Renovating the Republic: Unified Germany confronts its history – both deep and recent – as it defines itself for the 21st century

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Renovating the Republic

Unified Germany confronts its history – both deep and recent – as it defines itself for the 21st century
Germany and America go way back. German soldiers fought in the American Revolutionary War, and German settlers already had begun finding their way to America before the colonies became a nation. By the 1850s, many Germans had settled in the Midwest, and they followed the frontier west to the Great Plains. Germans were the largest group of immigrants arriving in Nebraska between 1854 and 1894, and by 1900, almost 20 percent of the state was first- and second-generation Germans.

For the past year, a group of University of Nebraska-Lincoln journalism students has closely examined this foreign country that, perhaps more than any other, helped shape the Cornhusker State. In January, 13 students spent 10 days in Berlin, interviewing Germans in government offices and nightclubs, at universities and mosques.

To a large extent, what they found was a tale of two 9/11’s. Without question, Germany’s long and complicated relationship with the United States – as a source of substantial immigration, as an enemy in two world wars and as a key ally in a protracted East-West Cold War – was changed by the events of Sept. 11, 2001. Germany, less inclined to rely on military power to solve international crises, supported U.S. moves in Afghanistan but not in Iraq, straining relations with the U.S. Since then, Germany’s own security has been tested by global terrorism.

But there was an earlier, even more profound 9/11 for Germany. On Nov. 9, 1989 – which, when written European-style, with the day before the month, becomes 9.11.1989 – Germans began tearing down the Berlin Wall. When the dust settled, the Soviet Union was gone, and Germany – split into East and West for 40 years – was reunited.

These two dates – British writer Timothy Garton Ash argues that one marks the end of the 20th century and the other the beginning of the 21st – color nearly everything happening today in Germany.

Our students’ work was aided immensely by Germany’s Goethe-Institut, especially our Berlin tour guides Gerrit Book and Anna Held, and by the German Foreign Office, which assisted with travel expenses. We would also like to thank Viola Drath for her help and inspiration, and Wolfgang Drautz, consul general, and Winfried Völkerling, vice consul, in the German Consulate General in Chicago.

Timothy G. Anderson
Charlyne Berens
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In today’s Germany, the only thing constant is change. On a bus tour through Germany’s capital city on a cold January day, guide Gerrit Book so frequently mentions renovation – past, present and future – that the city seems to be a work-in-progress rather than a product of history. Construction in the city is so common that cranes and helmet-wearing workers seem to fade into the background of everyday life.

As the bus weaves through traffic, Book methodically points out Berlin’s unique features. He talks about the Reichstag, home of Germany’s parliament, which was refurbished between 1995 and 1999. The building is now topped with a large, open-air dome that offers such a magnificent view of Berlin that the Reichstag is the most-visited parliament building in the world.

Less fancy but no less prevalent, Book mentions, is the widespread graffiti staining the city’s buildings, train stations and sidewalks. Like the new version of the Reichstag, the street art is still in its infancy – it has existed in Berlin only since the late 1980s.

In the heart of the city, Book gestures toward another young symbol of the 4 million-member metropolis. The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, a collection of 2,711 stone slabs that sits between the Brandenburg Gate and the site of Adolf Hitler’s bunker, is the city’s most visible reminder of the Holocaust’s atrocities. Although more than 60 years have passed since Germany’s Jewish population was nearly exterminated, the memorial is only two years old. For a city so thoroughly saturated in history, much of Berlin is strikingly new.

But there is nothing new about the relationship between Germany and the United States, whose histories are tightly interwoven. During the world wars, the U.S.-German relationship was characterized by
The sun sets behind one of the few remaining sections of the Berlin Wall.
animosity and American dominance as allied troops defeated Germany in both wars. In 1949, four years after the end of World War II, Germany became a divided nation. Split into the Soviet-run German Democratic Republic in the east and Federal Republic of Germany, run by the U.S., France and Britain, in the west, Germany came to symbolize the mounting Cold War. With the construction of the Berlin Wall — or the “antifascist protective rampart,” as it was known in East Germany and the Soviet Union — in August 1961, Berlin became a city divided.

As the Cold War progressed, West Germany’s alliance with the United States grew stronger. The relationship between the two countries was bolstered by the Marshall Plan, an innovative scheme that had the victorious Americans shelling out money to the Germans. Psychologically, politically and economically transformative, the Marshall Plan granted West Germany $1.4 billion for recovery between 1948 and 1952, $11.9 billion today. West Germany was a thankful and intelligent recipient. The country’s leaders used the funds wisely, ensuring that all loans were subject to interest, which caused the amount of money to swell rather than shrink. The Marshall Plan’s legacy of conciliatory cooperation lives on in today’s Germany: Citizens here remain grateful that after a terrible war ended the United States helped Germany help itself.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, the relationship between Germany and the United States developed into a positive partnership. Although Britain served as America’s primary European ally in the post-Cold War years, the U.S.-German relationship was characterized by friendship and support.

In 2003, the legitimacy of the U.S. invasion of Iraq tested the durability of the relationship. Then-German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder joined France, Russia and China in imploring the U.S. to give inspectors more time to search for weapons of mass destruction before invading Iraq, but U.S. President George W. Bush ignored calls for restraint and sent troops straight into Baghdad. Faced with Bush’s aggressive foreign policy, Schröder grew increasingly defiant, proclaiming, “Anyone who thought we were going to click our heels and snap to attention here was mistaken.”

The tides turned once again when Chancellor Angela Merkel took office in November 2005. The first female chancellor of Germany, and the first leader from the old East, was a welcome change for the increasingly isolated United States. Merkel was ready and willing to revitalize trans-Atlantic ties. Although she did not go so far as to send troops into an embattled Iraq, Merkel showcased her willingness to bond with Bush through frequent telephone calls and a shared stance against Iran’s nuclear enrichment program.

Before she became chancellor, Merkel distanced herself from Schröder’s hostility when she made a risky visit to Washington, D.C., less than two months before the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Underlying the warm Bush-Merkel relationship is the pair’s shared commitment to democracy, clearly important to a woman who came of age under an authoritarian communist regime.

For the United States, Merkel’s pro-American embrace sparked the first traces of reconciliation with continental Europe since the Iraq strife.

Today, the German-American relationship is more important than ever. With British Prime Minister Tony Blair no longer in office, American leaders will look to Merkel as an increasingly significant ally. Germany, it seems, is readying itself for this new position of European primacy.

In a way, the frenetic pace of rebuilding in Berlin is the physical expression of a country’s desire to move forward.

Drab concrete buildings have been brightened with color in the former East Berlin.
Although shiny new buildings and architectural gems never will heal Germany’s deep scars, they symbolize the new spirit of a country long burdened by memories of devastating world wars, Hitler’s Third Reich and the Holocaust. For the first time since the end of World War II, many young Germans lack any living familial connection to the Nazi era. Often even their grandparents were not involved in Hitler’s movement. In Germany, one easily can detect palpable guilt among everyday citizens, but it is guilt of a less personal, more detached nature. No longer do Germans want to hang their heads in shame. Nationalism — a non-violent brand, of course — is becoming trendy again.

Emerging alongside this nationalism is a German effort to keep pace with the steady pulse of globalization, a level of world interconnectedness that is threatening to a country like Germany. For a nation so set in its ways and steeped in tradition, globalization threatens to puncture fragile national institutions such as a generous social market program, a three-tier education system and a peacekeeping-only army. As the lines between cultures, markets and corporations blur, Germans must become adaptable, mobile and highly educated. In its push for renovation, Germany expresses not only its national pride but also its drive to keep up in the frantic global race. In this competition, highly educated citizens, a competitive army, a strong economy and a fluid culture — all of which Germany appears determined to produce — are the ingredients for success.

This mission is reflected in every facet of the nation’s growth. The country’s military, the Bundeswehr, is transforming itself from a domestic peacekeeping body to a more powerful international, interventionist force. Although it’s a startling move for a country once paralyzed by fear of its own potential military strength, so determined is Germany to gain legitimacy on the international stage that it is, for the first time since World War II, willing to send its army into other parts of the world. This shift in direction is partly intended to assert Germany’s role as leader of the European Union.

“If you want to be credible and fulfill that role, of course you have to contribute more to international security,” said Benjamin Schreer, a researcher at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs.

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novation is also taking place in the nation’s classrooms. Through a plan called the Excellence Initiative, Germany is working to bridge the gap between its universities and independent research centers, which ideally will boost the quality of university research and entice professors and students to stay in Germany. Although the world’s first university was established in Germany, the country’s institutions of higher education now lag behind their global peers, a phenomenon that has spurred a brain drain. Bright young Germans leave the country in favor of better educational opportunities elsewhere, perhaps in the United States or other European Union countries. If all goes according to plan, the initiative will help keep talented Germans where they’re desperately needed at home.

Evolving alongside new buildings and new attitude is a new culture. Difficult to define and increasingly amorphous, Germany’s budding 21st century culture is a colorful mix of high and low, traditional and contemporary, European and American and everything in between. Galvanized by globalization and the Internet, Germans are searching for an identity.

Yet what is emerging is notable for its lack of continuity. In one sense, Germany’s new culture is its lack of a definitive culture. It’s as if bits and pieces of various national cultures were thrown together to create a global identity, knowledge of which is critical for young Germans’ cultural literacy and survival in an integrated economy.

“It’s a world culture now,” said Van Tell, a DJ at the Berlin nightclub Q-Dorf. Everyone in the world hears the same music, reads the same magazines and watches the same TV shows.

“Everything you know, they know, and they love it just as much as you do.”

Germany is also gaining momentum with its membership in the European Union. Sitting in the geographic center of the union and boasting the largest population among member countries, Germany has significant leverage in an organization that continues to gain economic strength. Working through the EU, Germany has strengthened its voice as a global power while simultaneously proving that it can make love and not war with its neighbors.

“Germany has learned to pursue its interests through the EU,” said Thomas Risse, a trans-Atlantic specialist from the Free University of Berlin who now works at Harvard.

By all of these indications, Germany’s quest for physical, political and cultural renovation seems to be on track. But demographic and structural problems cast long, stubborn shadows over the reformation process and threaten the country’s progress.

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erman officials make no bones about their nation’s troubles. Unlike many American politicians, German leaders don’t blink an eye when faced with tough questions. Their pragmatism and honesty sometimes make the question-and-answer sessions with them seem too easy, and it’s not as if the officials have nothing to hide. Germany hasn’t been spared contemporary conflict fueled by differences in race and religion, nor has it escaped debt and unemployment. Indeed, every step forward has been matched by half a step backward.
One would think that the country’s Nazi past, with its ideology of a white European master race, would create among Germans a deep aversion to racial exclusion. Yet despite years of effort dedicated to mending a broken image, strong traces of xenophobia and racism hang in the air, most notably directed against Germany’s large Turkish population.

Back on the bus tour, Book points out the window to the Kreuzberg district in the center of Berlin. To the eyes of eager tourists, it’s a bit of an aesthetic letdown. A dense, gray working district, Kreuzberg looks shabby and rundown – hardly noteworthy on a tour of Germany’s great capital city.

But forge deeper into Kreuzberg and its cultural, political and social significance become crystal clear. Home to 200,000 Turks, the district is not just another pocket of Berlin. Rather, it’s a thriving culture. Theoretically, the system is fair: Based on the results of tests taken between the fourth and sixth grades, German students are directed into the Hauptschule, Realschule or Gymnasium – the main problem is that students to a dismal academic fate.

Primarily responsible for this inherent bias is the so-called language problem – a reference to the fact that many Turkish immigrants do not learn German, which makes it difficult for Turkish students to excel on the exams. Studies show that immigrant students are just as motivated and talented as their peers, yet cultural and language differences create an intrinsic prejudice against Turkish test-takers. Although new strategies are cropping up to conquer the language barrier – such as having both a German and a Turkish teacher in the classroom and involving Turkish parents more heavily in their children’s education – Germany’s school system has systematically, if unintentionally, committed most Turkish students to a dismal academic fate.

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Economic and financial woes also threaten Germany’s progress. Although Germany is the world’s leading exporter, its labor market is critically weak. With unemployment rates hovering around 8 percent, Germany risks a collapse of its generous social welfare system, which relies on employee contributions to survive. This problem is compounded by the nation’s aging population: A shrinking number of workers must sustain welfare programs for growing numbers of elderly retirees. And the birthrate is dangerously low.

“We need to be careful not to overstretch benefits,” said Martin Meurers, who works for the Division of International Economic and Monetary Affairs in Berlin.

The health care system is especially at risk. Differences between private and social insurance, an overcomplicated system and predicted demographic changes during the next 50 years are putting the system in jeopardy. Officials worry that unless the system is fixed, it faces continued turmoil, a troubling prospect for citizens relying on social insurance for emergencies and treatment of serious diseases.

Germany is also a stubborn participant in the process of globalization. The EU cre-
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s the bus glides along a street parallel to the Berlin Wall, tour guide Book talks about the East Side Gallery, a .62-mile-long stretch of the wall located near the Spree River in the Friedrichshain district and Ostbahnhof, the eastern train station.

This stretch of wall – rare because it’s somewhat intact – is covered in the colorful, creative murals by artists who, during the summer of 1990, painted symbols of peace and victory onto the formerly off-limits canvas. So well-known is the gallery’s image of former East German Prime Minister Erich Honecker and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev kissing each other on the mouth that the communist smooch adorns hundreds of postcards and T-shirts in Berlin’s souvenir shops.

As the bus rapidly moves alongside the wall, the gallery’s magnetic tourist appeal becomes clear. Groups of camera-happy travelers congregate around the murals, snapping photos and running their hands over Berlin’s famous barrier. Many even want a tangible piece of history to take home. Since 1989, thousands of eager fingers have dug into the wall and triumphantly claimed souvenir chunks.

Weather, vandals and time also have taken a toll on the East Side Gallery. Graffiti and holes mar the paintings, and Berlin’s wet winters and hot summers are causing the wall, formerly 103 miles long, to crumble.

Piece by piece, this famous section of the wall – one of the few remaining segments – is disappearing.

And to the anguish of many artists and history lovers, the city is doing little to save or fix this historical section. Although an artists’ initiative in 2000 allowed for a partial restoration of the East Side Gallery, no total renovation is in the works. This stems partly from a scuffle over ownership because no one seems quite sure who owns the gallery. Depending on whom you ask, the owner could be the Kreuzberg-Friedrichshain district, the city of Berlin, the federal government or private investors who purchased the land where the wall stands.

Berliners have suggested different modes for renovating the wall, including charging tourists a fee to view the remaining sections and putting that money toward repairs or creating a foundation that would support a long-term restoration project. But among many Berliners, the dilapidated East Side Gallery is simply a non-issue. Let time take its toll, they say.

“The way (the wall) looks now reflects Berlin,” said a Berlin resident identified as Michael B. in an Aug. 24, 2004, article on Deutsche Welle, a German news Web site. “It’s typical of the city. Not everything looks perfect here. If they start preserving it too much, it starts to look fake. But like this, it looks real.”

This ambivalence illuminates the developing spirit of renovation in Germany. As the East Side Gallery controversy reflects, Berliners are discerning about which landmarks warrant renovation. In some ways, it seems that a project is supported if it distances Berlin from the darker aspects of its history. For instance, although the Reichstag’s renovation was criticized by some for not respecting the former structure of the building, most Berliners seem proud of the attractive new landmark.

In other ways, though, Berliners want to remember – even the bad times. The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe sits in the center of Berlin, reminding people again and again of Germany’s past horrors.

For Germans, the way ahead is a delicate mix of past and future. Although they want to remember the past, they also want to forgive themselves and move ahead. While the memorial serves as a constant reminder of Germany’s dark history, it also eases the guilt and allows Germans to let go.

Today’s Germany is about more than rehashing the past. No longer do Germans want history books, long-standing guilt and the rest of the world to define their identity.

They want to create it themselves.
The Deutsche Oper Berlin buzzes tonight.

It’s Friday, and as the work week ends, the weekend entertainment roars to life. At the opera house, citizens trickle into the lobby to buy tickets and rub elbows with friends and acquaintances before the main event. The modern building, clearly influenced by the architectural styles of the 1960s, begins to bustle as curtain time approaches.

The large auditorium steadily fills as patrons take their seats on several levels. The people are of all ages and social strata, some in jeans and others in black ties, elegant dress and heavy makeup. Children line up near the orchestra pit to steal a look while the musicians tune. Tonight, the opera company continues its production of Die Zauberflöte – The Magic Flute – an opera by Austrian Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and based on a German libretto.

At last, the lights dim and the murmur of the crowd subsides to an anticipatory silence. The conductor signals to his orchestra, and the magic begins. While the lights, scenery and costumes all indicate a modern, state-of-the-art production, the music, lyrics and humor bring to mind an illustrious classical tradition – a time of Enlightenment, elegance and ingenuity without equal.

In a classical sense, this is German culture.

Germany claims plenty of notables on which to pride itself: Ludwig van Beethoven, Johann Sebastian Bach, Thomas Mann, Herman Hesse, Immanuel Kant, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Richard Wagner – the names command respect in music, literature and philosophy circles worldwide.

By some estimates, Germany should claim the crown as cultural capital of the world; it epitomizes traditional classical culture. To know those names and to experience their work is to be “cultured,” and those at the opera tonight almost certainly understand this concept.

Less than a mile away, the Q-Dorf nightclub pulses. Its 300-some patrons arrive fashionably late to the party, and suddenly the venue comes to life as laser lights zip through the haze of cigarette
Classic choices, American imports characterize eclectic culture

A rainy night does not deter fans from coming out to see *The Magic Flute* at the opera house. Germany is famous for classical composers such as Beethoven and Bach, but today, hip-hop and other American music dominate pop culture.
smoke. Tonight’s theme is “Black Attack,” and the disc jockeys spin the hip-hop and R&B tracks of Ludacris and Beyonce as the crowd responds with a collective jolt of energy. Shoulder to shoulder, the people dance among friends and intermingle with strangers.

No majority population exists at Q-Dorf. Germans and Turks, whites and blacks, old, young and younger all swarm the bars as bodies move seamlessly past each other for ashtrays or alcohol. Smack in the middle of the dance floor, three “thugged-out” high school students compete with one another to see who’s best at “krumping,” a hip-hop dance style they learned from YouTube videos.

An aura of sex oozes through the masses as guys grab girls, girls grab guys, girls grab other girls and guys other guys. Before long, a woman in high-heeled boots climbs onto a bar in the center of the dance floor and shows off her stuff. She’s joined by a shirtless man in a feathered fedora.

Meanwhile, another woman attracts the attention of a small group of admirers as she takes off her shirt to the rhythm of the music. That small group of admirers quickly grows. The DJ, in clear American English, asks for a round of applause for the night’s impromptu performers, and everyone cheers for the bare-breasted woman who has made her way onto the Q-Dorf stage for another wild, alcohol-fueled dance number.

In another venue down the street, an American punk rock group performs, and across town, techno parties attract crowds of willing ravers – people searching for all-night dance parties. It’s a typical night in Berlin’s club scene, but all things considered, it could be Los Angeles or Miami. Music from the biggest rap artists and rock stars of the United States blares in establishments all across town, and, oddly enough, finding German music becomes something of a challenge.

This, too, is German culture – 50 years of outside influences manifesting themselves in a young populace eager to participate in the world around them.

But, as a whole, the German people have a hard time reconciling the tradition of “culture” and the reality of culture. This struggle occurs in the United States and other countries, too, but of all the world’s nations, Germany might have the toughest task ahead in learning to accept its cultural elements.

Half a century of international turmoil and regrettable history has left the German people with an identity crisis. While Germans once understood who they were and what they could take pride in, they now struggle with a violent past, a guilty conscience and a splintered population being forced toward homogeneity after decades of separation.

But as the divides between the cultures of East and West, North and South, old and young, traditional and Internet begin to close, Germans eager to define themselves now have an opportunity to re-imagine the German image, come to terms with differences and take pride in their identity once more.

The only question is whether they want to.

To understand the significant impact of history on Germany's culture, consider the role of the Berliner Festspiele organization during the past 50 years.

Smack dab between the agrarian, rural northern Germany and the stereotypical brat-eating, beer-drinking Bavarian southern Germany, Berlin played an important role as a political and cultural hotbed after World War II. Although the city had been a European center for writers and cabaret entertainment before the war, it had to rebuild its status after the Nazi regime.

The Festspiele, a government institution charged with organizing city-wide art, theater and music festivals of the more high-class variety, finds its roots in the post-World War II years.

At the end of the war, the Allied Forces divided Germany into four zones, putting each zone under respective political and cultural influence of the British, French, Soviets and Americans. In 1948, the curtain began to fall between the democratic West and the communist East, effectively dividing the German populace for the first time since the German Empire’s formation in 1871. Now, two German cultures existed, each claiming the people’s historic past as its own.

With both countries tied up in reconstructing their cities and economies, traditional arts and customs suffered, and the national and cultural identities of each succumbed to the influences of capitalism and communism.

Enter the Berliner Festspiele – the Berlin Festivals – established to bring culture back to the life of the downtrodden Berliner.

“The idea was created during the Cold War,” said Kerstin Schilling, head of corporate communication for the organization. “The first idea was to give the poor Berliners something cultural – something so that they can leave their hard life here in the city. The second thing was to make a window to East Europe. So for a long time it was an [emphasis] of the Berliner Festspiele to
show things from Russia, from Poland, from Eastern Europe.”

Even in the early, nervous years of the Cold War, Berlin officials recognized the importance of maintaining a thriving culture. In addition to the oppressive threat of war between the East and West, Germans faced the lingering guilt of tearing Europe apart and committing atrocities beyond imagination during World War II. Suddenly, Germans weren’t so proud of their heritage.

Those in the government understood this and felt the repercussions, too. At the same time, they knew not to let the German spirit sink too low.

“There’s a preface of the first [Festspiele] program written by the mayor, and it’s fantastic to read because it stated why we should spend money for culture at this time — six or seven years after World War II,” Schilling said. ‘He said, ‘Because we have to. We have to help the Berliner; we have to bring culture into this city.’ You can only imagine how we felt at this time.”

And so the Festspiele began organizing high culture concerts and operas, daring to maintain Germany’s cultural preeminence amid defeat and dejection. The organization supported not only the works of Brahms and Bach but compositions of modern German artists, too.

At the same time, the occupying United States rose to political dominance in world politics, and with it came American culture. Along with the rest of Western Europe, West Germany spent the next 40 years digesting jazz, blues, rock ‘n’ roll, Hollywood, television, McDonald’s, Nike and Coca-Cola. A fascination with the American Way stormed through West Germany, and aside from a few rogue authors, artists, musicians and filmmakers, Germany’s cultural contributors stayed relatively quiet.

Meanwhile, East Germans looked on, cultivating a culture without capitalist American imports. With nothing but the Soviet influence to rely on, East German art, music and literature developed on its own. So, too, did the East German identity, largely shaped by the Communist regime. East Germans learned Russian instead of English or French like their Western counterparts. The social system and lifestyle of the East German adjusted to comply with communism as the country quickly became a shining beacon of Soviet success in Europe.

That pillar of Soviet strength collapsed on Nov. 9, 1989, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent implosion of the Soviet Union. Germany reunified, and the two parallel cultures now coexisted under one roof — a free, democratic Germany.

But while a political reunification can happen overnight, a cultural reunification can’t. And didn’t.

The Festspiele now found itself a bridge between two groups of people who, despite their shared heritages, viewed their fellow
It’s a special situation in Berlin.”

New York, maybe in Paris, but not like this. It’s also in London, it’s also in this town. It’s also in Berlin,’ Schilling said. “Everything is possible in this town. It’s also in London, it’s also in Paris, but not like this. It’s a special situation in Berlin.’

‘Everything is possible in this town. It’s also in London, it’s also in New York, maybe in Paris, but not like this. It’s a special situation in Berlin.’

– Kerstin Schilling
Berliner Festspiele

German as “the other.”

In the years since reunification, the Festspiele has featured cultural aspects of both East and West Germany, all the while attempting to erase the gap between the two.

But not all Berliners concerned themselves with the “high culture” the Festspiele represents. Many former East Germans opted toward the pop culture brewing in the streets of Berlin – the low culture of graffiti, techno and the World Wide Web. As youth across the globe developed a culture transcending political boundaries, eager East German youth wanted their print on the world, too.

Schilling said Festspiele research concluded only 50 percent of Germans are interested in what she dubbed “culture” – the traditional, classical art to which German contributions are so prominent.

But everyone is interested in some form of culture or another, and Germany has plenty of cultures to go around. East challenges West, capitalism challenges old communism, youth challenges tradition.

The Festspiele recognized this phenomenon and found success because of it. The organization now offers programs featuring theater, opera and fine art as well as world music, slam poetry and youth play productions.

“Sixteen or 17 years after the [end of the Cold War], you have this sort of laboratory here,” Schilling said. “Everything is possible in this town. It’s also in London, it’s also in New York, maybe in Paris, but not like this. It’s a special situation in Berlin.”

Today, the varying identities of Germans are loosely connected by history, but that history is hardly monolithic and definitely undefined. Germans still carry the guilt of war and resentment of “the other” that threaten the one, true German way of life.

The need to understand one’s own identity is universal to the human condition, and for Germans, that peace of mind has been missing for more than 50 years. If pride and confidence in one’s national identity play any role in success on a domestic or international level, then Germany could have a serious problem on its hands.

Back in Q-Dorf, 18-year-old Yeisen Acosta-Medina has won the dance-off among his circle of friends. Compared to him, the others know nothing about this dance style.

Now that the contest is over, Acosta-Medina teaches a younger dancer a few new moves.

“I like house [a Chicago-based dance music] and hip-hop because it’s something I can dance to,” Acosta-Medina says, dressed the part with diamond-studded jewelry, a bandana around the neck, baggy jeans and boots – like some kind of ghetto cowboy.

He didn’t pick up his style in Berlin, however. He’s imitating the dancing and fashion he has seen in American music videos on the Internet.

Acosta-Medina and his friend Mike Lopez say they seek out hip-hop videos from Germany, too, but the American ones have the most “exciting” elements.

“[American music] is stylish,” Lopez says. “People just like it here.”

Meanwhile, the club’s emcee, DJ Van Tell, knows how to play his audience, and tonight the people want black music – as in house, hip-hop and R&B, all developed by African-Americans.

Van Tell, an African-American from Detroit, has spent eight years in Berlin, enough time to learn the tastes of German club-goers – or at least to know they have no taste for German-produced music.

“The Germans don’t want to hear that shit,” he shouts over the bass. “They want American stuff. What the Americans do is what they want to do.”

Sure enough, American culture dominates Berlin. Craving Burger King or Dunkin’ Donuts? There’s likely one around the corner, next to the theaters playing the latest Brad Pitt flick. On the train, punk rockers with fauxhawks and iPods exchange head nods with a middle-aged man wearing a Simpsons T-shirt and reading Hunter Thompson.


The American influence supplants German culture and further complicates the identity question. In turn, Germans struggle to contribute culturally and turn to “superior” American imports. Van Tell and Lopez say they prefer American music because “it’s better.”

But perhaps that characterization too quickly paints Germans as mindless consumers of a foreign culture. Instead, the credit for this phenomenon may go to America’s cultural hegemony.
Yes, Germans love American culture, but so do the French, Israelis and Japanese. Teenagers in Africa idolize Atlanta’s most prominent rappers just as much as suburban American teenagers do. Anyone who suggests Germany lacks originality because of its consumption of Big Macs and Coca-Cola is sorely misguided.

On the contrary, Germany digests whatever hegemonic imports it can and, like any thriving culture would, reshapes them to fit its own needs. Thus, American culture gets molded into the German way of life and, after a period of time, becomes uniquely German.

The hip-hop lifestyle exemplifies this transformation. As a distinctly American form of music, hip-hop entered Germany as its role as a tool of political and social criticism waned in the United States. In the meantime, lower-class Germans and Turkish and Arab immigrants discovered the tool and used it just as black Americans had.

Rap became a lifestyle in Germany, a counterculture of social uplift and rebellion. Today, the immigrant population has made the country’s hip-hop community one of the largest outside of the United States.

The same principle inspired the New German Cinema movement in the ’60s and ’70s. Fed up with the country’s failing film industry, directors effectively rebelled against television and Hollywood by incorporating elements of existing Hollywood genres.

Today, at least part of German culture can claim the United States as its primary inspiration, and as Americans once searched for their versions of Bach and Beethoven, Germans now seek out their Bart Simpson and “Baywatch.”

And Acosta-Medina furiously labors on the floors of Q-Dorf to invent the first great German hip-hop dance.

Not all Germans like the 21st century model of German culture. Inside a local record store in Berlin’s wealthy Charlottenburg neighborhood, an elderly clerk scoffs at a customer inquiring about hip-hop clubs.

“I don’t know any because I don’t listen to that; it’s garbage,” he says. He tersely advises the customer to search out some other kind of music – a style that might better represent Germany’s musical traditions. Hip-hop, he implies, just isn’t German.

Later that night, two Berliners, dressed to kill and looking for a party, beg to differ.

“We’re two guys who know a lot of good music,” says one, 19-year-old Lucas Schnochenberg. “I think rap is good – from America, but also from Germany.”

The two say rap is part of German culture without defining what they mean by the term. For them, the idea of a unifying German identity isn’t comfortable. It’s limiting and restrictive. These guys don’t necessarily want to be associated with the lederhosen-wearing, oompah music-playing Germans in Bavaria – colloquially referred to as the Texas of Germany.

“Here in Berlin it’s very multicultural,” Schnochenberg adds, saying he no longer pays attention to differences between Easterners and Westerners or German culture and American culture.

