

Esther DISCHEREIT

Accept our Existence

Thanks to Michael Roloff and Kizer Walker

1952 vintage – My room is my country / I speak German to my typewriter / raggedly at the edge / My room is my country. These lines were published in my first volumen of poetry in 1996 “Als mir mein Golem öffnete“ / “When my Golem opened up”. I left the room and spent time outside, especially in the United States. I was teaching at the University of Virginia, in Charlottesville, the town whose citizens decided to stop worshipping Robert E. Lee. I had left, the day before the KuKluxKlan marched in.

After surviving the Shoa, my grandfather emigrated to the US. The eldest daughter, my aunt, had managed to escape Hitler by first emigrating to Shanghai and, at the end of WW II, found refuge in Philadelphia. “Come here, things are good here,” my grandfather wrote, but we remained in Germany. Our first and only children’s book was in English.¹ My mother read it to us; she did not translate anything. She was showing us the language of the liberators. The sister of mine who survived the Holocaust married an American football star who played for the Iowa Hawkeyes and then, professionally, for the Cleveland Browns. He is mentioned in the Hall of Fame with his father as the NFL’s first African-American father-son-combination.² My sister, a white Jewish woman, lived with her Afro-American non-Jewish husband in Champaign, Illinois; together they finally moved back to the city where their children were born, to Rome, Italy. Harold Bradley still works here as an actor, singer, and painter.

In this way different linguistic, passport and home country affiliations marked the family, as did different kinds of religiosities. “Foreign countries are a good thing,” we would say at home. Now we could regard this as a real advantage, as a broadening of the cultural horizon and development of human adaptability. People call it integration, assimilation or acculturation. However, at present more people than ever before worldwide had been forced to become immigrants.

The Undocumented in the US of course wish to have legalized status. 800.000 other human beings, their children, would prefer to live in secure circumstances under DACA, and to have the opportunity to lead a self-determined existence and to have the right to an education.

Recently my friend Wendy told me she will be re-entering refugee camps in Vienna and Berlin, to offer assistance as acupuncturist and yoga teacher with her colleagues. This American group of women left a great impression on me as well as on the other the young authors with whom I was

¹ Red Mittens by Laura Bannon, 1946

² By joining the Hawkeye football team, Harold Bradley Jr. completed the first African-American father-son combination to play football for the University of Iowa; his father played for the Hawkeyes in 1926. Bradley Jr. was one of five African-Americans to play for the Hawkeye football team in 1950, when the team finished the season with a road game at the University of Miami. Bradley and his four African-American teammates, nicknamed the "Orange Bowl Five", became the first African-Americans to play at the historic Orange Bowl stadium, a contest won by Miami, 14–6.[4] Bradley capped his Hawkeye football career by being named team MVP of the 1950 Iowa football team.[5] He graduated from Iowa in 1951 with a degree in fine arts. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold_Bradley_Jr.

working in Vienna. We were putting out a newspaper,³ which we sell to enable refugees to obtain subway and bus tickets, and arranged for German lessons at the university – immigrants can receive free English language lessons around the area here, too, thanks to the volunteers – and we made it possible for refugees to have access to classes at the university.⁴

My sister's father reported after 1945 that it took the help of thirty-eight illegal helpers to save him from the Nazis. Following recent events in Charlottesville, Edel Rodriguez, illustrator of the August 28 Time Magazine cover, did not avail himself of the opportunity to represent the man who gives the Hitler salute as Donald Trump.⁵ Once upon a time a great majority of Germans liked that salute and liked demonstrating it. But a majority of Americans do not salute or ever saluted in this manner. Why shouldn't it be possible to organize the protection of the Undocumented? DACA recipients and other immigrant groups are organizing resistance.⁶⁷ In the U.S, there exists a long tradition – the underground railroad for one – a tradition of helpers, of living one's life with social responsibility. One symbol of this stance is the American Memorial Library in Berlin, founded in 1954, gifted by the US especially to a younger German generation. These days this library is the one with the friendliest disposition to the public; day-in-and-day out refugees come here as do daughters of my German-Turkish neighbors who do homework here. I too occasionally visit and do my writing there.

³ Der Blick des Anderen, DRINNEN/DRAUSSEN/HEYMAT – GEFLÜCHTET_ZUGEREIST-_EINGEWANDERT, Extradruck 04/ 16, Wien, Institut für Sprachkunst, Universität für angewandte Kunst Wien, 2016, 36 Seiten (ed.) by Esther Dischereit

⁴ At present, Syrian, Eritrean, Iraqi, Iranian and Somali refugees have a so-called “decent chance” for a permanent status in Germany, recently Yeminis, too. However, Afghans meanwhile are being deported to their home country. The Balkan countries were declared to be countries of origin that did not pose a danger, as were Ghana and Senegal.

⁵ Times-Cover August 28, 2017 by Edel Rodriguez

⁶ CommunityBondProject To Defend Immigrants <http://www.communitybondproject.org/>

⁷ My colleague Maria was deported. I saw the void she – and others – leave behind <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/sep/02/deportation-void-maria-mendoza-sanchez-immigration>