This experiment made me worried and pleased at the same time – worried about our ability ‘to mould the minds of the children without anyone questioning us’, and pleased at what we could elicit from these children if we adults helped to provide a real opportunity for them to bloom like flowers.

The system of themes continued for several years, with the subjects changing. The themes were directly correlated to the reading statistics and the system evolved so that the children could choose the themes and vote on them electronically before planning started on the various activities.

Palestine in general still suffers from a severe, if not total, lack of teacher-training institutes that properly prepare professionals working with children. There is also no clear Palestinian pedagogical approach towards working with children, or rather, to be more precise, no such approach in the context of informal education. The Palestinian heritage is extremely rich and can form an important primary source for developing a Palestinian national strategic plan for informal education. I cannot but applaud the interest the Qattan Foundation has shown in providing quality cultural services and especially the loving, dedicated and understanding support of Mr Abdel Muhsin al-Qattan.

In 2011 I was awarded the French National Order of Merit in recognition of my work with children. I now look back on my experience with much love and appreciation, respect for my mistakes, and deep understanding that we cannot excel or make the slightest contribution to humanity without this passion for what we are doing, and also without asking many questions, most importantly: how can we adults who work with children find out how to help them, through love, to develop in a healthy way?

REEM MOHAMED ABU JABER was the director of the Qattan Centre for the Child in Gaza, Palestine from 2000 to 2012.

Translated by Jonathan Wright · Copyright: Goethe-Institut e. V., Fikrun wa Fann, June 2014

A M Qattan Foundation

<http://www.qattanfoundation.org/en/home>

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■ A specific population's level of education is considered an indication of how likely an authoritarian regime is to develop towards democracy.

At the same time, a country's education policy also reflects its political situation. How can states that have problems with their education systems still make democratic changes, and how can foreign institutions such as the Goethe-Institut provide assistance?

EDUCATION AND DEMOCRACY PARTICIPATION IS THE KEY

BY HEIKE THEE



Discussions at the debating club in Cairo.
Photo: Heike Thee
© Goethe-Institut

The reciprocal dependence of the educational level of a country's population and the political form of its government can be illustrated first on a theoretical level. Political science tells us that a democracy presupposes a liberal, democratic constitutional order that is the result of a democratic process of opinion formation and the expression of the political will of the people. In concrete terms, this means that before a democratic regime is established, a population works through a process in the course of which the majority of the people agree on this political order.

SHAPING THE POLITICAL WILL OF THE PEOPLE

This is where the education level of a population plays a decisive role. In order to be able to participate actively in this process and to shape this process by moving it towards democratic structures, it is essential that citizens are politically mature, familiar with participatory structures, know how to use them, and also respect the key characteristics of

democratic co-existence (e.g. the establishment of a liberal and pluralistic order, and solidarity in the personal behaviour of the individual).

The necessary skills for taking part in this process of expressing the will of the people can be taught in the public education system. After all, schools and universities are not just places where academic knowledge is imparted but also places where values are passed on and opinions are influenced. However, these values and opinions do not necessarily foster democracy: the orientation of their content is shaped by the respective government. This leads to the observation that the education policy of a state can serve as a mirror for the overall political project.

This is why it is most interesting to observe reforms in education policy and development trends – in particular in countries that are going through socio-political upheaval – and from them to draw conclusions as to the ideological orienta-

tion of the state that is in the process of being rebuilt. All of this is true for Egypt and Tunisia - two countries that were not only affected by the Arab Spring, but are also particularly relevant examples of the course of a post-authoritarian transformation in the region of North Africa and the Middle East.

EDUCATION AND POLITICAL UPHEAVAL IN EGYPT AND TUNISIA

The revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia - as well as those in other countries in the region of North Africa and the Middle East, where massive popular uprisings have led to lasting political and social changes since 2011 - were mainly instigated by people under thirty. For one, this age group is the largest in the populations of these countries (about 60% of the Egyptian and about 55% of the Tunisian population). Secondly, it has been hit by crippling mass unemployment: 70.8% of the 13.4% of the population who were out of work in the third quarter of 2013 were under thirty years of age (according to CAPMAS, the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics). What is also striking is the fact that the majority of these young, unemployed adults have a higher academic qualification. This also explains why the education reforms implemented during the transformation phase in these countries play such a major role. Because a large part of the Egyptian and Tunisian population and various political parties have been pushing for a swift implementation of these reforms since the overthrow of the authoritarian presidents, they have also become an indicator of the efficiency of governments in the post-revolutionary phase.

THE EDUCATION SCOUT PROJECT

In order to be able to observe developments in the field of education during the transformation phase in Egypt and Tunisia as soon as possible after they occur and be able to react accordingly, the Goethe-Institut in Cairo launched the Education Scout project. This project - like other transformation projects - was implemented on the basis of the Transformation Partnerships concluded by Germany and Egypt and by Germany and Tunisia in 2011, and was funded by the Federal Foreign Office.

The activities of the Education Scout project are very diverse. Since the beginning of the project in June 2012, structures have been put in place that allow changes in the Egyptian and Tunisian education systems to be observed soon after they are implemented, information about these changes to be made available to German and local partners in the field of education cooperation, and conclusions to be drawn for new projects in the field of education cooperation.

The fact that the activities of the Education Scout project are taking place in countries that are in the middle of a period of social and political upheaval, that they are worthwhile, and

that they lead to the improved adaptation of the education projects to the needs of the population is illustrated very clearly by the course of the Egyptian transformation phase and the resulting consequences for German-Egyptian education cooperation.

THE ISLAMISATION OF EDUCATION?

The transformation phase in Egypt thus far can be divided into two phases. The first phase corresponds to the time in office of the ousted president, Mohammed Morsi, i.e. from 30th June 2012 to 3rd July 2013. The second phase began directly after the first and is characterised by the rule of the transition government.

Both governments began their terms in office by announcing their intention to focus intensively on reforms in the education sector. During the presidency of Mohammed Morsi, the term 'Nahda' was used in this context. This word can be translated as 'upswing' or 'development', or even as 'renaissance' or 'awakening'. Use of the latter two translations led opponents of Mohammed Morsi and the Freedom and Justice Party to predict the Islamisation of the education system. Since the current transition government came to power, removing all traces of this supposed Islamisation has been the guideline for the new government's changes to the Egyptian education system. So far, however, it has been observed that no national education strategy was either drafted or implemented, neither during the presidency of Mohammed Morsi nor since the current transition government started its work. In concrete terms, this means that in both cases reforms were sporadically formulated and partially implemented, but that these reforms did not eliminate the key problems facing the Egyptian education system.

The first step undertaken by both administrations related to personnel. From Ministry of Education level right down to the level of university rectors and school head teachers, people were suspended from duty because of their political convictions and replaced by supporters of the ruling administration. In both cases, political allegiance played a much greater role than the expertise needed to do the job at hand. The reason given for these measures was that all traces of the previous government had to be removed. In the case of the Morsi administration, these changes were interpreted by its political opponents as preparation for an Islamisation of Egyptian society; in the case of the current transition government, the push to reverse measures implemented by the Morsi administration hid the fact that the transition government too was pursuing power-political interests, thereby securing the influence of the military in the education sector as well.

THE MATERIAL SITUATION OF SCHOOLS

The problems faced by Egypt's public schools are many and varied. The two biggest problems are overcrowding in urban

areas (with up to 100 pupils in each class) and inadequate infrastructure in rural areas (which makes it difficult for children to travel to school). Other problems of a material nature include teachers' salaries and insufficient equipment in schools.

While Mohammed Morsi was in power there was no widespread construction of new school buildings. One possible explanation for this could be people's lasting fear that the categorical construction of new institutes of education could lead to the Islamisation of the Egyptian school system. On the other hand, it may just have been down to the fact that the government did not have the necessary financial resources at its disposal. The latter reason would also seem to be a problem for the current transition government. That said, the transition government has indeed looked for pragmatic alternatives and convinced private investors to invest in the construction of new school buildings and new school media for the classroom. It is not possible to say whether these investments will be enough to increase the number of schools across the country and to improve the school infrastructure in the long term. There is no strategic plan for the implementation of this kind of initiative.

THE PROBLEM OF TEACHERS' SALARIES

While Mohammed Morsi was in office, attempts were also made to find ways of increasing teachers' salaries. The aim was to increase the salaries of young teachers starting out in their careers, which had previously been about €60 per month, by 100%. This was only rolled out across the country as part of the setting of a general minimum salary for civil servants of about €120 per month in September 2013. However, teachers who do not have a permanent contracts – and that accounts for over 60% of young teachers starting out – are not covered by this. Instead, they have to make do with the new fixed minimum salary of €40 per month.

In addition to the initiatives to improve material deficits in the public education sector, particular attention was also paid to the content of curricula. As already mentioned above, the way these changes are perceived is directly linked to the overall political conditions. During the presidency of Mohamed Morsi, the expectation was that this was precisely where the feared Islamisation of Egypt's young people would begin. This also explains the huge pressure to reverse the relevant changes as soon as the current transition government came to power. All the more astonishing, therefore, is the fact that the actual changes made to the curricula since 2011 have thus far been minimal. There have been changes in the core subjects of history, social studies, and Arabic. However, these changes amounted to dropping certain chapters of Egyptian history (such as those relating to the presidency of Hosni

Mubarak), introducing political personalities (as for example the biography of Hassan al-Banna) under Morsi, and replacing them under the mandate of the government that followed.

AUTHORITARIAN SCHOOL CULTURE

These content-related changes seem even less significant when one considers that the core of the education process – the methods for imparting knowledge and the associated relationship between teachers and pupils – was not changed. By neglecting structural reforms, an authoritarian school culture remains dominant to this day. This culture not only shapes the relationship between teachers and pupils, but also between teachers and head teachers and the entire Egyptian education system. This is a hierarchical system, where all power of decision is concentrated in the Ministry of Education. The structures within the ministry are pyramid-like. The only purpose of the various administrative levels of the Ministry of Education is to pass instructions from the Ministry down to the lower levels of the education system. No provision is made for participation in the formulation of the content of decisions. On the contrary, it is evident that the individual education levels adopt the authority demonstrated by the highest level of the hierarchy in their dealings with the next level down in the education system's administrative pyramid. This mechanism is in evidence right down to the lowest level of educational policy, namely the classroom.

As already mentioned at the outset, the driving force behind the revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East was people under thirty. In Egypt, it was also evident that minors, most of whom went to publicly-funded schools, joined demonstrations and demanded more say in decision-making processes, freedom of speech and other democratic values. Such demands were also made of schools, and because of the fact that suitable structures do not exist, massive disputes broke out, not only between pupils, but also between pupils and teachers.

DISCUSSION AND PARTICIPATION

On the basis of this observation, the Education Scout project came up with the idea of showing these pupils ways of dealing with these differences of opinion verbally and constructively and, at the same time, increasing their participation at school. To this end, debating clubs were set up in school in November 2013. In one workshop, which was led by an expert from the Global Youth Debates project, participating pupils and teachers from public and private secondary schools discussed a variety of social issues. A set of specific rules had to be observed in the process, thereby teaching them how to tolerate opinions that differed from their own and to find solutions together. This project will continue this year. By train-

ing teaching staff to become multipliers, the aim is to allow teachers to set up projects independently in a variety of schools and increase the number of participating pupils and teachers. However, it will depend on the Egyptians them

selves whether this initiative will lead to an improvement in relations between teachers and pupils and beyond that to a sustainable review of the structures in the Egyptian education system.

