

# The Immigrant Continent

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Few words are as undefinable with any certainty as the ones in the theme of this issue: Europe and its borders. For many of us these borders would shift when considered geographically, historically, intellectually, geopolitically, or culturally. Moreover, nothing unsettles the borders of Europe, or any continent for that matter, as effectively as the concept of migration. If one were to write a history of migrations, conceptualized as the migration of not only people, but also images, words, ideas, technologies, objects, information, and food, and if one were to put Europe in its global context by discussing the continent as a place of both arrival and departure, one would realize how porous these borders have always been. Such a history would critically acknowledge European countries' role in the history of modernization and colonization of other countries within and outside Europe, and disclose the region's character as an immigrant continent and diaspora of various peoples.

While a scholar may not have a hard time in convincing the audience of Europe's impact outside its borders, less is the case of Europe's acknowledgement as an immigrant continent. Despite Germany's long history with the "guest worker" and refugee programs after World War II, for instance, immigration has hardly changed the perception of what it means to be "German" in conservative circles, and the immigrant has constantly been judged by a measuring stick of "integration" that usually expects him or her to assimilate into a supposedly unchangeable, essentialist national identity, rather than contribute to the shaping of a multifaceted, transformed one in dialogue.

Exploring these issues was the motivation of my book *Open Architecture: Migration, Citizenship and the Urban Renewal of Berlin-Kreuzberg by IBA-1984/87*.<sup>1</sup> The extensive building and renovation practice carried out by IBA-1984/87, an international building exhibition, was justifiably one of the most important events of its time and a microcosm of international architectural debates from the mid-1960s till the early 1990s. An astonishing number of now-celebrated architectural offices participated in IBA-1984/87, including those of Peter Eisenman, Vittorio Gregotti, Zaha Hadid, John Hejduk, Hans Kollhoff, Rem Koolhaas, Rob Krier, Aldo Rossi, Álvaro Siza, James Stirling, Oswald Mathias Ungers, and

many other understudied architects and urbanists whose due acknowledgment is hopefully given with this book. IBA-1984/87 was also a telling example about the relation between city and statelessness, because the then run-down Kreuzberg has been home to migrants, predominantly from Turkey. I question what would have happened if the architectural discipline and profession were shaped by a new ethics of hospitality toward the immigrant, and call this open architecture. My overarching theme is international immigration and the ongoing human rights regime that impaired guest workers' and refugees' right to have rights, and therefore exposed the very limits of these past forms of open architecture. As many authors have exposed, the stateless puts into question the limits of the current human rights that presume the condition of being a citizen of a state. Ever since the first declaration of rights, the link between natural and civil rights, "man" and "citizen," and birth and nationhood has continued to define human rights, making it impossible to have inalienable rights without citizenship. Unlike conventional architectural histories, this topic requires giving voice not only to architects and policy makers but also to noncitizen residents. In other words, I extend the book's theme to its method and explore an open form of writing through a genre inspired by oral history and storytelling. This brings together historical projects and thought experiments toward open architecture (or the lack thereof) by also integrating the voice of the immigrant, and conceptualizes open architecture's various types with terms such as flexibility and adaptability of form, unfinished design and design that resists being finalized, collectivity and collaboration, participation and democracy, and multiplicity of meaning.

In this short essay it is not possible to do justice either to the complexities of this history or to the archival and on-site research, as well as the oral histories that I carried out during the process of writing the aforementioned book. Therefore, I would like to pick up a few examples that concern the visual arts during this urban renewal process, in order to give my readers a small glimpse into the discussion.

Kreuzberg is world famous today for its street art and graffiti, and the beginnings of this visual art scene can indeed be traced to the time when the area was predominantly inhabited by squatters, who had moved illegally to the war-torn and abandoned buildings, and immigrants who had arrived from Turkey with the guest worker program since 1961 and as refugees due the aftermaths of the 1980 coup d'état. In 1973 migrants from Turkey already formed the biggest portion of the noncitizen population in Germany (23 percent), followed by those from Yugoslavia (17 percent) and Italy (16 percent). Just before the Wall fell, 12.5 percent of West Berlin's population of two million was composed of what the Germans referred to as *Ausländer* (foreigners), half of whom were reportedly from Turkey. Kreuzberg had the highest percentage, and in some areas of the borough, including Kottbusser Tor, half the residents were migrants from Turkey.<sup>2</sup>



Fig. 1. Heide Moldenhauer's photographs of residents in Kreuzberg, Berlin, 1980. Courtesy: Heide Moldenhauer.