Among Berliners, older generations tend to disagree with that statement, and the young seem to support it. But neither Schnochenberg nor his friend Alex Ruthsatz is naive enough to believe Germany’s cultural rifts are bridged.

Time proverbially heals all wounds, and among Germany’s youth, the healing seems to have begun.

But while Germans may still fret over preserving Germany’s historic culture, for those young enough not to remember November 1989, the idea of German-ness hardly qualifies as important.

Ruthsatz and Schnochenberg reflect the sentiment. They are less concerned with their German identity than with their identity as multicultural citizens of the world. Political boundaries seem to fade in their minds.

In recent years, German politicians and activists opened a discussion on what defines German culture. What they have found
is a young populace that no longer carries history in the forefront of its mind and no longer wants to be defined by a strictly German identity.

“We had a very big discussion here about the leading culture,” said Paul Räther of the Werstatt der Kulturer, a community center formed to give minority populations a means for political and artistic expression. “Some politicians brought that topic into discussion. But they have never really thought about what is German culture. It has been a mixed thing since ever. There is no such thing as a distinct culture anywhere.”

That sentiment gains credence by the minute as the concepts of globalization and worldwide Internet access begin to dominate international relations.

Increasingly, national identity cedes importance to a universal, global culture that German, Turk, American and Iraqi alike can understand.

Instead of waiting for the latest news and cultural developments to reach Germany’s borders through magazines or television, the country’s Internet generation can find what it wants immediately.

Suddenly, being a part of the German culture isn’t important. Suddenly, being a part of a global Internet culture is.

“I think [the Internet has] its own Internet culture, which is very multicultural, and maybe it blends the good aspects of a lot of cultures,” Schnochenberg said.

Van Tell couldn’t have said it better himself.

“It’s a world culture now,” he said. “Everything you know, they know, and they love it just as much as you do.”

But not everyone loves it. The Berliner Festspiele still struggles to find ways to attract younger people to its traditional events. Meanwhile, Ruthsatz and Schnochenberg log on to watch the latest movie trailers, and Acosta-Medina posts his dance video on YouTube.

Even America’s cultural hegemony loses influence under the weight of an interconnected global society. Now the world knows Germans are just as creative and inventive as their American counterparts, even if they don’t see it in their streets and on their television sets.

“It’s all around the world,” Van Tell said. “It’s in Africa, it’s in America, it’s in Germany. People are going to get what they want to get, and it ain’t going to matter where it comes from anymore.”

In the summer of 2006, Germany hosted the FIFA World Cup, with Germany finishing third, losing only to Italy, the eventual champions. The run marked a historic moment in German sports, and that summer’s pride and excitement resonated throughout the
streets of Berlin. For the first time since the Third Reich, Germans flew their country’s flag outside their homes. Fans rallied around the home team and expressed love of their homeland. Suddenly, being German did not mean being ashamed and guilty.

Strange as it was for some at first, German identity had become a source of pride again.

“It was something really weird for the German mind somehow, and we realized how happy, unprecedented patriotism can work,” said Marcus Heithecker, managing editor of the Berlin newspaper Die Welt.

“It was just with football, but it was a moment of awakening where you realized there is another way of being a patriot. On another level, an intellectual level, we had suddenly millions of people going to museums and rediscovering historical exhibitions and finding the good part of Germany, something before 1933.”

Since that summer, Germans have rediscovered a pre-Hitler Germany, one they called a Land of Ideas, one the world’s thinkers called home. Now, German identity once again means something more than war crimes and walls. It means Enlightenment and Reformation.

Memories of war still prevail, but guilt is subsiding. For the first time, academic discussion of war’s lessons and legacy begins without the stigma of past actions.

“For decades, especially after the second world war, Germans had a problem being proud of being German,” said Irmgard Maria Fellner of the Federal Foreign Office.

“I remember when I was a youngster it was absolutely impossible to hang a German flag outside your house, which [Americans] do almost on a daily basis. It was impossible to sing the national anthem in public. You would be called a racist, a nationalist in your own country. Gradually, this has been evolving. Slowly it has become OK to be proud to be German.”

The nation seems ready to forgive itself and awaken from its cultural dormancy. Perhaps it’s even ready to embrace the variations within its own identity.

“It doesn’t matter anymore if you meet someone from East Berlin or West Berlin,” Schnochenberg said. “It doesn’t really make a difference. There’s a little difference in style of talking or behavior, but there’s not really those gaps anymore.”

Slowly but surely, Germans are becoming comfortable with themselves. As years pass, Germany’s wounds heal, and while the culture of old retains its advocates, history would teach that the new German culture – one of tolerance, pride and invention – will once again dominate the Land of Ideas.

“There is a change in the mind-set, more or less,” Heithecker said, “and we don’t know where it goes to just yet.”

A crowd gathers at the Keops Bar and Lounge to watch Lebent, a Turkish singer, who flew from Istanbul for the performance.
They didn’t call it a miracle for nothing.

At the end of World War II, the German economy was practically nonexistent. The country’s financial system was in shambles, its land violently ripped into four different zones of influence controlled by four different world powers. Part capitalist, part communist, the country was wracked by economic crisis.

Now, 60 years later, Germany is holding onto its position as the No. 1 exporter in the world. An economic miracle.

The country has managed to maintain a cushion of social welfare for its citizens while keeping taxes relatively low — considering the benefits the state provides — and wages relatively high. Its social market approach has seemed infallible.

Historically known as the Wirtschaftswunder, this miracle represents the astounding economic growth of West Germany after the war, growth so rapid and abundant that the country was forced to import workers to meet labor demands.

In the 1970s, West Germany suffered from unemployment problems, to be sure, while East Germany’s planned economy lagged far behind. Reunification of the two sides in the early ’90s planted potholes in the road to long-term economic success, but the economy nonetheless remained relatively stable.

A downturn in the early 2000s gave way to the
Fifty years ago, Germany’s economy was virtually nonexistent; Berlin was a city divided, with buildings crumbling from bombs and bullet holes. Today the country is the world’s largest exporter, and Berlin is a bustling modern capital.
economic growth of the past two or three years, and on the surface, Germany’s economy is like the archetypical apple-cheeked, sturdy Bavarian, unaffected by change and with strong confidence in tradition.

However, the German miracle was not everlasting – water no longer turned to wine once the wedding of East and West Germany was over – and for a united Germany, the honeymoon of boisterous economic prosperity is starting to fade.

As the European Union extends eastward and embraces the former Eastern bloc, it also inadvertently takes direct competitors into the economic fold. The rapid, powerhouse development of India and China similarly threatens Germany’s economic position, with the German Office of Foreign Trade predicting that China’s economy will even overtake Germany’s within the next few years.

Additionally, as Germany seeks to adjust its economy to combat these new competitors, the country becomes increasingly unable to support its expansive social welfare system.

The initial *Wirtschaftswunder* has become a thing of the past, and at present, both the country and its citizens must adapt as the world around them evolves. Germany faces an uncertain economic future, even as it emerges financially strong from the recession of the early 2000s.

In time, countries will begin to specialize, and the wages and welfare systems of lesser-developed countries will meet those of higher-developed countries in the middle ground of moderation, said Klaus Peter Schmid, recently retired economics editor for *Die Zeit*, a German newspaper akin to a weekly version of the *Wall Street Journal*. But until this adaptation occurs, Germany is engaged in a struggle to maintain the robust economic and social welfare system it has so long taken for granted.

Schmid, who reported on the German economy for 35 years, acknowledges that fundamental changes must take place, but he views the future optimistically.

“It’s not voluntary, but with all these questions concerning Europe changing with the demographic evolution, with globalization, we are forced to change,” he said. “To change something you have that’s lived for 50 years in good condition ... it’s quite difficult. But I think we’ll succeed in managing it.”

One of the central reasons that European nations founded the European Union was to achieve better, if not equal, standing compared to the United States, especially in economic matters. In fact, the precursor to the European Union was the European Economic Community, or the Common Market, established by the Treaty of Rome in 1957.

The EEC, now known simply as the European Community, was itself based on the European Coal and Steel Community of 1952, which included West Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Belgium and the Netherlands. Economics have therefore been a major factor in forming closer inter-country relations since the very beginning of European unity.

In 2005, about 47 percent of Germany’s exports were to other European countries. Additionally, in 2006, the EU3, comprising
Germany, the United Kingdom and France, had a share in world trade about 5 percent higher than that of the United States, according to the International Monetary Fund; singularly, Germany’s share of trade was only about 5 percent lower than the United States’.

Many of Germany’s economic successes and failures can be attributed to the coalition of countries that is the EU. For one thing, Germany has been able to remain snuggly nestled into its luxury position as economic leader in large part because the European Community offers 26 other trading partners in a system of free markets and open borders.

The United States, on the other hand, has no such inherent supply of product demand. Unlike the EU, where many countries are starting to specialize, the American states compete with one another on a much broader level, said Martin Meurers of the Division of International Economic and Monetary Affairs, part of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

For example, one might go to Germany for a car or to Spain for footwear; there isn’t really an analogous situation in America, Meurers said. It’s not as though one looks to California for bicycles and to Georgia for medical equipment. Instead of trading within a close-knit web of buyers and sellers with similar economies, the United States as a country must compete with a variety of economic and financial systems.

Meurers said the two main internal factors that led to Germany’s position as top world exporter were domestic economic troubles in the late ’90s and innovation. Fiscal woes related to the costs of reunification of West and East Germany in 1990 led to high unemployment and low wages; however, this in turn resulted in low inflation of prices and wages, making Germany’s exports relatively cheap compared with other countries’ exports.

Additionally, Schmid said, even though Germany’s employees now earn better wages, the country’s productivity is still very high compared with the productivity rates of other countries. And German products enjoy an excellent reputation abroad.

“The explanation is quite simple: because ‘Made in Germany’ is respected all over the world,” Schmid said. “(But) if you have a precise look at the goods, they are not really German, because in any product now we have imported a lot of parts from over the world. If you have a look at the German car, let’s say two-thirds of the parts come from abroad, but they are constructed in Germany, they are assembled in Germany, and people trust in the label ‘Made in Germany.’”

This is where the EU has also contributed to economic problems for Germany. Many of those respected products, while sold under the banner of German excellence, are primarily produced by non-German workers. The growth of the EU, for the most part, has simply exacerbated this trend.

Ten nations, most from the Balkans and the former Soviet bloc, joined the EU in May 2004, bringing the number of members to 25. In January 2007, Bulgaria and Romania joined. The average industrial growth rate of 11 of these new members (information was not available for Malta) in 2006 was 7.2 percent, compared with 4.4 percent for Germany.

After the fall of communism, many Eastern countries tried to adapt to the Western economic system. In doing so, they started with very low wages, very low social guarantees and very low taxes – something that has not much changed in the past 15 years, Schmid said.

“They offer low-cost jobs; their labor force is much cheaper than it is here,” he said. “This changes in a fundamental way the structure of industry. Many jobs have been exported to Eastern Europe, where you don’t need a very high level of skills,” such as assembly line work.

“And this is very hard for the German labor force,” he said. “This is our fundamental problem with globalization.”

Meike Weissmann, a 25-year-old psychology undergraduate student from Braunschweig, Germany, understands well how globalization will affect her future. Work is more expensive in Germany than in most Eastern European countries, she said, because the percentage of wages paid to the state is so high.

“(For example), a company pays a skilled worker 2,500 euros per month,” she said. However, 40 percent of that is converted into taxes paid to the government for programs such as health care and social pensions.

“One percent of this 40 percent is even paid off to the church,” Weissmann continued. “Therefore, from the amount of money the company spends to pay her employees, the employees receive a little part.

“The consequence is that the vast majority of Germans work a lot and live a rather maladjusted everyday life,” such as having a one-room apartment and not owning a car, she said. “The companies, on the other hand, complain about the high wages they have to pay and prefer workers from countries in Eastern Europe.”

Although the government talks about reducing taxes every legislative period, it doesn’t happen, she wrote in an e-mail interview. As a result, companies try to save money by paying lower wages, she said.

Before having a chance at a decent salary, Weissmann and her classmates are faced with the prospect of working for a year for wages equal to what a jobless person receives on welfare. Weissmann’s boyfriend, for example, accepted a yearlong, 50 hour-per-week marketing internship at the equivalent of $3 an hour, while normal wages for untrained employees are five to 10 euros per hour, about $7 to $13.

“He agreed, for he wanted this apprenticeship and other companies demanded the same requirements,” Weissmann said. “He now lives from welfare . . . .”

Experts agree that Germany needs to change on a very basic economic level in order to stay competitive. The argument centers on how Part of the solution for German companies has been in effect to export jobs to other countries by importing parts once produced by German factories.

“It’s a basic trend in the global economy,” Meurers said. “More and more is traded within the same industry,” as opposed to countries exporting fully finished products. This, essentially, is the opposite of specialization.

For example, a car sold in Germany could have an engine from the Czech Republic, a transmission from China and a muffler from Bulgaria, but the last part, say, the braking system, is installed in Germany; therefore, it is a German car. This gathering of parts doesn’t necessarily mean the car is of lesser quality, but it is a
clear indicator of job outsourcing.

Cars typically have been a strong part of the German economy, from Audi to DaimlerChrysler to the ubiquitous Volkswagen. Even these seeming industrial giants are suffering, however. DaimlerChrysler shed 13,000 jobs in North America last fall and plans to sell its Chrysler division after losing 1.12 billion euros in 2006. Volkswagen recently cut 20,000 jobs.

Additionally, despite posting significant profit in 2006, Volkswagen has been facing stiff competition from China. Not only is the Chinese yuan vastly undervalued by the government, which makes the country’s exports unfairly cheaper in the global market, but China launched its own automotive line last fall aimed at competing directly with Western companies.

There are some interesting ties between Volkswagen and the Chinese state-owned Shanghai Automotive Industry Corporation, or SAIC. The German company’s joint venture with China, using Chinese laborers to build its cars, is one of the oldest in the country. Not only that, but Wang Xiaolou, the general manager for the company’s subsidiary SAIC Motors, worked at the Shanghai Volkswagen for 14 years; at least 500 employees at the company were at one time employed in either Volkswagen or General Motors joint ventures with and in China.

Finally, SAIC is going to build a new plant in the same location where Volkswagen announced two years ago that it was going to build a new factory; however, a sharp decline in Volkswagen’s Chinese sales shelved the company’s plans, this despite China’s role as the second-largest market for VW cars outside of Germany.

Historically, Germany has underestimated competition from Asia. Scott Fuess, a research fellow at the Institute for the Study of Labor in Bonn, Germany, and an economics professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said that while Americans have long recognized Asia as “an economic fact of life,” Europe, particularly Germany, has not.

“So they’re liable to either disregard the strength of the competition they will face from Japan and India or grossly overstate it and start using words like ‘horde’ and ‘flood’ and ‘wave,’” he said. “How is (Germany) going to compete when India graduates from doing call centers to doing sophisticated business consulting?”

Schmid, the former economics editor, said most people are unaware of the extent to which outsourcing occurs.

“I am convinced this will be one of the central effects of understanding that the old days are over,” he said. “When you call the French railway asking for something concerning the timetable for trains, they answer you from Marrakech, Morocco. When people learn this, they try to understand that something fundamental has changed. This is something you cannot stop – it will go on.”

“It’s also something that must be dealt with. Currently, China exports 19 billion euros more to Germany than it imports from Germany. And while wages are rapidly rising in China because of thriving profits, the country will be a source of cheap labor for some years yet.

One sign that Europe is starting to pay attention to Asian economic growth emerged at a conference in Hamburg, Germany, in late February. While relations between Europe and the United States are stronger than between Europe and Asia, the two markets are looking to work toward even closer ties.

At the EU-U.S. Summit on April 30, the two parties established the Transatlantic Economic Council to “review ongoing EU-U.S. economic engagement in order to maximize progress in existing transatlantic dialogues” and to “provide input and guidance to the EU-U.S. Summit on priorities for pursuing transatlantic economic integration,” according to official summit reports.

“It’s in our interest that partners on both sides of the Atlantic work together better,” said Jürgen Fitschen, the Germany head of Deutsche Bank, in an interview with Deutsche Welle, a German news Web site. “That includes taking over companies and expanding on both sides. In this respect, it is a fundamental interest.”

Demographic issues in Germany also require attention. The country currently has a negative birthrate, and that, coupled with the increasing flight of younger people, means Germany is getting older and older. Add heightened unemployment, hovering around 9.5 percent as of April 2007, according to the Federal Statistical Office of Germany, and the outlook turns rather bleak for maintaining Germany’s lavish social security system.

Take health care, for example.

“I think the problem is so big that I don’t really see a solution,” said Birgit Cobbers, an economist with the German Federal Ministry of Health. “It’s a two-way problem.”

Low economic growth, like Germany experienced in the ’90s and early 2000s, hurts health care funding, as revenue for Germany’s health care system is financed half by the employer and half by the employee. With citizens out of work, funding for health care drops significantly while the number of people in the system stays roughly the same.

Meurers agreed. “We need to be careful not to overstretch benefits,” he said, “because it all depends on taxes. It’s all related.... We have to accept that the world is
changing."

Social security will only get worse unless something happens to reverse the trends, especially considering the loss of young, educated Germans seeking higher wages and better jobs abroad. Schmid expressed confidence that Germans currently leaving will return in about a decade, but others aren’t so sure. Fues compared Germany’s brain drain to that occurring in Canada.

“For well-educated Canadians, making the move from British Columbia to Seattle is not all that hard. Making the move from Ontario to Ohio is not all that hard,” he said. “And the Canadian government, rightly, is worried about losing some of the best and brightest people, and they have identified, quite rightly, that if you ever want to get them back, you’ve got to get them back fast.”

Once people start families and become part of the social fabric in the new nation, it’s hard to get them back, Fues said. “Maybe in 40 years (the Germans) will come back – as patients,” he said. “Wanting health care. Wanting operations. Wanting to be taken care of. … There are any number of German scientists, doctors, professors, musicians, art historians, who find they can make very nice lives for themselves in Toronto, New York, San Francisco and so on.”

Susanna Schrafstetter, who was born in Germany and earned a doctorate from the University of Munich, said she left her native country for several reasons.

“There was the feel of economic insecurity in Germany in the field that I wanted to go into,” the UNL history professor said, referring to university-level education. “And I think that one of the great things about Europe now, about the European Union, is that you have essentially free movement of labor. … For young people, that opens up opportunities as well. You can go abroad and do something different for a time, get to know a different society. That’s intriguing and promising.”

Weissmann, the psychology student, is less positive.

“I see the beginnings of a ‘two-class wage system’ in which lots of people (even qualified university graduates and academic persons) get underpaid and a small group of powerful people get overpaid,” she said. “Therefore, lots of Germans ask the question, ‘Why should I work, if I drudge and mull and struggle and cannot afford any more luxury … than the indispensable things,’ which welfare would provide without a job.

“I have a pessimistic view of to where our economy goes,” she wrote. “There is a trend toward higher profits and lower wages. … Now the companies abstain from profit-sharing, even though this would not jeopardize the company’s future profits.”

The German government has some responsibility for improving the job market, Meurers said. Changes in government policies concerning research, subsidization, tax incentives and job training, among others, could do a lot to spur the economy.

While admitting that certain production jobs will most certainly continue to leave the country, Meurers remained optimistic.

“We think we can face this challenge if there are some reforms in our economy and integration on an international basis,” he said. “I think we can keep the idea. Look at our Scandinavian neighbors.”

**‘It’s in our interest that partners on both sides of the Atlantic work together better.’**

—Jürgen Fitschen Deutsche Bank

In the future, he said confidently, Germany should benefit from globalization.

Some of the government reforms passed during former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder’s administration were aimed at reducing the number of long-term unemployed. Before, if a welder lost his or her job, he or she could essentially wait for a new welding job to turn up while being financially supported by the government.

Now, whenever that person is offered a job, welding or not, he or she has to accept it or lose his or her social guarantees. This is a fairly new concept for most Germans.

This leads to another important point: Companies and the government are not the only ones who will find it necessary to adjust to globalization. Individual Germans will find that the burden, in fact, falls upon their shoulders, too.

“It will take a bit of a mentality change in Europe,” Meurers said. “It’s a slow process, but we hope people understand.”

Eventually, globalization is predicted to lead to further specialization of industrial countries, allowing each nation to have a niche in the market. However, specialization requires high technical skills and practical experience, something many unemployed Germans don’t have.

“We have a lack of trained people, and this goes on five or six years already,” Schmid said.

Germany’s strong, unified system of social welfare has made it less necessary for Germans than Americans to pack up and move for employment reasons, he said. But at the same time, Germans can no longer expect to be able to find a job in the same town where they were born.

“The key word is mobility,” he said.

Adjusting to globalization will also require patience. As economically developing countries increase their appetites for imports, wages will rise in response, and eventually, the labor market should even out somewhat as German exports become Bulgarian or Ukrainian imports and as the prices for Bulgarian or Ukrainian exports rise. But despite the progress made, Schmid said, this process could take years.

“Gradually, (poorer countries) are adopting the other systems,” he said. “But they have a lot of time before them. That can last 10, 15, 20 years. And that’s a lot of time in a system of open borders, open frontiers, where everyone can sell abroad, can import, can export jobs, can invest everywhere.”

Timing is everything, he added.

“Because if they practice very high wages now, their (competitiveness) vanishes,” he said. “They need this difference of labor costs to be able to produce cheaper than we do in Western Europe. That’s their chance. And if they adapt too rapidly, they lose their chance. They lose their advantages.”

Exactly what the future holds is unpredictable, especially in the rapidly changing world of global economics. It’s clear that changes must occur — and soon. If Germany wants to maintain its global power, it must figure out how to export quality goods at a low price while dealing with demographic problems, a growing population of unskilled laborers and the flight of skilled young people. Competition rushing in from its low-wage European neighbors and the looming Asian economic power also threaten the current system.

The solutions are not obvious, nor are they easy, but for the most part, German economists remain optimistic.

“It’s interesting to try to find answers to these questions,” Schmid said. “We’re really at a fascinating period now in Germany. ... There is more change in the air.”
SPLENTERED COVERAGE

REFORMS MIGHT HELP SIMPLIFY HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

BY STEPHANIE SPARKS

In Germany, a country that has long touted its social health insurance system, Sandra Nötzel, 30, a freelance marketing manager from Munich, represents the minority: She prefers private insurance to the country’s social health system.

“With being privately insured,” she said, “I know that I get the best treatments offered.” She also gets top doctors, private hospital rooms and no-wait appointments.

Ever since she can remember, Nötzel has participated in private insurance. Because her father was a member of the civil service, her family could opt for private coverage. Now that Nötzel is self-employed, she, too, can choose to contribute a portion of her income to private insurance or to social health insurance.

But 75 percent of the people can’t make their own choice. In Germany, workers making less than 47,700 euros per year for three consecutive years – roughly $62,000 – are required to participate in the social health insurance system. Employees – along with their employers – contribute to health insurance funds that finance the social health insurance system.

An additional 13 percent of workers are over the salary limit and voluntarily participate in social health insurance; another 10 percent opt for private insurance.

Because of this division between private and social, compulsory and voluntary, insured and uninsured, German health care has become a splintered system in need of reform in order to deliver on the country’s promise of universal health care.

Germany has had some form of social health insurance since 1883. In the late 19th century, rapid industrialization and numerous economic crises contributed to a dismal existence particularly for the urban working class in Germany. After recognizing that social and political oppression were ineffective in controlling potential upheaval, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, in 1881, decided to try something positive instead and suggested the need for a national health care system.

Germany has had some form of social health insurance since 1883. In the late 19th century, rapid industrialization and numerous economic crises contributed to a dismal existence particularly for the urban working class in Germany. After recognizing that social and political oppression were ineffective in controlling potential upheaval, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, in 1881, decided to try something positive instead and suggested the need for a national health care system.

Two years later, in 1883, Bismarck’s regime passed legislation that required workers in specific industries to pay two-thirds of their health insurance contributions. Employers were required to pay one-third. While some workers resisted participating in the sickness funds – what Americans call health insurance plans – the number of people insured in Germany doubled between 1880 and 1885.

Today, more than 100 years later, Germany faces serious problems that threaten the health care system: significant differences in the private versus social system; lack of transparency in an overcomplicated program; and major demographic shifts projected during the next 50 years. Further complicating these problems are advances in medicine and technology – oftentimes very expensive ones – that are helping to drive up the costs of health care.

Germans are left wondering: Can their country adapt to overcome these challenges?

Some of the splintering of the German health care system results from the division between private and social health insurance. In the private system, physicians are motivated to provide patients with more extensive treatment options because private insurance will often pay for more care. Nötzel recognizes this rift.

“‘There is like a two-class issue that has been going on because the doctors make more money with having private people,’” she said.

For Klaus Ostermann, 54, a human resources manager from Lüneburg, social health insurance sometimes means more out-of-pocket expenses. For example, when he purchased his last pair of glasses, he had to pay for them himself. He has also paid for his own false tooth because he receives no coverage for tooth replacements. On top of that, Ostermann has seen his payments for medication coverage increase.

Even with coverage cutbacks in the social system, the private system is no picnic. When a patient is privately insured, he or she must pay for services upfront and wait for reimbursement. If patients have social health insurance, they just show their cards, and doctors bill the sickness funds directly.

The other downside to private insurance: It requires participants to pay for individual family members. Social health insurance coverage includes the employee’s
spouse, if unemployed, and children.

The German health care system is complicated. It’s technical. It’s like a DVD instruction manual that nobody has time to read. Take for instance Cordula von Hinüber, a 28-year-old event planner in Berlin who has social insurance. As an event planner, she understands complexity, but she finds her choices confusing and criticizes the sheer number of sickness funds.

“There are very many insurance companies,” she said. “It’s like a forest.” When choosing her own social health insurance plan, she simply looked for the cheapest option.

The number of social insurance choices—292 sickness funds in 2004—creates a confusing, complex system. Many Germans may feel overwhelmed and, like von Hinüber, simply choose the least expensive plan.

Dr. Nicola Dankelmann, a Berlin gynecologist, believes the complications caused by so many choices contribute to Germans’ gloomy outlook about the future of their country’s health insurance. “It’s much too complicated in every case,” she said. “And nobody really knows what’s going on.”

Dankelmann also noted that substantial portions of money go to the internal affairs of insurance funds and make the health care system much too muddy to understand. “It’s not transparent at all,” she said.

Demographic shifts—increased life expectancy and decreased birth rate—in the German population are also having an impact. According to Birgit Cobbers, an economist at the Federal Ministry of Health in Berlin, the current life expectancy in Germany is 80 years and is expected to increase by six years before 2050.

The dilemma of this demographic shift is that elderly members of the population who are no longer working are going to dramatically outnumber younger people paying the gigantic health care bill. Supporting growing numbers of elderly people—who pay a reduced contribution—is like riding a seesaw with an elephant on the other side.

While individuals between 20 and 60 years old are expected to account for 46 percent of the population in 2010, this age group is projected to drop to 35 percent by 2050. But because of the “Contract Between Generations”—the social agreement that younger, working employees pay for the health care of older citizens—increasing pressure is going to be placed on future generations to finance the health care system.

At 44, Dankelmann recognizes this problem. “This pyramid is getting turned around with this demographic climate. Nobody knows what will come up.”

This paints a bleak picture for future generations. Anna Held, executive manager for the Leo Baeck Summer University who’s only 30, says younger generations need to plan ahead for old age.

“People need to be a lot more self-reliant,” she said. She knows younger Germans are aware the social health insurance system may not cover all their needs.

“Germans know they should be doing something, but they don’t envision what problems they will be having at age 60.” She suggests that the Federal Ministry of Health take steps to promote self-reliance among all Germans.

Delivering on the promise of universal health care has proven difficult since the system’s inception nearly 125 years ago. Less than two decades ago, it got even harder.

After East and West Germany reunified and the booming economy of the West absorbed the struggling economy of the East, the German federal government began a series of health reforms that sought to contain costs by keeping contribution rates stable. Between 1989 and 2003, the federal government passed a series of 11 reforms to restructure social health insurance and to address rising costs. But none of these reforms was long-lasting or comprehensive enough. Nor were they enough to make the public happy.

So in 2004, the government passed legislation to address integrated care, disease management programs, voluntary gatekeeping—which requires a referral from a primary doctor before a patient may see a specialist—and quality management. But even with a dozen modifications in 15 years, the reforms have not solved the growing health care problems.

Not until the Grand Coalition between Christian Democrats and Social Democrats took power in 2005 did the government comprehensively address the overall structure and financing of the health care system. Under the leadership of Chancellor Angela Merkel, overhauling the splintered health care system became one of the government’s top priorities.

After months of debate, the coalition government introduced a new comprehensive health care package to broaden patient choice, to increase competition in the private and social systems, to create a centralized health fund and to integrate uninsured individuals into the health care system.

In October 2006, the German cabinet approved the comprehensive reforms, and in January 2007, Health Minister Ulla Schmidt called the coalition’s comprehensive reforms a “breakthrough” for German health care.

Yet the true breakthrough came the next month when both houses of parliament passed the health care overhaul. These system-wide reforms are intended to create a more unified health care system that upholds the German tradition of universal health coverage. The proposed reforms took effect on April 1, 2007.

How does it work? The primary component of the reform establishes a centralized health fund by 2009. All contributions to social health insurance and—for the first time—federal subsidies will be paid into this central fund. Contribution rates will be standardized for all employees, and insurance companies will be reimbursed from the fund.