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Translated by Aingeal Flanagan · Copyright: Goethe-Institut e. V., Fikrun wa Fann, June 2014

■ **The Egyptian author Taha Hussein warned as long ago as the 1930s that the future of Egypt depended on reforming its education system. His book *The Future of Culture in Egypt* is a plea for an enlightened, democratic and Mediterranean Egypt.**

THE SEA OF KNOWLEDGE TAHA HUSSEIN AND THE DEMOCRATISATION OF EDUCATION IN EGYPT

BY ANDREAS PFLITSCH

At the start of his autobiography *al-Ayyâm*, which was written in 1926 and is one of the best-known texts of Arab modernism, Taha Hussein describes the narrowness of the world as he perceived it as a young child:

'He was convinced that, on his right, the world ended at the canal that flowed past just a few steps away. Well, why not? After all, he couldn't see how wide the canal was, and couldn't gauge that a sprightly lad could leap across from one bank to the other; he couldn't image that there were exactly the same people, animals and plants on the other side of the canal as there were on this.'

An eye condition had caused him to lose his sight when he was just a small child, and had limited his horizon accordingly. However, it is not simply this physical impairment that the author is describing in his memoir. It is also a reference to the narrowness of the provincial village, the cultural and religious traditions and the restrictions of the rather poor life into which he was born in 1889, which gave rise to his yearning for the world 'beyond the canal'. Knowledge and education were to be his route out into the wider world. His thirst for knowledge, which clearly stayed with him all his life, enabled him to break out of his narrow world. Thus the blind village boy grew up to become one of the most influential intellectuals of Arab modernism, who, as the author of plays and novels, the editor of influential newspapers, as a literary critic, university lecturer, and politician in the field of education has had a lasting influence on Egyptian and Arab intellectual life.

OBEDIENCE INSTEAD OF DEBATE

After attending the local Koranic school in the village, Taha Hussein followed in his older brother's footsteps at the age of thirteen by going to study at Al-Azhar University in Cairo. This, for him, was a great adventure – the blind boy's first step in his triumphal ascent. In the Egyptian metropolis he came to regard scholar-

ship as a 'boundless sea', and was seized by an unbridled enthusiasm for it. He was 'determined to throw himself into this sea, to drink of its waters, as much as was granted to him, was even prepared to drown in them. What death would be more worthy of a noble man than one that befell him on the path to knowledge and was tantamount to drowning in scholarship?' he wrote in the second part of his autobiography.

However, his initial enthusiasm quickly gave way to disappointment over the narrowness of the teaching at the Azhar University. When he heard of the lectures by the reform theologian Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905), it opened up to him a



Anti-Mursi graffiti in December 2012 at Tahrir Square in Cairo. Photo: Stefan Weidner © Goethe-Institute

whole new world of knowledge that made the traditional teaching seem insipid and hollow. This did not envisage discussion, and was characterised not by freedom of scholarship but by strict hierarchy, obedience and indoctrination. Over time, his doubts about the teaching at al-Azhar continued to grow, and so did his new love of literature, which the Azhar scholars did not consider a serious subject. Taha Hussein found a counter-model to their theological discourses in classical Arabic lyric poetry. He discovered 'the difference between the crudeness of the Azharite taste and the refinement of the Ancients, (...) between the dullness of the Azharite intellect and the critical judgement and artistic sensibility of the Ancients.' In the third part of his autobiography he even speaks of a 'soul-destroying boredom that caused him terrible anguish'. (III, 9). The Azhar sheiks he had initially admired so much on account of their great knowledge increasingly became a deterrent, and the objects of his hostility. In their lectures, he remembered, 'he always heard the same stale clichés and regurgitated, sterile lectures, which spoke neither to his heart nor to his taste nor to his intellect, and conveyed to him nothing new.' Disappointed love soon turned into rebellion, and Taha Hussein, along with a couple of his friends, was expelled from the university.

He enrolled in the brand-new Egyptian University, and later became its very first graduate. At this university, founded in 1908 on the Western model in direct competition to the venerable Azhar, he became acquainted with a completely different form of learning. The professor giving the first lecture he attended seemed to him 'as new and as strange as it is possible to be new and strange'. He was utterly spellbound, and afterwards could barely sleep for excitement. Later he idealised this period, writing that 'Egyptian university life was an uninterrupted feast that the Egyptians celebrated night after night, however disparate their levels of education. Poor and rich, traditionally-dressed or in European clothes, they thronged the lecture halls.' The Egyptian University becomes, in his recollection, a unifying school for the nation, bridging every divide, while the Azhar University is vilified for 'torturing its spirit'. The Egyptian University, however, was not the last stage of his ascent.

THE WEST AS BOTH MODEL AND ADVERSARY

Taha Hussein's educational path then took him, in November 1914, on a scholarship to France, where he continued his studies over the next four years, first in Montpellier and later in Paris. Since the early nineteenth century Arab literary figures had been challenged by the encounter with the West. They compared their own culture, religion and tradition with the modern Western world and debated the necessity of reform. Since – if not before – the report by Rifaa at-Tahtawi (1801–1873) on the study mission to Paris he headed from 1826 to 1831, the French metropolis had become the ultimate symbol of modern Western culture – also for Egyptian intellectuals.

Tahtawi had approached Paris and its inhabitants with openness and sympathy, and described the advantages and disadvantages of European society from a comparatively confident standpoint, presenting some things as exemplary and worthy of imitation while others, which he clearly rejected, he declared inappropriate. In the decades after Tahtawi, the relationship between the Arab-Islamic world and Europe became noticeably more tense. Against the backdrop of the very rapid increase in European power in the age of colonialism and imperialism, and its oppressive military superiority, the debate on the Arab side became increasingly apologetic. Progress and modernisation were now increasingly reframed – by both West and East – as part of a European monopoly. An inverted counter-movement led to isolation reflexes: an emphasis on the otherness of their own, Arab culture, along with a withdrawal to what people regarded as their own identities and traditions.

Gamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839–1897) and Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905) called for the re-establishment of Islamic identity through a return to the pure origins of the religion, rejecting traditions that had developed over later years. However, there were some who had modern visions, too: at the turn of the century Qasim Amin (1863–1908) was already arguing in his books *Tahrir al-mar`a* (*The Liberation of Women*, 1899) and *al-Mar`a al-gadida* (*The New Woman*, 1901) against the separation of the sexes and in favour of the active participation of women in Egyptian society. As a precondition for this, Amin called in particular for a clear improvement in the educational situation of Egyptian women.

TAHA HUSSEIN'S VISION OF A MEDITERRANEAN CULTURE

Taha Hussein would later promote a similarly confident, aggressive stance towards modernism. Even before coming to France as a young man to study, he had immersed himself so deeply in European thought and European literature at the Egyptian University that the journey across the Mediterranean was not, for him, a journey to a foreign land. As a result, he did not feel any irreconcilable contradiction – let alone a 'clash' – between the civilisations. In his 1938 book on education policy, *Mustaqbal ath-Thaqâfa fî Misr* (*The Future of Culture in Egypt*), he dismisses the contradiction between Western modernism and Eastern tradition – and with it the paradigm of supposedly, for Islamic societies, 'foreign modernism'. As he depicts it, there is no cultural divide between Egypt and Europe. On the contrary: they share a joint Mediterranean culture, which in the course of history has been formed equally by Greeks and Romans, by Jews and Phoenicians, by Arabs and Turks and Crusaders. Greek philosophy, Roman law and Abrahamite monotheism had, he said, shaped the culture around the Mediterranean – which for this reason should be seen as a bridge, not a frontier. The actual frontiers of this Mediterranean culture were marked by the Alps in the north and the Sahara in the south.

On the basis of this assertion, Taha Hussein called for the Arab inferiority complex in the face of the supposed superiority of the West to be overcome. He wrote that it was the Egyptians' duty, after achieving full independence, to establish a democratic system, modernise society, and in particular to 'banish from their hearts the terrible and harmful fallacy that they were made of different stuff to the Europeans and endowed with a different intelligence.' For him, education was the ideal way to achieve the goal of catching up with the Europeans (again) and becoming their equal partner.

EDUCATION AS A PATH TO MODERNISM

The Future of Culture in Egypt is a decidedly programmatic cultural and educational policy statement by Hussein which should be viewed in the context of historical developments. Two years before it was published, in August 1936, Britain and Egypt had signed the agreement ending the occupation of Egypt, which began in 1882. Egypt's forthcoming independence raised questions about the country's future, especially about its cultural affiliation and national identity. Hussein's idealistic negation of the cultural differences between Europe and Egypt can be explained in this context. It was a time of new beginnings, and for Taha Hussein this meant, above all, a new beginning for the future of education. He believed that only if Egyptians – both men and women! – improved their educational situation would they be able to make the most of their potential and catch up with Europe.

At the time, many of his compatriots, as well as quite a number of European observers, shared Hussein's optimism. Khedive Ismail famously commented, on the occasion of the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, that Egypt would become 'part of Europe'. The British writer and adventurer Richard Francis Burton underlined Ismail's optimism by noting his conviction, during his visit to Egypt in 1876, that highly satisfactory progress was being made. Burton's assessment was unequivocally positive: 'Egypt must indeed, despite all predictions to the contrary, be seen as one of the most successful among the modern kingdoms.' It was therefore 'difficult to see any obstacle that could hinder its rise'.

EDUCATIONAL REFORM

With the achievement of independence in 1936, then, the road towards a modern Egypt seemed clear. According to Taha Hussein, the prerequisite for this was a fundamental reform of the education system. The constitution of 1923 had

already made it compulsory for Egyptians of both sexes to attend school, and had also made it a constitutional requirement for public elementary schools (*al-makâtib al-`amma*) to be free of charge. However, the elementary schools that developed out of the Koranic schools (*katâtib*) only offered a very modest basic education, whereas primary schools (*madâris ibdâ`îya*), which offered a modern education oriented towards the European system, still charged fees. It was only through the primary schools that pupils were able to pursue the path to higher education, which would enable them to rise up through the ranks of officialdom. In this way a two-tier system was established which cemented discrimination against the lower classes to the advantage of the middle class. In *The Future of Culture in Egypt* Taha Hussein was still arguing that elementary schools could be an adequate means by which the state could strengthen Egypt's national unity. However, during his time as an adviser in the Education Ministry, from 1942 to 1944, he was forced to acknowledge that the two-track school system was threatening to split society. Efforts by the education minister of the day, Ahmad Nagib al-Hilali, to democratise the education system by abolishing school fees for primary schools were unsuccessful. When Taha Hussein himself became Minister of Education in January 1950, he continued to pursue the course Hilali had initiated and helped to push the measures through. He explained that education had to be as freely available to every child as 'the water we drink and the air we breathe', and in 1950 he abolished school fees for secondary schools. In 1951 he combined the primary and elementary schools, extended them from four to six years, and in so doing created a standard primary school for all Egyptians.