Fig. 2. Candida Höfer, *[Untitled]*, ca. 1976. Copyright Candida Höfer/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.



Fig. 3. View of the murals by artist Hanefi Yeter on the corner of Adalbert- and Waldemarstrasse, renovated by IBA-1984/87, photographed by Esra Akcan, Berlin, 2012.

Among the art events that focused on the issue of immigration, Kunstamt Kreuzberg at Mariannenplatz organized the Morgens Deutschland abends Türkei exhibition between May 26 and August 23, 1981.<sup>3</sup> Filled mostly with Gert von Bassewitz's full-page street photographs that were accompanied by the texts of Turkish authors and architects such as Cihan Arın, Safer Çınar, Necati Gürbaca, Hakkı Keskin, and M. Niyazi Turgay, the catalog of the exhibition reserved half of its pages to the political, economic, and religious structure of Turkey and the other half to the guest workers' working conditions, their children's schooling, and leisure activities in Kreuzberg. In other words, the exhibition aimed both to document the guest worker's place of arrival and to inform the German public about their place of departure. The critique of the recent 1980 coup d'état in Turkey and an article comparing the rise of fascism and political criminalization in Turkey and rightist extremism in Germany signaled the authors' political orientations and how they were applying their left-wing ideas to the contexts of both countries.<sup>4</sup>

Most of these authors were also members of the Initiativkreis Gleichberechtigung Integration (IGI) group that exposed the housing discrimination in Berlin in its brochure "What Foreigners Think About Foreign Politics," written in both Turkish and German and released around the same time as the exhibition in May 1981.<sup>5</sup> IGI demanded to be a "discussant" in the German integration debates, not just the "object of discussion."<sup>6</sup> It reported that landlords and housing bureaus consistently turned down foreign families' applications to rent apartments, which subsequently pushed them into ghettos made up of run-down buildings with small, substandard units. "The apartment will not be rented to foreigners" was a common phrase in newspaper advertisements.<sup>7</sup> Taking advantage of immigrants' lack of rights, landlords failed to perform legally required maintenance, since foreign families could hardly make official complaints about the decaying state of their apartments. The brochure also outlined a few architectural principles that coincided concurrently with the urban renewal carried out at the same time by the Altbau section of IBA-1984/87, where the IGI member Cihan Arın also worked as an architect.

To give another example of collaboration between artists and architects that took place during the same urban renewal (Altbau section of IBA-1984/87), one might mention Heide Moldenhauer, who became responsible for the renovation of two urban blocks in the Kottbusser Tor area. She took about 3,500 diapositives on the streets, in the Hof-spaces and apartments, and during the tenant meetings and the renovation process, building up a collection which now stands as nothing less than a sophisticated city archive of the period.<sup>8</sup> Recently, Candida Höfer's early career photographs of Turkish guest workers in Germany have attracted the attention of scholars, who have praised them for their intimacy and dialogical nature, and for capturing the



Fig. 4. Postcard depicting the mural on the facade of a building in Dresdenerstrasse 10, attributed to Hanefi Yeter (since erased).



Fig. 5. Cover of the exhibition catalog for Mehmet Berlin'de/Mehmet aus Anatolien, Kunstamt Kreuzberg, 1975.