If money from the fund doesn’t cover the costs of treatment, insurers can charge extra to those they insure. Conversely, if insurers manage transfers from the central fund efficiently, they may reimburse members’ contributions. The idea is that those insurance companies that reimburse will be more appealing to the public. The government hopes to create competition between funds and greater transparency for the complicated system.

Part of the reform also aims to welcome uninsured individuals back.

Cobbers fears that if the government didn’t do something, the number of uninsured may have increased to 1 percent or more, an unacceptable level in Germany’s social democracy.

By responding to the uninsured population and establishing a new health fund, the comprehensive health care overhaul takes broad steps to create a more integrated, cohesive system for future generations, to fashion a more transparent system and to deliver on its promise of health care for all.

Even though the government argues that no two-tier system of care exists, Nötzel—as someone who does not participate in the nation’s social health insurance—believes the German health care system does have its inequities. She contends that people who make less than 47,700 euros per year may be getting short-changed.

“They get second-class treatment,” she said, “and that’s not OK.”

And although she has no plans to leave her private coverage for social health insurance, Nötzel appreciates the comprehensive changes to the nation’s health care system. “For all the people who are publicly insured, definitely the system has to change or the doctors have to change or something has to change.”
Imagine if George Washington had declared himself emperor. Perhaps, later on, a Patrick Henry type would have incited a rebellion, turning the nation to democracy or perhaps to socialism or even communism.

What if the Confederate states had won the Civil War?

None of this happened, of course. The sovereign nation of America has always been a democracy — at times weaker, at times stronger, but nevertheless always a democracy.

Even when the Civil War threatened to tear the country apart, the issue was not democracy itself but the balance of power between the states and the federal government.

Germany, however, has an eclectic history when it comes to forms of government, including imperialism, democracy and dictatorship. This unstable and often turbulent history left post-World War II political leaders with a task of colossal proportions: how to introduce democracy in a form that the German people — their morale and sense of identity sent reeling by two world wars and the consequences of the Holocaust — would not only accept but support.

The Weimar Republic, Germany’s first attempt at democracy established by the German revolution after World War I, had sought to establish itself during a period of great economic duress. After World War II, Germany faced a similar situation.

This time, however, German leaders had learned from their predecessors’ mistakes.

Their solution was to create the Soziale Marktwirtschaft — the social market. To provide people with the incentive to support a second chance at democracy, the government, in crude terms, sought to bribe its citizens.

“The idea was that ... democracy would benefit if you have a broadly stable and prosperous society — that the market would, in other words, support democracy,” said Susanna Schrafstetter, who holds a doctorate from the University of Munich and is currently an associate professor of history at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Democracy in Germany was born from the revolution following World War I, but the young system was not prepared to solve the numerous problems of a nation devastated by war and reparations.

As supporters of democracy struggled to keep an unstable Germany on its feet, they faced apathy or, worse, distrust from its citizens, paired with acute anger and bitterness at the harsh punishments imposed by the victors. The economy and infrastructure of the nation were for all intents and purposes destroyed, and people struggled to survive.

The Great Depression only exacerbated the financial situation, because the German economy was built on foreign capital, mostly loans from America accumulated to
Citizens rally behind social programs in reconstruction after World War II

pay World War I debts. Similarly, foreign trade was and continues to be a major factor in German financial success, and so the worldwide slowdown was especially detrimental.

Enter extremists on both sides of the political spectrum.

Right-wing activists argued that the German revolution, and not the failure of the German army, had led to Germany’s disastrous defeat in the war. Left-wing extremists, on the other hand, pushed for the creation of a Räterepublik, or council-based communism.

Despite the groups’ widely differing viewpoints, their battle cry was essentially the same: Abolish the Weimar Republic.

This atmosphere of frustration, despair and distrust made conditions ripe for Adolf Hitler to seize power. He promised to make Germany great again, to return the nation to its former glory. Nothing could have
sounded better to the downtrodden German people.

Conditions for the average German citizen did, in fact, improve during the early years of the Nazi regime, perhaps explaining the high level of support it initially received. The idea of buying people's support by providing them with basic social services and tangibly improving their lives led to the creation of the social market, which not only survived but thrived and acted as a model for the nearby Scandinavian nations.

Development of the social market was the turning point in German history, according to Martin Meurers, with the Division of International Economic and Monetary Affairs in Berlin.

"Politically, it was a very important term after the war," he said. "We, the government and the state as an institution, will take care of you.

"It was a great compromise between the free capitalist market and socialism," he added. "It's been very successful ..."


As a result of World War I, Germany lost 14.6 percent of its arable land, 74.5 percent of its iron ore, 68.1 percent of its zinc ore and 26 percent of its coal production through returned territories and reparations. The loss of Alsace-Lorraine to France and half of Upper Silesia to Poland disrupted some of the most important connecting links in the industrial and transportation systems.

"In fact, Germany had become very much poorer by these territorial changes," Stolper wrote.

The terms of the armistice and the peace treaty made a bad situation worse.

"Even without reparations obligations," he continued, "it would have been hard for Germany to re-establish a sound balance in her external exchange accounts unless foreign aid were forthcoming."

The instability of the economy resulted in political instability.


"From the prosperity of the Wilhelminian Empire, Germany plunged into World War I, a war it was to lose and which was followed by a wide range of economic sanctions, including heavy reparations payments," he wrote. "(Germans from the time) speak of lost jobs, lost homes, lost savings, of heirlooms that they sold in a desperate attempt to recoup only to find that the money they received had lost its worth within days. They speak of a life's work wrecked in a single hour."

The exchange rate in July 1914 was one American dollar for every 4.2 Reichsmarks. By Nov. 15, 1923, one dollar was equivalent to 4.2 trillion Reichsmarks.

"Inflation was rampant. That term doesn't even begin to describe it," said Hans Gilde, who moved to America from Germany in 1955, when he was 13. Gilde is a senior lecturer in modern languages and literature at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. "Everyone became millionaires and billionaires and multibillionaires, but it didn't mean anything because money was worthless. ... This caused a lot of bitterness among the people."

Imagine the price of a loaf of bread suddenly jumping from a standard $3.95 to a colossal $3.95 trillion. Instead of carrying cash in a wallet, you'd need a station wagon.

"Finally the collapse of the monetary system was complete, and all and sundry were swept into the disaster," Stolper wrote. "Money no longer fulfilled its essential functions for a modern economic system. Hence some people reverted to primitive methods such as barter."

Paper money was utterly worthless.

"Politically, this was the time of the worst disorders and of dangerous attempts directed against the very existence of the young Republic," Stolper wrote. "Economically, the period was dominated by inflation. The era of political upheavals, of Putsches and political mayhem ended on the day that inflation ended."

Economic prosperity, boosted by foreign aid and the introduction of a new currency, the Rentenmark, led to political stability, a lesson that would prove invaluable to future German leaders.

However, the Weimar's prosperous years from 1923 to 1929 were short-lived. Crises erupted in the industrial, agricultural and banking sectors, and nationwide depression soon followed.

"Like the preceding boom the German depression can only be measured by American standards," Stolper wrote, referring to the stock market crash of 1929. "There was one difference between the two countries, but it was a fundamental one: America's democracy was established beyond doubt. The economic crisis could therefore have no more tragic political consequence in the United States than to bring about the traditional replacement of the ruling party by..."
the opposition. “In contrast, the young German Republic was not as yet sufficiently sure of itself to withstand the shocks to its economic fabric.”

The Weimar Republic dealt with the crashing economy by fixing prices and increasing state control. “Closely tied as the price system was to government decisions and to monopolistic organizations or companies,” Stolper wrote, “it had lost much of the flexibility that prices display in a free capitalist economy.”

The government also sought to employ deflationary practices, which are typically widely unpopular. “This deflationary policy drained the democratic system of all vitality. Most depressingly, it failed to achieve its purpose to stop the rise in unemployment,” Stolper wrote.

In 1930, 2.3 million Germans were unemployed and receiving benefits. By 1932, that number had risen to 6 million.

The German people were growing weary and frustrated. Unemployment issues were not solely to blame for Hitler’s rise to power, Stolper wrote. “Yet, in the end, it was undoubtedly the economic crisis that bred the climate of despair in which revolutionary and visionary movements are apt to become rampant.”

Gilde agreed, saying a flawed constitution also contributed to the republic’s downfall. “Anyone who wanted to be a political party got involved, and it was extremely difficult for any party to get any sort of majority,” he said. “The political scene was totally fragmented. And that really became a problem.”

In the early 1930s, various political parties, especially on the right, formed militias. Communists and Nazis fought each other in the streets.

Hitler and the National Socialist Party initially gained support by exploiting these economic woes and manipulating public blame through propaganda and anti-Semitic rhetoric. “All those who had been expropriated by the inflation, cut off from credit, or oppressed by the debt at high interest were easy believers in the truth of what the National Socialists were saying,” Stolper wrote.

Germany held five elections in 1932. Then, German President Paul von Hindenburg, getting on in years and “somewhat senile,” appointed Hitler chancellor in an attempt to pacify the Nazis, Gilde said.

“And, of course, that was the beginning of the end.”

Once in power, the Nazi Party erected work camps and created massive public service programs, similar to U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt’s “New Deal” legislation. However, while both American and German youth were creating national parks and building roads, young German laborers were also building guns and tanks.

“Beginning step by step but then increasing in rapidity, first under the necessity of creating jobs, later in the course of rearmament, an economic system was constructed which made the state as much an economic dictator as it had been from the beginning a political dictator,” Stolper wrote.

Despite such employment programs, unemployment problems didn’t end until 1938. In fact, more workers were needed than were available. Hitler solved the problem by capturing Austria and the Sudetenland in 1938 and the rest of Czechoslovakia in 1939, essentially creating new reserves of labor.

Fearing a blockade like the one Britain used during World War I to cut off invaluable food and material supplies, Hitler sought, with mixed success, to make Germany economically independent. Soon, conscription was forced, and citizens were no longer allowed to choose their jobs.

Overall, economic conditions were better than during the Weimar Republic. Unemployment was much lower, but scarcity of various products raged, particularly material goods, and the standard of living had changed little.

“Men deprived of their personal liberties may feel less bitterly abused if, at the same time their material welfare improves,” Stolper wrote, adding that the individual worker gained maybe 200 Reichsmarks more per year.

However, the government used a variety of methods such as paid vacations and inexpensive theater and concerts to manipulate people into thinking they were better off than they were.

Additionally, Germany’s early success in World War II spurred nationalism and convinced the German people that the country could not fail. Finally, they had a leader who could restore not only the economy but also the country’s international power and prestige.

“The average Joe Blow in the street, his situation improved,” Gilde said. “The Nazis managed to restore pretty much full employment. They aggregated the Versailles Treaty, restored national pride. And as long as government policies are a success and you perceive that success, you support it.”

As every schoolchild knows, Hitler and Nazi Germany suffered massive defeat in World War II. The country unconditionally surrendered May 9, 1945. Hitler is believed to have killed himself in his bunker on April 30.

‘As a practical matter, a social market seemed to be a way of building consensus in the post-war period.’

—Scott Fuess
Institute for the Study of Labor
nal arrogance could have misguided the Reich leadership into believing that their aggressive war could be won.”

Gilde echoed this thought. “In a way, they kind of dropped the ball,” the native German said. “They didn’t really gear up energetically for a war until they were in the middle of it. Sure, I mean, (Hitler) restored the German air force and army, but it was not done on as high a level as they could have done it.”

After World War II, Germany’s economy was left even more damaged than it had been in 1918 after the German revolution, and its citizens paid a high price. “The first several years after World War II, the years after the Stunde Null, were years of bitter penury for the Germans,” Smyser wrote. “Their land, their homes, and their property lay in ruins. Millions were forced to flee with nothing but the clothes on their backs. Tens of millions had not enough to eat or to wear.”

Stolper pointed out that the government was firmly entrenched in virtually every aspect of Germany’s economy, choking the means of improvement. “When National Socialism was defeated it left behind an economic system in which the government was omnipresent and paramount,” he wrote. “Almost everything was rationed, subject to official price fixing, or allocated and distributed by public authorities. Yet nothing was in sufficient supply to fill the most immediate needs. No one even dared hope for better days.”

Imperialism had failed the German people, capitalist democracy had failed the German people, and authoritarianism had failed the German people.


“People wanted to get back to normality and move forward with their lives,” Gilde said. “It was an absolute national disaster.”

Where to turn? Enter the Soziale Marktwirtschaft.

“I guess, historically, part of it is recognition that poverty, unemployment can lead to political instability,” said Schrafstetter, the UNL history professor. “In a sense, it was also seen as providing an economically stable basis for democracy, for the rebuilding of democracy for Germany.”

Forty years earlier, Stolper’s interpretation was the same. “Economic recovery was responsible to

a large extent for the enduring stability of political conditions in the Federal Republic (of West Germany),” he wrote, a stark contrast to the Weimar Republic. “At that time, the helplessness of wavering governments in the face of economic catastrophes had made the nation feel deserted by its leaders, and this had prepared the soil for the foolhardy political aberrations that ensued.”

It was a slow transition, however. To immediately dismantle Germany’s war economy in 1945 would have thrown the nation into further chaos, so the Allies’ first move was to reform the German currency, replacing the useless Reichsmark with the Deutsche Mark.

“What seemed almost incredible happened,” Stolper wrote. “Literally from one day to the next fresh vegetables appeared in the windows of the food stores empty for years; shoes, clothing, and underwear, unaffected.


“The old-fashioned liberal market economy, on the other hand, was incompatible with contemporary values and could not simply be resurrected,” he continued. “What was needed was a new synthesis, and here (Müller-Armack) employed the term ‘social market economy.’”

To the embattled Germans, it seemed like the best choice. “Ideologically it was particularly well-suited to post-war Germany,” Nicholls wrote, “where the doctrines of collectivism had been discredited by Hitler and by a widespread fear of Communism, but where the need for social responsibility was strongly felt as the country faced the results of its military catastrophe.”

The Allies, additionally, were eager to boost the country’s economy. “The western powers, especially the United States and Britain, realized that if something wasn’t done, communism would take over all of Europe,” Gilde said. This fear led to programs that included the Marshall Plan, which resulted in a “tremendous infusion” of American financial aid to Germany.

“As a practical matter, a social market seemed to be a way of building consensus in the post-war period,” said Scott Fuess, a research fellow with the Institute for the Study of Labor in Bonn, Germany, and an economics professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

“See the Germans, unlike the British or unlike the French or unlike the Belgians ... they all had to rebuild after the war,” he said. “But the Germans not only had to rebuild their society, they had to restore it. From the dregs of Nazism and the wretched excesses of the Nazi period.

“So to rebuild and restore, they needed a degree of social consensus, and that probably made the social market approach seem to be the most desirable.”

Gilde agreed. “I think it was some really good situations that came together at an opportune time,” he said. “The people definitely didn’t want another dictatorship. ... They appreciated the aid that was given them, and there was a certain amount of trust in the people that were called upon to run the country.

“That helped them establish on a sound footing democratic principles in the West.”

“The idea was that ... democracy would benefit if you have a broadly stable and prosperous society.’

– Susanna Schrafstetter
UNL history professor

obtainable for money the Saturday before, could once more be bought.”

Currency reform was not the whole solution, however. Germany still faced a controlled economy in dire need of change. A long and complicated argument ensued as to which economic system to adopt, with the Soziale Marktwirtschaft emerging as the winner.

“The argument for and against the market economy was in Germany much more than a mere controversy among experts as to the best way to carry out reconstruction,” Stolper wrote. “It was also a struggle to build a new society.”

The term “social market economy” was coined by professor Alfred Müller-Armack of the University of Münster, who sought a compromise among the government, the markets and interest groups.

Cornstone of a Democracy

Weimar and the Rise of Hitler

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C O R N E R S T O N E O F A D E M O C R A C Y

RENOVATING THE REPUBLIC
The dollar has always been the dollar. New faces may have been added to bills, and the buffalo nickel has long since gone out of style, but American currency has remained more or less unchanged since the beginning of the nation.

Well, not really.

When the American states were still colonies, residents used a mixture of English, Spanish and French money. It wasn’t until 1775 that America had its own currency, established by the Continental Congress and known as the Continental Currency.

This was an utter failure: Depreciation of the currency resulted in the phrase “not worth a Continental.”

In 1792, Congress passed the Mint Act of April 2, resulting in the world’s first decimal currency system, which is still used today.

The money changed from heavy coins to printed paper, and the design has varied over the years, but ever since the Federal Reserve Act of 1913, the government has been directly in charge of printing and minting America’s money, and the dollar has remained the backbone of the nation’s currency.

Not so for Germany, the country whose Taler was the inspiration for 18th century America’s “dollar.”

While America has had basically the same money for nearly 100 years, Germany has witnessed three different forms of currency in fewer than 60 years, each with its own impact on the economy and its own imprint on the German psyche.

With the division of Germany into two nations with two different economic systems after World War II, the currency likewise was split. To prevent a repeat of the hyperinflation that had occurred after World War I, West Germany introduced the Deutsche Mark on June 21, 1948, to replace the low-confidence Reichsmark. The East responded with the creation of its own Deutsche Mark, later renamed the Mark der DDR.

Forty-one years later, the 1989 reunification of Germany resulted in yet another currency change, to the unified Deutsche Mark.

A woman exchanges Deutsche Marks for new euros in front of the headquarters of the European Central Bank in Frankfurt, Germany, on Jan. 1, 2002.
Then in 2002, Germany abandoned the Deutsche Mark altogether and adopted the euro, the official currency of the European Union.

Despite economic concerns and nostalgia-based resistance, the euro is not only surviving but thriving. The nearly 6-year-old currency is doing to the dollar what David did to Goliath – knocking the giant from its seat of power. Americans traveling in Europe may be surprised to find that the dollar just isn’t worth that much anymore, at least not compared to its multicoloored cousin.

Which is precisely the reason the euro was created.

In May 2007, 1 euro was worth $1.35. On the surface, Germany is clearly winning, but Germans themselves aren’t so sure the change was worth it.

“If you take a poll, the majority of people are still against the euro,” said Klaus Peter Schmid, recently retired economics editor for Die Zeit, a respected national weekly newspaper. While the Deutsche Mark is thoroughly German, the euro remains an emotionally empty stranger. In fact, to combat the perceived emotional distance of the euro, local currencies are exploding across Germany, even though they are not legal tender.

A similar situation occurred in America during the late 18th and early 19th century. The federal government then permitted approximately 1,600 private banks to print and issue their own paper currencies. By the mid-19th century, about 7,000 different state bank notes were in circulation.

Although such currencies were given government approval in the U.S., the local currencies of Germany are essentially illegal.

“The regional currencies are not really a threat to the Bundesbank (German national bank), although technically they are illegal and could pose a problem,” said Gerhard Roesl in a February BCC News article. Roesl had written a report on local currencies commissioned by the Bundesbank.

“The Bundesbank tolerates the local currencies, which are regarded as a kind of ‘social money,’” he said. Since they can’t be spent outside the local community, the euro will remain the main form of economic exchange.

Twenty-two local currencies were in circulation in early 2007 with 31 more planned for the near future. Local currencies arose mainly from a desire to keep wealth local. Since most of them depreciate after a certain amount of time, Germans using them are pushed to spend quickly. Additionally, the currencies allow those in poorer communities, usually in the former East Germany, to pay with goods and services instead of earned income. At the heart of the issue, though, is widespread disillusionment with the euro.

“The (Deutsche Mark) was the symbol for stability, for growth, for confidence, for all these positive factors, which are very German, you know?” Schmid said. “It was really the symbol, and they didn’t want to lose this symbol.”

After centuries of division, turmoil and warfare, Germany had finally found success with its Deutsche Mark, and the German people were reluctant to part with the emblem.

The Deutsche Mark, or D-Mark, represented everything great about the West German economy. It was a new currency for a new era, and it helped usher in the golden years after World War II.

However, the Mark der DDR, or the Ostmark, was in a sorry state. On the black market, the exchange rate was often five or even 10 Ostmark for one D-Mark, though the East German government claimed that parity existed between the two currencies.

When the two economies merged in 1990 after reunification, therefore, an exchange rate reflecting the actual strength of each economy would have severely handicapped East Germans.

“’There was a gap between the two economies, and you had to reduce the gap,’” Schmid said. “This was done, once more, by public money – subsidies coming from Western Germany to Eastern Germany.”

Perhaps the biggest subsidy of all was the exchange rate itself, set at one-to-one for the first 4,000 Ostmark converted, then changing to two Ostmark for one D-Mark for any amount beyond.

At the time, economists criticized the move as too generous, but the West German government was determined to provide East Germans with the same social guarantees that West Germans enjoyed.

Paul Kosan, director of the German software company OCR Solutions, said the effects are still being felt.

“The state debt increased dramatically as a result of the money invested into East Germany,” he wrote in an e-mail. “Unfortunately, after a couple of years a considerable amount of the investments (had) been invested wrongly. That hurts the country.”

Still, Schmid said he believes it was a necessary sacrifice.

“This was one of the prices we had to pay for reunification,” he said. “This became a problem of public finance and the public budget. … Germans are serious, you know? If you must finance such a fantastic thing as reunification, well, they levy taxes.”

According to the Free University of Berlin, the total costs of reunification have amounted to more than 1.5 trillion euros as of 2007. Unemployment is high, and morale is low in the former East Germany, despite the billions of Deutsche Marks and euros poured into the area every year. After reunification, many East German businesses were unable to compete with West German and European capitalist-based industry.

In spite of the setbacks the economy suffered and the debt accumulated from reunification, the D-Mark remained a force to be reckoned with.

The strength of the currency, combined with fond memories of Germany’s Wirtschaftswunder, its economic rejuvenation after World War II, caused a substantial majority of Germans to oppose adopting the euro, which wasn’t only a new financial system but an entirely different kind of money.

I was there, on the first of January 2002,” said Susanna Scharfstetter, who holds a doctorate from the University of Munich and is currently an associate professor of history at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. “From midnight on the 21st of December, you were essentially supposed to go to an ATM and get the new currency, and if you wanted to continue celebrating into the New Year, you had to pay someone with (euros).”

Scharfstetter recalled going to an ATM at around 1:30 a.m., and sure enough, the machine spit out euros instead of the fa-
miliar D-Mark.

"You could go to a bar and basically hand over your euros," she said, adding that bartenders used calculators to determine price and change. "You could still use the old money as well, and it would kind of go back and forth. They would give you either, whatever they had. But it worked."

Imagine if you went to the local ATM to withdraw cash for a cup of coffee before work, and suddenly you were holding pesos in your hand. For some, even months of preparation couldn’t make that first time seem normal.

Anna Held, a freelance tour guide for the Goethe Institut, however, said the change didn’t affect her much. “I wasn’t making that much money anyway, so it was like, ‘OK, new currency,’” she said with a laugh, but she said her mother still often converts euro prices into D-Marks when shopping.

In 2001, the D-Mark was strong, stronger than the euro, and consequently many Germans did not want to change.

“There was a fear that when we introduce the euro, the stability vanishes,” Schmid said. “That’s not true.”

Many countries’ central banks, even outside Europe, have been replacing dollars with euros, he said, a sign of trust that in 10, 20, 30 years, the euro will still be a stable currency.

“It’s very difficult to explain this to people because they are not interested in what the president of the central bank of Japan keeps in his cellar, in his treasuries,” Schmid said. “But for the money itself, it’s very important. No, I think this is a really great success, the euro.”

Germans were also concerned about companies using the changeover as an opportunity to raise prices or lower wages, Schrafstetter said.

While Held said it would have been very hard for employers to cut wages, it wasn’t hard at all for retailers to raise prices: “For stores, department stores, they definitely took the opportunity, even to the extent where people were paying the same amount in euros as they had in Deutsche Mark.”

If a sweater cost 20 D-Marks on Dec. 31, 2001, and the price remained at 20 even after the switch to the euro on Jan. 1, 2002, a German would be paying roughly 40 D-Marks.

Kosan, of OCR Solutions, agreed.

“It was a tough move for everybody,” he said. “Unfortunately, the prices in many if not all of the cases stayed almost the same. ... So the German people were complaining a lot and wished (the D-Mark) back.”

In general, the exchange rate for Germans was pretty easy to figure out — about two D-Marks per one euro. Other countries that adopted the currency had a harder time adjusting, Schrafstetter said. In Italy, for example, one euro was equivalent to roughly 2,000 lira.

“So people ... when they go shopping, they think in terms of thousands, ten thousands, hundred thousands,” she said. “And then you have to go back to figures like 10 euros, 20 euros, 50 euros. And that’s probably a lot more confusing than what we had in Germany.”

For many Germans, Held said, the practicality of the change didn’t really hit home until they left home.

“I think a lot of people didn’t see the purpose until they went abroad for the first time,” she said. “It’s like, ‘Oh, I’m in Italy, and it’s still the euro.’”

Schmid agreed, saying that before the euro, disputes between different European countries concerning currency and exchange rates were common. Such problems simply don’t exist anymore.

The German government advertised the change for about a year before the switch, Held said, with posters of prices in each currency at stores, explanations of how bank accounts would adjust and what the new money would look like. For the first three years, Germans could exchange their money at any bank. Now, only the Central Bank can make the switch.

In America, this would be similar to driving to Washington, D.C., or New York City to exchange your grandmother’s secret sock drawer dollars for, say, the new Americas. Held theorized that elderly people’s hidden hoards are one reason for the seemingly infinite period of time people are allowed to exchange currency.

The government, which adopted the new currency over the objections of the German people, understood the strong emotional attachment its citizens had for their beloved Deutsche Mark. To help with the change, it aired “Goodbye, Deutsche Mark” television commercials that were essentially tributes to the old currency.

“Like, ‘The D-Mark has accompanied us through the last 10 years, through good times and bad times, but now it’s time for a change,’” Held said. “In a way, (the commercials) were very emotional. They would have pictures from the ’50s and ’60s of families, sitting down to dinner, playing outside, and then this very emotional music.

“Thank you, D-Mark, for the times we’ve had together,” she said. “It was like a lover saying goodbye.”

PHOTO BY TERESA PRINCE

The euro is the third form of currency used in Germany in the past 60 years. Many worried about the change, but the euro has become a very strong currency.
Members of a NATO operational reserve forces battalion check vehicles outside the village of Prizren in Kosovo. The battalion is from the German town of Hagenow.
Military evolves to fill interventionist role

BY KYLE HARPSTER

In some Cold War scenarios, World War III would begin as hordes of Soviet tanks poured over West Germany’s eastern horizon like armor-plated cockroaches, their tracks churning emerald green fields to muck in their wake. At its inception in 1955, the Bundeswehr – West Germany’s armed forces – had the single explicit role of holding back those tanks, of buying time until U.S. and other NATO units could arrive to stem the tide of T-72s.

But in 1989, everything changed. The Soviet Union collapsed, and the Iron Curtain disintegrated. When the dust settled, the Bundeswehr realized that it had become an army without an enemy, without a role, without a purpose.

The West Germans created an enigma in 1955. The Bundeswehr has struggled throughout its history to define its role in a society that today is almost universally opposed to warfare after launching the two most catastrophic conflicts in world history. Now, because of pressure from its NATO allies and the desire to once again play a central role in the international commu-
ty, Germany has decided to commit its military to missions outside the country. The *Bundeswehr*, forged in the crucible of the Cold War, faces the daunting task of transforming itself into a modern military force capable of fighting and keeping the peace in a range of foreign missions. With every step, the *Bundeswehr* must deal with the obstacles of its present — and the demons of its past — in its search for a purpose.

When the fighting finally stopped in the summer of 1945, Adolf Hitler's Third Reich and its vaunted war machine, the *Wehrmacht*, lay in ruins. Edwin Hartrich, who served as a soldier in the 44th Infantry Division in Germany and later worked as a consultant to German industrial firms, described the widespread devastation in post-war Germany in his 1980 book, *The Fourth and Richest Reich*.

“The war had reduced German cities to dusty heaps of broken stone and brick rubble, desolate facades of gutted buildings: roofless, windowless, and without floors,” he wrote.

The human toll was even more devastating. More than 2 million German soldiers had died on battlefields that spanned the globe, from the deserts of North Africa to the hedgerows of northern France and the shattered streets of Stalingrad and Berlin. The Allies detained about 2.5 million soldiers in prisoner of war camps, and another 3 million were missing in action and presumed dead. Millions of widows walked the streets dressed in black.

“The hospitals were filled with the human debris of war: the sightless, armless, legless; the scarred, burned, and mutilated soldiers, the still-living human sacrifices to Hitler's war making,” Hartrich wrote.

Some historians call this time *Stunde Null*, or “zero hour.” *Stunde Null* represents the crippling psychological and physical damage that prevailed in Germany at the end of the war. It also represents an abrupt shift in the way Germans viewed the military's role in society and the use of military force. The war's terrible destruction, as well as the horrific atrocities some *Wehrmacht* units committed under the Nazi regime, fostered an abhorrence of military culture that became ingrained in the German psyche.

The conquering Allies played their own part in *Stunde Null* with their program of Three Ds: demilitarization, denazification and democratization. The first of these was arguably the easiest. Little was left of the *Wehrmacht* save a few captured tanks and field guns. The rest of the army littered Europe’s roads and fields with burnt-out hulks. From the beginning, however, the Allies knew Germany could not remain disarmed and neutral for long. In the early 1950s, with the Cold War beginning to heat up, Germany had to face the inevitability of rearmament.

Kurt Adenauer, who took office as West Germany’s first chancellor in September 1949, was the first major political figure to push for West Germany’s rearmament after the war. Adenauer, Hartrich wrote, saw rearmament “as the instrument with which to free his country from the Allied occupation rule and to obtain almost complete political and economic freedom for the fledging Republic.”