These measures set a new course for educational policy in Egypt. However, it was to be a long time before the ideas were actually implemented. For quite a while the reform existed only on paper, mainly because of a lack of finances, such that on the eve of the 1952 revolution considerably fewer than half of Egyptians aged between six and twelve went to school at all. Furthermore, the level of the former elementary schools remained poor even after they were converted into primary schools, so that in many places the change amounted to nothing more than a change of name. After the 1952 revolution the new rulers resumed the overhaul of the education system. The focus of their efforts was on quantitative expansion, with the result that the qualitative improvement of the education system continued to lag behind – a problem which, not least as a result of Egypt's demographic development, remains unresolved today.

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Translated by Charlotte Collins · Copyright: Goethe-Institut e. V., Fikrun wa Fann, June 2014

■ **The cultural activities undertaken by foreign cultural institutes in the Islamic world are concentrated on capital cities; the provinces tend to get a raw deal. The Robert Bosch Stiftung's Cultural Managers want to change this situation. Taking Egypt as an example, it's clear how rewarding, but also how difficult their task is.**

TAKING CULTURE TO THE PROVINCES THE EDUCATIONAL WORK OF THE ROBERT BOSCH CULTURAL MANAGERS

BY **AMIRA EL AHL**



We are sitting in a dark little basement room in the centre of Mansoura. A TV hangs on the wall, with rows of chairs packed close together in front of it. There is a rehearsal space next door, and the soundproofing is only partially successful: while Schubert is being played in the film, other, wilder melodies can be heard through the wall. The bookshop Books & Beans, in the centre of the Delta city of Mansoura, is a refuge for artists and liberal minds. Books are sold on the ground floor, and here in the basement musicians can rehearse their latest pieces. And once a month, film fans and Germanophiles meet here to watch productions from Germany.

On this particular evening, around thirty people have gathered to watch *4 Minutes*, a 2006 feature film from the German director and producer Chris Kraus, starring Monica Bleibtreu and Hanna Herzsprung. It's the story of the pianist Traude Krüger, who has been giving piano lessons in the Luckau women's prison for more than sixty years. There, she meets

Jenny: aggressive, unpredictable, withdrawn, convicted of murder - but extremely talented. Violence is one of the film's major themes, in the form of prison brutality, Jenny's abuse by her father when she was a child, and the violence of the war in which Traude lost her lover.

SERIOUS DISCUSSIONS

Every last seat in the basement room is taken, and people are even sitting on the stairs leading up to the bookshop. As the last four minutes of the film are over, and the final notes of the 'Negro music' fall away, an animated discussion breaks out among the viewers. One man in his mid-forties sees the film as racist, because jazz is repeatedly referred to as 'Negro music': 'The film only escapes this in the final four minutes.' Another man of the same age sees it as a portrait of German society, which in his opinion always sees the good in people, 'and this film shows that clearly'. In spite of Jenny's conviction

Lecture of Stefan Weidner
organized by the Bosch Cultural
Manager at the University of
Minya, Egypt, in December
2012. Photo: Alexander Besch
@ Goethe-Institut

for murder, and the outbreaks of violence, the piano teacher only sees her talent. 'In my opinion the film doesn't talk about German society, but about people and personalities and their fates,' argues a young man in the audience. The film could be set anywhere. No, says the man he is addressing, this is a German film about German problems. There are no gay people or child abuse in Egypt. The comment is met with disbelief by some people in the room, who strongly disagree. The discussion is in full swing.

Angela Verweyen is the organiser of this film club, which meets in Books & Beans in Mansoura once a month. She has been the Robert Bosch Stiftung's Cultural Manager for the Nile Delta since May 2012, working with bookshops and libraries, and organising readings, concerts and film evenings. 'The great thing about the programme is that we can try so much out, and have such a free hand in shaping it,' she says. The basic guideline is that the cultural manager should convey an image of a young, modern Germany. The foundation has three cultural managers in Egypt, and their programmes mainly target a young, student audience. It's exciting, says Angela Verweyen, to work in a region and in cities that aren't as saturated with cultural events as, for example, the capital city, Cairo.

The 'cultural managers in the Arab world' are part of a joint programme by the Robert Bosch Stiftung and the Goethe-Institut. Cultural managers from Germany have been sent to institutions in the Arab world since October 2005. They are awarded stipends, and have the task of creating events and initiatives that encourage cultural interaction, in order to promote German-Arab dialogue. To start with, just one cultural manager was sent to Egypt in 2005, and was based in Upper Egypt. Since 2012 there have been three of them: Angela Verweyen, Christian Salman and Alexander Besch, in the Nile Delta, northern Upper Egypt and southern Upper Egypt respectively.

NEW TERRITORY

When Angela Verweyen began her work in the Delta in May 2012, she was entering unknown territory. 'My area was the Nile Delta, but I had no guidelines on which cities I should choose for my work,' says the 31-year-old, who studied Arabic, politics and Islamic studies at university. She was familiar with Cairo and Alexandria from her studies and her work experience with the Goethe-Institut. But she had hardly any experience of the Delta. She did some research and started speaking to people, several of whom pointed her towards Books & Beans in Mansoura. Mansoura is the capital of the Dakhalia Governorate and home to one Egypt's largest universities, internationally recognised for its faculty of medicine. So Angela organised a meeting in the bookshop, bought a train ticket, booked a hotel room and set off. The train reached Mansoura after dusk. She couldn't find a taxi, and

was left standing on the street, in the dark, in a city she didn't know. 'Suddenly a young woman came up to me', she remembers. She said she knew how it felt to be alone in a strange city: she had spent the summer in London not long before. She drove Angela to her hotel. 'I had been feeling pretty desperate, and then this woman came along. For me, it was a positive sign that Mansoura was a city where you can feel at ease; and I do, to this day, absolutely.' She has been welcomed with open arms.

Thanks to Mansoura University's faculty of medicine, the city has a large audience of people interested in Germany and German culture. 'A lot of the prospective doctors want to go to Germany, and are learning German. Hence all the interest in everything to do with Germany,' says Angela. They are eager to understand German culture, and to have the chance to talk to a German native speaker. This means that Angela has also become the go-to person for all questions about Germany. 'We are seen very much as German points of contact, as German representatives, with no distinction made as to who we work for.' Creating a space where Egyptians can meet her, and German artists, is a central aspect of her work.

Angela also organises cultural activities in Damanhour, another city in the Nile Delta: film screenings, concerts, and activities for children, who are introduced to the German language through games. 'That's always a good way in, then you win over the parents as well,' she says. In Damietta, her third mainstay in the Nile delta, the city's first ever bookshop is about to host a reading: 'The owner is in her early twenties, and full of enthusiasm.'

Back to Mansoura. The afternoon before the film showing, Angela has a meeting in another bookshop where she organises readings. The managing director of Al-Asreya is keen to put on more German-themed events. There are enquiries about German courses, and they want to hold a German culture week, with music, films, art, and of course literature. 'Readings are my favourite thing to organise, because there is a direct exchange with the audience' says Angela, who over the next few months will be travelling the Nile Delta with authors Michael Roes and Hussain Al-Mozany. But films are another good way of introducing an Egyptian audience to German culture.

LEARNING ABOUT GERMANY

Her colleagues Christian Salman and Alexander Besch also organise regular film evenings in their provinces. The Luxor Film Festival has just finished, at which Germany was this year's focus country. The films shown there included *Run Lola Run*, *Nowhere in Africa*, *The Lives of Others*, *Distant Lights* and *Almanya*. 'The audience consistently liked the films,' says Alexander. He and Christian were responsible for the German selection. The aim of the Film Festival is to appeal to the resi-

dent population, with a focus on young people, and women in particular. Alexander has also started showing films in Minya, where he works as a cultural manager. The University of Minya's faculty of languages has a German department, the only one in Upper Egypt. In addition to around four hundred students majoring in German, there are another eight hundred or so at the university who take German alongside medicine, pharmacology, tourism and media studies. But knowledge of German culture is still very poor, as Alexander explains. 'This means there's a great deal of interest in learning about Germany,' he says. A lot of people have a very naïve idea of Germany. 'Through the films, they see that there are social problems in Germany, too.'

The cultural managers have two main criteria for selecting films. Can they be shown to a conservative audience, who have often had a sheltered upbringing, without shocking them with too much violence or with sexual scenes? Secondly, careful consideration is also given to the subject matter. 'I want to show people something they can get their teeth into,' says Alexander. The cultural managers always pay attention to a film's content and message, with the aim of prompting an animated, critical discussion among the students after a screening. 'I think it's important that they form their own opinions, although they don't get that at all at their universities,' says Angela. For example, the cultural managers have shown series of films on the themes of family and immigration. This is particularly important to the students, since most of them want to be able to work in Germany later on.

Almanya was especially well-received by the Egyptians. 'The people here can immediately relate to this film: it raises an issue, and goes down well everywhere,' says Alexander. In Dammanhour, Angela says, it prompted an hour-long discussion. 'The film draws on issues that are very relevant here.' Many people here are thinking about emigration and life in a foreign country. Seeing how things go for people who have emigrated, and how family life develops afterwards, is something a film can communicate better than any conversation. 'A viewer asked me after the film why I had to rob him of all his illusions,' says Angela. The reality – albeit only portrayed in a fictional film – always looks different from how people imagine it at a distance. *Sophie Scholl* was another film that really spoke to Egyptians, as the theme, despite its specifically German background, was a very current one in Egypt: 'How much do I stand up for my political beliefs, even if in doing so I am risking arrest and possibly death?' explains Angela.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Another series of films was shown during 'Green Week', which takes place annually all over the world. The cultural managers were aiming to raise awareness of environmental issues. Christian Salman toured schools on the Red Sea with the film *The Age of Stupid*. This British docu-drama is set in the year 2055. The world is polluted, and only one man has survived; he looks back at what happened in the past with the help of old films from 2008, and asks why nobody did anything about environmental pollution and global warming while there was still time. 'The project had some great side effects,' Christian explains. The screenings led to local synergy effects: local authorities also used the film to really bring home the issue of environmental protection.

In Hurghada, the well-known tourist resort on the Red Sea, Christian works with the Misr Public Library. The Red Sea Writers' Association is among those invited to readings by German authors. 'It's very satisfying working there. The audience is incredibly grateful when someone comes over from Germany,' the cultural manager says. His audience consists entirely of Egyptians, and mainly of writers, even though Hurghada has a sizeable German community. 'These people don't come just to be entertained, but for the exchanges with German colleagues.' At a typical reading, around two-thirds of the time will be taken up by the discussion between audience and author.

Exchange is a big priority for the cultural managers, and so they have a Facebook page, through which they stay in touch with their partners, the students, and participants in the cultural events. 'We now have almost 2,700 likes, and around four hundred of those come from Mansoura alone,' Angela says proudly. She feels at home in Mansoura, and the people of the city on the Nile – whose name means 'the victorious' – have welcomed her in return. In May, Angela, Christian and Alexander will be replaced by three new cultural managers. People in Mansoura find it hard to imagine how they will cope without Angela Verweyen. Everyone she has worked with there has taken this tall, blonde, Arabic-speaking woman with the big smile to their heart. 'My successor will do a brilliant job,' she assures me, with a laugh. And she'll use Facebook to stay in touch with all the young, talented creatives in the Nile Delta: the photographers, the breakdancers, and the members of the heavy metal band. 'There's everything in Mansoura,' Angela says.

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■ Germany has been waiting for the introduction of denomination-specific Islamic religious instruction in schools for many. Finally, things have started to move but the process has been dogged by numerous problems and disputes.