subjects looking at the camera—in contrast to images representing the patronizing ethnographic gaze.<sup>9</sup> In this sense, Moldenhauer's collection is a much more comprehensive oeuvre, as most of her photographs show the many levels of the agency of the residents she worked with, rather than capturing them with an ethnographic authority or with the confidence of a photographer who feels entitled to intervene in individual lives (fig. 1 and 2). The first empty unit renovated under Moldenhauer's responsibility served as a model apartment in IBA-1984/87, used to gain the public's trust. Block 76, which she was responsible for, was also the exemplary project introduced in IBA's most visible Idee Prozeß Ergebnis exhibition catalog. In this block, 424 out of 551 occupied units accommodated 1,165 residents, out of which 770 were noncitizens and 456 were children. Single-room flats comprised 25 percent of the apartments, and 48 percent of units had no private toilets. While this data illustrates the housing problems in numbers, Moldenhauer's photographs provide the same evidence in images.<sup>10</sup> With her translator, Necla, whom she met on the street, Moldenhauer created another exhibition in 1984 on women as architects, which included a display she created that was composed of her own photographs pinned over pieces of typical Berlin wallpaper, a low table, and two cushions that Necla's mother had knitted and sewed for the display.<sup>11</sup> Moldenhauer also convinced the German-Turkish artist Hanefi Yeter to design mural reliefs on the facade of the corner building at Adalbert- and Waldemarstrasse, which was under her responsibility during the urban renewal. Yeter's work is composed of humans made out of colorful three-dimensional tiles shown in everyday life scenes with a twist of unfamiliarity (fig. 3).<sup>12</sup> Yeter was not an arbitrary choice. The since erased mural on Dresdenerstrasse 10, in the area—also attributed to him—was one of the first representations of migrants' objects from everyday life and memories of home, made visible on the scale of an urban facade in Berlin (fig. 4).<sup>13</sup> Yeter was also one of the three Turkish artists who were featured in the bilingual Mehmet Berlin'de/Mehmet aus Anatolien exhibition, also at Kunstamt Kreuzberg, between September 6 and November 9, 1975 (the other two were Mehmet Çağlayan and Mehmet Aksoy, fig. 5). Just like the Morgens Deutschland abends Türkei exhibition in the same space six years later, which involved some IBA Altbau members, this show had two foci: a long chronological overview of Turkey's economic, political, and cultural history, and information about the bureaucratic details of immigration, such as requirements for residence and working permits, demands for democratic rights, photographs of Kreuzberg's streets, and guest workers' conditions and leisure activities.<sup>14</sup>

Numerous other murals are reported to have been painted by artists, residents, and squatters during this urban renewal (fig. 6), starting a tradition that made Kreuzberg a world center of graffiti and street art. Ayşe Erkmen's work on the walls of a corner building at Heinrichplatz (1994) is one of the most canonic examples of this tradition, which is composed of scripts conjugating the untranslatable Turkish past tense with the "miş" suffix, making the viewers question the



Fig. 6. View of the mural on the facade of a stable in a Hof in Kreuzberg, renovated by IBA-1984/87, photographed by Esra Akcan, Berlin, 2012.



Fig. 7. Ayşe Erkmen, mural on Oranienstrasse 18 (1994), photographed by Esra Akcan, Berlin, 2014.



debates on integration through the perspective of the translatability and untranslatability of languages (fig. 7). Several buildings deserve a name in the history of architecture, partially due to their life as political graffiti canvasses, such as Álvaro Siza's senior's club, also built as part of IBA-1984/87. Every time the city repaints the walls of this building white, it takes no more than a couple of weeks for graffiti artists to totally reclaim them. The process has turned the senior's club into a temporary exhibition space that is never empty or blank, but filled with periodically changing graffiti. Unlike the architectural critics who adore the serenity and silence of Siza's buildings, the city's inhabitants have interpreted his modernist white facades as blank surfaces on which they can write their own stories (fig. 8). Recently the graffiti culture in Kreuzberg has become so co-opted into the logic of gentrification that newcomers into the area are said to ask commercial artists to tag the walls of their buildings, so that they have an image to their liking or so that non-artists would not write their own political messages. That is why the graffiti artists "Blu" painted over their own famous mural in 2014, to protest openly the fact that their work had become a harbinger of the area's gentrification: "The city started to use the aesthetics of resistance for its marketing campaigns"<sup>15</sup> (fig. 9).