War-weary Germans resisted any plans to rearm, however, and it was only in 1954 that Germany’s parliament authorized Adenauer to begin negotiations with the Allies. In October of that year, he signed the Treaty of Paris with representatives from the U.S., Britain and France, ending the Allied occupation of West Germany and recognizing it as a sovereign state. West Germany became the 15th member of NATO, and Adenauer agreed to place the country’s full support behind the defense of Western Europe against the Soviet Union.

Edward Homze, a professor emeritus of modern Germany and the European military at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, studied for two years at the Free University of Berlin in the late 1950s. He spoke at length about Germany’s heated debate on the military’s place in society.

“When the Germans decided to build their own army, they were badly split,” he said, adding that many Germans were afraid the *Bundeswehr* would become an elite, militaristic body similar to the previous army. “How are you to weed out, in the case of the Germans, this kind of authoritarianism that’s so inbred in any military organization?”

When the parliament created the *Bundeswehr* in 1955, it built several key elements into the military’s framework that served to weave it into the fabric of society. These measures, along with strict political control, were meant to keep the military from becoming a state within a state that could grow powerful enough to guide foreign policy as it had in the past.

The first of these elements is the concept of *Innere Führung*, or “moral leadership.” *Innere Führung* states that German
law and values should guide a soldier’s actions while he is serving in the Bundeswehr. This mind-set is meant to create an environment in which German soldiers can think for themselves, thereby preventing the blind obedience to orders that led to so many atrocities during World War II.

Closely related to Innere Führung is the ideal of Bürger in Uniform. German soldiers are “citizens in uniform” who have the same legal rights and responsibilities as any other member of society.

Conscription, the final and most basic element of the framework, acts as the binding force between the armed forces and society. The universal male conscription system is meant to force participation in the military at all levels of society, again to prevent an elite military class from developing. West Germany called up its first pool of conscripts in 1956.

Col. Hans Reimer, German liaison officer to the United States Joint Forces Command in Norfolk, Va., volunteered to serve in the German army in 1977 when he was 18.

“I didn’t even think about anything else than joining the armed forces,” he wrote in an e-mail interview with a reporter. “I was ready to die for defending my country.”

Both of Reimer’s grandfathers had served in the German infantry in World War I, and one later joined the air force. Reimer’s father joined the army at age 15 and served in World War II. He was severely injured fighting American troops on the Western front and taken as a prisoner of war.

The term of conscription when Reimer joined was 15 months. “In [those] days conscription was enforced by very tough laws,” he said. “Everybody who was not going to serve in the armed forces had to undergo a very tough process of questioning.”

Most of Reimer’s friends joined the Bundeswehr for this reason. “Most of them,” Reimer said, “served because they had to.”

Most conscripts also decided to leave after their term. But Reimer stayed.

“I’ve always been a patriot,” he said. “So I wanted to defend my country, and where could I have done this — from the perspective of a young man — better than being a member of the armed forces?”

During the past 30 years, Reimer has commanded platoons, companies and a regiment, he said. His rise through the ranks gave him a better perspective on what the army needed to do to improve. He saw problems he wanted to help solve.

“So I stayed, strived to get up the ladder, strived for positions with more and more influence and tried to contribute to fixing things as best as I could,” he said.

For Reimer and every other German soldier, their mission was simple. When it laid the foundation for the German military, the German parliament was clear on a final, unequivocal point: The Bundeswehr was created as a defensive force only. Its purpose was to deter the Soviet Union, not to wage war.

In 1989, that purpose evaporated into thin air.

When communism collapsed in Eastern Europe, the Germans found themselves surrounded by friends. More than any other European military, the Bundeswehr had been geared toward fighting a static land battle against massive Soviet armored formations. The end of the Cold War prompted a new debate about the Bundeswehr’s purpose in a new global security environment.

Maj. Alexander Bitter, an air force officer who works as a researcher for the German Institute for International and Security Affairs in Berlin, knows firsthand the difficulties the Bundeswehr has faced in defining its role. His dark brown eyes flashed as he described the military’s internal turmoil in the early 1990s.

“We have [had] German soldiers in western Germany since 1955. They were here for saying ‘stop’ to the Russians,” he said, jabbing his index finger against the table with a thump. “But that was it.”

Reimer also remembers the changed atmosphere in the German military after 1989.

“Some didn’t know what was going to happen,” he said. “But most were bound into daily business.”

The army’s first task was to integrate 88,000 soldiers from the East German National People’s Army into the Bundeswehr. The army’s ranks swelled to almost 530,000 but had to be reduced to about 370,000 to comply with an agreement signed in 1990 by the four occupying powers and East and West Germany.

“The National People’s Army was a force that recruited a lot of its personnel by conscription,” Reimer said. “So it was not that hard to reduce the numbers.”

Reimer said the Bundeswehr initially offered no real incentives, such as a bonus or an offer for another job, for soldiers to
leave the armed forces.

"On the other hand there was also no obligation to stay," he said. "If a member of the forces wanted to quit because of better chances on the private market – only East Germans – he could simply apply, and it was approved."

In the early 1990s, some Germans believed the Bundeswehr's role should be expanded to include participation in NATO and U.N. missions outside the country. However, the 1991 Gulf War illustrated that Germany was still hesitant to use force, despite pressure from its NATO allies to participate. Germany sent a handful of obsolete aircraft to Turkey and a few mine-sweepers to patrol the Persian Gulf after the fighting had stopped.

The Gulf War, however, did convince some Germans in the conservative Christian Democratic Union party that Germany had to do more if it wanted to retain its credibility in the international community. In the years after the Gulf War, Germany embarked on a series of small, low-profile missions in an incremental approach to military intervention. These small steps would set precedents and lay the groundwork for larger missions. Many Germans were convinced that, in the new security environment, Germany had both the means and the responsibility to take a more active role in international peacekeeping and humanitarian missions.

The first real step came in 1992. For the first time since 1945, German soldiers left their native soil; they entered a land emerging from years of civil war. But still, they did not go to fight. About 140 German soldiers arrived in Cambodia in May 1992 as part of a U.N. peacekeeping mission. The Germans set up a field hospital to assist victims of the Khmer Rouge. One year later, the CDU-dominated parliament committed 1,640 troops to a U.N. peacekeeping mission in Somalia to provide food, water and protection from local warlords. In July 1992, Germany began participating in an arms embargo against Yugoslavia by providing airborne reconnaissance and control aircraft.

The more liberal Social Democratic Party, however, disputed the legality of sending German troops abroad. The "out-of-area debate" focused on two articles in the German Basic Law that stated the military could be used only for defensive purposes or within a system of collective security like the U.N.

In July 1994, the German Constitutional Court finally settled the debate by ruling that the conservatives' incremental approach was legal, provided that any Bundeswehr deployment receive a majority vote from the parliament. This effectively gave the CDU consent to continue its approach and made it legal to deploy the Bundeswehr on a variety of missions in the future.

In March 1999, the German military launched its first combat mission. Four Tornado strike aircraft stationed at an airbase in Italy flew bombing missions against Serbian troops in Kosovo to prevent the expulsion and oppression of the Muslim population there. The mission represented a new step in Germany's acceptance of the use of military force. Then-Chancellor Gerhard Schröder justified the NATO mission by saying that Germany had a moral obligation to lend its support and that "there was no other option open but to end the murdering in Kosovo."

Reimer served as an adviser to the commanding officer in a brigade headquarters during the Kosovo campaign.

"I supervised the whole spectrum of tasks to be fulfilled in peace-building missions, like running a jail, supporting forensic research, hunting down indicted war criminals, you name it," he said.

Reimer also helped start an Albanian-language newspaper Days of Hope. He said the newspaper "opened the local population's ears to our messages."

During the missions in Kosovo, Somalia, Yugoslavia and Cambodia helped make Germans more accustomed to the use of military force, they had revealed deep flaws within the Bundeswehr's structure and way of thinking. The German military was a creature of the Cold War, and, as the 20th century came to a close, military planners saw that the structure – and the very mentality – of the Bundeswehr would have to adapt to modern conflicts that varied in scope and intensity.

The Bundeswehr Transformation Center is a sprawling complex of white stucco buildings and gravel driveways planted among the pine trees a few miles east of Berlin. In an ironic twist, the complex once housed the East German military command, a sublime, everyday reminder to Capt. Friedhelm Stappen of how quickly the winds can shift.

"We are quite an example of how things have changed in Germany and in the world," said Stappen, the center's deputy commander. "Our outlook has changed completely, and our mission – the mission of the armed forces – has changed."

The Bundeswehr's new role is to act as an interventionist force that can fight small regional conflicts, combat terrorism and stop or prevent civil wars, non-state violence and ethnic conflict. The Bundeswehr Transformation Center, founded in 2004, is a German Defense Ministry think tank responsible for planning and managing the transformation process in cooperation with other defense policy groups. It is working to make the Bundeswehr leaner and more lethal, with each military branch working seamlessly with the others, an elusive quality called "jointness."

In other words, its job is akin to changing a sumo wrestler into a triathlete.

Reimer said the most important change the Bundeswehr must make is in its mindset.

"You may have heard the phrase that there is just one thing harder than to get a new idea into people's minds, and that is to get an old idea out of it."

— Col. Hans Reimer
German liaison officer

Bitter, the think-tank researcher, agreed and added that the Bundeswehr was not yet fully prepared for overseas missions.

"We have kind of a mindset from the Cold War, and we try to change the structures to be more effective," he said. "We don't have the strategic airlift capacity, we don't have weapons, we don't have light armored trucks – and we are changing that."

Those structural changes cost money, however – lots of money. Indeed, funding has proved to be transformation's greatest obstacle. Chronic under-funding has hamstrung the Bundeswehr since the mid-1990s, and the defense budget remains
B E Y O N D  T H E I R  B O R D E R S

In 2003, Germany’s defense spending was about 1.5 percent of its gross domestic product, compared to about 4 percent in the United States. According to an October 2006 article in Deutsche Welle, Germany also spends less on its military than Norway, Holland or Finland.

A 2003 report by the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies at The Johns Hopkins University takes a close look at the Bundeswehr’s transformation process, including the funding problem. According to the report, more than half of the Bundeswehr’s budget goes to salaries and benefits for its personnel while only about 13 percent goes to new equipment. The trend extends across Europe: “European nations spend far greater proportions of their defense budgets on personnel costs than does the United States and spend only about one fourth of their budgets on research and development.”

Some critics within Germany suggest that the Bundeswehr’s current strategy is like trying to change a flat tire while still driving down the road. They argue that the Bundeswehr has taken on too many missions while trying to modernize its equipment at the same time, straining an already thin budget. Instead of investing in research and development of new weapons, it is funnelling money into the maintenance of obsolete vehicles and equipment.

“Funding is always a big issue,” said Benjamin Schreer, another researcher at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs. “The baseline is that there will not be a substantial increase in money to fund for arms or defense transformation.”

A few ongoing defense programs illustrate the difficulties the Bundeswehr faces in modernizing its equipment. The military needs communications systems, intelligence gathering equipment and precision-guided weapons, to name a few.

Schreer, who specializes in military transformation, said the army has a particular shortage of armored fighting vehicles and armored personnel carriers for use in Afghanistan – where German troops have been operating since shortly after Sept. 11, 2001 – largely because the army can’t afford new ones.

“They are mostly outdated, or they are in too few numbers to be deployed on a larger scale,” Schreer said. “So at the moment, you see in Afghanistan some interesting developments with the army getting more armor on their vehicles, but it’s a very slow process.”

Another problem area is strategic airlift capability, a vital requirement for any military that wants to reach crisis points quickly. According to the 2003 Johns Hopkins study, the U.S. has 250 heavy transport aircraft – its European allies have 11. To increase its airlift capacity, the German air force has ordered 60 Airbus A400 M heavy-lift transports, the first of which should be delivered in 2010. Until then, the Bundeswehr continues to lease former Russian aircraft from Ukraine.

“The European A400 M is still a long way to go,” Schreer said, “so that is a severe problem when looking at operations in Afghanistan when there have already been instances in which the Bundeswehr was unable to fly out their troops with their own aircraft.”

Bitter, at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, described the prolonged development of the Eurofighter, the crown jewel of the air force’s modernization program. Bitter chuckled as he recalled several name changes required by delays in getting the fighter, whose development began in the 1980s.

“It was called Fighter ’90, then it was...
called Eurofighter 2000, and now we call it Eurofighter because the 2000 felt so old,” he said.

Bitter said the bill for the 180 Eurofighters the air force plans to buy and for the A400 M program runs to about 20 billion euros, or $26 billion. The Bundeswehr receives nearly 23 billion euros a year in funding, with much of that going to air force programs, a major point of contention within military circles.

“The navy is in Lebanon, the army is all over the world, the air force is nearly nowhere and gets most of the money,” Bitter said. “So it will be a hard fight.”

The transformation process faces obstacles not only with money and high-tech weaponry. The mindset of the soldiers themselves may be most important. Some argue that the process is paralyzed by bureaucratic infighting, a problem hardly unique to Germany.

Homze, the UNL professor, said that like many large institutions, the Bundeswehr has become set in its ways.

“They kind of get used to certain things, doing things in a certain way,” he said. “It’s hard to restructure them.”

Schreer, the German Institute for International and Security Affairs analyst, said much of the resistance to transformation comes from within the leadership of the individual branches of the military.

“Particularly the army, at least until recently, had been very resistant to change,” he said.

Planners say the transformation process will be mostly completed by 2010, a date Schreer considers optimistic. “I wouldn’t be surprised if the deadline would be met two or three years later.”

In 2001, the transformation process took a back seat to a new mission. The terrorist attacks against the U.S. on Sept. 11 led Schröder to pledge his full support to the U.S. and German troops headed for Afghanistan soon after.

But relations between the U.S. and Germany soured in 2003 as the Bush administration tried to gather support among its European allies for an invasion of Iraq. Schröder refused to support the U.S.-led coalition because he felt Germans would not allow the country to play a part in a mission that lacked international backing.

In May 2003, Peter Struck, Germany’s defense minister under Schröder, revealed a new set of defense policy guidelines that would have been unimaginable a decade earlier. He said since Germany no longer faced a conventional threat, it had to protect “our security wherever it is in jeopardy.” In one oft-quoted statement, Struck said Germany’s defense began at the Hindu Kush, a mountain range in eastern Afghanistan.

In October 2006, the German Defense Ministry released a defense policy white paper, the first of its kind since 1994. The 133-page report stated that the Bundeswehr would assume a greater international role and would be capable of deploying 14,000 troops on five simultaneous missions.

Times had changed.

Today, from the rugged hills of northern Afghanistan to the waters off Lebanon and the Horn of Africa, almost 10,000 German soldiers, sailors and airmen have been deployed on foreign missions.

In Afghanistan, 2,900 Bundeswehr soldiers are part of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, which works to prevent Taliban or al-Qaida attacks on civilians. In 2004, German soldiers also helped administer the first presidential elections in the country’s history. Their mission in Afghanistan, however, has strained the defense budget and raised questions about the quality of German soldiers’ training. In the fall of 2006, several pictures surfaced in German newspapers of Bundeswehr soldiers posing with human skulls while on patrol near Kabul.

The incident is reflective of the problems the German military faces in its new role. Debates continue on the effectiveness of the transformation process and whether Germany should even send troops to places like Afghanistan, where actual combat is more likely than in previous mission areas.

The 2006 white paper also confirmed the Bundeswehr would keep the conscription system, which many analysts and military officials say has become obsolete.

Despite the fact that Germany’s democracy has been stable for decades, many in Germany see conscription as sacrosanct, a vital safeguard against the possibility of a nationalist, authoritarian military.

According to the 2003 Johns Hopkins policy report, conscription also “has provided a pool of low-paid workers for public service jobs by way of those draftees who choose civilian rather than military service.”

Many conscripts choose to don scrubs instead of camouflage fatigues. Conscripts are allowed to opt out of military service and work instead at hospitals, assisted-living centers and other health care facilities. The Bundeswehr screens out many other conscripts because of health problems. Schreer admits the military is struggling to attract the kind of people it needs to fill its professional ranks and that about half of
conscripts choose public service instead of military service.

Joseph Cicmanec, a 24-year-old university student in Stuttgart, chose to take a civil service assignment instead of joining the army.

“I chose the civil service because I wanted to stay here and play soccer for my team,” he wrote in an e-mail.

Cicmanec worked at a care center for the elderly where he cooked and served meals for residents, took them shopping and accompanied them on visits to the doctor.

“I was there to make their lives easier,” he said.

He added that one of his friends worked for the same agency, but most of his friends joined the army, despite the negative images of the military that many Germans still have.

“Some of my friends think about the Bundeswehr that it is a waste of time,” Cicmanec said.

When it began in 1956, conscription required each soldier to serve 12 months. Conscripts today have only nine-month service requirements, not enough time to receive effective training for modern warfare, according to the Johns Hopkins report. The report concludes that these conscripts “will be more of a nuisance than an asset.”

Schreer said German soldiers go through a basic training program that is similar to those of other Western armies. After that, their specialized training depends on the type of unit they are assigned to or for which they volunteer.

“Some of them go to highly complex units,” Schreer said, such as paratrooper detachments, for example. “Others are, you know – they end up as a barkeeper.”

Eliminating conscription could finally ease the Bundeswehr’s budget constraints and free up money the military now spends on personnel costs. With an all-volunteer army, like those of the United States and many of its allies, the Bundeswehr could be more effective in its new interventionist role.

Despite misgivings in some circles, Schreer said the number of out-of-area missions the Bundeswehr takes on will probably increase in the future, mainly because of Germany’s desire to boost its stature within the international community, especially within the U.N. and the European Union.

“If you want to be credible and fulfill that role, of course you have to contribute more to international security,” he said, “and I think we are seeing an increase in the number of international operations.”

The Bundeswehr’s story illustrates the fact that Germany views defense policy far differently from the way the United States and many of its European allies do. The Germans have rejected unilateral military action and adopted an ideal of “never on our own,” a mind-set demonstrated by the German refusal to participate in the U.S. war with Iraq.

Trade, diplomacy and developmental aid – not just military force – are also important to German defense policy. The U.S. views its military as a tool that can be used to solve many foreign policy problems, including terrorism. The Germans see military force as a last resort.

“In the United States, or in particular in certain elements of the U.S. Army, you have this war-fighting ethos,” Schreer said.

“You don’t have that in Germany, likely due to historical experiences after the second world war.”

Today, the German soldier serves as a peacekeeper and a humanitarian, not a war-fighter. The Bundeswehr’s current missions within the U.N. and NATO frameworks are a good fit for this philosophy, a senior German press official at the U.S. Embassy in Berlin said.

“Germany is good at the type of reconstruction mission it is now undertaking in Afghanistan because Germans are good at organizing large projects,” the official said.

“That’s what we do well. As for the fighting part, that’s not really for us.”

Bitter, however, said future combat missions for the Bundeswehr are inevitable. NATO has already placed great pressure on Germany to send troops to the more volatile southern region of Afghanistan, where U.S. and British troops now play the largest role. German special forces units have already participated in some combat action in the south, and the parliament has approved the deployment of a number of Tornado reconnaissance aircraft to assist NATO forces there.

“They will come. There is no doubt,” Bitter said, referring to future combat missions. “But it is a process that the society has to deal with. It is a very slow process, and it is a change of mindset.”

Despite all the obstacles, the Bundeswehr’s transformation into a leaner, more flexible foreign policy tool has begun. The process will last until the end of the decade and cost billions of euros and countless headaches and heartaches for German soldiers, politicians and civilians. Germany still wrestles with memories of its dark military past, but it has learned to balance respect for those memories with responsibility in the international community. The Bundeswehr has found a purpose, and after decades of soul-searching, the German armed forces have finally stepped back into the sun.
On the cool, gray evening of Friday, Oct. 27, 1961, 10 Soviet T-54 tanks rumbled to a stop at the Friedrichstrasse crossing point between East and West at the Berlin Wall. Less than 100 yards away, six American M-48 Patton tanks leveled their main guns at the new arrivals.

For the first time in history, American and Soviet troops directly faced each other as enemies.

Today, in a place that could have become a flashpoint for a third world war, sightseers snap photos next to the checkpoint’s guard shack and buy souvenir T-shirts printed with Soviet military insignia. The crossing point, which the Americans named Checkpoint Charlie after the third letter in NATO’s phonetic alphabet, was an icon of the Cold War during its day but has now become mainly a tourist spot. Even though the concrete barriers and barbed wire are gone, a sense of the checkpoint’s significance pervades this part of the Friedrichstrasse. Checkpoint Charlie serves as a strange sort of memorial to an alien world in which Berlin lived as a divided city.

On the previous Sunday back in 1961, East German troops had harassed a U.S. diplomat and his wife as they tried to pass through the crossing on their way to an opera. The soldiers asked the couple to present their diplomatic passports, but the Americans, following State Department instructions, refused. To have done otherwise would have indicated diplomatic recognition of East Germany and admitted that East Berlin was part of East Germany. The diplomat gunned his engine, but the soldiers quickly surrounded the car and forced it back. A few minutes later, the diplomat returned with an escort of armed American military police. The East Germans let him pass.

For the next few days, MPs escorted more State Department officials through Checkpoint Charlie. On Wednesday, the first American tanks arrived at the border post. The next day, the first Soviet tanks appeared.

With guidance from State Department and West German officials, Lt. Gen. Lucius D. Clay, President John F. Kennedy’s personal representative in Berlin, had orchestrated the standoff to prove that the Soviets, not the East Germans, were the power behind the wall. The Americans also wanted to make it clear to East Germany that it had no right to control American soldiers or diplomats in Berlin.

It was a high-stakes game, witnessed by hundreds of civilians on both sides. With Soviet and American soldiers standing only a football field apart, even a minor accident or a private’s nervous trigger finger could have sparked a war.

Western reporters described the tense scene in their dispatches Friday night. Sydney Gruson of The New York Times reported the confrontation “was like two chess players trying to come to grips in the middle of a disorganized board.” He added that the Soviet tanks were, in fact, part of a 33-tank force that had moved into Berlin on Thursday night. “Their black-uniformed crews remained in the tanks, an unsmiling soldier behind the long-barreled 100-millimeter gun on each tank,” he wrote. On the other side of the checkpoint, the American tanks sat “bathed in a garish light from six high-powered searchlights mounted by the East Germans on wooden towers.”

CBS correspondent Dan Schorr reported in his evening broadcast that civilians in West Berlin watched through binoculars as the American soldiers and tank crews nervously ate from their mess kits.

Peter Wyden, in his 1989 book, Wall: The Inside Story of Divided Berlin, said Schorr also helped settle a lingering debate about the tanks’ true nationality. The Soviet tank crews had obscured the Red Army markings on their vehicles with black tape so Western observers would think the tanks were East German. Schorr made his way across the border, approached one of the tanks and tried to speak with one of the crewmembers in German. The response came in Russian.

Then, at 10:30 a.m. on Saturday, the Soviets blinked. Their tanks withdrew, followed by the Americans’ tanks half an
In the 1960s, Checkpoint Charlie, shown in the above postcard, was the dividing line between American and Soviet control. It was the only place each army’s troops and tanks ever faced off.

Today, the same spot looks quite different: Soldiers no longer stand guard at Checkpoint Charlie. Instead, the busy street is home to coffee shops and tourist stalls.

hour later. The whole standoff had lasted about 16 hours. Lt. Gen. Clay had called the Soviets’ bluff about enforcing the crossing restrictions.

According to Wyden, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev later told Kennedy’s press secretary he had given the order to pull back the tanks.

“If the tanks went forward, it was war,” Khrushchev said. “If they went backward, it was peace.”

Peace between East and West had been a delicate matter since 1945. After World War II, the Allies divided Germany — and Berlin itself — into zones of occupation. In 1948, when the West proposed to create a West German state and began circulating Western currency in Berlin, the Soviet Union blockaded the city. From June 1948 until May 1949, Allied air transports delivered a daily average of 8,000 tons of food, fuel and other raw materials into the western part of the city. Until 1989, West Berlin remained an outpost of Western influence deep within East Germany.

During the next decade, the Allies poured money into West Berlin, making it a prosperous symbol of wealth and capitalism. East German refugees streamed into West Berlin and were then flown to West Germany. Werner Sikorsky and Rainer Laabs report in their book Checkpoint Charlie and the Wall that more than 2.6 million East Germans fled to the West between 1949 and 1961. Soviet and East German officials decided to cut West Berlin off from the rest of the city to stop the exodus, which was causing severe economic damage to East Germany.

On the morning of Aug. 13, 1961, Berliners awoke to find thick coils of barbed wire along the demarcation line between East and West Berlin. East German soldiers and police rushed to block traffic between the sectors.
“The quietness of East Berlin’s deserted streets was shattered in the early hours of the morning by the screaming of police sirens as police cars, motorcycles and truckloads of police sped through the city,” the Reuters news service reported.

Concrete walls soon replaced the barbed wire. East German masons, watched closely by border guards, reinforced the barrier,16 walling themselves in brick by brick. In some cases where buildings ran parallel to the wall, East German engineers simply sealed the windows on the front wall and tore down the building behind it. Otherwise, anything in the path of the wall was built around, pushed aside or simply bulldozed.

In its final form, the Berlin Wall stretched about 100 miles and included 45,000 concrete wall segments that stood 12 feet tall, 4 feet wide and 6 inches thick. High-wattage spotlights illuminated the death strip every night until 1989. The wall eventually was patrolled by almost 1,000 dogs and was fortified with mines and self-firing automatic weapons. A report published in 1996 said East German border guards fatally shot 239 people at the wall after 1961.

Subway stations that were connected to stops in the West were walled up or demolished; a blank white space replaced West Berlin on East German subway maps.

Hundreds of East Germans were able to escape the tightening noose in the first days of the wall by ramming through barricades in their cars or crawling through the barbed wire, but their escape routes soon disappeared. Human smuggling quickly became big business in Berlin. People paid thousands of U.S. dollars to escape East Germany hidden in the trunks of cars or in shipments of potatoes.

Checkpoint Charlie, a crossing point reserved for non-Germans, served as an escape route for many. According to Sikorski and Laabs, many Third-World diplomats in East Berlin moonlighted as smugglers and used Checkpoint Charlie to transport everything from people to caviar. With diplomatic immunity, border guards could not search their cars.

Checkpoint Charlie also became a common backdrop used by Western spy novelists. English writer John Le Carré opens his 1963 book, *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*, with a scene at Checkpoint Charlie. The novel's main character, a British secret service operative, watches as one of his agents is gunned down at the checkpoint while trying to escape East Germany. The checkpoint also plays a major role in Len Deighton’s 1983 novel *Berlin Game*, another story about espionage in the divided city.

Gene Policinski, executive director of the First Amendment Center in Nashville, Tenn., visited Berlin in the mid-1980s to give lectures to military journalism students from the United States and Europe. Policinski, an editor at USA Today at the time, recalled the elaborate ritual Westerners had to endure while crossing back into West Berlin at Checkpoint Charlie.

The Western car would pull up to the checkpoint, and an East German guard would walk out to meet it. The guard would gesture for the Westerners to show their passports, to no avail.

“If you were in the car with U.S. military, you did not show your passport,” Policinski said.

A few seconds later, a Soviet guard would leave the East German guard shack and approach the vehicle. Because the Soviet Union was a member of the four official powers in Berlin, the Americans would pull out their passports and hold them up to the glass for five to 10 seconds. They would not roll down their windows.

The Russian guard would scribble frantically to take down the passengers’ names, but custom allowed the crossers to put their passports away after the prescribed amount of time whether or not the guard was finished.

The Russian guard would scribble furiously to take down the passengers’ names, but custom allowed the crossers to put their passports away after the prescribed amount of time whether or not the guard was finished.

Then the guards would raise the wooden bar stretched across the street, and the car would drive through the checkpoint and back into West Berlin.

“It was amazing to see the whole Cold
War come down to this little kabuki theater,” Polincinski said. Now, a faded American flag snaps in the wind over Checkpoint Charlie’s small guard shack, a squat white structure about the size of a tool shed. A flat roof hangs about two feet over the side of the wooden building to keep rain off the guards’ heads. The shack is a replica; the original was taken down long ago and placed in a museum.

Polincinski said the shack, which resembled a small mobile home, was designed to give an air of impermanence to the American side of the checkpoint, as if the Cold War would end the next day.

“The symbolism is that it wasn’t permanent,” he said.

Now, actor Tom Luszeit, 33, stands outside the shack dressed in an American military uniform. He holds an American flag and poses for tourists’ pictures for a euro.

“I am capitalist, not communist,” he says, joking.

The roar of tank engines has been replaced by the sound of sputtering diesels powering eggshell-colored Mercedes taxis. Crowds of Berliners and tourists bustle through the street where American soldiers once patrolled with loaded rifles. Traffic swishes past, including a red station wagon with rap music thumping from its speakers.

A few souvenir shops capitalize on the history of this place. Inside are racks of postcards with pictures of the 1961 tank confrontation, T-shirts and old Soviet memorabilia — replicas, of course. The shops sell Soviet flags, uniform jackets with fur liners and stacks of fur hats with the Soviet hammer and sickle stitched on them. An officer’s beret will set a tourist back 15 euros or about $20. Outside one of the shops, a uniformed woman with a long brown ponytail sits at her small stand where, for one euro, she will stamp people’s passports with an East German seal. She doesn’t speak English.

The shops also sell small plastic cases with pieces of spray-painted concrete inside — pieces of the wall, the signs advertise. Prices increase exponentially with the size of the chips. A chunk the size of a golf ball goes for 25 euros, about $33. The pieces are fake; the few remaining sections of the wall have been fenced off to prevent tourists from chipping them into nothingness.