THE DIFFICULTY OF TEACHING ISLAM ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN GERMAN SCHOOLS

BY RABEYA MÜLLER

The introduction of Islamic religious instruction in schools is in line with paragraph 7(3) of Germany's constitution, the Basic Law, which states that 'Religious instruction shall form part of the regular curriculum in state schools, with the exception of non-denominational schools. Without prejudice to the state's right of supervision, religious instruction shall be given in accordance with the tenets of the religious community concerned.' Religious instruction is considered a right of all Muslims and Germany's federal states have either already implemented it or aim to do so.

It is therefore indisputable that religious instruction in Islam should have a fixed place in the German education system. In accordance with the recommendation made by the German Council of Science and Humanities in 2010, the German federal government made tens of millions of euros available to establish academic centres for Islamic religious instruction at a variety of universities across Germany. The intention was for these centres to train the teachers of Islam needed to provide this religious instruction.

Despite initial objections from some Muslim groups with close ties to their countries of origin, which had for many years integrated the teaching of Islam into the teaching of their respective mother tongues, most representatives of the Muslim community now agree that this religious instruction should formally fall within the state-run supervision of schools and should be provided in German.

THE COORDINATION COUNCIL OF MUSLIMS IN GERMANY

Because a Muslim partner entity was needed to help prepare the introduction of denomination-specific religious instruction at schools, some of the larger Muslim associations in Germany joined forces and set up what is known as the Coordination Council of Muslims in Germany (KRM), so that the various state branches of the KRM could act as this required Muslim partner for the various state governments. Some federal states accepted this offer; others sought their

own solutions. For example, the federal state of Hesse works only with the Turkish-Islamic Union of the Institute for Religion (DITIB) and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. The situation in the states of Lower Saxony and North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) is very different. In both cases, the subject known as 'Islamic Religion' has already been introduced in a number of pilot projects. Here, preparations were made largely in conjunction with so-called 'advisory councils'. Bavaria, on the other hand, is working with two models simultaneously: one is the provision of classes in Islamic Studies and other is the so-called 'Erlangen model', where parents'



Huda Lutfi: The Streets Are Yours and Mines. Photo: Stefan Weidner © Goethe-Institut

associations and other Muslims who are organised at local and association level act as contacts for the authorities.

By way of example, let us take a closer look at the advisory council model adopted by NRW and Lower Saxony. The state government of NRW, for example, emphasises that some Muslim organisations were given a significant say in both shaping the content of the subject (drawing up the curriculum, approving teaching material, etc.) and approving teaching staff at schools and universities, which it feels fulfils the requirement stipulated in the Basic Law that religious instruction shall be given in accordance with the tenets of the religious community concerned. The advisory council model was applied both at university level (namely at the University of Munster) and at state level. The state government of Lower Saxony has adopted a similar approach, especially when it comes to the granting of what is known as the *ijazah*, the authorisation that all teachers of Islam require.

WHICH ISLAM SHOULD BE TAUGHT?

A faith-led Islamic theology is required at university level. However, just how far opinions can diverge even on this matter is illustrated by the current controversy surrounding Professor Mouhanad Khorchide, currently Professor of Islamic Theology at the University of Munster. For quite some time now, Prof. Khorchide has been the target of massive criticism, above all from the associations in the KRM, some of whom accuse him of being 'too modern', and some of whom say he is even passing on 'false teachings'. In addition to numerous other reproaches, complaints have also been made that Khorchide is not teaching the Islamic 'mainstream'. In December 2013, the KRM even went as far as to say that there were irreconcilable differences. Despite the ongoing dispute, Prof Khorchide is still a member of the Advisory Council for Islamic Religious Instruction in NRW.

While Islamic Theology expects an internal perspective on religion to be taught, this does not mean that this internal perspective should come from an opinion that prevails within the religious community at any given time or place. It is not absolutely necessary to make the current faith orientation practised by a majority the sole subject of research and tuition. At the very least, a certain diversity of opinion must be possible.

At all universities, future teachers are trained in accordance with a curriculum that has already been approved by university bodies and bodies set up by representatives of the Muslim community. However, if functionaries in certain Muslim associations create the impression that students in the individual departments are completing their studies under the supervision of a university lecturer who is not recognised by that association, then this is very disconcerting for the stu-

dents in question. Many are just about to complete their degree courses or are right in the middle of them. They cannot simply switch universities, and fear that they are jeopardising their future career. By acting in this way, the associations are turning on the most defenceless people, and also the wrong people in this matter, namely: the students. This situation is robbing students of the possibility of choosing a university as they see fit, which is one of the rights enjoyed by students at German universities.

It goes without saying that the state cannot assume responsibility for the content of theological instruction at a university. Nor is that its constitutional duty. On the contrary: the state is obliged to act in a neutral manner towards all denominations. It also goes without saying that the religious communities have to be involved in the process.

WHO SPEAKS ON BEHALF OF THE MUSLIMS?

However, Muslims in Germany are not organised in structures that have developed and evolved over the centuries, as is the case with the Christian Churches. Two aspects are problematic in this respect:

- Who then speaks on behalf of Muslims?
- Are there Islamic structures that can address the issues that need to be tackled, or does Islam in Germany have to adopt Church structures, i.e. does it have to organise itself in the same hierarchical way as the Christian Churches?

Debate has been raging about the first question for years now, whereby no consideration has ever been given to the possibility that the answer to the second question could be inextricably linked to the answer to the first. This basically means, for example, that those people who see themselves as the representatives of many Muslims cannot allow Islam to be established in Germany at the expense of the fundamental tenets of Islam, nor can they promote any such move. Islam does not have a sole and single contact person and a religious leader, nor have Muslim communities throughout the history of Islam been administered centrally or had a clear hierarchy like the communities of the Christian Churches. However, just because the German state is not familiar with anything but Church structures such as these, and has thus far had virtually no experience of religious communities that do not have these structures, it does not mean that one cannot negotiate with religious communities that are structured in different ways. It is indeed possible. However, a little more flexibility is required of the state.

The granting of the *ijazah* plays a key role in all of this. In the past, Islamic tradition had it that students learned what they needed to know from their teachers. Once they had successfully completed this process of learning, the teacher would grant them what is known as the *ijazah* (permission), which

permitted that student to start teaching the material he/she had learned.

So if the aim is to maintain the Islamic character of teaching, both in terms of methodology and content, maintaining at least this tried and tested traditional method would be most welcome. Instead, there are arguments about the orthodoxy of the individual graduates, and judgement is passed on them, something which reminds us of the practice of the Christian Churches. The German school authorities are having great difficulty adopting a flexible approach to this matter, and in many cases, the solutions they come up with are often in sharp contrast to Islamic views. Islam is in favour of making basic decisions at local level. If, for example, a prayer leader or a teacher does not meet the requirements of the community, he can look for another Islamic community. However, this does not impinge upon the fact that he is permitted to teach. Nor does it call into question the orthodoxy of his faith.

Although the German Council of Science and Humanities has said that the academic qualification is the responsibility of the university alone and that the respective Islamic advisory councils can only raise objections on the basis of religious scruples, what exactly that means is not explained in any greater detail.

For example, the fact that a marriage between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man can be seen as an obstacle to the granting of the *ijazah*, even if the teacher in question has been teaching successfully and with the approval of the majority of the parents, pupils, and the head teacher at her school for years, should make us think.

COURAGE TO DISCUSS MATTERS

The notion that students have to conform in every respect to a mainstream that is defined from outside also raises questions, regarding:

- a) the curricula that have been approved by most of the Islamic communities, and
- b) the concept of the freedom of research and tuition, which is required by all German universities.

Teaching staff teach in accordance with a curriculum that has been approved by religious communities, among other bodies. However, this does not mean that students at university do not have to learn to deal with diverging opinions and trends, and to address them in a constructive manner. Unless they subsequently teach lower age groups, they will be confronted with diverging ideas at the latest when they enter the classroom. Moreover, pupils must be encouraged to raise different opinions in class and to question the opinions of the teacher.

This kind of inner-Islamic discourse allows for a better exploration and discussion of the 'mainstream'. It is also mutually enriching for all sides, and would be good for all denominations of Islam. After all, this is an old tradition: there has always been a diverse inner-Islamic discourse, which was especially lively in the early Islamic period. Many still look back with great pride on what Muslims achieved in a variety of areas, including the humanities. However, these achievements were only possible because early Muslims looked and thought outside the box, dared to go against the 'mainstream', and derived academic principles on the basis of the Koran that did not correspond to the fundamental vision of the world that prevailed during that period. For example, as early as the eighth or ninth century, Muslim scholars said that the world was not flat.

Another example: Islam does not have priests who are appointed to positions by a superior institution such as the Church. Instead, prayers in the community have always been led by someone who was considered an acceptable prayer leader by that community. This way of thinking and acting is a form of grassroots democracy that has always been good for Muslims. From an Islamic point of view, therefore, universities cannot train prayer leaders (imams), only theologians. The same is true of the Christian Churches: a degree in theology does not make someone a priest; the Church provides further postgraduate training before ordination. This is why it seems a little strange that up until 2012 the following requirements were outlined in the *ijazah* ordinance for the state of Lower Saxony:

- for male applicants: indication of the mosque generally attended for Friday prayers and the German-language manuscript of a khutbah written and presented there by the applicant himself;
- for female applicants: details of the mosque generally attended and the provision of plausible evidence that the applicant is involved in the work of the community.

Happily, this *ijazah* order has since been greatly improved, and criticism of it has been taken on board. It is to be hoped that these changed guidelines went hand-in-hand with a certain rethink with regard to content and that they were not just a formal concession in order to make it easier for the graduates to be hired as teachers, regardless of their theological views. Time will tell whether the relevant people in the German authorities and the Islamic associations really do handle the *ijazah* more generously.

However, if internal Islamic debates about female prayer leaders for mixed-gender prayer (such as the one led by Amina Wadud in the USA in 2005, and also in the meantime in various places in Germany) are anything to go by, there is little to indicate that they will. In this respect, however, everyone involved should realise that this is a trend that can-

not simply be ignored, and which must be taken into account when training teachers for Islamic religious education.

DIVERSITY IS NEEDED

Generally speaking, the move towards denominational Islamic religious instruction is good and right. It should, however, be clear that it cannot be developed and managed according to the pattern of Christian religious instruction and its established traditions. Islam requires not only plurality of thought, but also an independent structure that all sides will have to develop together. As is stated in a number of declarations: 'The self-image of Muslims, the diversity of the organisational

structures, and the requirements of theological competence should be taken into account.'

The diversity inherent in Islam must also be reflected. Disappointment with existing Muslim organisations is spreading among young people in Germany, even though this is the very generation that needs to be reached. It will only be possible to do so if the whole gamut of Islamic perspectives is taken into account.

There is an old saying which is also applicable to the teaching of Islam at schools: 'He who swims with the current will never reach the source!'

RABEVA MÜLLER is a Muslim theologian who is particularly committed to gender issues in Islam and to a progressive Islam and Islamic religious education in Germany.