One might indeed ask how Kreuzberg resisted gentrification for so long in the first place, as opposed to its immediate neighbors Mitte and Prenzlauerberg in the former East Berlin, which were gentrified instantly as the Berlin Wall came down in 1989. Few in the art scene indeed mention the determining impact of Kreuzberg's urban renewal during the 1980s for this outcome. The IBA Altbau policy gave the renovated buildings public housing status usually for twenty-five years, which enabled the citizens and noncitizens to stay in their apartments and hence disabled gentrification until very recently. At a time when the Berlin Senate had issued housing regulations targeting the "foreigners," such as moving bans and settlement quotas that aimed to reduce the percentage of immigrants to ten percent all over West Berlin, the Altbau section of IBA-1984/87 subverted these housing laws by carrying out an urban renewal that prevented the displacement of the current noncitizen residents. In contrast to conventional city planning implemented from above, IBA Altbau director Hardt-Walther Hämer coined his approach as "gentle urban renewal" (*behutsame Stadterneuerung*, usually translated as "careful urban renewal"), and openly promoted the use of a participatory model in which the people directly affected by the renovation would become the decision makers. In an area of 310 hectares with 56,000 dwellers, an area composed of many abandoned buildings and blocks, most of which had no indoor toilets, leaking walls, broken door and window frames, and decaying structural beams, a participatory model on a unit-by-unit basis required the mobilization of many working groups and mediating agencies.<sup>16</sup> The Altbau team prepared countless handouts to explain the renewal process and organized *Hausversammlungen* for each and every building in order to record and negotiate neighbors' conflicting and complementing requirements; the tenant advisors working in



Fig. 8. Views of the changing facade of Álvaro Siza's senior's club, built for IBA-1984/87, photographed by Esra Akcan, Berlin, 2009–2016.



Fig. 9. Blu, graffiti in Kreuzberg, photographed by Esra Akcan, Berlin, 2009 (since painted over).

newly established tenant consulting agencies went door-to-door to each and every apartment to discuss the residents' needs and budgets; the translators found on the streets or in universities were employed; the architects removed or added walls, combined or divided units, and added stairs and service spaces to optimize the neighboring tenants' differing needs within their budgets; the developers agreed to some low-profit deals for the prestige of participating in IBA; the residents agreed to move temporarily to another apartment, or to put up with the construction in their apartment during the renewal process; and the authorities agreed to give public housing status to residents for approximately twenty-five years, so that no single noncitizen family was unwillingly displaced from their apartment, keeping the original percentage of noncitizens in the area intact for approximately two decades. As many immigrant residents still living in the area did not fail to mention during my interviews, it was indeed thanks to their own endurance through the tough days when the area was packed with decaying, war-torn buildings, and their own attempts to renovate and maintain these buildings as decent places to live, as well as their own initiatives for the commercial and cultural enrichment of the neighborhood, that Kreuzberg has become one of the most multicultural neighborhoods of Germany today—a fact that they complain is hardly acknowledged by the German government, media, or cultural analysts.<sup>17</sup>

While *Open Architecture* analyzes the immigration policy and culture in the late 1970s and 1980s, this topic gained a newfound relevance as I was finishing the book. The busy migration route between Germany and Turkey entered a new phase recently, due to the violations of free speech in Turkey, which pushed countless opposition journalists, intellectuals, and academics to forced or self-chosen exile. Additionally, during the final years of writing this manuscript, we witnessed the world's biggest refugee crisis since World War II, due to the war in Syria. Ever since, the conditions of and the conceptual distinctions between refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers have infiltrated daily newspapers and conversations. The disciplines of art and architecture have been relatively more attentive to the status of the refugee today, producing some internationally visible exhibitions and publications, which, in the face of the structural challenges I had previously recorded, however, have only concentrated on immediate solutions. Moreover, in the United States, my own country of residence, individuals from certain countries have been subject to travel bans, and immigrants have been stripped of their long-established lives and families. These recent global developments and the steep decline of civil liberties around the world exposes the fact that many of the same phenomena discussed in my book are continuing to pose problems today with little or no improvement, including rightlessness of the stateless, crises of citizenship categories in national and international laws, state brutality, lack of decent housing, quandaries of public housing, and hostility toward immigrants. But in that case, the findings are also a chronicle of hope, reporting inspiring stories against all odds of immigrants who rightfully take credit for making Berlin's

Kreuzberg one of the most exciting places to live in the world. In cases of the lack of hospitality reflected in architecture and urbanism, examples documented in the book show that individual residents triumphed over these non-open spaces. Finally, my book brings out solidarities between ex-migrants and citizens, despite the overwhelming discriminations.