A half-dozen small restaurants have opened since 1990 on what was once the Western side of the crossing point. They offer pizza, Chinese food and kebabs. A Mexican restaurant, a Subway sandwich shop, a cocktail bar and a coffee shop also do business here. A small café with a neon Coca-Cola sign sits on the north side of the street.

On the corner near Checkpoint Charlie stands Café Adler, a four-story brick structure, where, legend has it, Le Carré wrote The Spy Who Came in From the Cold. Inside, the walls have yellowed a little over the years from dust and cigarette smoke. Gold moldings trim the ceiling. On the bar, an 8-inch-tall porcelain eagle — Germany’s national symbol — perches among the bottles of liquor. The café is full of patrons who sip coffee and beer at their tables. Conversations in German and English, mixed with the clatter of dishes, reverberate off the walls.

Bertram Denzel, a musician who has worked as a dishwasher at the café since 1988, emerges from the kitchen door and slides onto one of the bar stools. Locks of red hair fall over his forehead as he pushes his large, brown-framed glasses back onto the bridge of his nose.

He said Café Adler’s location — it was the last building on the Western side before the border — made it a mecca for journalists during the Cold War. Spies from both sides of the wall also frequented the café, if the stories are true.

Denzel wasn’t at work on Nov. 9, 1989, when people from across the city scaled the wall and began tearing it down, piece by piece. The next day, a co-worker told him journalists and East Germans had flooded the café and quickly ate and drank everything in sight.

“After three days, we were completely sold out,” he said.

He remembers one specific group of men, a West German and two of his East German friends, who came into the café at about that time.

“Do you have …,” one of the East Germans began to ask Denzel, but the West German interrupted him.

“Hey, stop asking like that,” he said with a touch of indignation, adding that his country never had shortages of anything. “We are in the West!”

Denzel paused for a moment and then looked at the East German.

“I said, ‘I’m sorry, we’re sold out,’ ” he said with a laugh.

Denzel agreed that Checkpoint Charlie had become mainly a tourist spot instead of a monument. Nestled among the restaurants and tourist shops, Museum Haus am Checkpoint Charlie, which opened in 1963, offers some idea of the historical significance of this neighborhood.

“It’s a normal crossing now, and that’s a pity,” Denzel said. “You can’t imagine how it was.”

The checkpoint has brought a steady stream of customers to the café, however. Denzel said the café’s historic cachet gives it an edge over the newer tourist shops and restaurants in the neighborhood.

“Now we are the oldest place around here, so it’s working good,” he said, adding that the café is usually full of journalists, tourists and a number of local regulars.

“It’s a nice mixture,” he said. “It’s not only a tourist place.”

Behind him, outside the café’s windows and across the street, stands Checkpoint Charlie’s white-painted sign so clearly visible in TV footage from the 1961 standoff and now so common in postcards and tourists’ pictures: “You are leaving the American sector.”

The sign is a replica, too.
German police officers guard the main train station in the northern city of Kiel on Aug. 19, 2006, the day an arrest was made involving a failed plot to bomb trains in the country.
Officials take aggressive stand in fight against terrorism

BY KYLE HARPSER

In the afternoon on the last day of July 2006, a man boards a train making the three-hour run from Aachen to Hamm. Behind a seat on one of the train’s double-decker cars, he leaves a heavy black suitcase.

Inside are wires and batteries. An alarm clock timer, counting down. A three-gallon canister of propane gas. A plastic bottle filled with a gallon of gasoline.

About 10 minutes before the train reaches its next stop, the bomb is set to explode, hurling shrapnel through the air for 300 feet and creating a fireball 50 feet wide. The explosion will be as destructive as the London bombings in 2005, which killed 52 people and injured hundreds. In an instant, the July 2006 train bombing will become the worst terrorist attack in German history.

Instead, investigators later determined, the bomb failed to explode because of a faulty detonator.

At the end of the day, the train stopped at its hub station in Dortmund, a city of about half a million people in western Germany. The train’s conductor found the suitcase during his inspection and left it at the station’s lost and found office.

Staff members there opened the suitcase the next day. They called police, who brought in bomb disposal technicians to dismantle the device. Meanwhile, in Koblenz, about 100 miles south of Dortmund, lost and found staff at the train station there discovered another unexploded bomb in a similar suitcase that had been brought to the office the day before. The plot’s coordination led investigators to believe the bombs were the work of a terrorist organization.

The attempted bombings stunned Germany, which had managed to stay out of terrorists’ sights after the attacks on the United States on Sept. 11, 2001. In 2004 and 2005, Germany had watched terrorism creep closer to its doorstep when Islamic terrorists bombed a busy train station in Madrid and trains in the London Underground, but Germans had felt relatively safe because of their government’s opposition to the U.S.-led war in Iraq.
The foiled bombings shattered Germans’ sense of immunity and sharpened an already charged debate over how Germany should fight terrorism while still protecting civil liberties.

The police had a number of leads on the suitcase bombers, Deutsche Welle, a German news Web site, reported. They first examined the railway stations’ closed-circuit video surveillance footage, which showed grainy images of two young men, one wearing a white soccer jersey, as they wheeled the suitcases around a train station platform in Cologne. Police released the footage to the news media on Aug. 18, hoping that someone would recognize the men, and offered a reward of 50,000 euros, or $64,000, for information leading to the suspects’ arrest. Investigators also found a note with Arabic writing and a Lebanese telephone number inside the Koblenz suitcase.

That same day, a 21-year-old Lebanese student named Youssef Mohammed al-Hajj Dib turned on his television to see images of himself and the other suspected suitcase bomber flashing across the screen. In a panic, he phoned his family in Lebanon to ask for advice. Lebanese intelligence services intercepted the call and notified the Germans, who traced him to Kiel, about 30 miles north of Hamburg.

On Aug. 19, police arrested Mohammed in a pre-dawn raid at a Kiel train station as he tried to flee the country. Investigators searched his dormitory room and found fingerprints and DNA samples that matched those taken from one of the suitcases. Der Spiegel, a German weekly news magazine, interviewed several of his friends, who described him as “friendly, polite, devout, but relatively inconspicuous.”

A massive manhunt continued for the second suspect, but he surrendered to police on Aug. 24 in Tripoli, Lebanon. Police identified him as Jihad Hamad, a 20-year-old Lebanese student who lived in Cologne. Police in Germany and Lebanon eventually arrested two more suspects. All four men were extradited to Lebanon, where they face up to 25 years in prison for attempted murder and arson.

In March 2007, Hamad told a Beirut court he had not intended to kill anyone but only wished to send a warning that Europeans should not insult the prophet Muhammad, who had been the subject of cartoons in Danish newspapers in September 2005, prompting widespread Muslim protest.

The foiled bombings brought a new
A New Sense of Urgency

‘Baader-Meinhof really shook the very foundation of a lot of the easygoing German attitude: “Oh, well, terrorists – they’re not a part of us.” Yeah, well, they are.’

Edward Homze
UNL professor emeritus

level of urgency to the long-running debate in Germany over how much latitude law enforcement and intelligence agencies should have in fighting terrorism. They also raised unsettling questions about the existence of homegrown terrorist groups similar to those responsible for the London attacks in 2005.

Julianne Smith, director and senior fellow of the Europe Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C., said in an e-mail interview that the attempted train bombings focused Germans’ attention on the increased threat.

“They have always been concerned,” she said, “but each attack brings the reality a little closer.”

This was not the first time Germany had faced terrorism.

At the 1972 Munich Olympics, the left-wing Palestinian group Black September took 11 Israeli athletes hostage in their dormitory in the Olympic Village. After a botched rescue attempt by German police at Fürstenfeldbruck airport, all of the Israeli hostages, along with a German police officer and five of the eight terrorists, were killed.

Another terrorist group – this one homegrown – had an even more profound effect on Germany. In the 1970s and ’80s, German police and intelligence services fought against the Red Army Faction, also known as the Baader-Meinhof Gang after two of its founders, Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof. The RAF was a left-wing militant group that grew out of the student protest movement and social upheavals of the late 1960s and was responsible for a number of bombings, shootings and arson attacks against German politicians, businessmen and even U.S. servicemen during the 1970s.

The group’s activity reached its peak in the fall of 1977, the season that became known as the “German Autumn.” A string of attacks began in late summer when, on July 30, RAF members led by Christian Klar and Brigitte Mohnhaupt shot and killed the president of the Dresdner Bank in front of his home.

Both terrorists were eventually caught and imprisoned. Mohnhaupt gained news media attention in Germany again in the spring of 2007 when she was freed on parole after serving 24 years in prison for her role in several murders. Klar has applied for clemency, but the German government is still considering its response.

On Sept. 5, 1977, RAF members kidnapped Hanns Martin Schleyer, a former Nazi party member and SS officer who was then head of the German Employers Association, after killing his driver and police escort. The terrorists shot and killed Schleyer the next month after negotiations to free him failed. Police found his body in the trunk of an Audi the next day.

By the mid-1990s, German police had arrested most of the group’s prominent members, and the RAF officially disbanded in 1998.

The RAF rattled German society unlike any other group since World War II, said Edward Homze, a professor emeritus of modern German history at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Homze studied at the Free University of Berlin from 1957 to 1959 and has visited Germany every few years since then.

“They were really pretty neurotic about that whole thing,” he said, referring to the German reaction to RAF attacks. “Baader-Meinhof really shook the very foundation of a lot of the easygoing German attitude: ‘Oh, well, terrorists – they’re not a part of us.’ Yeah, well, they are.”

T he more recent debate over how strongly to respond to the threat of Islamic terrorism goes back to the 2001 attacks on the United States. The German government immediately voiced its support for the U.S. and pledged to send troops on a U.S.-led mission to Afghanistan late that year. Almost 3,000 German soldiers remain deployed in Afghanistan today.

Since then, Germany’s increased presence abroad has led Islamic terrorists to add Germany to their list of targets, experts say. Smith, of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said Germany has been listed on al-Qaida Web sites specifically for its involvement in Afghanistan.

But Germany continues to expand its military involvement abroad. In 2006, Germany agreed to send its navy to the waters off Lebanon in a small peacekeeping role, and Germany trains Iraqi policemen outside of Iraq. In March 2007, a senior Taliban leader in Afghanistan named Germany as a target in an interview with a German political magazine.

Germans also worry about the fact that three of the Sept. 11 hijackers had planned for the attacks while living in Hamburg. More than 3 million Muslims live in Germany, many of them students or members of the lower socio-economic classes who, some experts say, may be susceptible to extremist thought. Intelligence agencies in many countries have long considered Germany a haven for Islamic terrorists.

“There are signs that terrorism groups or Islamic charities are using Germany as a staging ground for other attacks or, at a minimum, using Germany to get new recruits for the cause,” Smith said, adding that she believes the problem is worse in Britain and France, where the Muslim populations are even less assimilated.

After Sept. 11, Germany introduced a series of laws that “loosened restraints on phone tapping and the monitoring of e-mail and bank records and freed up once-proscribed communications between the police and the secret services,” The New York Times reported in December 2001. Many German politicians also called for the creation of a nationwide anti-terrorism database that would be accessible to all police and intelligence agencies to help catch terrorists before they could strike.

The database would include names, addresses and membership records for terrorist organizations, bank accounts,
telecommunications and Internet data, religious background, travel details and other information.

But the proposal left many Germans uneasy. Smith said the debate over the database illustrates Germany’s historic reluctance, in light of its Nazi past, to sacrifice civil liberties.

“They have very strict laws about data protection as a result of their history with World War II,” she said. “They do not feel comfortable giving away personal data. Any time you ask a German for a phone number or credit card number, you see them flinch.”

Germany has so far limited the erosion of its civil liberties. The United States has seemed more willing to sacrifice constitutional rights for a measure of security, an approach that sometimes puts Germany at odds with its allies across the Atlantic. In the spring of 2007, for example, the United States and Germany quarreled over the amount of personal passenger information that German air carriers would be required to give American officials for U.S.-bound flights.

The debate over civil liberties also helps to characterize a broader difference in the two countries’ counterterrorism strategies. The United States and Germany, experts say, see terrorism through different lenses of experience.

“We have many conceptual differences,” Smith said, “and these differences have affected our relationship almost daily since 9/11.”

At the most fundamental level, Germany sees terrorism as a problem for law enforcement, not the military. Smith added that the language used by some U.S. officials to describe the fight against terrorism especially rankles some Germans.

“Germans — and Europeans more broadly — do not like the term ‘war on terror’ as it denotes a victory. … They view [terrorism] as something that must be managed.”

Benjamin Schreer, a researcher for the German Institute for International and Security Affairs in Berlin, agreed with Smith that the U.S. tendency to label the fight against terrorism as a war rubs Germans the wrong way.

“The word ‘war’ has a very bad connotation in the German political debate,” he said, “and there is the notion that you cannot win a war against a tactic. Terrorism is a tactic. Terrorism is not an enemy. So there is this huge conceptual difference.”

Schreer said the main difference between the German and U.S. approaches is that, in Germany, “the military element of this fight on terrorism is rather subordinated,” while the United States places a greater emphasis on military action.

“That’s not a big part in the German debate,” Schreer said. “It’s more a question of legal, financial, developmental and other issues.”

Karsten Voigt, coordinator of German-American cooperation for the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin, said the United States sometimes misunderstands this approach. When Americans look at the German defense budget, which is about 1.5 percent of Germany’s GDP compared to about 4 percent in the United States, they think Germans are being soft on terrorism, he said.

Voigt argued, however, that Germany’s policy is not soft. It is wise.

He pointed out that Germany uses developmental aid to alleviate the economic and social conditions at the root of terrorism. Germany has invested heavily in eastern and southern Europe and other unstable regions around the globe in what Voigt calls “preventive diplomacy.” Those expenditures don’t show up in the defense budget, he said.

The more forceful American approach, he said, is reflective of history, in which Americans have usually been painted as the good guys, whereas Germany has been characterized as the enemy for much of the 20th century.

“Therefore, we have to invest in the improvement of that image,” he said.

The German strategy is also influenced by its fight against the RAF terrorists 30 years ago, he added.

“Our original vision of terrorism was shaped by our experience in the ’70s, where we had more political terrorism with a strong ideology,” he said. Voigt added that Germany learned that the best way to fight terrorists was to change their mindsets and their sympathies and to rely on police and intelligence forces to apprehend them if that strategy failed.

The United States has also not been the easiest of allies in the fight against terrorism. Relations between Germany and the United States soured in early 2007 when the news media revealed the German government’s secret participation in the CIA’s extraordinary rendition program, under which suspected terrorists are seized and then flown to secret prisons for interrogation, sometimes under torture.

In January 2007, an EU committee released a report that criticized several EU countries, including Germany, for their involvement in the program and for not upholding “the respect of human rights.” Deutsche Welle reported. The report also stated that more than 300 secret flights made stops in Germany.

“The rendition issue is perhaps the biggest challenge in our relationship at present,” Smith said.

In late January 2007, a German court issued a warrant for the arrest of 13 CIA agents accused of kidnapping a German citizen of Lebanese descent and flying him to Afghanistan, where he was allegedly tortured. The man, Khaled al-Masri, was abducted in Macedonia in 2003 and was imprisoned in Afghanistan for five months. He said he “was shackled, beaten, and interrogated about his alleged ties to al-Qaida, before being released without charges,” The New York Times reported. German authorities never arrested any CIA personnel.

About the same time, Foreign Minister Frank Walter Steinmeier came under intense criticism for his alleged involvement in the case of Murat Kurnaz, a German-born Turk who had been arrested in Pakistan only weeks after Sept. 11. He was taken to the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where he says he was tortured. He was released without charges in August 2006. The German media accused Steinmeier of blocking Kurnaz’s release in 2002 when U.S. officials, after a more thorough
investigation of his background, decided that he posed no threat.

Schreer, however, is quick to point out that while rifts between the two countries may develop on the surface, the relationship stands on a strong foundation.

“We should acknowledge that Germany is actively, very actively, cooperating with the United States on a whole range of counterterrorism issues, particularly in terms of homeland security, particularly in terms of exchanging information,” he said.

Smith agreed and said U.S. and German intelligence agencies have worked well together in the past, especially with the sharing of information about Iraq.

“But the question remains – how will our disagreements over Guantanamo and rendition, which make Germans worried about whether we use torture, affect our intel-sharing relationship in the years ahead?” she asked. “There are some troubling signs.”

Smith added that, despite their reluctance to curb civil liberties, the Germans are taking steps to improve their police forces, intelligence agencies and judicial systems to fight terrorism more effectively. In the wake of the attempted train bombings in 2006, many German politicians called for an increased number of surveillance cameras in public places and renewed the proposal to implement an anti-terrorism database.

On Aug. 21, only two days after police arrested the first suitcase bomber, Deputy Interior Minister August Hanning told the German media the arrest would not have been possible without video surveillance. In another press conference that day, Chancellor Angela Merkel voiced her support for placing closed-circuit video surveillance systems in public places.

In September, three weeks after the first suspect was arrested, federal and state interior ministers agreed to the creation of an anti-terrorism database, and on March 30, 2007, it finally went into effect. Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble called the implementation “a useful, reasonable step which shows that Germany takes the fight against Islamic terrorism very seriously,” Deutsche Welle reported. Supporters of the new database say it will make it easier for police and intelligence agencies to prevent terrorist attacks, but debate continues over whether the database will erode privacy rights.

Like the United States, Germany continues to struggle to find a balance between security and protecting civil liberties. The database is just the beginning, Smith said. “They have made some very important changes in recent years,” she said, “but they still have a very long way to go.”
Side by Side
Religious leaders hope members of diverse faiths can accept differences

BY JOEL GEHRINGER

H

arun Bulut feels comfortably at home and yet, at the same time, uneasily far away from it.

In the basement of Berlin’s Sehitlik mosque on this Sunday night, he and a dozen men, heads covered and shoes removed, crowd in a corner, clutching prayer books and speaking in Turkish about the word of Allah before the day’s evening prayer.

As imam of the mosque, Bulut leads the study group, teaching lessons and peppering the conversation with lighthearted words and jokes.

Bulut’s words and attitude make the session feel more like a casual get-together than a prayer meeting, and the men he leads feel at ease before the official prayers.

Steadily, more members enter the mosque, and when the group reaches about three dozen, evening prayer begins.

Down here, in this sprawling room decorated with blue-green carpet and mural-sized scripture passages, the men feel safe. Inside the walls of Sehitlik, they can go about their sacred business without worrying about who will object or disapprove.

In here, there are only brothers in faith; out there, everything else.

“The mosque is a very big and expansive building,” Bulut said. “The Turkish visit this mosque and feel something familiar. They feel like we are at home.”

Built in 1999, the Sehitlik mosque stands on ground already connected with Turkish heritage. Outside the doors lies the oldest Turkish cemetery in Germany, a relic from the days of the Ottoman Empire. Turkish soldiers who died in World War I are buried here.

When the mosque was planned, Berlin’s Muslim leaders thought no one would object because the area was already inhabited by Turkish Muslim immigrants.

Before evening prayers, men gather at Berlin’s Sehitlik mosque to discuss the word of Allah. Some Germans opposed the construction of the large, ornate mosque, which was built in 1999.
But the non-Muslims did complain, saying the dome of the mosque and the two prominent minarets stood too high to meet building codes—a thinly veiled objection to the mosque’s placement in their backyard.

The complaints from the community wouldn’t stop Muslim leaders from building, however. Sehitlik was a necessity.

“This mosque was built because there was a need for it,” Bulut said. “There are a lot of Turkish Muslim people who want to pray here in a mosque, and it’s a cultural need to build this mosque.”

So the mosque went up in spite of the objections of the non-Muslims. After all, who cares what they think?

In essence, that attitude prevails among all of Berlin’s major religious groups, whether Muslim, Jewish, Catholic or Protestant.

On the surface, each professes a politically correct willingness to work together and settle their differences. But while leaders talk of peace, youngsters attack each other in dark alleys, right-wing fundamentalists terrorize homes and schools, religious leaders try to form shady alliances, and neighborhoods object to a new mosque that might attract undesirables.

Even in a country where secularism reigns and nearly 58 percent of its citizens say they are uninterested in religion, Christians, Jews and Muslims just will not cooperate.

It’s not only a German problem, though. The conflicts exist across the globe, and they often cause much more dire situations elsewhere. Berlin has yet to see the type of violence exhibited in Palestine or Northern Ireland.

But as a newly reunified and freed city in a post-Sept. 11 world, Berlin might represent Europe’s 21st century Petri dish of interfaith relations. As each religion attempts to expand in the city, it must also avoid bumping elbows with and igniting the ire of another.

• The traditions and beliefs of Christianity have slowly slipped out of Germany, the birthplace of Protestantism and homeland of the head of the Catholic Church. This decline has made Germany’s Christian leaders nervous, and they have begun new efforts to reinvigorate the church.

• Turkish immigrants are bringing Islam to Berlin in droves, with about 400,000 immigrants currently living in the city. Muslim organizations want to build mosques for these immigrants, and they want so-called German-Germans to coexist with Muslims without a fight.

• Berlin also hosts the fastest-growing Jewish community in the world, with nearly 12,000 Jews now living here—three times as many as 15 years ago. The number of synagogues, community centers and kosher restaurants in Berlin has swelled. Currently, more Jews are immigrating to Germany than to Israel or the United States, leading some to declare a Jewish Renaissance.

With each community trying to survive and push its own agenda, problems are inevitable. But if leaders and members of these faiths can find ways to settle their differences, the world could look to Berlin as a model for peaceful coexistence.

Religious leaders and experts remain skeptical. Some believe the key to cooperation lies not in reconciling religious doctrines but in getting drastically different cultures to live peacefully side by side.

Bulut says he wants Muslims to get along with others. But he knows some outside the walls of the Sehitlik mosque don’t like him or his people, and while he invites Christian and Jewish leaders to visit the mosque and gain some understanding, he’s not going to jump through any hoops to make it happen.

S tephan Kramer is tired of the questions. Every day, someone asks, “What can we do for you?” or “How can we help you?” or “We feel so guilty. What can we do to make it better?”

It makes him sick.

As secretary general of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, the country’s largest Jewish advocacy group, he constantly encounters German citizens wishing to make up for the crimes of the Holocaust.

“Everywhere I go, and I find this astonishing,” Kramer said about running up against the German feeling of guilt. “I say to young Germans, ‘You are not guilty. There is no such thing as a citizen guilt. But you are responsible for the present and future.’”

In response to those questions of guilt and repentance, Kramer asks people to speak against discrimination and persecution, but he knows few actually will. Kramer himself struggles to do so. A racist joke here, a stereotype there—everyone hears them. Some laugh. Few object.

If progress is being made at all, it’s a slow and painstaking effort.

The council exists for progress, not only among Jews but among Germans in general. Formed in 1950, the organization played a key role in the fate of Jews in Germany after World War II.

Kramer said the council was formed with one goal in mind: Get all Jews out of Germany and leave the country to its Christian roots—mostly Lutherans and other Protestants in the north and mostly Catholics in the south—the way the Germans seemingly wanted it.

“The council was built to close down, switch off the lights, say bye-bye and get the last one out,” Kramer said.

Largely, the efforts worked. Roughly 200,000 to 300,000 Jews lived in Germany in 1945, but in about a decade, only 25,000 to 27,000 remained, and most weren’t happy living in the “house of the butcher.” Those numbers stayed steady for the next 30 years.

But in 1989, as communism fell and reunification of East and West Germany loomed, Jewish leaders decided to save what small religious communities were left in Germany. They looked for ways to encourage immigration, to be sure Jews in Germany would not die out and inadvertently realize Hitler’s goal of a Jew-free country.

When the Iron Curtain lifted in 1989, immigration came almost naturally. Already, Jewish leaders in East Berlin had en-
couraged Soviet Jews to move from Russia to escape outbursts of nationalistic violence, and after the Soviet Union disintegrated, Jews from the East flooded Germany looking for relatives, jobs and a new way of life. In about 10 years, the Jewish population rose to 100,000.

Not all of the Jews were devoutly religious, of course. Community-building became a matter of preserving the Jewish culture, and religion was only one aspect of that. Many of the Jews who immigrated weren’t really Jewish at all, having a distant Jewish heritage or only a Jewish father, not a Jewish mother as required under Judaic law. Some did not practice Judaism and knew very little about their religion, but they came anyway – as an ethnic group.

Christians also experienced problems during this period. The Christian churches of Germany, both Catholic and Protestant, are pseudo-governmental institutions. Germany’s government recognizes the churches as it would any corporation, and in return, Germany’s churches sanction the government, an acknowledgement of Christianity’s historical impact on the country. Members of these churches – mainly Catholic and Evangelical Protestant – pay a special church tax to fund the church as a governing body. The tax waivers between 8 percent and 10 percent of one’s income.

After the war, the numbers of practicing Catholics and Protestants in West Germany dropped, with the sharpest decreases occurring in the late 1960s and 1970s.

In the East, Communist leaders effectively purged religious organizations by denying practicing Christians jobs and education. Active Christians dropped to less than 5 percent of the population. Secularism began to dominate the previously Judeo-Christian Europe as a tide of atheism and moral relativism rose.

By the end of the 1990s, Jews and Christians found themselves moving in opposite directions – the former gaining members and influence and the latter declining and struggling to make up lost income. But on a religious and cultural basis, the two managed to get along. Christian attitudes toward Jews shifted thanks to softening language from the Vatican, and the two cultures realized their shared history and heritage.

But another large religious population quietly existed in Berlin, and neither Christian nor Jew seemed to notice or care until those planes hit the towers across the Atlantic.

Muslims had lived in Germany for decades by 2001, the first large groups coming from Turkey as part of Germany’s post-war guest worker program. Few immigrants actually practiced Islam, and few Christian or Jewish leaders and scholars took notice of or interest in the burgeoning population. Only after the terrorist attacks in the United States did many of the secular Turkish, Arab and Kurdish people living in Germany rediscover their Muslim roots.

Suddenly, the Muslims were everywhere, and now Jews and Christians believed they had to pay attention.

“Dealing with them was the only way to get out of trouble,” Kramer said of the popular perception. “I mean, who wants 9/11 in Germany?”

Kramer admitted that Muslims were included in religious dialogue only after 9/11 – and not so that Jews and Christians could stage theological debates or find common causes with Muslims. The traditional religious cultures of Germany now had no choice but to recognize Islam as both a growing social and political power and a cultural and ideological threat.

As Germans began to see a minority culture they previously had chosen to ignore, Turks and Arabs were no longer Turks and Arabs: Everyone who fit the profile became a Muslim, no matter how little he or she actually associated with the faith. Now, immigrants from the Middle East felt pressure to represent Islam. At the very least, it made Germany stop ignoring them.

“Many people started considering themselves Muslim after 9/11,” said Paul Räther, of the Werkstatt der Kulturen, a community center for cultural minorities in Berlin. “They didn’t think about it before. They would never call themselves Muslim, but then they were forced to do so.”

At first, Germans expressed sympathy toward Muslims, Räther said. But as political rhetoric made “Islam” synonymous with “extremism,” attitudes changed. Suddenly, Muslims had to prove their innocence in the public arena.

“They needed to present themselves as
just people,” Räther said.

And so, Muslim organizations built mosques that actually looked like mosques, where the practices of Islam were put on display. Previously, all but a few of Berlin’s 80 mosques were simply gathering rooms in the back of homes, shops or restaurants. Because these places weren’t obvious places of prayer, Germans got nervous when a dozen Turks would gather in a back room at night and do who-knows-what. The mosques, like the newfound Muslim spirituality, were meant to present Islam to Berlin as non-threatening.

But non-Muslims often ignore those efforts, characterizing the Islamic culture of Berlin as a monolithic, alien force trying to take over the world, ignoring the fact that Turkish Shiites, Turkish Alevi, Arabs and Kurds all fought among themselves. Of Germany’s 80 or 90 Muslim groups, not one could be designated as a leader or representative, because each group stood for something different.

Nevertheless, Christians and Jews knew that Muslims, even without a central leader, had to be included in the religious discussion.

As a professor of religious studies at the Free University of Berlin, Hartmut Zinser has gained a reputation as a man of science.

A wall-sized bookshelf with textbooks and journals and piles of writings and research materials fill his office. Some of the works are ones he has written, like his research book on new religious movements or his surveys of Berlin’s religious landscape.

Over his 20-plus years of studying religion in Germany, Zinser has developed relationships with each of the city’s religious communities and now is frequently invited to be a scientific participant in Germany’s interfaith dialogue meetings.

No one is more disheartened by these talks than he is.

“I have, from all these inter-religious discussions, the impression that one goes there because one has to,” he said. “One speaks and does not hear what the other says and waits for the moment to speak and then leaves afterwards.”

The modern era of interfaith dialogue in Germany originated with American occupation in the 1950s. Authorities from the United States thought it important to force Germans and Jews to educate each other about their respective religions and cultures in order to prevent further violence against religious minorities.

For more than 40 years, those talks remained healthy and beneficial. After reunification, though, relationships began to crumble.

Now, despite the effort each religious group puts into organizing talks and promoting cooperation among religions, very little gets done in areas where understanding matters most.

In recent years, religious talks have struggled from misunderstanding and relentless positioning for power in Berlin. Largely, the conflicts erupt between Christians and Muslims, who both want full rights and freedom to practice and spread their religions while not necessarily recognizing the rights and freedoms of the other. Meanwhile, the Jews participate while maintaining a calculated distance.