Translated by Aingeal Flanagan · Copyright: Goethe-Institut e. V., Fikrun wa Fann, June 2014

■ **'It's normal to be different,' says the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and in theory, at least, Germany agrees. However, research into the day-to-day experiences of people of migrant origin with disabilities show that when it comes to turning this good intention into reality, Germany still has a long way to go.**

EXCLUDED IN A NUMBER OF WAYS THE DIFFICULTY OF BEING A PERSON OF MIGRANT ORIGIN WITH A DISABILITY IN GERMANY

BY **DONJA AMIRPUR**

According to the migration pedagogue Ursula Boos-Nünning, the take-up of almost all social assistance that is available to people with disabilities in Germany is below average among families with a migrant background. However, as interviews with families of migrant origin who are raising a child with disabilities show, this has nothing to do with 'cultural differences'. In a research project conducted at the University of Bremen, parents report that it is above all their migration situation and experiences of discrimination that determine whether and how they can avail themselves of services: families often come up against language barriers, their insecure residence status prevents participation, or their request for measures that will not exclude their children fall on deaf ears. Ayşe Kolat and her daughter have experienced all of this. They came to Germany when Rana, who had early infantile autism, was four years of age. 'We had already started therapy in Turkey. However, we came here seeking political asylum. We spent two-and-a-half years in a hostel for asylum seekers. During this time there was no therapy and we could do very little for Rana.' The strain on families with uncertain residency status has been proven to be immense: in many cases, the fact that they have to live in overcrowded hostels, have minimal health insurance cover that only covers the most acute conditions, and are not permitted to work leads to psychological problems. If 'nothing can be done' for the child, families can break down under the strain.

Drawing from the book
*Es war einmal oder nicht.
Afghanische Kinder
und ihre Welt
(Once Upon A Time
Or Maybe Not At All:
Afghan Children
and Their World)*
by Roger Willemsen.
S. Fischer Verlag,
Frankfurt, 2013.

make it to the supermarket with her three children. The living conditions in the hostel are just wretched. And on top of everything, not even the educational authority is making an effort to get them places at school and to support their development.'

Some families only get a definitive diagnosis many years after the birth of their child. However, contrary to the assumption that parents don't want to accept that their child has a disability, many parents find waiting for a diagnosis a huge strain. They're worried that they are wasting valuable time



THE FIGHT FOR INFORMATION

Ivana Ilic, a social worker with the charity Kölner Rom e.V., tells of a refugee family with two disabled children who have been waiting for places at school for several months. 'The mother can't even go shopping for food because she can't

- time during which their child could have been receiving support. The reason for this is quite straightforward: in Germany, until there is a diagnosis, there is no support. Important support measures cannot be taken, and it is more difficult to address the specific needs of the child.

'When I was in Iran, I was well informed,' says Parissa Jalili. 'I knew the system; I knew what had to be done.' Both Jalili's children have a disability. The first child received care and support in Iran. When the second child arrived, the family was forced to leave the country. According to Jalili, when she arrived in Germany, she was powerless. To this day (her son is now twelve years of age), his disability has not been diagnosed.

These families are locked in a daily struggle to obtain information. But they are coming up against a system in which authorities and institutions only provide information when it is specifically requested, which means that people have to know that they can claim specific services and know where to submit their applications.

Many parents encounter discrimination. They are spoken to like children; they are sometimes accused of preferring to care for the children on their own ('because that's the way it is in their countries of origin'); they are supposed to sign forms that they do not understand. As a consequence of all this, they avoid contact with the bodies that provide assistance and advice.

That's how it was for the Yildirim family. Eight-year-old Fatih Yildirim used to go to a special school where the focus was on learning. Although his father is no great fan of the special school system, he saw that his son felt at home there and was developing well. He hoped that Fatih would soon learn how to read and write: because Mr Yildirim is worried about his son's future. What will become of the boy if something happens to his parents? Mr Yildirim does shift work; there is not much money left to save at the end of the month. He relied on the school's support and hoped that it could help Fatih become more independent. However, after a year, the teachers decided that Fatih should switch to another school. When the new school year began, he had to move to a special school where the focus was on 'intellectual development'. Mr Yildirim felt that this was a step backwards. But the school got its way even though both Fatih and his parents were opposed to the move. Mr Yildirim tried to intervene, but failed, because he wasn't allowed to bring an interpreter along to the meetings. Pressure was put on him to sign minutes of the meeting, although he could not understand them. He was not told anything about his rights at the meeting.

HOW TO DEAL WITH DISABILITY

Many families with a migrant background are critical of educational facilities that exclude certain children, such as special-needs kindergartens. Fariba Mostafawy shares this view: 'Of course, the best solution is when all children are together.' However, it is more difficult for children with a migrant background to visit a regular kindergarten or an integrative school. Parents report that their children are either not offered places at these schools or are refused such places on the grounds that their child is not suited to an integrative school. For families with an uncertain residency status, it is even more difficult to get a place at preschool for their children, even though families in a precarious situation are in particular need of support. Ms Jalili also spent several years in a refugee centre, where living in such close quarters with others was a psychological strain on both the family and the child. 'The situation was completely unacceptable. It was very difficult indeed. Some of the other families were even involved in a stabbing incident. That was caused by all the stress. Initially, we couldn't bring our child to preschool because there was no room.' Eventually, she gave up on the idea that her son would go to an integrative school. At the age of four he got a place in a special school. 'He was afraid of children; he'd had no previous contact with children, and he started to scream.' Had the child been able to attend preschool, both he and his family would have been able to participate more in society, which would have been a welcome relief from their difficult life in the refugee centre.

Of those families with a poor command of the German language, those who spent their child's early years in their country of origin know more about their child's disability. Parents who were already living in Germany when their child was born know much less about their child's disability.

It is often assumed that families of migrant origin ignore offers of disability assistance because their frame of reference is the inadequate structures in their countries of origin. This assumption is not, however, confirmed by the families interviewed for this research project.

'I'M ONLY GOING TO MAKE MYSELF UNPOPULAR'

The case of Canan Mutlu shows that families of migrant origin naturally do want support that can help their children be independent. Mutlu's sons initially showed no consideration for their little brother's early infantile autism. 'In the beginning, they had some difficulties because they wanted to treat him like a normal boy. So I said to them, 'Okay, on the one hand that's good; on the other hand, you have to remember that he has a disability and you have to live with

that. He's not going to get better in this respect; he will always be autistic. But we can make sure that he's more independent." She is happy that her son is making good progress at the special school and that he has a chance of being able to switch to an integrative comprehensive school.

Regardless of their educational background, these parents disprove the frequently-voiced theory that parents with a migrant background are insufficiently willing to support their children by co-operating with the school. The pedagogue Fariba Mostafawy felt that her son's kindergarten didn't have a specific concept of how to provide sufficient support for her son, so she took matters into her own hands and enrolled him in a sports club. He took part in athletics, swimming, and water-skiing. 'I want to be able to say to him, "Look at all the things you can do!"'

But some parents react in a more restrained manner if they don't agree with the pedagogical work in the school or kindergarten. 'Well, I'm not going to go in there and ask, "Why is my child learning so little here?" I'll only make myself unpopular,' says Fariba Mostafawy, who fears that such an intervention on her part could have a negative effect on the children. This is why many parents go on the defensive when they make contact with educational institutes, instead of contributing their knowledge and expertise about their child. They try to compensate for the deficiencies that they see in the German education system by taking action themselves,

and don't dare to demand assistance from any institutions. However, these interviews show that when the parents don't get basic support – care allowance, allowance for those with visual impairments, a disabled person's ID – then even the support measures initiated by the parents themselves don't bear much fruit, because they have to invest too much time and effort in earning a living.

In their staff professional development courses, the German institutions responsible for people with disabilities focus heavily on such things as the 'evil eye' and popular beliefs held by people in Islamic countries, and in so doing impose a cultural interpretation on the difficulties of integrating these people. Meanwhile, they completely overlook the structural barriers that make it so difficult for people of migrant origin with disabilities and their families to participate in society.

Names have been changed.

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* For more detailed information on the research project, please see the publication 'Behinderung und Migration – eine intersektionale Analyse im Kontext inklusiver Frühpädagogik' (Disability and Migration: An Intersectional Analysis in the Context of Inclusive Early Pedagogy) at <http://www.weiterbildungsinitiative.de/publikationen/details/artikel/behinderung-und-migration-eine-intersektionale-analyse-im-kontext-inklusive-fruehpaedagogik.html>

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■ How can German schools shed light on National Socialism, when many pupils in Germany today are not of German descent, but of Arab, Turkish, Iranian or Eastern European – and so have a completely different relationship to German history? Our author, who is himself of Polish extraction, sat in on one such history lesson.

WHAT DOES HITLER HAVE TO DO WITH ME? ON THE DIFFICULTY OF TEACHING GERMAN HISTORY MULTICULTURALLY

BY STANISŁAW STRASBURGER



Discussions at a German school with witnesses of Nazi war crimes.
Photo: Javier Sa Cordeiro
© Goethe-Institut

TEACHING UNIT 1: ALIENS - DO THEY LIVE AMONG US?

As part of my preparations for participating in a history lesson on National Socialism, in a comprehensive school in Porz, I read the textbook that the students there use. It is published by a large, well-known publisher, and fits in with the curriculums of several German federal states. One of its two chapters on fascism includes an interesting cartoon. An old man is sitting on a chair. He is well-built, and looks like somebody who doesn't tolerate any back-chat. His thin little grandson stands in front of him. His head is raised, though his hands are thrust into his trouser pockets, and he has a shocked expression on his face. His grandfather is saying something like:

... And then in 1933, a lot of brown creatures came down from outer space. They murdered and pillaged all over the place, before disappearing from the earth again in 1945 ... There was an enormous number of them. And until this day, nobody knows where they came from, or what happened to them.'

In this textbook, there is also an interview with a Turkish man, Arslan, whose flat in Mölln was set on fire by neo-Nazis in 1992. His wife and two daughters died in the fire. He only managed to escape by jumping out of the window of the burning bedroom.

'What did we do to deserve this?' asks Arslan, in despair. 'The flat was already on fire when my wife went into the hall to save the children. A moment later, the flames were so high that I couldn't get through the door. I jumped out of the bedroom window. My wife took our son into the kitchen, which saved his life. She was burned to death, along with our two daughters, when she ran into the hall to get them. Why did all this happen? We were asked to come here: we came as *Gastarbeiter*, guest workers. We didn't force ourselves on this country. Is that how you treat guests?'

A few pages further on, there is a table giving the names of

neo-Nazi groups in Germany. One column shows the dates they were banned. But the authors point out that this approach is controversial. Banning individual groups doesn't lead to any change in the convictions of their followers. It often just provokes them to go underground, where it's more difficult to control their actions.

The textbook also contains quotes from young neo-Nazis in the 1990s. Why do they set fire to houses where people are sleeping?

'My father's only unemployed because some cheaper Turk or something is doing his job now. Are we supposed to just stand by and watch?'

'The government gives them a flat and benefits that I don't have any chance of getting. I'm a second-class citizen.'

'The government isn't managing to deal with this problem, and until they do, we've got to do it!'

But also:

'We do it to teach politicians a lesson!'

'We do this shit partly because we've got nothing else to do.'

Further on, the authors set out some exercises. They encourage the pupils to look for the motives that the underage perpetrators give to justify their behaviour. They suggest holding a discussion about sentencing. They suggest that children investigate whether anything similar has happened where they live, and talk about it to the police, the public prosecutor and the local youth services.