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1. Esra Akcan, *Open Architecture: Migration, Citizenship and the Urban Renewal of Berlin-Kreuzberg by IBA-1984/87* (Basel: Birkhäuser, forthcoming in 2018). For the relevant details and extended bibliography concerning this article, please refer to this book.
2. Jürgen Hoffmeyer-Zlotnick, *Gastarbeiter im Sanierungsgebiet: Das Beispiel Berlin-Kreuzberg* (Hamburg: Christians, 1977). Ample studies of the legal, sociological, and cultural aspects of immigration were undertaken in Germany during the Cold War years. For recent scholarly books, see: Tomas Hammar, *European Immigration Policy: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Ayhan Kaya, *Sicher in Kreuzberg: Constructing Diasporas: Turkish Hip Hop Youth in Berlin* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2001); Leslie Adelson, *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Toward a New Critical Grammar of Migration* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Timothy Hatton and Jeffrey Williamson, *Global Migration and the World Economy: Two Centuries of Policy and Performance* (Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press, 2005); Deniz Göktürk, David Gramling, and Anton Kaes, eds., *Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration, 1955–2005* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Rita Chin, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Ruth Mandel, *Cosmopolitan Anxieties: Turkish Challenges to Citizenship and Belonging in Germany* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Gökçe Yurdakul, *From Guest Workers into Muslims: The Transformation of Turkish Immigrant Associations in Germany* (Newcastle: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Annika Marlen

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- Hinze, *Turkish Berlin: Integration Policy and Urban Space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).
3. Today known as Kunstraum Kreuzberg.
  4. Kunstamt Kreuzberg, ed., *Morgens Deutschland abends Türkei*, exh. cat. (Berlin: Verlag Frölich und Kaufmann, 1981).
  5. "Yabancıların Yabancılar Politikasına İlişkin Görüşleri/Stellungnahme der Ausländer zur Ausländerpolitik," (Berlin: IGI [Initiativkreis Gleichberechtigung Integration], May 1981). Prepared by Cihan Arın, Safer Çınar, Necati Gürbaca, Hakkı Keskin, M. Yaşar Öncü, and M. Niyazi Turgay. The item is in Cihan Arın's and the author's collections.
  6. Ibid., 2.
  7. Ibid., 24.
  8. I worked on this collection when it was still in Moldenhauer's personal archive. Since then it has been acquired by Landesarchiv in Berlin.
  9. Amy A. Da Ponte, "Candida Höfer's Türken in Deutschland as 'Counterpublicity,'" *Art Journal* 75, no. 4 (2016): 16–39.
  10. Heide Moldenhauer, "Planungsalltag am Kottbusser Tor," in *Idee Prozeß Ergebnis: Die Reparatur und Rekonstruktion der Stadt* (Berlin: IBA, 1984), 134–37.
  11. Heide Moldenhauer, interview by the author, May and June 2012, Berlin, in English, 00:32:00 (audio and video recordings of this interview are in the collection of the author).
  12. Ibid.
  13. Akbar Behkalam to Hardt-Walther Hämer, Letters of 30.3.85, and 2.4.85, Archiv IBA, Block 81, Folder A58, SK/80, AdK.
  14. Kunstamt Kreuzberg and Berliner Festspiele GmbH, eds., *Mehmet Berlin'de/Mehmet aus Anatolien*, exh. cat. (Berlin: Dieter Ruckhaberle, 1975).
  15. Lutz Henke, "Why we painted over Berlin's most famous graffiti," *The Guardian* (December 19, 2014), <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/dec/19/why-we-painted-over-berlin-graffiti-kreuzberg-murals>, accessed December 20, 2014.
  16. See, for example: Archiv IBA, Folder: Kreuzberg SO 36. A3 SO/17, Sammlung Baukunst, Akademie der Künste.
  17. See Akcan, *Open Architecture*.