Zinser said talks get even more complicated when groups within religions disagree. Certainly Christianity is divided – not only between Catholics and Protestants, but among Lutherans, Reform, Free Christians and others. Because the church is a quasi-governmental organization, plenty of bureaucracy surrounds even the simplest decision. Churches inadvertently drove away members tired of slow responses and meaningless declarations that never truly addressed important issues.

Räther, who often works with minority...
Muslim populations to get them political attention, gets the same impression about today's interfaith relationships. With Christian leaders often dominating the conversation, nothing meaningful gets said by or about Muslim or Jewish issues. Therefore, non-Christians often choose not to participate.

But some Christians argue that Muslims' actions don't necessarily deserve support from Christian churches. Uwe Siemon-Netto, a German and a Lutheran theologian now living in St. Louis, formerly covered religion for German newspapers and said he has seen Muslims walk around spitting on meat in sausage stands and butcher shops. He's also aware of imams who freely pass out Korans to Christian leaders but reject Bibles given in return. Now, more than ever, Siemon-Netto argues, Christians should not relinquish their beliefs.

"The Muslim attitude toward Christianity is exceedingly arrogant," he said. "I have come to the conclusion that most Muslims do not really want to cooperate. They are determined to take over, and if Christians are weak, if their practice is weak and they behave like idiots, then they are only pouring oil on the fire of the Muslims."

Meanwhile, Jewish talks with Muslims are often political peacemaking gestures, not serious discussions about solving the issues of religious discrimination or interfaith education. The Jewish and Muslim faiths have much in common to fight for, including rights for circumcision and kosher food. The two groups have talked about cooperating to push agendas, but talk is cheap: It doesn't have to be pro-Muslim.

"There's lots of problems between even Turkish and Kurdish people," he said. "They just project their local troubles from Turkey into exile in Berlin. And there's trouble between right-wing Germans and all kinds of groups, which is particularly strong in East Berlin. But it's coming into the West as well."

Viewed in this light, Berlin's religious conflicts and, for that matter, religious conflicts around the world seem a bit more understandable. Hating people for their beliefs might not make much sense, but hating them because their way of life disrupts one's native way of life, though not excusable, makes more rational sense and might be a better starting point for solving conflicts.

Perhaps Christians don't have as many
problems with Muslims as Germans do with Turks and Arabs and vice versa. Perhaps Jews receive better treatment than members of other faiths not because their religion is now accepted but because people of other faiths still feel the guilt of the Holocaust. Perhaps Jews abstain from discussion not because they disagree with Christianity and Islam but because they are wary of dealing with two cultures who share equally anti-Semitic histories.

Räther thinks this might be the case, and he offered no real solution to the conflicts – yet. But education, he said, is the first step.

For Muslims, specifically immigrant Muslims, the key lies not only in teaching Germans about Islam but also in teaching Turks about Germany.

“We are all of the opinion that if you live in a different country, you have to learn their culture and learn their language without giving up your own culture and your own language,” Bulut said. “We want to integrate but not assimilate, because the world is for all of us. The sun shines on all of us. We breathe the same oxygen.”

Kramer, too, knows reaching out to mainstream Germans will bolster community relations more than any religious talks ever will. The fight is against extremism, racism and bigotry, not against Christians and Muslims.

“It starts with the evening dinner table with Mommy and Daddy making a discriminatory joke,” he said. “After the joke comes the whole process that goes on and goes on and maybe ends with, ’Hey, why don’t we put them all in prison and after that burn them all up?’”

Some people have already reached out to educate, like Aycan Demirel, a resident of Berlin’s largely Turkish Kreuzberg neighborhood, and Rabbi Henry Brandt. A Muslim him- self, Demirel started a campaign in November 2006 to fight anti-Semitic rhetoric from Turks and Arabs in Berlin. In 2005, Germany’s Central Islamic Council honored Brandt with an award for promoting religious understanding – the first award from a German Islamic group given to a Jewish theologian.

German media outlet Deutsche Welle reported in March 2007 that Mina Ahadi, an Iranian-born Muslim now in Cologne, established the National Council of Ex-Muslims, an organization meant to combat Middle Eastern stereotypes and prove not all people from Muslim backgrounds are fundamentalists.

But arguments and violence persist, and, some say, still worsen. Shortly after creating her organization, Ahadi received dozens of death threats and was assigned a police bodyguard. In May 2006, a neighborhood organization in East Berlin objected to yet another proposed mosque, saying the building would increase traffic and lower property values. In December 2006, Jewish leaders in Berlin reported that violence against young Jews had become a daily occurrence in the streets of the city. A few months later, a neo-Nazi group attacked a Jewish school with gas and graffiti, raising fears and concerns of growing extremism.

In addition, Deutsche Welle reported in April 2007 that four major Muslim organizations in Germany will organize into one large advocacy group, the Muslim Coordination Council. The group hopes to increase the German Muslim political and social presence. It’s considered an accomplishment by Islamic leaders but a threat by many other Germans.

Religious leaders and experts hold out hope that the people of Berlin will eventually accept their differences, but if education is the key to this acceptance, then the religious communities of the city still have a long road ahead.

Religiously, the city might be at peace for now, but culturally, it’s on edge. Bulut said he still holds out hope that cultural groups in Berlin can work out differences. They don’t have to agree, he said, but they do need to live without fear of one another.

“There will always be some troublemakers or some fights, but our aim is to reduce it to a minimum,” Bulut said. “Both countries [Germany and Turkey] have to do a lot of work to live here friendly and to solve these problems. I am of the opinion that not all of the problems will get solved, but it’s getting them on the minimum so we can live here, without fighting, with peace, so we can respect each other and all live here.”

Kramer is less optimistic about the future of relationships between religious groups, but, like Bulut, he said he will continue to do what he can to keep conflict to a minimum.

“My problems are not with those 10 or 15 percent anti-Semites,” Kramer said. “I will not convince them, not even if I take my whole life sitting in front of them. [My problem] is with the majority that is silently standing aside listening. If we do not oppose those Nazis openly on stage and de-mask them with arguments – clear, understandable arguments – at least one out of three of these silent bystanders will think, ‘Maybe he’s right. Maybe these Nazis are right,’ and that’s dangerous.”

As Berliners still struggle with the political and social turmoil of the last 60 years, Germans feel most comfortable with Germans, Turks with Turks, Jews with Jews, Russians with Russians and Arabs with Arabs. Often, the people in one of these groups know only one or two things about the people in the others: the religion they follow and the problems it seems to cause. Until social and political understanding expands, Berlin could continue to face these religious and cultural problems. But if Berliners can work out their differences, then maybe hope exists for Mexican and American, Shiite and Sunni, Israeli and Palestinian.

In fact, some say that of all cultural elements, religions could have the most in common. Faith in a higher power and belief in a set of morals are universal human qualities, and though the faiths and morals differ, they commonly exist to achieve the same ends – peace, love and understanding.

“There is no strong tension between the religions as religions,” Räther said. “There are tensions among people as people, and that’s where we have problems.”

Imam of the Sehitlik mosque in Berlin, Harun Bulut still hopes the city’s cultural groups can work out their differences.
When Florian Leibert arrived in the United States for his semester as an exchange student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, one of the first things he noticed was the churches that seemed to be on every street corner.

The 24-year-old student from rural Bavaria was raised Lutheran but is not religious.

“While in Lincoln, I noticed a lot more Christians than I thought I would,” he said, “and more people with obsolete opinions.”

Alex Ruthsatz, a student in Berlin, also noticed the difference when he visited. When asked how Germans perceive Americans, Ruthsatz’ response was quick: Americans are “very religious.”

Meanwhile, many Americans’ perceptions of Germans would seem to cover much of modern Europe – secular, atheistic and immoral. After all, it was the famed German philosopher Freidrich Nietzsche who declared, “God is dead.”

“Some of them just don’t care about religion or beliefs,” said Tristan Foy, a 22-year-old Nebraska Wesleyan University student who spent his spring 2007 semester in Trier, the oldest city in Germany. “I live in a predominately Catholic area (in Germany), and a lot of people say how they were raised Catholic, but they don’t really have much to do with the church nowadays.”

These views seem strange when one considers that the “religious” United States promises freedom of religion and separation of church and state while “secular” Germany still recognizes Christian churches as parallel governments intertwined with the state.

The Christian Science Monitor reported in 2006 that “there are more theologians in the current German parliament than in any other Western parliament, including the U.S. Congress.”

No one in Germany seems to be alarmed by this, as might be the case if it happened in America. Germans accept religion and religious leaders as part of their storied history and culture. To deny the influence of religion would be to deny hundreds of years of German identity.

In addition, ways of measuring religious involvement differ between Americans and Germans, who believe there are other ways to be faithful than showing up for service every Sunday morning – like paying church taxes, for starters.

Meanwhile, some Germans worry that the rise of ultra-conservative evangelism, an American import, will take advantage of a semi-religious government. At the same time, the churches are resisting efforts by the non-religious to bring Germany into a world of post-religious morals and ethics. Debates rage about which issues and policies churches should have influence over, and some worry the argument could lead to the kind of polarization currently seen in American politics.

But overall, Germans believe religious influences in the government help more than they hurt. Their system demonstrates that a little church in state might not be such a bad idea after all.

Religion looms large in the histories of both Germany and the United States.

The United States traces its roots to pilgrims seeking religious freedom, and the Constitution guarantees freedom of religion and effectively separates church and state. The nation’s founders feared the type of government-church intertwining found in European countries at the time.

Germany’s constitution, on the other hand, includes the freedom to practice religion, but it doesn’t separate the churches from the government. The constitution, first adopted in West Germany in 1949, explicitly says that no state church shall exist, but it also establishes the explicit rights of churches to act as public corporations, give religious instruction in schools, administer hospitals and retirement centers and provide services in prisons and even legislative buildings. The government even protects Sundays and religious holidays as days of rest and spiritual improvement.

Germany’s history as part of Europe’s Holy Roman Empire set this standard for government-church intermingling.

Catholic and Protestant churches ruled much of Europe and contributed
to the development of its nations for centuries, but Germany stands out from the others because it never experienced revolution and re-creation of the government. Germany’s citizens never removed religious leaders and influences from the government, and today the churches maintain an authority that is not allowed in other countries.

“The separation of state and church never really came through,” said Hartmut Zinser, professor of religious studies at the Free University of Berlin. “The churches still have privileges from the Middle Ages that have not been abolished.”

These privileges include the right to levy taxes, participate in parliament and teach religion in public schools. German public school students are even required to take classes in ethics or religion.

In addition, the Bundestag, Germany’s parliament, is currently controlled by the Christian Democratic Union, a political party created by Catholics and Protestants in 1949 to advocate for the churches and their members.

Nevertheless, Germans make a concerted effort to keep religious ideology out of government and politics.

Stephen Burnett, an associate professor of classics and religious studies at UNL, said Germans use much less religious imagery in politics than Americans do—not because they’re all atheists but because they disagree with how American politicians often use fundamentalist and right-wing imagery to justify policies on topics such as war or environmentalism.

“They find such arguments profoundly unimpressive, and German Christians find them downright depressing,” Burnett said.

Politicians use so little religious speech that Germans were shocked when nearly all members of parliament opted to be sworn in under the religious oath instead of the standard oath of office after the 2006 elections.

That “religious” version ends with the words “so God help me” and is otherwise identical to the non-religious oath.

According to a 2005 survey by Cambridge researchers, between 41 percent and 49 percent of Germans claimed to be agnostic or atheist, compared with a 2007 Cambridge survey reporting that 3 percent to 9 percent of Americans hold similar beliefs.

Statistics like these often lead Americans to assume European society is much more secular and less influenced by religious faith or the church.

“I think many of even the religious Germans probably have some relaxed values, perhaps more so than Americans, although it could just be the youth,” said Foy, the Nebraska Wesleyan student. “For example, they may have a belief system that they at least give thought to, but still it doesn’t bother them to cohabitate with a partner.”

But Germans often accuse Americans of immorality and misguidance, too. Depending on how one understands religiosity and the role of churches in society, both Germans and Americans could be right. Even Foy, who said he once believed Europe to be “spiritually dead,” now believes Germans maintain some sort of spirituality and moral code even if they don’t often talk about it.

“You measure religiosity in different ways in America than in Germany,” said Uwe Siemon-Netto, a German and a Lutheran theologian. “In America, 30 or 40 percent are going to church any given Sunday. That is not the case in Germany, where it’s maybe four, five, six percent. On the other hand, [Germans] do bother to pay their church tax, which is significant.”

Siemon-Netto doubted any American...
would be willing to pay an additional 10 percent of their income in church taxes on top of all other taxes.

Even those who don’t believe that attending church or tithing equals righteousness can find measures of religiosity that show differences between American and German culture.

Siemon-Netto cited social statistics from the two countries. Between 1999 and 2004, Germans performed 15 abortions for every 100 live births, compared with an estimated 16 to 20 in the United States, according to the German Federal Statistics Office and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. Germany also experiences only two divorces per 1,000 people annually, while the United States has 7.5, according to the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics. Some American states still use the death penalty; Germany abolished capital punishment in its 1949 constitution. To some, statistics such as these make Germany the more pious nation.

Germans also don’t seem as tied to strict interpretation of scripture as Americans and are more willing to discuss and debate doctrine and theology. Siemon-Netto said German newspapers even run articles and opinion pieces on religious issues, a practice that he says surpasses any kind of religious coverage and involvement by American media.

At the same time, German theologians are less likely to participate in the kind of evangelism seen in some American religious circles. And church members are less likely to participate—or even listen.

“They’re relationship to the institutional church is different than in America,” Burnett said. “In America, if you are a member of a church body, you are expected to give voluntarily, to serve and to participate.”

However, Germans who consider themselves members of a religion don’t necessarily get involved. Many retain religious identification out of tradition, and so even though few actually show up for service on Sunday, a majority still call themselves religious.

“It’s perfectly normal to simply identify yourself that way,” Burnett said.

This phenomenon isn’t exclusive to Christians. Germany’s Jews and Muslims tend not to participate in religious practices, either. However, Germany’s Jewish organizations are not intertwined with the state in the same fashion as Christian churches (though they are allocated taxes in the same way), and the German government essentially ignores mosques and Muslim organizations.

Many Germans associate with their church only by registering with the government and paying their taxes. The process is more structured and public than in America.

“If you choose to identify, as an American, that’s the choice of you and your family,” Burnett said. “That’s nobody’s business. There’s no registration office in Washington, D.C. In Germany, it’s formal. It’s public record. Yet, there is no expectation that church membership requires church attendance.”

Burnett, who has lived in Germany four times since 1984, said the churches he attended averaged anywhere from a dozen or fewer people every Sunday to full congregations. Involvement often depended on the region: Germany’s rural areas have higher rates of religious involvement. Still, he said, nearly everyone seemed to identify with one organization or another.

Because Germans measure religious involvement differently, they tend to assign churches different responsibilities than Americans might. With few people sitting in their pews to preach to and to educate about theology, church leaders have the time (and money, thanks to the church taxes) to promote welfare through social services, spearhead community programs and appeal to the government. Germans view churches less as institutions that exist to guide individuals to salvation and more as vehicles to maintain social order and influence the government.

“The German churches have a tendency to speak out as a kind of liberal conscience of the state,” Burnett said. “They try to call the state to do things on a moral basis. Politicians often ignore them, but it is a way they can make their presence felt.”

After failing to act effectively against the Holocaust and Communist rule, German churches might now feel compelled to speak out on social issues to prevent further failures. With churches lobbying, politicians can leave religion out of their debates and focus on the issues at hand. It’s a much different system than the one Americans know, but some experts argue it works just as well.

Because of the German churches’ role in society, it seems many Germans want churches to stick around even if they don’t want theology in their lives.

“The churches are organizations of social responsibility,” said Zinser, the Free University professor. “It’s a belief we have in Germany, and it’s what Germans say the churches should be doing.”

In fact, some believe churches hold a monopoly on social services because of the sheer amount of work they do running infirmaries, retirement homes, orphanages and historical and modern churches as well as employing clergy and lay people to provide education, healthcare, religious sacraments and social work.

As atheism and non-religious movements grow, some progressive Europeans want to reject this traditional church role in favor of state-administered systems. These ideas, strong in Britain and France, have more support in the former East Germany, where remnants of Communist suppression and right-wing extremism still dominate the religious landscape.

But Germans seem to still want that social arrangement, especially in places like Saxony and Bavaria, where religious involvement remains relatively high and where the government enjoys having a “branch” that believes it exists solely to attend to these responsibilities.

“The German churches are not branches of the civil service, per se,” Burnett said. “They are independent corporations that have special responsibilities and privileges within the German state. But they believe they have these civil service responsibilities to society.”

Even those who call themselves non-religious seem to believe the churches should take responsibility for Germany’s social welfare. The struggle between religion and atheism is over ideology, not the churches’ right to exist. As long as influences of extremism don’t pollute politics and as long as churches continue to provide for society, Germans seem content. Their system represents an increasingly rare remnant of history and serves to remind Europe of its roots. Even now, as secular democracies continue to develop in Europe and elsewhere, the German system continues to demonstrate a unique way that church and state can get along.
As the sun begins to set, purple and blue shadows cover the 2,711 concrete blocks that fill a plaza nearly the size of three football fields.

The gray monoliths, like larger-than-life coffins pushing up and out of the ground, rise irregularly to the sky. Some are only 2 feet high and others nearly 15, and they are placed so close together that only one person at a time can walk the stone-lined paths between.

As you walk through the concrete field, the blocks begin to tower above you. Like a mouse in a maze, you begin to feel hemmed in, uncertain which way to turn. Look up to the fading light, and the uneven ground causes you to stumble. The buildings, the streets, the life of Berlin, so close around you, disappear.

The colorful sunset, visible only moments ago, vanishes. All that remains are the bleak shades of gray.

Some visitors to the Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas – the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe – say that is just the point. The memorial, not far from Berlin’s iconic Brandenburg Gate, evokes to some small extent the disorientation, isolation and fear felt by the Jewish victims of Germany’s Third Reich as they were led to their deaths more than 60 years ago.

As the memorial was being planned and built, many Germans opposed it. The location was too touristy. The memorial was too big. Worst of all, visitors might feel they had now “done the Holocaust” and didn’t need to
Monumental Debate

travel to the actual sites of Adolf Hitler’s crimes against humanity – the concentration camps themselves.

Since the memorial opened in May 2005, however, about 4 million people – Germans as well as tourists – have made their way through the memorial. While these visits may have been easier emotionally than a stop at a concentration camp, it is unlikely that anyone was left untouched by the experience.

As you cross the grid of blocks, they gradually get shorter again, and you can see a staircase leading to the underground museum.

After airport-like security checks, you walk toward the timeline display, which details Hitler’s actions from when he first grabbed power on Jan. 30, 1933. It focuses on his attempts to exterminate an entire race during the 1930s and ’40s. Photographs, often graphic, illustrate Germany’s history during that time: Jews in prison camps. Mounds of corpses being bulldozed into mass graves.

At the end of the timeline you walk into a dark room where dim blue beams of light come up from 15 rectangles in the floor. The rectangles contain diary entries, letters and newspaper articles written by concentration camp prisoners.

You stand in silence, trying to comprehend how something so horrifying could happen. You read the inscriptions with your head hanging low.

One such inscription is a diary entry from Lejb Langfus, a prisoner in a camp in Poland. While imprisoned, Langfus was forced to work in the crematorium until he was murdered in November 1944.

He wrote about riding in a wagon to the concentration camp. Those rides were notorious for killing prisoners by dehydration or suffocation:

“Because the great crush, the mass of bodies pressed together … could keep people … hanging in the air, this made it possible for them to stand for 30 hours. There were no conversations, no discussions … Everyone was only half in possession of their senses due to tiredness and exhaustion. The cramped conditions fatigued and debilitated everyone, and overwhelmed the spirit at the crucial moment. Only once was the door of the wagon opened; in came two guardsmen who, in exchange for wedding rings from the women, allowed them something to drink.”

The dark room, like the entire museum, is silent except for sporadic sighs, gasps and faint whispers.

Family pictures and descriptions of how prisoners struggled to survive during the Nazi rule line the next exhibit. Photographs show grandparents, aunts, uncles, mothers, fathers, siblings and infants. Many of their stories end with only one person left to carry on the family name.

As you leave the museum, you pass a clear box where visitors have left euro bills ranging from 10s to 50s to help with upkeep.

Lights illuminate the stories of some Holocaust victims and survivors in the information center under the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin. The underground museum was a late addition to the memorial.
of the museum and memorial.

You leave the building to face the gigantic stones again. Enjoying the rest of the day seems out of the question. You are sad and disgusted, and you carry with you the thought that the world must never let this happen again.

Even though the memorial and museum are emotionally moving to many people, Stephan Kramer, secretary general of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, believes the concentration camps are more powerful and realistic reminders of the Holocaust.

Planners of the memorial did not involve the council until the last stages of the project, Kramer said, but he opposed it so much he wished he had never been involved at all.

Once the museum was added, Kramer said, he made peace with the “thing,” as he calls it.

The memorial was not built for the Jews, Kramer said, but for the tourists.

“It was made for the major tourists who come to Berlin, who want to see the Brandenburg Gate, have a bratwurst, see the memorial and then it’s done. ‘We’ve done it, we’ve seen it, we’ve had a picture,’” Kramer said. “But it’s not an authentic place. It’s just some concrete pillars.”

To the Jewish community, he said, the true memorials are the places where people were imprisoned, tortured and murdered.

Torsten Gareis, coordinator of the memorial in Berlin, agrees with Kramer to some extent but says the location of the memorial is advantageous because it’s in Germany’s capital, and many tours begin at this area.

Dominique Miethüg, who works at the museum’s information desk, sees the memorial’s location as a plus precisely because it is near other tourist sites. When people visit Germany, he said, they will end up seeing it and thinking of the Holocaust. Tourists can’t really avoid seeing it because it’s near everything and it’s so big, he said.

The memorial is also near the site of Hitler’s bunker. The Soviets, when they occupied East Berlin, destroyed the underground bunker, and it has only been marked by a small sign since 2006. Miethüg believes that being situated so close to where much of the Nazi planning occurred makes the monument’s location fitting.

Many visitors tell him they would rather come to the memorial than go to a concentration camp, he said, because seeing the memorial is easier emotionally.

About 2,000 visitors tour the underground exhibit each day, and the number increases to 3,000 people during the summer, Gareis said. Given the time-consuming security checks at the entrance, that is the maximum number of people who can get into the museum each day.

Despite some Germans’ disapproval, the memorial has been a popular site. Gareis said a majority of the visitors, 60 percent, are German.

Berliner Ursula Menzel, 71, and her son first visited the memorial and information center earlier this year. They had wanted to visit since it opened, she said, to see what type of information was being displayed. As they left the museum, they said they were satisfied with its emotional impact.

“Younger people should be required to visit the memorial for school,” she said through an interpreter, “so they don’t forget the history.”

Kate Saville, 32, of London, walked up the stairs to leave the museum, a somber look on her face. She was deeply moved by the exhibits, she said, but she was not satisfied with the stones’ layout.

“You can’t get lost when all the stones are in a grid,” Saville said. “The artist’s intention was to represent how the Jews felt lost, but we couldn’t get lost at all. It would have been better if they weren’t straight lines.”

Inge Hahn, 38, also of Berlin, toured the memorial to gain a better understanding of Germany’s history. She didn’t find the memorial as powerful as some other Holocaust reminders in Germany, she said.

Hahn has visited two concentration camps and sides with some who complain that this is not an authentic site.

Kramer couldn’t agree more.

“You need the authentic places where you have a feeling – forgive me for being so sarcastic now – you have to smell it, taste it, feel it,” he said. “If you go into one of these old wooden houses where you smell the shoes, the clothes – how it was burning, when it was burning – it is different.”

When you visit a concentration camp, you learn that Kramer is right: No matter what the value of the memorial, walking through a concentration camp is undeniably a different experience.

At the northwest edge of Berlin sits the small town of Oranienburg. It is a short train ride from the center of Berlin, a short train ride tens of thousands of Jews and other prisoners of the Third Reich made in the 1930s and 1940s.

Walking along Oranienburg’s streets, you pass identical, small A-frame houses set close together. All have green yards, many of them fenced and some home to barking dogs or children playing on colorful plastic playground equipment.

Nothing – other than signs directing

A young girl runs between concrete blocks at the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe. Some Jewish leaders have opposed the memorial, saying the site has no historical significance. The memorial was designed by U.S. architect Peter Eisenman.
you to Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp—suggests a Nazi industrialized death factory lies only blocks away.

But when you reach the end of the road, with houses a street-width away, you see the camp. Nigel Dunkley, a tour guide who has led you from the train station to the camp, points out that the road you have just walked is the same route the prisoners took, the same path where thousands of people died just getting to Sachsenhausen.

As you approach the entrance to the camp you see a German phrase welded into the gate’s bars: “Arbeit Macht Frei”—“Work makes you free.”

At Sachsenhausen, the actual concentration camp took up only a small portion of the massive work camp’s grounds. The triangular design of the camp became a model for others: Because the barracks fanned in a half circle near the base of the triangle, guards could clearly see every inch of the camp. Any prisoner trying to escape would be spotted immediately.

Sachsenhausen was designed, technically, to be a work camp, not a death camp. In reality, the distinction simply meant a slower death: The prisoners, forced to work, were fed only 800 calories a day, Dunkley says, and grew progressively weaker. An estimated 23,000 to 55,000 people died here.

As you tour the grim and silent camp, you learn that prisoners typically survived anywhere from three weeks to three months. Inside one of the barracks, Dunkley points to the three-level beds. Three people shared each bed, which meant nine people in a three-level bunk bed.

“Prisoners were only allowed one bathroom break a day, and with their insufficient diet, many of the prisoners were sick,” he says. “People in the top bunk got sick, and it dripped down to people sleeping below them. So none of the levels were very pleasant places to sleep.”

As Dunkley shows you the camp’s jail, he asks you to think about how horrible life must have been for someone who was not only in a concentration camp but also in its jail.

At what remains of the crematorium building, Dunkley explains how some of the troops killed the prisoners.

One room was the site of one of the first gas chamber experiments, he says. Another room was where the prisoners were taken to what they were told would be a medical checkup. When prisoners stood against a wall to have their height measured, Dunkley says, someone in an adjacent room shot them in the back of the head through a hole in the wall.

Dunkley then moves to the crematorium, which holds an original stretcher, no wider than 2 feet. Several bodies were placed on it at once, he says, and burned together.

People who lived nearby remember being unable to get the black, greasy residue of ash off the windows of their houses, Dunkley says. Today, outside the crematorium are two grass squares, each about 5 feet by 10 feet, that cover what were 10-foot-deep pits. “That was human ash,” he says.

Amelia Pitt, 25, of Australia, a member of Dunkley’s tour group, wanted to see a concentration camp because the Holocaust is such a large part of Germany’s history. She and a small group of friends walked silently through the tour. Occasionally they muttered, “Oh, my God,” or shook their heads in disgust and shock.

“I had chills most the day listening to what happened in this camp,” Pitt said. “It’s
different when you hear about the camp than when you are actually seeing it. When you see it, it’s just awful. I just felt sick walking around here.”

At the end of the tour, Dunkley says showing tourists Sachsenhausen is important. Now that they have seen the history firsthand, maybe they will be resolved to never let something like the Holocaust happen again.

Dealing with the past is never easy for Germans, said Miethiug, the employee at Berlin’s memorial.

But he believes the memorial also helps Germans and tourists learn the same lesson they get at camps: History cannot be allowed to repeat itself.

That thought has echoed in the classrooms at school and in the minds of Germans. Slowly, Germans are learning that the past is history and they now need to worry about the present and future.

Irmgard Maria Fellner, chief of staff to the coordinator of German-American cooperation in Germany’s Foreign Ministry, said Germany’s history has made it difficult for many to feel pride in their country.

She remembers when she was young and few people hung German flags outside their homes, something many Americans do regularly. She said it was also impossible to sing the national anthem in public. If you did, you would be called a racist in your own country, she said.

Gradually Germans have come to terms with their past, she said, and slowly it has become acceptable to be a proud German. Just look at the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany, she said. During that time, people could sing the national anthem, be proud of their nation’s team and wave a German flag.

Germans have begun to relax about their identity. They have learned how to deal with being Germans in public and have accepted being Germans at heart, Fellner said.

The country has been known for its World War II education in which students learn about the Holocaust throughout almost every year of school.

Annika Bischof, 23, grew up in northeastern Germany in Beeskow, and remembers all the school discussions, readings and assignments about the Holocaust and the second world war.

“We learned about the Holocaust every day,” she said. “I felt horrible how the Jews in the prisons were treated, and I felt guilty about being a German.”

Since Bischof has completed school, she has realized that she was not responsible for the Holocaust. But Bischof said she and others in her generation are responsible for the future.

Kramer, director of the Jewish council in Berlin, is quick to agree. Holocaust survivors have told young Germans that they are not to blame for what happened in the past. But Kramer reinforces what Bischof has learned in school: Younger generations are responsible for the present and future.

He encourages Germans, Americans and everyone else to confront discrimination of any kind.

Racism isn’t just an event like the Holocaust, Kramer said. It could be something as little as a joke at the dinner table. But even a little joke should be taken seriously, he said.

“After the joke comes the whole process that goes on and goes on and maybe ends with, ‘Hey, why don’t we put them all in prison and after that burn them all up?’

“Stand up, develop your own understanding, become immune against those waves of discrimination.”

That, he said, is the lesson of the Holocaust.
As the rain rhythmically pitter-patters on the white plastic tarps propped up over the fresh produce, Turkish vendors hold plates of sliced clementines, tangerines and oranges and shout for people to taste their fruits.