Towards the end of the chapter on the history of Hitler's Germany, there is also a famous picture of the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto, where the Germans are forcing a colony of oppressed people, with a little boy at their head, to retreat. Underneath it is the information that the boy was the only one of his family to survive the war, and now lives in New York. There is a German with a gun standing next to him in the photo. The caption says that he was finally identified twenty-six years later. He was prosecuted by a German court for crimes against humanity, and received the death penalty in 1969. (...)

TEACHING UNIT 3: REMEMBERING IN GERMAN

At the school in Porz, I meet a boy called Sasza, and his friend. Despite appearances, Sasza is a native German. His name is very popular here. I ask him if he knows of any traces of Nazi crimes near where he lives. 'I can't remember,' he says. 'We went on a trip once to one of Hitler's prisons. Sometimes there are these copper cobblestones on the streets ... We were told about that in GL (Social Education). Maybe that's why I only noticed them then ...' the boy laughs.

The Germans call those cobblestones *Stolpersteine* - stumbling stones. The artist Gunter Demnig makes them to order - for 120 euros a stone. Anybody can fund one and have it installed outside a house where a victim of the Hitler regime lived. Assuming, of course, that the owner of the property gives their consent.

Demnig engraves the person's name, dates, and places of birth and death, if they are known, onto the 10cm x 10cm square plate. Demnig's *Stolpersteine* can be found in more than three hundred German cities and towns. The artist says his project shows a National Socialism that wasn't just a political abstraction: it reached into the houses of every one of us.

'What kind of idea is that?' Sasza's friend says, getting worked up. 'You're supposed to rub the soles of your shoes over these stones, otherwise the copper just goes dark and you can't read what's on it any more ... Weird. Apparently we're supposed to remember, but it's like you're trampling on someone's grave. These people often don't have a grave. Sasza's right. Who notices them? You go past the house ...

This stone is tiny. You don't look down at the ground the whole time ...'

Frau Michel, the social education teacher whose lesson I am to attend, joins our group. She listens to the conversation for a moment, but it's obvious she's itching to say something. As soon as we stop talking for a moment, she jumps in: 'So, I didn't experience the war first hand. Your parents are certainly younger than me. I know from my parents that it was a terrible time. Ever since I was a child, they've kept repeating that we have to do everything we can so that Germany never starts another war. It was bad for the civilian population too. My parents weren't Nazis, they weren't party members - my mother was even openly against it. I grew up in an atmosphere where it was drummed into me that nothing like that must ever be allowed to happen again. Maybe that's why I became a teacher, and why I'm here with you now.'

'You know,' Frau Michel says, turning to me, 'I don't have the opportunity to address this subject in lessons every year ... But at least when there's any kind of anniversary, I remind the students of it. We're always talking about this topic. Perhaps that's the difference between your generation and me.'

I don't know what happened to Frau Michel's family. What she has told me is something I hear from a lot of Germans. Meanwhile, my history textbook, published in the mid-1990s, shows that the number of Germans who were prepared to oppose the system during the period of National Socialism was between twenty and forty thousand.

Evidently these Germans had a great many children, whom I keep meeting ...

As Frau Michel walks away, Sasza recalls a meeting that his class had with victims of the war.

'What did that teach me? Today, I think: not a lot. We've been going over and over the subject of National Socialism since class 7. We have to remember, so any opportunity will do,' he says sarcastically. 'And we're doing it now as well. A bit of the French Revolution, a bit about the history of the countries the other kids are from. Like Turkey for example. And then it's just the Weimar Republic and Hitler. After a while, even the worst crimes stop affecting you.'

'I think that meeting was unnecessary. Of course I remember that it happened. Who were the guests? Poles? Ukrainians? I don't know, maybe they were Poles. I think it's about time we stopped talking about this subject.'

'The problem is,' says Sasza, 'I can't imagine what it was like in those days. We learn so much, but it's always about politics. About the war, and the Holocaust. I don't know how people lived back then. Afterwards, when we met them, we didn't really say anything. We'd had enough. Nobody wanted to hear it.'

A girl who has been standing in the corner, listening, comes to join our conversation.

'Let me tell you about this trip we did through the city. One of the things we did was to go and look at a plaque, where some forced labourers were hanged in the spring of 1944. We were there with a guide. When he was telling us about the execution, our teacher went really green and started crying. But you know what? She was the only one crying. I think teachers take it all a bit too much to heart. Nobody mourns for the victims of the Napoleonic war these days, either.' (...)

TEACHING UNIT 6: NATIONAL SOCIALISM FROM MY PERSPECTIVE, OR: WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO WITH THIS KNOWLEDGE?

When I ask who knows what happened during the Nazi period in the countries their families are from, nobody says anything. 'Nobody talks about history in our family,' I hear. Finally, Samira speaks up.

'Once, when we were learning about it at school for the first time, I spoke to my grandparents. My grandpa gave me a book to read – and that was it. We discussed jokes about National Socialism at home as well. We talked about whether it was acceptable to make them at all. Old people don't like it when you remind them about it.'

'But a lot of people were made to go to war,' says Ferhad. 'Sometimes they were forced to kill as well. Today, people in Germany live with each other.'

'Hitler wasn't even German, he was Austrian,' says Thomas. 'According to his own criteria, he should have fallen into his trap himself. He wasn't a pure German at all.'

'A lot of Germans followed him because he promised them a better future. They were told, if you do your bit, everything will get better for you. So why shouldn't you do it ...? It's human, normal ...'

'So if somebody came along today,' I ask, 'and offered you a better future in return for going to war, what then?'

'Oh, no, there won't be another dictatorship in Germany ...' says Ferhad with conviction. 'Back then there was really bad unemployment. That was one of the reasons. Now we know how war can be, and that we won't make those mistakes again... the people in Germany won't be drawn into another war today.'

'Hitler promised people a lot of things that we have now,' says Samira. 'There's nothing you can use to bribe people any more. We're not so easy to tempt these days.'

'Exactly,' says Ferhad. 'In Germany today there are benefits you can live on, maybe not all that well, but you can. It wasn't like that then. The people probably had to go into the war, everyone was going hungry, there were these tickets for food, for everything; even if somebody didn't want to – they had to feed their families.'

'You know, we learn about this every year,' says Abussamed. 'We go over the subject again and again. After a while it gets boring. It's always just Germany, and Germany again. For example, take the Ottomans, Iraq today, there are bloody wars there, too. Not just in Germany. Anyway, it's better to look forward, to what's happening now, and not always back to past history.'

'Well, for me it's still important, if I'm living in Germany ...' Kathrin ventures. 'What happened here in the past affects me too. We started doing this topic in the third year of primary school. And we've had it every year. That might be a lot, but it's still important...'

'Yes, on the other hand it's good that we're doing it so often,' says Ferhad, backing her up. 'If you hear something one time, you don't remember that much of it. A few weeks later you've forgotten it. But later, if somebody from abroad asks you how it happened, what the Night of the Long Knives was, then at least you know. I know it all off by heart, because we did it in school. When somebody like you comes in, I can tell you the answers ...'

TEACHING UNIT 7: A BREAK AFTER EVERY LESSON

At break-time, I talk to Paul, who is in a lower year. His class has just had a lesson on the Holocaust and the concentration camps: it was the first time he had heard about them. Paul is deeply moved by the extermination of the Jews. This charming blond boy with the child-like face, who looks as if he comes from a well-to-do middle-class family, starts by asking me for details. How exactly did the Nazis murder all these people? What gas did they use? What did they do with the bodies? Finally, he says:

'But it's kind of illegal, isn't it, to murder Jews? You don't do that, right?'

'Of course not,' I reply, somewhat taken aback.

'Wasn't there some kind of police who could have shut these camps down?'

'The police were helping, just like the military, and the railways that transported the prisoners ...' I reply, regaining my composure.

'So these people were bribed, were they?'

'No,' I say, 'they did it of their own free will.'

The boy shakes his head in disbelief. The bell rings. We say goodbye. Should I be glad that Hitler is such an unimaginable concept for him? Or should I be worried that history lessons aren't managing to convey one of our most terrible experiences to the young citizens of Europe?

TEACHING UNIT 8: THE LEGACY AND THE PRICE OF ACCEPTANCE

'The children are fed up with National Socialism at school,' I say to Frau Schommers, the school's vice-principal, at the end of the day. 'They don't identify with the Germans of seventy years ago, and they'd rather learn about something else.'

'Listen, since when did students have to agree with what they learn at school? Excuse me.' Frau Schommers refuses to be backed into a corner. 'Living in Germany entails a certain acceptance of the German legacy, in both a good and a bad sense. That's one of the requirements of our education. Our school has two Turkish teachers, one Palestinian and one African teacher. They've really helped us to understand our students. The students themselves have a different relationship with them. They often don't trust us as much as they trust them.'

'I'll tell you the facts of the matter. Let's take the question of how religion should be taught in schools. We have lessons for Catholics and Protestants. Some schools have Islamic religious studies lessons as well, but we don't. And the students who don't go to religious studies lessons have to do something. So recently we've started offering "German as a second language". The students have a choice. So some Buddhists and Zoroastrians go to Religious Studies, and some Catholics do extra German lessons. You know, I'm a German teacher. For years now I've been noticing that the repertoire of words that the middle-school students, and even the six

teen- to nineteen-year-olds, are using is gradually shrinking. That means that the students simply don't understand some of the text extracts, for example from the history textbook. We have to explain what individual words mean. These are our day-to-day problems. Are you going to write about that, too?'

EPILOGUE

This report was written for one of Poland's largest daily newspapers. It wasn't published, because – as the editor-in-chief put it – it doesn't describe a German school class. The supplement considers itself a 'reporter magazine', which suggests that the texts contained in it relate to the real world, not some fictional universe.

However, the following conversation took place between the author and the editor:

'What is a German school class, anyway?'

'One that has German children in it,' the editor replied.

'And who are these German children?'

'The ones whose parents and grandparents are Germans.'

'In Germany today, classes like that basically don't exist.'

'That doesn't matter. In Poland, that's still how we imagine Germany. You have to think up a class like that, whether it exists or not.'

STANISŁAW STRASBURGER is a Polish writer and journalist. Amongst other things, he organises cultural projects between Poland, Germany and Lebanon. His novel *Handlarz wspomnień* (*The Story Seller*) came out in 2009. The Arabic edition was published in Beirut by Dar al-Adab.

Translated by Ruth Martin · Copyright: Goethe-Institut e. V., Fikrun wa Fann, June 2014

■ **The Islamic scholar Angelika Neuwirth has had a greater impact on Koranic research in Germany than anyone else in recent decades.**

What she has to say is revolutionary – not only for Muslims, but also for Europe. Salafists, in particular, could learn a great deal from her

SALAFISM OR PHILOLOGY WHAT YOU CAN LEARN FROM A SCHOLAR OF ISLAM

BY **NAVID KERMANI**



Huda Lutfi: *You Don't Want to Upset Me.*
Photo: Stefan Weidner
© Goethe-Institut

Some time ago, a group of devout Muslims announced that they intended to give every German a generally-intelligible edition of the Koran. To invite their fellow citizens to read the Koran, these devout Muslims planned to stand about in pedestrian precincts and go around ringing people's doorbells. At the same time, they also intended to run a poster campaign bearing the slogan: 'Read!' – Read! In the generally-intelligible translation that was to be distributed in the pedestrian precincts, this constituted both the opening of Sura 96 and also, according to these devout believers, the very first word God said to the Prophet: *iqra` bismi rabbika llâdhi chalaq / chalaqa l-insâna min calaq* – 'Read! in the name of your Lord, who created / Created man from a clot of blood'.

Their announcement caused quite a stir, and indeed disquiet, among the German public. The devout Muslims were the top story on the television news; they found themselves on the front pages of national newspapers, and were invited onto talk shows on the main public TV channels. The German Inter-

ior Minister also expressed his concern, and the security services declared that they were keeping a very close eye on these people. The devout Muslims themselves firmly rejected any suggestions that they had extremist sympathies, pointing out that the Bible was also given away for free in generally-intelligible translations. Their campaign should not, they said, be seen as a mission – there is no such term in Islam – but simply as *dacwa*, an invitation. Why shouldn't one read the Koran just as one reads the Bible?

YES – WHY NOT?

Like so many debates that are whipped up into minor hysteria by the constant noise from all sides that constitutes the shaping of public opinion nowadays, the one about handing out Korans also died down quickly. The devout Muslims didn't have enough money to print eighty million or fifty million or even one million copies of their Koran, nor were there enough volunteers all over the country to invite people to

read it. It eventually emerged that the Koran had only been distributed in those pedestrian precincts that were also furnished with television cameras. And yet the question remained, hanging in the air, and in the press, as well: why shouldn't one read the Koran just as one reads the Bible?

The newspapers and talkshows, the Interior Minister and the security services all provided answers. But philology can give answers that are more exciting, more logical, even more politically relevant – that is, exemplary philology like that of Angelika Neuwirth. If one wished to reduce her research to a single denominator, a single statement, a fundamental theme, it would be this: the Koran itself is the reason why it shouldn't be read like a Bible.

It begins with the dating of Sura 96, which, if one examines it closely, can hardly be the first, and it continues with the simple Arabic wording that the devout Muslims obviously failed to understand. In Koranic Arabic, *iqra'* means not 'Read!' but 'Declaim!', 'Recite!' or even 'Repeat!' The Koran itself explicitly denies that the Prophet was presented with a written document, comparable to Moses' Decalogue. The modus of revelation is repeatedly given as the spoken word: spoken aloud, recited like a cantilena, or even sung – *rattili l-Qur`ânâ tartilâ*, as it says elsewhere in the Koran. The poet Friedrich Rückert translated this section into German more beautifully and more precisely than any devout Muslim: 'Singe den Koran sangweise,' he wrote. 'Sing the Koran like a song.'

THE KORAN IS NOT A BIBLE

The Koran is not a Bible. As obvious, even banal, as this statement sounds, its implications have been flagrantly ignored – not only by the general public, but also, for many years, by Orientalists, who based their assumptions on Christian theology and Old Testament scholarship in particular. It is thanks in no small measure to Angelika Neuwirth's early research that, since the 1980s, the realisation has gained general acceptance, in Western scholarship at least, that the Koran is neither a sermon about God, nor spiritual poetry, nor a prophetic speech in the Ancient Hebraic style. The Prophet certainly did not compose his revelation as a book, which is normally read and studied alone and in silence. The Koran's own conception of itself is as the liturgical recitation of the direct speech of God. It is a text intended to be read out loud. The written word is secondary, and until well into the twentieth century it was, for Muslims, little more than an *aide-mémoire*. God speaks when the Koran is recited: in the strictest sense, one cannot read it, one can only hear it.

In this context, Angelika Neuwirth speaks of the sacramental character of Koranic recitation. Although Islam does not use this term, it is essentially a sacramental act to take God's

word into one's mouth, to receive it through the ears, to learn it by heart: the sacred is not simply remembered, the faithful physically take it into their bodies, actually absorb it, much as Christians do Jesus Christ when they take Communion. (This, incidentally, is why singers are supposed to clean their teeth before declaiming the Koran.)

And now devout Muslims appear on German television and announce that they will be handing out unsolicited Korans in pedestrian precincts and on people's doorsteps. You only have to have read a book, or a single article, about the Koran by the non-Muslim scholar Angelika Neuwirth to comprehend the presumptuousness of these devout Muslims, who are disregarding the linguistic structure of the text and the history of its reception; to appreciate the sacrilege that, in their zeal, they are committing.

One need only think of the fact that in Muslim households the Koran is, to this day, kept in the place of honour, wrapped in precious cloth. The whole Islamic tradition holds that merely reading aloud from, listening to or touching the Koran – by Muslims themselves, and certainly by those of other faiths – requires them to be, if not actually ritually purified, at least in a state of respect, humility and contemplation. Because in reciting or hearing the Koran a Muslim relives nothing less than the initial act of revelation: it is not a human voice, it is God himself speaking to him or her. This was why, in former times, Muslim military leaders would avoid taking manuscripts of the Koran into battle so that the word of God would not fall into the hands of unbelievers, and why those of other faiths were sometimes even forbidden to learn Arabic on the grounds that they would then be able to recite the Koran. These are curious, perhaps even extreme examples, yet they are indicative of the scruples that Muslims have always retained with regard to the Koran. And now these devout Muslims wanted to distribute the Koran like a leaflet, or a product sample, with no reservations about copies of the Koran ending up, like all leaflets or product samples, in the nearest rubbish bin.

TREATING THE KORAN UNSCRUPULOUSLY

And what an edition, what a devout yet insipid German edition of the Koran, all too easily intelligible and therein falsifying the heart of the Koran, it was that the devout Muslims wanted to distribute! Even the opening of Sura 96 that they quoted on the posters, the supposed call for the Prophet to read: this, in Arabic, is a rhyme – *iqra` bismi rabbika llâdhi chalaq / chalaqa l-insâna min calaq*. It is a rhyme, as all the verses of the Koran, without exception, rhyme. The Koran is *legato*, rhythmic, onomatopoeic language. You cannot simply read it as you would read a story or the wording of a law. Anyone who opens it without preparation is initially con-

fused. To him (or her) the Koran appears disjointed; the reader is bothered by all the repetition, the mysterious or incomplete sentences, the allusions whose references remain enigmatic, the drastic changes of subject, the lack of clarity with regard to the grammatical person, the ambiguous imagery.

The difficulty of reading and comprehending long passages from the Koran is not one that arises only in pedestrian precincts. Right up to the present day, Western academics, especially those influenced by their study of the Bible, have disputed the authenticity of the Koran on the basis of its chaotic, indeed arbitrary-seeming structure. They claim that the Koran in the form in which we know it today is the product of a later age, and owes its existence to many different authors whose writings were assembled at random. Muslims, of course, deny this, as a later date of origin and authorship by an anonymous collective would render the entire foundation of Islam obsolete.

All devout Muslims are recommended to read Angelika Neuwirth. She made her reputation as an academic with her first great work, the *Studies on the Composition of the Meccan Suras*, in which she demonstrated the poetical homogeneity, the internally consistent image matrix and extensive textual integrity of the Koran through a microscopically precise reading of the text. Exactly those things that appear enigmatic, disconnected, tiring to the ordinary reader, and especially to the reader of a generally-intelligible translation – the repetitions, anacolutha, ellipses, insertions, the sudden changes of the grammatical person or the apparently surreal metaphors – are what characterise the quality of Koranic language for an Arab listener, and explain why James Joyce was fascinated by the Koran. Thus, historical-critical textual analysis, which devout Muslims often claim is directed against Islam, broadly confirms the traditional picture of Islamic salvation-history. The Koran is, in its essential components, the work of a single period, and of an ingenious, linguistically highly-gifted intelligence. The question is: who was this intelligence?

The answer Angelika Neuwirth provides to this question is, for the devout, a far more uncomfortable one. In the work she did after the *Studies on the Composition of the Meccan Suras*, she turned her attention to the oral character of the Koran and demonstrated its performative elements. What is meant by this is that the Koran is not simply a text that must be read aloud and which, like a musical score, is only realised in performance. No – the text itself, as it stands, is in part the written record, the carefully-edited transcript, of a public recitation, a performance, written down after the fact. The Koran thus does not consist solely of the statements of a single speaker: it incorporates interjections from an audience

of believers, or of unbelievers – as well as spontaneous responses to these interjections, which repeatedly lead to abrupt changes of subject.

GOD SPEAKS, MAN ANSWERS

This, however, means that the congregation, those who were the first to hear the Prophet, made a substantial contribution to the Koranic text, and the transition from an oral to a written culture takes place in the Koran itself. If we read the Koran as precisely as Angelika Neuwirth demonstrates, it becomes clear that the Koran is not dictation, but a conversation: for and against, question and answer, puzzle and solution, warning and fear, promise and hope, the voice of the individual and the refrain of a chorus. That God speaks in the Koran is something one has to believe. But philology is enough for us to see that, in the Koran, Man answers.

This conversation that is the Koran takes place not only with the Prophet's immediate listeners on the Arabian peninsula in the seventh century. In her more recent work, culminating in the propaedeutics of her Koran commentary, which runs to several volumes, Angelika Neuwirth reveals that the Islamic revelation is embedded in the culture of Late Antiquity – i.e. the same period and cultural realm in which Jewish and Christian theology also developed.

This is not, however, one of the usual lists of ways in which Arab thinking influenced Western scholarship. The fact that one of the main strands of the European Enlightenment can be traced back to Arab culture, and to Judeo-Islamic philosophy in particular, is something that has been known in Germany at least since the period of Jewish scholarship – even if Germany's current Minister of the Interior is still unaware of it. Angelika Neuwirth is concerned with something else. She makes clear that the Koran itself, the founding document of Islam, is a European text – or vice versa: that Europe, according to its origins, also belongs to Islam. The explosive contained in this research is something no security service is capable of defusing. It will rock the foundations of our intellectual landscape for a very long time to come.

Angelika Neuwirth's most recent work, the first volume of her Koran commentary, gives us an indication of just how enriching this shock might be. By tracing the various Biblical, Platonic, patristic and Talmudic references in addition to the ancient Arabic and inner-Koranic ones, and above all by paying serious attention to the linguistic structure of the Koran as a poetic text, a musical score for sung recitation, the extent to which the Koran has breathed in the entire culture of the eastern Mediterranean becomes apparent. And the extent to which, in turn, its exhalation has permeated this, our culture.

In my laudatory speech I have referred only to Angelika Neuwirth's tremendous and excellent work on the Koran. Acknowledging her numerous essays on classical and modern Arabic poetry, such as those on the important Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, would require a whole other speech. I have also omitted to depict Angelika Neuwirth as an instigator, which she is as well: the instigator not only of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences' comprehensive project on the textual history of the Koran, but also of countless smaller research projects.

Almost everyone in Germany who is doing work on the Koran or classical Arabic poetry – including myself – has been taught by her, infected by her enthusiasm and supported by her loyalty. At the same time, she also spends many months of the year in the Middle East, keeping a room in Beirut and another in Jerusalem, supervises a whole host of religious students from the Muslim world, and gives lectures not only at Harvard and Princeton but also at many Arab universities, as well as at the most important Islamic institutions.

TAKING THE OTHER SERIOUSLY

For as long as I have known her I have been asking myself how she manages it. Time is one aspect – so much work crammed into just one life! But why is it that people, even those at the heart of Islamic scholarship, listen to her so closely, even though her research may touch, even undermine, the very foundations of the Muslim faith? I believe this has to do with her attitude, her empathetic fidelity to the text, her seriousness, and with her own piety. And perhaps this is something we can learn from this philologist in terms of the way the secular public realm relates to religion. We may question that which is sacred to others; we may, of course, criticise the fundamental principles of any religion. But we should respect the fact that, for others, these fundamental principles are sacred, and we should take this seriously.