The rain pools on the tarps, and men periodically reach for brooms to shove the water from the sagging canopies. Booths line the city-block-sized plaza, leaving two aisles barely wide enough for customers and their umbrellas to squeeze through. The customers quickly visit each booth to choose from this week’s offerings of food, jewelry, linens and clothes.

But the weather doesn’t stop customers from their weekend shopping at this market or others like it in this old city district. Turkish restaurants and shops selling döner kebabs — lamb or chicken in a pita, and, some say, the country’s best-selling fast food — share space on the neighborhood’s streets with Internet cafés and thrift stores.

This part of the city is home to some 200,000 Turks, and most of them have carved out lives here where they rarely feel the need to travel beyond the boundaries of this district.

But though they may act as if they are living in Istanbul, they are not. They are living in Kreuz-
Cultures and languages mix in large outdoor markets in Kreuzberg that stretch for blocks. Stalls offer produce, meat, flowers, clothing and jewelry in the mostly Turkish neighborhood of Berlin.
berg, an eclectic collection of rundown buildings and luxury apartments, home to working-class families, affluent young professionals, gays and immigrants. Berlin’s southernmost district, it includes the historic site of Checkpoint Charlie on the north and old Tempelhof Airport on the south.

More than 40 years after the first wave of Gastarbeiter – guest workers – arrived in the country, Turks are less integrated into Germany than ever before, the sheer numbers of them having created a parallel Turkish society within the German one. Many of these Turks were born here; in fact, many of them are second- or third-generation inhabitants of Germany, a country that has never considered itself a nation of immigrants.

They may live and work in Germany. They may send their children to German schools. But they are not – they and the Germans around them will say – German.

Turkish workers began coming to what was then West Germany in the mid-1960s when unemployment had reached an unprecedented low. Of those who were unemployed, officials agreed many were either physically incapable of working or in the process of moving to new jobs. For all intents and purposes, everyone in Germany who wanted a job had one.

So the Turks came. As did the Italians, Spanish, Dutch, Greeks and North Africans. But mostly Turks. They were supposed to stay only a short while to help Germany – and other Western European countries – get through an unemployment crisis, but they did not go home. They became part of what The New York Times, in 1965, called “a great European migration.”

And yet, to a large extent, Germany denied they were there.

“Germany always denied being an immigrant country,” said Aldo Graziani, chairman of Berlin’s Community Foundation, “so there was never talk of creating a program to help with the flow of immigrants.”

Graziani, whose organization serves as an outlet for Berlin’s citizens to discuss community problems and their solutions, said it was the guest worker program that changed Germany. “I always understood Germany’s history as being an immigrant country,” he said, “but that was denied for many decades by many politicians.”

Ahmet Nazif Alpman, the Turkish consul general in Berlin, agreed that Germany has never thought of itself as a nation of immigrants, and that, he said, keeps Germany from recognizing the contributions the Turks have made.

“There’s a tendency to underestimate this role, this positive and contributive role of migrants, who are not guest workers anymore,” Nazif Alpman said as he sat in an antique chair in his canary-yellow living room in Berlin. “People have to understand that we need to live together and not side by side.”

Across Berlin, Karsten D. Voigt, coordinator of German-American Cooperation at the Federal Foreign Office, also agrees.

“We have to accept that we are an immigration country,” he said.

Nazif Alpman looks at the United States, which he believes has more seamlessly integrated immigrants, and wishes Germany could be more like America. But, he said, Germany has not yet reached immigration maturity because of its history of not accepting “the other.”

A simple question, he says, indicates whether Germans are ready to accept Turks in their country: Do Germans see Turks simply as people who moved to Germany, or do they still see them as foreigners?

Nazif Alpman blames the lack of integration on the personal preferences of both Germans and Turks and also on Germany’s immigration policy.

Germany’s Immigration Act, which went into effect on Jan. 1, 2005, is the nation’s first attempt to provide a legislative framework to manage immigration as a whole.

It promotes the integration of legal immigrants in Germany, in part by simplifying the residency permit process – reducing the number of permits from five to two – and in part by focusing on the purpose of residence instead of residence titles, such as students or migrant workers. The act provides for highly qualified or self-employed people to be granted a permanent residence, often referred to as a settlement permit.

Other provisions require new immigrants and foreigners who have been living in Germany to take courses for integration. The courses cover German language skills, history and culture lessons. If immigrants and foreigners don’t attend the courses, they can be fined 1,000 euros, currently about $1,300.
No Place to Call Home

Turkish delight and other snacks are sold in fruit and nut stores in Kreuzberg. Customers meet in the stores for tea and to purchase dried fruit, nuts and sweets.

But the law is ever changing to accommodate immigrants’ needs and abilities.

Chancellor Angela Merkel’s cabinet approved a reform of Germany’s immigration laws in March. Under the new laws, foreigners can obtain legal residence provided they find jobs by 2009 and have lived in Germany for at least eight years – six years for families with children. The draft law stipulates that applicants are not allowed to place a burden on local authorities by seeking additional social service payments once they have found employment.

The reform sets a minimum age of 18 years for foreign spouses to join their partners in Germany, provided the partner is also 18 or older. The newcomer is also required to have a basic knowledge of the German language. Officials said the move was intended to counter forced or arranged marriages.

But some officials in Turkey say the reform violates human rights. Turkey’s Foreign Minister and Deputy Premier Abdullah Gul has criticized the law for requiring a level of language proficiency that could be difficult for some to achieve.

Those laws may be beside the point if Turkey joins the European Union, which the country has sought to do since October 2005. If the country is admitted, Turks can freely come and go from Germany whenever they want.

They will no longer be illegal.

However, many Germans oppose Turkey’s admission to the EU. A BBC article published in 2006 said many Europeans don’t see Turkey as a European nation. Furthermore, the article foresees a wave of Turkish immigrants to Europe if Turkey becomes part of the union.

The influx of Turkish immigrants and the poor economy in Turkey itself could economically hurt the EU, the BBC article said. Also some think Turkey is too big and would try to have too much power within the bloc.

Turkey’s struggle to enter the European Union is as difficult as the Turkish immigrants’ struggle for acceptance in Germany.

But Turks are not the only immigrants in Germany. Berlin alone is home to people from about 190 different ethnic backgrounds, according to Elke Pohl, public relations director for the state of Berlin’s Office of Integration and Migration. But the Turks have tended to live together, in the center of Berlin, where older, cheaper apartments can be found. Such highly concentrated areas, she said, can allow immigrants to think they are still in Turkey.

“It’s not easy to go out and integrate,” Pohl said, “when 30 to 40 percent of your community are non-Germans.”

Because Turks and Germans tend to live, work and go to school separately, they don’t see much of each other. They are left to wonder what the other group is like. When the two groups do briefly come into contact, stereotypes can develop. Such stereotypes can lead to discrimination and racism.

Annika Bischof, 23, of Beeskow, Germany, is a communications major at Coventry University in England. She believes her generation is more accepting of different cultures than her parents’ generation. But still, she said, cultural differences can lead to discomfort.

German men and women, for example, act as equals in their romantic relationships, Bischof said, while in Turkish couples the men seem to have control.

“Germans walk down the street side by side,” she said, “but when I see a Turkish man walking down the street, he is followed by his wife and children.”

Bischof said she also has noticed that Turks often travel in larger groups, which makes some Germans feel uncomfortable; Germans, she said, usually walk alone or in small groups.

For their part, some Turkish people say they have been victims of prejudice from Germans, said Kenan Kolat, president of the Turkish Union. Germans often don’t know what to think when they see Turkish women who wear headscarves and have three or more children in a nation with a declining birthrate, he said. Some think Turkish women’s sole purpose is to bear children.

“One part of discrimination is racism,” Kolat said. “I can’t explain feeling this look in people’s eyes. You can see it in the subway, on the street. The eyes say a lot of things, and we can feel this. German people cannot feel this.”

For Pohl, the root cause of any immigration “problem” is education. Turkish immigrants arrive in Germany with too little of it. Without basic education, she said, immigrants today can’t get jobs, contributing to a nearly 40 percent unemployment rate among immigrants in Berlin.

“Some studies have proven that Germans just don’t like foreigners or ‘the other’ cultures,” Pohl said. “But (according to the studies) if they earned money, Germans would be more able to tolerate them.”

Pohl believes Germans’ inability to accept “the other” may be caught up in the nation’s World War II history. But others think more recent history may also have had an impact.

Gerrit Book, 35, a freelance tour guide with the Goethe Institut in Berlin, said the terrorist attacks on the United States on Sept. 11, 2001, changed Germans’ attitudes toward Turks. Once Germans would
have said “hello” to Turks on the street just as they would to Germans, he said. That changed after the attacks.

“Before, there were Turkish and Arabic,” he said. “But now there are just Muslims. Now people start wondering what’s happening behind closed doors of a Turkish home or mosque.

“Life for Turkish people got difficult after 9/11.”

When it comes to hurdles, there is no barrier like language.

Language, Book said, is an important step toward assimilation into a community. Now, Germany’s Immigration Act mandates that immigrants applying for residency must have “adequate knowledge of the German language.”

If Turks don’t know German, said Graziani of Berlin’s Community Foundation, they will struggle getting jobs, and they won’t be able to intermingle with Germans. In other words, he said, they won’t be able to integrate.

Graziani believes immigrants should prepare more before living in Germany or trying to become citizens, learning for example, how to have a conversation with someone in German.

Kolat, of the Turkish Union, believes the perception that no Turk can speak German is a form of discrimination itself.

He said that when Germans recognize him as Turkish they often compliment his language skills. “They say, ‘You speak good German,’ and I say, ‘You, too,’” Kolat said with a chuckle.

Burak Dimirkiran, 17, studies in a classroom where a majority of the students are Turkish or otherwise non-German. His father lived in Syria, then moved to Turkey and then to Germany. His mother, though Turkish, was born in Germany.

While Dimirkiran acknowledges that many Turks tend to keep to themselves because they haven’t learned German, he is not one of them. He attends a school that teaches in German. And instead of going home and speaking Turkish for the rest of the day, Dimirkiran said he spends time with German friends and continues to speak German with them.

“The language barrier is not a problem for me,” he said.

One of Dimirkiran’s classmates, Damla Sarper, 16, said she, too, is comfortable speaking German because of school and the help of her German friends. Sarper, who wants someday to be a hairstylist, said she knows if she couldn’t speak German, she wouldn’t be able to get a job.

The 2005 Immigration Act also allocates funding for integration courses, which give participants a chance to have German conversations and to learn about German culture and laws.

These are just the latest programs that have been set up to educate the immigrants, said Voigt, of the Federal Foreign Office. Since the 1960s, laws have been revised to be more accommodating to the workers who came to Germany when the Germans sought their help.

When Germany held the 2006 FIFA World Cup, much was made of how enthusiastically the German people flew their flag. But Germans waved other flags during the World Cup games as well, not only banners that represented the teams they supported but also banners that celebrated their ethnic background.

Voigt said, pointing out that he considers himself not only a German but also a European, an intellectual and a Protestant, and that’s just for starters.

Still, as Ahmet Geredeli stands behind a fresh produce stand on a rainy, cold Saturday, he remembers the day in 1970 when he and his parents moved from Turkey to Berlin.

His father was among the 2.1 million guest workers who had come to Germany already by that year. Geredeli’s father, who, like most of the guest workers, didn’t have much of an education, worked as a mechanic.

Geredeli was just 14, and that day, for the first time, he came face to face with people who didn’t want him living in their country. Today, nearly 40 years later, Geredeli said he still feels some Germans don’t want him here.

“They will say things like, ‘Go back to your own country. Your parents are uninvited,’” he said. “But to me this is my home country. Why should I go away?”

“I think it should be a lesson for us that one should not reduce the complexity of human beings to one identity,” Voigt said, pointing out that he considers himself not only a German but also a European, an intellectual and a Protestant, and that’s just for starters.

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“They will say things like, ‘Go back to your own country. Your parents are uninvited,’” he said. “But to me this is my home country. Why should I go away?”

“Renovating the Republic

No Place to Call Home

Pamfily is one of many Berlin restaurants that caters to the large Turkish population.
SEEKING ACCEPTANCE

TURKS WANT TO GAIN CITIZENSHIP WITHOUT LOSING CULTURE

BY KATIE BACKMAN

I imagine that you’ve lived in the same country your whole life. You’ve grown up in this country. You’ve gone to school here. You have found a job and even started your own family.

But none of that matters to the locals. You, your parents, your grandparents weren’t supposed to stay. You were all supposed to finish your work and leave.

But you did not go back. You stayed. You are a foreigner. And to many people here, you will always be one. Some of them even think you don’t belong just because of the color of your skin or your religion. It doesn’t matter if you speak their language because they pick up on your accent.

You are not a citizen. And you are never supposed to seek citizenship.

This is the scenario many Turks living in Germany struggle with every day.

And yet, to some Turks, like Burak Can, a lawyer in Berlin, Germany remains a country of possibilities. It is a country where people like Can have a chance to succeed.

Many of the guest workers who came here more than four decades ago thought the same thing originally: They saw Germany as a chance to improve their lives.

In the mid-1960s, West Germany invited men from Turkey and other countries to come to work – guest workers. Germany had a shortage of workers, and the country needed temporary help. It seemed like a good short-term solution.

But many of the guest workers didn’t leave. They had been trained for the jobs, and the German employers didn’t want to retrain new employees. So the workers stayed. And then their families came.

Today, Turks in Germany are often men and women without a country. They haven’t fully assimilated into Germany mainly because their culture is so different. They feel as if Germany doesn’t want them because they are still perceived as foreigners. And Turkey doesn’t want them back because they are seen as having abandoned their home country.

Such barriers prevent Turkish-Germans, such as Can, who has been a German citizen for 15 years, from feeling

Ahmet Geredeli moved to Germany from Turkey in 1970 because his father was in the guest worker program. Geredeli and his family are now German citizens.
welcome, respected and needed.

“I work in a very conservative profession,” Can said in English, his third language. “When you look like me, with the long hair, and have a Turkish name, people think that perhaps I am not a good lawyer or speak good German because my name sounds strange. It’s not German.

“Germans have an idea about Turkish immigrant people,” Can continued. “It’s that these are only workers, not professional type guys.”

On Jan. 1, 2000, Germany reformed its citizenship laws to try to correct the problems that stemmed from the guest worker program. The families from the guest worker program pay their taxes and abide by the country’s laws. They’re no longer guests.

The reformed laws are an attempt to show that foreigners are welcome if they seek citizenship.

Germany has three ways for a person to become a citizen: by birth, by naturalization and by “right of return,” a route open only to ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe and the Soviet successor states.

Formerly, immigrants couldn’t become citizens unless they were born in Germany and had a German parent — “citizenship by inheritance,” the law called it.

As an alternative, the previous law also permitted a person to have residency for 15 years — though many say that is too long.

Now the laws say that children born to non-citizens in Germany have an automatic claim to German citizenship if at least one parent has lived legally in Germany for at least eight years, rather than the previous requirement of 15 years. Those children will be allowed to hold dual citizenship until they are 23 years old, at which time they will be required to choose German or a foreign citizenship.

About 100,000 children have been born in Germany to non-citizens each year for the past 10 years.

To be naturalized, foreigners must give up their native citizenship at age 23, have a record clean of felonies and be able to support themselves and their families. Applicants must also be able to speak German and know the country’s basic laws.

Some exemptions exist for giving up dual citizenship, such as economic loss of property rights in the former country or unreasonable fees for renouncing citizenship — costs for things like processing and translating citizenship status, marriage licenses and other such legal paperwork into the new country’s language.

In addition, the law is not retroactive. Those who had dual citizenship before the new laws passed are allowed to keep it.

In January 2000 when the new regulations took effect, approximately 3.6 million foreigners had lived in Germany for 10 years or more, which meant they had fulfilled the new eight-year residency requirement, according to the German Embassy.

In 2000, 103,900 Turks obtained German citizenship. The number of Turks seeking citizenship has gradually declined since the new laws have passed.

The reformed law has helped immigrants like Ahmet Geredeli adapt to their new country. Geregedeli immigrated to Germany from Turkey in 1970 because his father was a member of the guest worker program.

His father, like many of the other guest workers from Turkey, didn’t go back. Instead, he began calling Germany home.

Geredeli is a German citizen, and so are his children. He said, through an interpreter, that he wanted his children to have German citizenship because he believed it would create an easier life for them.

“Turkey and Germany are both my countries,” he said. “Turkey is my country of origin, and Germany is my home.”

Geredeli still returns to Turkey to see his family. But, like many other Turks who live in Germany, he has found that he isn’t always welcome in Turkey. To some, he is seen as a person who abandoned his native land.

Geredeli said neither nation fully accepts the choices he has made.

Kenan Kolat, president of the Turkish Union in Berlin, agreed.

“When Turkish people are in Germany, they are foreigners,” Kolat said. “But those same Turkish people who live in Germany are also considered as foreigners to the people in Turkey because those people left their country.”

Can believes it will take years for
things to change. Turks living in Germany still want to feel Turkish, and some Germans still don’t accept members of a different culture.

Can says he shouldn’t have to feel guilty about being Turkish. He said he knows the German language and history, sometimes better than natives, but he’s still not accepted.

When Can meets new people, he said, they usually compliment his speaking skills and ask him why he’s in Germany. He feels as if he has to explain why he’s a Turk living in Germany and how he became a lawyer.

Many Germans see immigrants, especially the Turkish ones, as not being able to learn the language properly or go to university, Can said.

“Sometimes I think the German society will never accept us how we are and who we are, despite that we have been living here for about 40 years,” Can said.

Kolat said many Turks who moved to Germany still have love for and pride in Turkey, and they want to show those feelings by keeping a tie to the country: their citizenship.

This was the case for Can, who had both German and Turkish citizenships before the reform law was passed.

“Having two citizenships is a privilege,” Can said, “and I guess no one wants to give it up.”

Former Turkish citizens who move back can apply for a blue card, which gives them rights similar to citizenship, but they can’t vote or be elected to a political position in Turkey.

Many Germans don’t know what to think about the Turkish culture, Can said. Because of fear of “the other,” he said, many Germans want Turks to give up their heritage as soon as they become citizens. They want them to act more German.

But many Turks may see things differently.

As Can said, “I have a culture, and this culture is not very bad. So why do I have to give up my culture? I am a part of this city. I am a part of this country.”
Klaus Groth teaches his class of 16- to 18-year-olds how to add and subtract fractions at Friedrich Ludwig Jahn Hauptschule. *Hauptschule*, the lowest tier of secondary education in Germany, is the level most Turkish students attend.
BULLET SHELL CASINGS REST ON THE CRACKED SIDEWALKS OUTSIDE FRIEDRICH LUDWIG JAHN HAUPTSCHULE, A PUBLIC SCHOOL IN THE KREUZBERG DISTRICT OF BERLIN.

Tucked between graffiti-splattered brick buildings in this Turkish neighborhood, the aging campus is bordered by a brick fence on three sides. At the front entrance, an iron gate, though securely locked, shakes as teenagers pound its bars and yell.

They shout, they taunt, they laugh.

The students’ brown and black clothing accentuates their dark hair and eyes.

Upstairs, in one of several four-story buildings, students run and shove their way through the light gray hallways. The reflection of two laughing boys is caught by the shattered glass of a stairwell door behind them. Their conversation soon blends in with the many echoing howls of their classmates.

Minutes after the bell sounds, the students finally stumble into their classrooms, doors banging shut and chairs screeching across the floor.

Once inside, they clamber into their seats. They are rarely quiet.

Burak Demirkiran, 17, wipes the board for his teacher.

In a school where Turkish can be heard in the hallways but German resounds in the classrooms, Burak, a second-generation Turkish and Arab immigrant, erases the English words: “Turkey 4 Ever. Fuck off(f) the Rest.”

He finishes his task and takes a seat at a desk two rows back among his Turkish and Arab class-
mutes. The small chair barely holds him.

Burak is perfectly hefty and well-proportioned for a young man recently recruited to play American-style football. A right guard, he is still learning his position because he has played for only a few months.

But, in those short months, he has spent many hours plotting to escape the classroom’s walls. He would rather be on a football field somewhere – anywhere – in the United States.

He looks up college teams on the Internet. He doesn’t have a favorite university, but he wants to attend one – whichever one would take him.

His eyes sparkle when he thinks about it, talks about it, dreams about it.

But Burak will not play football in America. He will not go to university. And, in Germany, he probably will not find a job.

The German school system took shape hundreds of years before the United States’ birth. A land that helped develop the university system and opened its first kindergarten in 1840 also produced some of the most famous musicians, poets and philosophers in the world.

But as of May 2006, Germans awoke to an astounding reality. Contrary to assumptions, in recent years their system had not been producing the world’s top students. In fact, according to a report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, a well-regarded, worldwide study, Germany had fewer students who achieved top scores than 12 other European Union member states.

Using the European standard of free education, which it helped foster, Germany provides three levels of secondary schools for academic or apprentice instruction.

Unlike the educational system in the United States, Germany’s system tests students between the fourth and sixth grades, depending on the policies of each of its states, and uses the results to place students into one of three tracks: Gymnasium, the university track; Realschule, the apprentice track; or Hauptschule, the lowest track.

It is this system that has bound Germany to its current fate.

Education is so decentralized that students in various parts of the country take the test at different times, start secondary education at different grade levels and go through assorted curricula. The system has no home base and no way to identify itself nationally, making country-wide reform next to impossible.

Many, however, believe such reform is necessary.

The German system, purposely or not, seems to assign students to educational tracks based not only on intelligence and skill but also on race.

The 2006 report, which used the 2003 Programme for International Student Assessment results – known as the PISA study – indicated upper level high schools accept proportionately more German students than Turkish students, giving activists for immigrant education the fuel they needed to spring into action.

Within the German high school system, immigrants make up 60 percent of students in the Hauptschule while they constitute only 10 percent of the students in the Gymnasium, the university-bound track. Academically, most students with a foreign background are almost a year behind native German students.

Germany had never prepared to educate children from a different culture, especially one with a different educational philosophy and language. And, despite recent programs designed to bridge the gap, the current generation of immigrant students may be left behind.
Aldo Graziani, chairman of Berlin’s Community Foundation, said Germany was not quick to recognize literacy problems because immigration was not understood as a problem requiring work from both sides.

“We woke up too late,” he said.

Heading to Germany in the 1960s as a part of the guest worker program, these “migrants,” as Germans call them, were supposed to leave when their two-year time-card expired. But when businesses decided it was more beneficial to keep their guest employees than to train new ones, women and children began joining their spouses and fathers in Germany, mostly in Berlin.

In 2005, according to the Federal Statistics Office of Germany, 7.3 percent of Germany’s 82 million people came from foreign countries or were born to immigrants. In 2001 Germany had the fourth-largest immigrant population in Europe. Currently, more than 400,000 of Berlin’s 3.4 million people are of Turkish descent.

Now, decades after the guest workers first arrived, their third- to fifth-generation descendants – mostly Turkish – are still considered “migrants.”

During the past 40 years, as the number of those with foreign ancestry increased, the cultures began to separate. With their own doctors, lawyers and barbers, Turks no longer needed to integrate, and they created an almost parallel society within Germany’s borders.

Without a forced integration of language and culture, Germany and its Turkish population must now work together to find a compromise between necessary integration and complete assimilation.

Graziani said immigrants were never told what they should learn, and they never asked to be taught. And, at this point, it may be too late to help the current population of thousands of students of Turkish descent.

“We need to take care of the second wave of kids so that it doesn’t happen again,” Graziani said. “The problem has such dimension that it is overwhelming to tackle it. Even with the growing initiatives it is not possible. The schools are overstretched.”

In Burak Demirkiran’s math class, he and his 11 peers are oblivious to the realities the 2006 study presented. They raise their hands eagerly to answer their teacher’s questions about the addition and subtraction of fractions and are occasionally scolded for answering out of turn.

“The biggest problem is that for students who graduate from Hauptschule, there are virtually no apprenticeships,” said Klaus Groth, Burak’s teacher. “Even those students who finish Hauptschule and finish with a good GPA are not guaranteed an apprenticeship. But we have to fight this fight ... to give these students a future.”

Kenan Kolat, secretary general of the Turkish Union in Berlin, said 60 percent of Kreuzberg’s population is not of German descent. Kolat’s non-governmental organization strives to represent the immigrant population in Berlin without political bias.

If immigrant students are to find success in Germany, he said, they must be educated with their native-born peers for a minimum of 10 years.

“At this point, “the system is built on German students,” he said.

Immigrants in Germany are three times more likely than German students to drop out of school. In Berlin, the dropout rate for migrant children reached 30 percent last year.

Marianne Demmer has worked in German education for 40 years, 25 of them in the classroom. Though she now represents the Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft, a teachers’ union in the state of Ber-
Failing Grade

lin, Demmer directs her efforts to the needs of small children in the German school system.

The PISA study, which examined the education systems of 41 industrialized nations in 2003, offered Demmer useful evidence for her cause.

“They showed that school systems that are not selective can get good results and are much better in social equity and in the support of immigrant students,” Demmer said. “(It was) the first time we had an argument to say, ‘Come on. It’s illogical to say the system is the best in the world.’ It’s really not true.”

The results also negated any arguments that immigrant students were less motivated than their “German-German,” or native, counterparts. Instead, they indicated that immigrant students were just as eager to learn – if not more so.

Burak Can, 27, is a second-generation immigrant who grew up in Berlin. He attended Sophie-Charlotte-Oberschule, a Gymnasium and, after graduating from Free University in 2003, earned a law degree in 2006. Now a lawyer for a Turkish-German law firm, Can plans to do further study at a law school in the United States.

Can’s success proves that those students considered “Turkish-German” because of their foreign descent can defy the odds, but it does not make Can any less passionate about the school system’s integration troubles as a whole.

“This problem started about 30 years ago, but in only the last part of 10 years the German government said, ‘OK, we’ll have to do something against (it),’” he said.

Fourth-grade immigrant students who lack the German language skills or the parental involvement that are vital for success in the German schools often are academically deprived because of Germany’s three-track system. But one group, the Turkish Parents Association, is trying to change that.

Every day from noon until 6 p.m., the Parents Association devotes itself to the education of immigrant students in Brandenburg, a district of Berlin, by offering a place for students to study after school.

On Friday evenings, they meet to discuss the most pressing topics affecting their children and their children’s education.

They pack into the meeting room as Turgut Hüner, project coordinator, steps to the front.

The goal of the group, founded in 1985, is to speak for both Turkish and native German parents – though no native Germans are in attendance. The organization discusses the challenges immigrant parents face in their teenagers’ education and pushes for a better education standard for immigrants.

For many of the Turkish parents, leaving their homes to support their children’s education is a new idea. In fact, it’s one they have adopted from the German society that surrounds them.

With the school day ending at noon or 1 p.m. in most German states, teachers expect parents to help their children with their studies. While tutors are useful, few Turkish families can afford to hire them.

For these same parents, the idea that their children’s education shouldn’t end when the school day ends is a new concept. In most Turkish schools, it is teachers – not parents – who are responsible for educating the next generation.

Monika Rebitzki worked as a parent educator in Berlin for 23 years before retiring in 2002. In her position, Rebitzki rallied parents behind particular issues in hopes of reforming certain aspects of an unchanging, and formally unchallenged, school system.

She said her biggest challenge is immigrant education, and a lot of the trouble comes down to cultural variances.

“There is another understanding of school, the role of teachers and their role in education,” Rebitzki said. “You can’t say this for the whole Turkish population because a lot of them have integrated and go in this system very well, but traditionally, parents don’t know their role in (educating their children). ... They don’t know why they have to come to school to talk with the teacher and help their children get along in school.”

Jörg Carius’s booming voice reaches beyond his doors and into the entryway of the Friedrich Ludwig Jahn Hauptschule administrative office. He is a native Berliner who grew up in Kreuzberg, attended Friedrich Ludwig Jahn and has refused to leave. Though the last thing he wanted to do was teach, he found his way to the front of a classroom in 1969 and, 38
This “huge problem” is what many Germans call the language problem.

Without proper instruction, immigrant students sneak by in elementary school until they are tested and dropped into Hauptschules. And once they are there, it is next to impossible to move up to the Realschule or Gymnasium level.

Quickly, what started as a language issue turned into much more in many Hauptschules.

In a lot of schools (Hauptschules) it’s a climate of depression, no motivation, sometimes violence,” said Demmer, a teachers’ union vice president. “The main problem is that students in Hauptschule think, ‘We are the losers; we won’t find a job after school,’ and so on.”

To deal with the language problem, Turkish groups have clustered together, creating separate lives, separate communities and a separate society away from German culture and the German language. Their need to speak German is becoming less important outside the schools, making it more difficult within them.

To Graziani, the Berlin Community Foundation chairman, it all goes back to a lack of recognition of the problem by the government and German and Turkish citizens alike.

“The challenge and the requirement to learn the language is diminishing,” Graziani said. “Because of the lack of speaking the language, many (immigrants) have the greatest difficulty finding a job. There is a huge share of young people … who left school and wouldn’t find a job for different reasons, but one of the reasons is the lack of language knowledge.”

In the end, teachers are the ones shouldering most of the blame.

In general their numbers are dwindling quickly, and as German attempts to educate the next batch, it seems they should be reaching out to Turks as well as Germans.

For Rebitzki, a parent educator, the answer to many issues, and particularly to the language issue, is to have both German and Turkish teachers present in the schools. However, finding Turkish teachers is a chore in itself.

Because so many Turkish students are shuffled into Hauptschules, few of them qualify to attend university and earn teaching degrees. This cycle will continue until some sort of compromise is reached, somewhere—a anywhere.