I would like to congratulate Angelika Neuwirth on being awarded this year's Sigmund Freud Prize.

NAVID KERMANI is a Cologne-based writer and scholar of Islam. His work has won numerous prizes. This is a transcript of his laudatory speech for Angelika Neuwirth, given at the award ceremony for the Sigmund Freud Prize of the German Academy for Language and Literature, which was held at the Staatstheater Darmstadt on 26th October 2013.

Translated by Charlotte Collins · Copyright: Goethe-Institut e. V., Fikrun wa Fann, June 2014

■ **Children in Afghanistan are very special.**

They love school and know all about the conflicts in their country. German journalist Roger Willemsen has devoted his latest book to them and the world they live in.

'I WAS GIVEN A SCHOOLBAG AND I'M HAPPY' AFGHAN CHILDREN AND THEIR WORLD

BY **NOURIA ALI-TANI**

What do we really know about Afghanistan? What do we know about the lives of its children and the way they see post-Taliban, post-Allied forces Afghanistan?

Old Afghan stories begin with the words 'Once upon a time, or maybe not at all'. This is also the title of Roger Willemsen's book, in which the children of today are given the opportunity to tell their stories.

Since 2005, author Roger Willemsen has been a regular traveller in Afghanistan. He has made a conscious decision always to travel autonomously, independently, as a civilian, and definitely not as a so-called 'embedded journalist' with the military, as many of his colleagues have chosen to do. This may be risky, but it also allows Willemsen to really make contact with the Afghan people and culture and to forge friendships. This was the only way it was possible for him to write a book that shows not only the dark times, but also the moments of light that are part and parcel of Afghan life. Willemsen, a versatile intellectual, is not only an ambassador for Amnesty International, Terre des Femmes and CARE, but also patron of the Afghan Women's Association. He is simultaneously curious and reserved: a sensitive observer.

VERY SPECIAL CHILDREN

Afghan children - 'totally different to children in other countries' - impress Willemsen the most. He describes them as 'old beyond their years, with bags under their eyes and deep lines engraved on their faces', 'miniature people whose faces have been marked' by their experiences of war and ancient dust, hard labour, and frequently dire hardship. At the same time, however, they are also full of curiosity, lucidity, and optimism about the future. These children are different; these children are unique. They love going to school and adore their teachers. Do they play? This question is often greeted by blank faces. Their thoughts are politicised, their lives militarised.

Roger Willemsen
**Es war einmal
oder nicht.**
**Afghanische Kinder
und ihre Welt**
**(Once Upon A Time
Or Maybe Not At All:
Afghan Children
and Their World)**
S. Fischer Verlag,
Frankfurt, 2013.

Willemsen has gathered notes about conversations with them as well as letters written and drawings made by them. And even though their lives may differ, their reactions to matters such as education or national responsibility are surprisingly uniform. They all want to improve their country, spread peace and brotherliness. Even the youngest among them has a sense of responsibility and an understanding of politics. They read the newspapers to their parents; they look for explanations for confusing situations. Their comments, related here, include: 'The troops killed 28 people, two of whom were Taliban. The rest were subsequently labelled Taliban', or: 'The school was rocked by a bomb explosion. I'm fed up with this.'



LESSONS ABOUT LANDMINES

All they know is war and a life of insecurity. In the classroom hangs a poster illustrating different weapons. This class is about landmines. The children play in burned-out tanks; they play war. Every family has lost some members; all of the children have seen other people die. They are traumatised, in a country where few have ever heard the word 'trauma' and psychological help is almost unimaginable. Both these negative and other, positive experiences – symbolised by nature and happy families – dominate the letters and images presented in this book, a small selection of which we have reprinted here. The way they deal with what they have experienced and the pain they feel in their souls contrasts in these pictures with the desire for harmony: alongside the helicopters, Kalashnikovs, and bleeding bodies we see flowers, animals, and happy celebrations. It is quite possible that the act of painting other life-worlds and writing letters was therapeutic for many of the children. We in the West, who are not affected by the situation in Afghanistan and who live in a different world, listen to the children and share their worries. The images of the West drawn by these Afghan children raise a smile. Everything is in perfect order; the men are muscular and wear sunglasses; people live in skyscrapers, loll around on sofas, and do their homework by electric light. These children are excellent observers!

EDUCATION IS THE KEY

'I got a sewing machine and a pair of scissors. My life gets better by the day.' Willemsen also made a conscious effort to visit Afghan women on his travels. He met female lecturers, football players, and women who work in workshops. Every

where he went, he saw that education is the key; the key to economic development and social modernisation. Women are the vital engine that keeps things moving here. This is not a Western invention: it is human logic and necessity. However, as liberal as the Afghan constitution might be, there are still numerous obstacles to overcome. Every morning, Basira goes to school as a girl; in the afternoon, she works in the bazaar as a boy. The general lack of security, the landmines, and rape make it very difficult for women to go out in public. However, there are exceptions, like the father who has opened up part of his private home so that the girls in the city can attend classes.

Unlike other experts, Willemsen has no need for dramatisation and know-it-all recommendations. He is restrained. He consciously highlights Eurocentric patterns of perception and tries to see things from a different perspective. He gives children, women, village elders, and former fighters alike the time and space they need to tell their stories, and to show us in the West that 'we are not all murderers'. At the same time, Willemsen provides background information on the richness of Afghan culture and combines it with documents he has collected to create a convincing image of contemporary Afghan society: its dark side, its light side, the hunger for education, and the Afghan people's yearning for peace. The children, in whose pictures we immerse ourselves here, are Afghanistan's future. They will shape and develop politics and society. This book gives us hope. These children know the way.

The author and the publisher are donating all revenues from the sale of this book to the *Afghanischer Frauenverein e.V.* (*Afghan Women's Association*). The money will go directly to maintaining existing schools and building new ones.

NOURIA ALI-TANI is a political scientist who lives in Munich.

Translated by Aingeal Flanagan · Copyright: Goethe-Institut e. V., Fikrun wa Fann, June 2014

■ Theatre is often described by practitioners as a 'safe space': a forum in which it is not only permissible but desirable for performers to express emotions, break taboos, speak uncomfortable truths, reach out, experiment, fight, and come together.

PLAYING BRECHT IN DAMASCUS

A BOOK ON POST-REVOLUTIONARY ARAB THEATRE

BY CHARLOTTE COLLINS



Rolf C. Hemke launching his book on Arab Theatre at the Theater Mühlheim an der Ruhr in December 2013. Photo: Stefan Weidner © Goethe-Institut

For most, if not all, of the Arab practitioners profiled in this book, theatre, as a forum for free expression, is a place of existential importance. It is not, however, safe. Some, like the Iraqi director Monadhil Daood, were forced into exile after staging work critical of the regime. Others, such as Morocco's Naima Zitane or Tunisia's Meriam Bousselmi, have received threats in response to plays examining the treatment of women in Arab society. In 2011 Juliano Mer-Khamis, the former artistic director of the Freedom Theatre in Jenin, who worked with young Palestinians and described himself as '100 per cent Palestinian and 100 per cent Jew', was shot dead in front of his theatre building.

Arab theatre practitioners do not, then, always enjoy the luxury of safety. However, they are in a position to create theatre that possesses an immediacy, urgency and relevance it generally lacks in safer, more comfortable societies. Good drama thrives on conflict, and contemporary Arab theatre makers certainly have no shortage of material. The 'Arab

Spring' sparked upheaval all across the region, but as Rolf C. Hemke – the editor of this elegant anthology of essays – comments, its effect on Arab theatre has largely been overlooked. This is all the more surprising because, as Hemke says, 'Theatre is often the most political and the most spontaneous of all forms of art. Hence, theatre can function as a seismograph of societal conditions.'

A dramaturg who for some years now has curated the international 'Theatre Landscape' festival in Mühlheim an der Ruhr, Hemke stresses that *Theatre in the Arab World* should not be mistaken for an encyclopaedia. It makes no claim to represent Arab theatre in its entirety: rather, it is a subjective overview, a brief introduction to the contemporary theatre scene in nine countries from Morocco to Kuwait, examining a few key figures in each. It opens a window onto an unfamiliar world: a world that is, by its very nature, ephemeral – all the more so in these fast-moving times. Published in late 2013, this edition may already need updating: Is the Syrian director Omar

Abusaada still living and working in Damascus? How is the quasi-documentary independent theatre that emerged with the revolution in Egypt addressing the country's ongoing political vicissitudes?

INVALUABLE SNAPSHOT

It is, nonetheless, an invaluable snapshot of contemporary Arab theatre – and apparently the only book of its kind. The text is complemented by dozens of atmospheric black-and-white portraits and production photographs. It piques our interest with outlines of the practitioners' work, including tantalising descriptions vividly recalling past productions. In *Banafsaj (Violet)* by the Lebanese director Issam Bou Khaled, for example, a woman recreates herself out of body parts from mass graves and goes searching for her young, dead son. She embarks on an odyssey through a dreamlike, parallel world, but when at last she 'believes she is once again holding her child in her arms, the sandbag she has taken to her heart bursts and the "child" slips away from her grasp, like the passing of time in an hourglass.' The reader is often left wishing one could still reserve a ticket.

Germany's Theater der Zeit and Sud Editions in Tunis have collaborated to publish the book in parallel bilingual editions – German/English and Arabic/French – making it immediately accessible throughout the region, as well as to interested foreign parties. One of their stated aims is to find 'active partners' for Arab theatre makers abroad. Creating innovative al-

ternative theatre is always a financial struggle: publicity, sponsorship, invitations, co-productions and foreign tours are often essential to keep a company going.

Anyone with an interest in the topic should buy the book for its reference section alone. It contains a list of contact details, not only of the main local funding bodies and training institutions, but also of theatres, theatre groups, directors, festivals and cultural centres. There is a brief description of the kind of work they do, which ranges from theatre in education to experimental, site-specific performance, from original, devised shows to re-interpretations of the classics. Shakespeare is especially ripe for adaptation: we read of a Tunisian *Macbeth* with Ben Ali as the power-hungry tyrant, Kuwaiti director Sulayman al Bassam's *Arab Shakespeare Trilogy*, and Monadhil Daood's Sunni-Shia *Romeo and Juliet*.

Daood's early training in Baghdad has shaped his whole approach to theatre. His university tutor 'used the Arab tradition, but (...) encouraged us to find "our" conflict on the stage, and to look around in our world to see what is relevant to us for dramatisation.' This book spotlights a number of people who have adopted a similar approach to creating powerful, original Arab theatre. Ignoring what is going on around them is simply not an option. 'The theatre is one of the methods to observe from a distance what is happening to us,' explains the Syrian director Mohammad al Attar. 'The theatre is also a means of survival, of staying productive, and of not despairing.'

Theater im arabischen Sprachraum – Theatre in the Arab World, edited by Rolf C. Hemke. Bilingual German-English edition published by Verlag Theater der Zeit (Berlin 2013) simultaneously with the French-Arabic version from Sud Editions, Tunis.

CHARLOTTE COLLINS is a journalist and translator specialising in theatre.

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