D amla Sarper, 16, a classmate of Burak Demirkiran’s wants to become a hairdresser.

Her mother, an active member of the parent association, said she wants more German-Turkish student interaction for her daughter.

“There are no native Germans,” she said through an interpreter. “This is a problem because native Germans in Kreuzberg do not want to send their children to such a school. So the question is: Why can’t native-born Germans and foreigners go to the same school?”

For Damla’s mother and numerous other Turkish parents and families, the problem is not that they don’t want to penetrate the German social wall. It’s that they can’t.

A lot of the problems are rooted in stereotypes.

Stories of violence in Turkish schools, particularly among the teenage boys, get amplified by media coverage.

The Rüüti Hauptschule in Berlin has a student population that is 83.2 percent non-German. Teachers went on strike in March 2006 to protest violent and uncontrollable students in their classrooms.

Stories like that can lead to widespread false impressions.

Alex Ruthstaz graduated from Rheingau Oberschule, a Berlin Gymnasium, in 2006. One night his friend Lucas was walking home from a party when a Turkish boy approached him. At first Lucas thought nothing of it, Ruthstaz said, since it seemed the boy only wanted to talk. But when they had walked a few feet, more teenagers appeared. Somewhat uncertainly, Lucas continued to walk with the boy toward his friends, but when they reached the group, the Turkish teenagers attacked Lucas, Ruthstaz said.

This story, combined with others like it, has given Ruthstaz a generally negative impression of immigrants in Berlin.

“Almost any time you get in trouble, it is with immigrants,” Ruthstaz said. “They don’t really have to go to school, and they hang around all day bored, so they’re searching for some action. … It’s not that we hate immigrants or something like that, but too many of them make trouble, and one day I think this will be a reason that no one wants to live here anymore or come for a visit.”

Yet the problems go both ways.

Nuri Erberger moved from Turkey to Germany with his parents in 1973 when he was 5 years old. He was fully educated in the German school system.

Erberger’s children are as afraid of German teenagers as Ruthstaz and his friends are of Turkish kids.

“My second child right now also has problems,” Erberger said through a translator. “He was on a field trip with his class with a lot of Turkish kids in West Germany. People walked by and threw rocks through the windows and screamed slurs like, ‘You shitty Turks! What do you want here?’ and,
‘Get out!’

In both cultures, misconceptions are rampant. People form opinions on whim and rumor and jump to unwarranted conclusions. If the two groups are to cooperate, both sides need to be better educated.

Acknowledging their many problems, Germans and Turks alike seem ready for some sort of compromise. Germany may need to restructure its education system, but Turks and other immigrants may have to improve their German language skills to find success.

Yet Can, the Turkish-German lawyer, still questions where to begin. The social problem has become political, and the stubbornness of both sides will make quick change a challenge. To Can, it looks as if the Germans are demanding that the Turks assimilate while the Turks are asking why such drastic actions are necessary.

“This is an issue because it is very hard and very strange to accept for Turkish people,” Can said. “They think, ‘I have a culture, and this culture is not very bad so why do I have to give up my culture? I am a part of this city. I am a part of this country. Why do I have to assimilate?’”

In a small Turkish market at the heart of Berlin, Ahmet Geredeli shouts in both Turkish and German for customers to purchase his produce.

From the look of his dirty clothes and wet brow and the sound of his constant bel lows, Geredeli is a typical Turkish market salesman. That is, until he begins listing his life’s accomplishments. There are four of them, all boys.

Kenan is a 26-year-old engineer, Kerim a 25-year-old accountant and Kadar a 22-year-old university student. Kubra, the 13-year-old baby of the family, is attempting to live up to his brothers’ academic and professional achievements.

Geredeli glows with pride as he talks about each of his sons, smiling broadly from behind the yellow and orange fruit that surrounds him on this rainy January day.

But Geredeli is not the only Turk in Berlin who can cite triumphs like these.

Since the release of the 2006 report, it seems only the negative aspects of immigrants in Germany’s education system have been published. Success stories like the Geredelis’ largely go untold.

While obvious problems still exist and direct causes are difficult to pin down, German and Turkish citizens have begun admitting their weaknesses and, though a little late, have begun to address the causes.

They have realized a little give and take from both sides is in order.

Thomas Isenee, a school teacher for 36 years, said Germany must first revamp its system.

Forget the three tiers, he said. Group the students together and make a more cooperative learning environment.

Isenee taught at Martin Buber Comprehensive School in Berlin, which included grades seven through 13. A comprehensive school is based more on the American style of education, allowing interaction among students at all skill levels.

Isenee argues that keeping students together and creating a more supportive atmosphere is vital to their educational achievements down the road.

“In my personal opinion, this is a process that Germany has to change in all aspects,” Isenee said. “The most important thing is to reduce the selection system because it doesn’t support creative teachers.

You can get rid of the ‘bad boy.’ You don’t have to think about those who don’t achieve in the academic sense.

“As long as they have a chance to get rid of the problem, you can’t solve it.”

Erberger, who has lived in Germany since he was 5, said he and his wife have taken the next step with their children. Opting out of the monoculture school system, they send their children to a double-culture school.

“The school our children go to is really a new thing,” Nur Erberger, Erberger’s wife, said through an interpreter. “It is school for Turkish children, adapted to the German education system.”

With two teachers in the classroom, one Turkish and one German, the curriculum is based on both cultures and both languages, giving the students an opportunity for growth in both arenas.

Nur Erberger said her children feel more comfortable and are more willing to go to school with both teachers present. And, most importantly, they are learning both languages.

“We noticed that Turkish children here tend to speak either German or Turkish,” she added. “We felt our children should speak both.”

Back at the market, Geredeli shares his favorite story about Kenan, his oldest son, for whom he first battled for his family’s educational right.

“The director of the high school told him he should go to another school because of his (intelligence) level, but I said, ‘No. I want him to stay and go to university,’” Geredeli said. “My son graduated with high notes, and the director said he didn’t know Turkish students could do that.”

As for Burak Demirkiran, that stereotype could be right.

Maybe Burak, a student of Turkish and Arab descent, won’t ever play American football. Maybe he won’t attend university and maybe he won’t find a job in Germany. But maybe his children will.
BRIDGING THE DIVIDE
KENNEDY SCHOOL INCORPORATES DUAL CURRICULUM

BY KATELYN KERKHOVE

Students shuffle quickly through wide hallways, passing rows of lockers on each wall. Minutes after the bell has rung, a few teenagers still scurry in and out of Ann Jurewicz’s classroom.

Caroline Meder, 17, tells a classmate not to worry: She still has plenty of time to grab her forgotten book. Ms. Jurewicz is always late.

“Ms. J,” as the students call her, is Caroline’s English teacher. Notorious for her late arrivals to the classroom, Ms. J is beloved by her students, who seem excited by her somewhat quirky personality.

When Jurewicz does arrive – only a few minutes behind schedule – Caroline finds a spot among the students on the left side of the room.

At the same time, April Moeller, 17, takes her seat among students on the right.

April, Caroline and the 15 other boys and girls in the room are all juniors. Around the room posters admonish the students, in English, to be “charismatic” and to act with “integrity.” But outside the wall of windows, a group of third-grade students skips past, their teacher yelling commands in German.

No one inside seems to notice the racket, except one teenage boy sitting nearest to the open window who lets his gaze wander beyond the clear glass beside him.

Jurewicz, as usual, leads the class discussion, but whenever she pauses, students murmur in side conversations in both German and English. A student who poses a question in German is quickly answered in English. Even Jurewicz switches between the two languages at times, though in this class she prefers to speak English.

The line between the students on the left and the right blurs more and more as the class continues: No distinct detail or feature seems to differentiate the students. April and Caroline both chose sweaters this morning, each pairing them with jeans. Their classmates sport similar styles, both boys and girls wearing the latest in Western style clothing.

But even though it’s well hidden, there is one difference. Most of the students on the right side are Americans. Those on the left are Germans.

Nestled in a residential area of the Zehlendorf district, in the southwest corner of Berlin, sits the John F. Kennedy International School.

With its six buildings and 139 full-time staff members, the K-13 school educated 1,701 students during the 2006-2007 school year. April is one of 567 American students, and Caroline is one of 970 Germans. The other 164 are of various nationalities.

The school was established in 1960 as the German-American Community School, a bilingual public college preparatory school, with the hope that if young Germans and Americans were educated together, they would develop a mutual respect and understanding for both cultures and excel academically.

The school was renamed for Kennedy after his assassination in 1963. In 1964 the Berlin Parliament gave theEducational Directorate – the school’s governing body made up of three German and three U.S. government representatives as well as two representatives from the Parent Council – independent management of the school’s educational policies as long as those policies incorporate the standards of both the United States and Germany.

Spots are limited, and students must apply. Most often, American students are accepted first come, first served, but for German students it’s a little more difficult to get in because more of them apply.

April and Caroline would agree that, to some extent, the two groups at
the school are blended: The German and American students work and play together, the teachers share ideas and the two cultures’ philosophies intertwine.

However, from an inside perspective, one gets a different view. Although the Kennedy School strives to erase cultural boundaries, differences still exist. And both the Germans and Americans have found ways to define themselves through philosophies, educational styles and general stereotypes.

After 30 years in the U.S. public school system, Mark Olderog retired from education, leaving Red Mountain High School in Arizona behind. The Nebraska native said he grew tired of the government telling him “how to educate kids.” President George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act was the final straw for Olderog.

Once he retired, though, he knew his career was far from over. Just months later, he applied for the American principal opening at the Kennedy School. His initial interview in the U.S. was far from over. Olderog said working in Germany has forced him to appreciate much about the American system he left behind. The German system requires heaps of paperwork: Dotting every “i” and crossing every “t” takes its toll, Olderog said.

While educational reforms come slowly in the U.S., the process is even worse in Germany, Olderog said. “They aren’t overtly resistant to change,” he said. “They just really have to see the benefit and that it’s not going to create more work and that it will make things better without more details.”

But even with all the details, Olderog has grown to love the Kennedy School. While it is unique for its Gesamtschule standing – meaning it educates kindergarten through 13th grade on one campus – it is not as unique as its international title may imply, he said.

In reality, there are only two cultures in the Kennedy School, making it bicultural, not completely international. However, these two cultures include three groups: the Americans, the Germans and the German-Americans – students with one German and one American parent.

The goal of completely integrating the students is difficult to achieve, Olderog said. For instance, if Americans are transferred to Berlin for business, their children may enter the Kennedy School and take a German language course among their other studies. They will also participate in a program in which they stay with a German family for two nights.

But this does not necessarily complete the bicultural transformation.

“Are they really immersed? No,” Olderog said. “It’s not really bicultural. They aren’t here long enough. And for those who are German-American families, then it’s hard to figure out what to say, culturally speaking.”

Structurally, the Kennedy School separates its curriculum into two tracks: the diploma track, based on the American model, and the Abitur track, based on the German model. The main difference is the philosophy behind the curriculum. While students on both tracks are required to take physics, biology and chemistry, those on the diploma track will take each subject separately. Those on the German-based Abitur track will have a mix of each subject in every grade until they graduate.

For American students to be accepted into the Abitur program, they must have the necessary German language skills. Depending on their fluency, students are placed in groups A through E, a continuum with A meaning fluent in German and E meaning fluent in English.

All German students and 15 percent to 20 percent of the American students at the Kennedy School follow a program leading to the Abitur. By finishing the Abitur, these students only need to take a couple of extra classes to earn their American di-
The benefit of the system is the choice presented to the students and their parents. Depending on where the students hope to attend college – Europe or the U.S. – they can choose the appropriate path.

For April and new student Philip Scott Neuman, having the opportunity to continue work toward their high school diploma made the transition to Berlin easier.

The nine-hour school day, however, did not. Both students had been used to ending their day around 2:30 p.m. in the states.

But with the ability to come and go and to take periods off, options they didn’t have previously, both said they feel as if they are treated with a little more respect by their teachers at the Kennedy School than they were at their American high schools. Overall, the style of the German-based part of the system requires more responsibility from the students, and both April and Philip have grown to appreciate the freedoms that come with it.

“Here, it’s like you walk in late to class, you’re late – but at least you are there,” April said. “You have to take responsibility...
for being late. It gives a lot more responsibility to the kids, which I think is good.”

Like many of the American students at the Kennedy School, April came to Berlin when one of her parents moved here for work. April, whose father is a U.S. diplomat, has moved nine times in her 17 years – from San Antonio to Washington, D.C., to Ireland, back to Washington, to Venezuela, back to Washington, then to Iceland, then to Belgium, back to Washington and then to Berlin.

When she arrived here in August 2006, she decided to finish high school on the diploma track at the Kennedy School because its curriculum continued what she had already taken, and she did not have the necessary German language skills to do otherwise.

Back in class, Jurewicz frantically runs down her to-do list. The most important task of the day is to make sure her students are on track with their next project – writing research papers on novels they have selected.

Well-known titles by American authors ring through the room as students shout out the books they’ve chosen, and Jurewicz makes suggestions.

Moving to a girl named Sophie, Jurewicz says, “Hemingway and the Lost Generation, I think, would be good for you.”

To a boy on the other side of the room, Jurewicz says bluntly, “Dude, I think you can write. I think it’s just the slacker thing that’s the problem.”

Jurewicz’s classroom is similar to many other classrooms in both the U.S. and Germany. It’s filled with posters and books and cluttered with random papers.

She has also pinned a world map to the corkboard on the right side of the chalkboard. Above it is the quote, “Share your possibilities in such a way that others are touched, moved and inspired by your possibilities.”

Jurewicz began her career at the Kennedy School when she taught European history from 1997 to 1999. She said having the experience of living in Europe was important to her success in teaching the subject. She returned to Berlin a couple of years later.

But she said she has found some of her methods are quite different from those of her German counterparts.

Overall, Olderog would agree. The German strategy seems to be more stand and deliver, while the American teachers tend to use more interactive methods and are more willing to deviate from their initial plans, he said.

“We tend to teach the way we were taught,” Olderog said. “The Germans haven’t gone into education and analyzed it the way Americans have. But we probably change too (often) in the United States.”

Caroline and Jakob Thomä, a German student who has attended the Kennedy School his entire academic career, discuss the differences between German and American teachers as they move through the hallways of the science building.

Jakob, 18, jokes about the high-energy American teachers, saying they provide a nice break from the stern German teachers he deals with in the Abitur program. His favorite story to tell, and he whispers it softly as he walks up the stairs, is the one time he made a bet with an American teacher. He can’t recall the details, but the stakes were simple – beer.

Caroline said she likes the structure her German teachers provide, and she also sees a shift in attitude when she steps from a German classroom to an American one.

“The general stereotypes that come with Americans and Germans I realized...
“There aren’t really any stereotypes,” Philip, the new American student, says about the school. “I mean, there are a lot of pretty blonde girls, but other than that we’re all just kids going to school together. Ah, but there are a lot of pretty brunette girls, too,” Jakob retorts, smiling at April and Caroline.

There is a lag in the conversation as April and Caroline roll their eyes and Jakob blushes slightly.

Then he summons up his nerve and continues to make his case by illustrating a picture of Americans from his German perspective.

The first thing he points to is the competitiveness of his American peers. Their must-win attitude, he said, comes from their extremely goal-oriented tendencies. Unlike Germans who seem to be more path-oriented, focusing on the details instead of the ultimate goal, Americans just want to win – right now, Jakob said.

“Sometimes (Americans) can be too competitive,” he said. “And then it gets critical because you can’t play soccer with them anymore because you are worried if you beat them, they are not going to be able to take it.”

Philip laughs. Not a laugh of approval but one of surprise. Jakob’s bluntness, it seems, has caught the new American student off guard.

For many American students, the Kennedy School offers a place to make the transition from one culture to another a little easier. If they have just arrived in Germany and do not know the language, they take classes entirely in English while enrolling in German language courses.

Philip is on Level E, meaning he takes classes that are taught mostly in English as he makes his way to graduating on the diploma track.

Because of the special demands of the bilingual, bicultural educational setting, U.S. high school students applying to the Kennedy School must, as a general condition, demonstrate academic ability sufficient to succeed in the American college preparatory program.

For German students, like Jakob, finding room in the school can be difficult.

In kindergarten, there are 20 designated spots available for native Germans. Jakob said most Americans are accepted since fewer of them apply.

He also said the mix of students has ended up being a positive aspect of his education. Since he leaves the school every day and finds himself surrounded by the German culture, spending a few hours a day with his American friends instead of his German friends has given him a unique perspective.

“It was a good thing because I have many German friends as it is, and there is a different influence going on there, especially because this is an American school in Germany,” he said.

Something very different from American high schools, however, is the variety of extracurricular activities offered by the school. While in the states sports take up much of students’ time, at the Kennedy School it is the Model United Nations, a mock U.N. organization for students, that constitutes the biggest outside activity.

Both Caroline and Jakob, the Ger-

For many American students, the Kennedy School offers a place to make the transition from one culture to another a little easier.

With one of my (American) teachers,” Caroline said. “Every time we come into class, she says, ‘Oh, you Germans, you are always grumpy, always complaining and whining,’ and when I walk through Berlin everyone always yells at me and no one ever says ‘hi’ and smiles.

“I think in the German students you kind of see that attitude, too.”

Jakob sits at a round table in the principal’s office. To his right are Philip and April, and to his left is Caroline.
Y ears collide in Wedigo de Vivanco’s office.

The straight lines of the modern glass coffee table and leather couches stand out against the classically carved wooden bookshelves.

But de Vivanco fits in with these contradictions.

The dean of international affairs at Free University of Berlin, de Vivanco has worked in education for nearly 25 years, spending the last 10 in his current position. But his age, seen in the light gray of his hair and the creases around his eyes, is not reflected in his quick wit and intense gaze.

As he contemplates his position at the university and the decisions that come with it, he chooses his words carefully, efficiently.

He starts by posing questions, rhetorically, to himself.

“What do universities have?”
“What do they need?”
“What is a good university?”

As he considers both the recent struggles of German universities to compete internationally and the selections by the German federal government for the Excellence Initiative – a federal funding project for German universities – de Vivanco begins to rub his brow. It seems the system’s philosophies of the past are colliding with the realities of the present.

Education in Germany has not changed much in the past hundred years but will need to adjust now if it is to earn respect globally. De Vivanco willingly admits that Germany’s university system, with little recognition worldwide and an increasing number of students opting out, is showing signs of weakness. But, even with all his criticism that would follow, at this point de Vivanco refuses to waver on his personal opinion, no matter how many factors are raised against him.

“You have more and more international rankings, and you soon realize that Germany’s were certainly not in the forefront,” he says. “But I still think many of the universities are way above average in their research.”

As with the rest of Germany’s education system, its universities have recently come under international fire. When the Institute of Higher Education released its international rankings in August 2006, Germany’s academic and political leaders did a double take: No German university was among the top 50.

The United States took 37 spots on the list, with Harvard, Stanford and Berkeley claiming first, third and fourth place, respectively. The United Kingdom nabbed five top 50 positions with the University of Cambridge coming in second. Germany’s University of Munich was listed 51st.

Almost immediately, the once premier German universities that had produced some of the world’s top thinkers – people like Charles Darwin, Werner von
A student blows a whistle as she shows a model of a pig, a symbol of the bad economic situation in Germany’s universities. Thousands of students showed up at Brandenburg Gate to protest a lack of funds for education.
Braun and Thomas Mann – seemed devalued, creating a clamor for a solution.

And the solution needed to come quickly.

With the realization of the nation’s global academic deficiencies came the recognition of a brain drain in an already shrinking German youth base. The New York Times reported in February 2006 that recent government statistics showed 144,800 Germans emigrated in 2005, up from 109,500 in 2001. With only 128,100 Germans returning, 2005 became the first year in nearly four decades that more people left than came back.

Even more problematic was the type of people leaving.

“They are doctors, engineers, architects and scientists – just the sort of highly educated professionals Germany needs to compete with economic up-and-comers like China and India,” The Times reported.

Benedikt Thoma, a 44-year-old engineer, told The Times, “I asked myself, ‘Why should I stay here when the future is brighter somewhere else?’”

Economics play a role in the recent brain drain, but many Germans also perceive a degree earned abroad to be more valuable. The number of students attending university in Germany has tripled since World War II, but it is still below those of other European nations. According to Germany’s Federal Statistical Office, 359,000 new entrants applied for their first semester during the 2004-2005 school year, but only 344,500 did so for the 2006-2007 school year.

But the issues within the university system come from more than a waning interest in higher education and the outsourcing of the brightest German minds to more publicized universities in the United States and Switzerland.

What it comes down to is a severely stratified and often unequal system in grades K-13. And the decentralization that has developed because of different ideals in the various states has created a lack of funding. The combination of these factors has forced many students to find “better” opportunities elsewhere.

Just as top medical and scientific researchers in Germany choose to work at independent research institutions instead of universities, students are choosing to attend universities outside of Germany.

For de Vivanco, what the system requires is what an upper-level scientist would require of his aspiring students – to ask the “naive” questions, which may have already been answered but need to be rethought.

“To be challenged all the time makes one think, ‘Well, I really misjudged one of these things.’”

Historically, the decision to attend university in Germany was based more on socio-economic factors than on academic performance.

This mentality still pervades the German system today: The three-tier high school system that shuffles students into the Realschule, the general education, or lowest, track; the Realschule, the apprenticeship track; and the Gymnasium, the university track, still allows injustices to occur.

Hauptschule students are usually poor or from immigrant descent, according to a 2006 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development report, which included results from the 2003 Programme for International Student Assessment. Immigrants, in fact, make up 60 percent of Hauptschule students but only 10 percent of students in the Gymnasium, the report indicated. Many experts say it isn’t a lack of motivation or intelligence that causes the trend but rather an unconscious bias toward those of non-German descent.

Marianne Demmer, vice president of a German teachers’ union, said it’s a lack of opportunity caused not only by differences in skill but by prejudice and cultural differences.

Once students take the placement test, they are tracked into a certain high school level where moving up is not nearly as easy as moving down. Without their parents’ support, good German language skills or the money for tutors, immigrant students slide easily into the Hauptschule with virtually no hope of climbing out.

The problems that permeate the system today have been the same for the past 30 years – meaning Germany is stuck, Demmer said.

“Since that time the German school system tries to modernize from the bottom instead of from inside the school system,” she said. “But the main problems in Germany are the same all the time.”

Afraid to allow a certain group or individual to dominate a field after World War
master’s in an additional three. The objective was to make the degree more transferable to programs outside of Germany, most notably in the United States.

For Kehr things worked out well, but he still saw some flaws as Giessen tried to move forward.

“I know some people that wanted to go to our sister school in Wisconsin, but the U.S. school didn’t recognize their bachelor’s because they had only taken six semesters and the school required eight,” Kehr said. “So everyone says (the change was) nice – it makes things easier – but it’s still not working completely.”

As de Vivanco continues to discuss the situation as it affects Free University, he concludes decentralization of the system is to blame.

“Everything is fairly decentralized,” he said. “After last year, the change in basic law underlined (that) the federal state is responsible, not the federal government, and that the federal states object to any interference by the federal government.”

What de Vivanco is conjecturing is not a new idea. After Adolf Hitler’s regime it was easy to understand why Germans would want education to be as far from the realm of the federal government as possible. Schools had been the breeding grounds for future Nazi leaders, and the brains that had developed the gases for mass killings in concentration camps had come from Germany’s very own scientists and universities.

A guilty conscience that was not easily soothed resulted in the decentralization of German states, a move that was made even easier because of Germany’s history. Dating back to the Holy Roman Empire, Germany had been a land of small states, based on different leadership and philosophies.

At this point, many experts and academic leaders in Germany and abroad believe that reform at the university level is necessary nationwide and that achieving consistency may require federal help. In the U.S., 80 percent to 90 percent of the applied research is done in university labs, allowing students to constantly question the older generation and forcing forces to be reworked and advances to be found almost by mistake. But many of these labs are headed by universities looking for quick results, and minds aren’t always allowed to wander into the complete unknown, de Vivanco said.

In Germany, most research is done at independent societies, places not necessarily governed by the need for fast results. These research institutions – like the Max Planck Society – receive federal funds, giving them benefits that state-funded universities do not get. In total, only one-fifth of the German Ministry of Education’s grants go to universities while the remainder go to independent researchers.

This enormous lack of funding at the university level makes it difficult to gain international recognition. While societies like Max Planck have been lauded for their achievements in scientific research, a relative dearth of research in universities isn’t helping build Germany’s higher level education reputation. In many instances, top scientists leave their positions at universities for independent research societies that provide better facilities and more time to devote to research, meaning students may not be learning from the best in their field.

Without ways to tie university programs together and without the federal government’s ability to force or, in most cases, even suggest ideas for improvement, German universities are struggling to find their way in a world moving rapidly toward globalization.

The most obvious way for the federal government to contribute is through funding, de Vivanco said.

A free university system is difficult to support when the states attempting to fund it are struggling economically. Germany’s federal budget deficit reached 3.2 percent of its gross domestic product in 2005, putting it above the 3.0 European Union standard. While it improved to 2.1 percent in 2006, finding sources of revenue has become difficult to say the least. And keeping professors on board but requiring them to do more teaching and less research leaves them uninspired in some cases. And their equipment is far from top of the line.

The United States “devotes twice as much of its income to universities and colleges as Germany, mainly because of high private spending – and bigger donations,” The Economist reported in December 2006.

The financial frustrations of administrators and professors have caused a sharp drop in the number of professors at the university level, and retaining faculty remains a challenge because of the strict rules that guarantee a position for no more than five years at a time.

“Professors’ salaries and pension payments are all funded by taxes, which is a real danger in a place like Berlin since the Bundestag is bankrupt and has an 80 billion euro deficit or so,” said Stephen Burnett, a UNL professor and expert in early modern Germany. “The same is true for universities in places like Hamburg and Bremen. Even
in very wealthy states such as Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg, professors are very expensive to pay, and they do not even have enough of them — at least by our standards — to provide enough classes to meet student demand.”

With little money rolling in, universities have no money to give out, making need-based university-sponsored scholarships practically unheard of in Germany. While some private and public institutions grant scholarships to individual students, few donations support scholarships through universities, de Vivanco said.

The reason for this isn’t necessarily that people don’t want to give, but they may not even consider it an option since it has not been widely done historically.

Private donations have always been difficult to attain because the wealth base was periodically destroyed by wars.

“They basically turned everything with value to zero — it was crazy,” de Vivanco said.

Burnett said he recently discussed the funding issue with Detlef Jucker, a professor at the University of Heidelberg. Jucker told Burnett why German individuals and businesses have not been generous in their giving to higher education: German universities have no tradition of keeping in contact with alumni and, even if prior students had been willing to give, the post-World War II generation was the first to accumulate wealth.

“After World War I there was a period of hyperinflation in the early 1920s that wiped out the savings of many Germans. Then there was the Great Depression. Then there was World War II and the damage it caused to physical property,” Burnett said. “Then in 1948 there was the currency reform where new German marks were issued and the old ones were not worth anything anymore. So the American-style idea of approaching wealthy individuals and encouraging them to donate to universities is a relatively new one — and one that many German professors find very distasteful.”

Offering hope in a dismal financial situation is Klaus J. Jacobs, a German-born Swiss billionaire. Founder of the Jacobs Foundation, which aims to develop younger generations through achieving long-term structural and attitudinal changes, Jacobs in November 2006 donated 200 million euros — then $250 million — to a private university in northern Germany. The endowment to the International University Bremen, which will now be named Jacobs University Bremen, is the second largest ever to a German university.

The initial 19 million euros a year will go to the development of research and training programs within the university’s curriculum.

One of the only universities in Germany to offer bachelor’s and master’s degree programs like those in the United States, JUB gives students better international opportunities because their diplomas are more respected worldwide.

Alexandra Delvenakiots, Jacobs Foundation communication officer, said Jacobs believed in what the institution was trying to do and that’s why he chose to support it.

“They had to focus and change the system and change the way they finance the system,” she said. “Now, it doesn’t matter from which financial background students come from. If you get accepted by JUB, and you say you don’t have the money, you can get additional scholarships — extra help.”

Opened in 2001, JUB educates more than 1,000 students of 85 different nationalities a year, something that also appealed to Jacobs. JUB offered something unique, not only to Germany but to Europe as a whole, Delvenakiots said.

But also unusual was the donation itself. Fear of influence from private donors has made administrations wary of taking donations, but Jacobs has set out to change that mentality, saying he wants nothing to do with changing the curriculum or methods of teaching within the university.

“As a foundation, the return on investment that we have is the possibility to say, ‘Let’s give it a try and give money and help (JUB) survive and develop.’” Delvenakiots said. “Mr. Jacobs is really keen on using his contacts and every occasion to speak about this and to say this is really necessary. This doesn’t mean that you want to try to get better than public universities or change the system but to become an additional method to offering an education.”

Overall, the financial backing provided by the Jacobs Foundation is another way to make sure the next generations receive more globally recognized degrees.

“The aim is to educate young people to become competitive,” Delvenakiots said. “You have to offer smaller classes and high language skills and practical teaching, not teaching stuff that you wouldn’t use later in life. We have to focus on some things that will prepare people for future questions and challenges.”

Wile Delvenakiots said studying in Europe was attractive, Sean Hang Edmond Wong, 29, said it was necessary for him to not only move from Canada to Europe but to move to a specific German university.

Born in Hong Kong, Wong became a Canadian citizen in 1993. He attended the University of Toronto and earned an honors bachelor of science degree in 2003 in materials chemistry.

The University of Toronto ranks 24th on the list of top 50 universities and provided Wong with what he considers positive experience and the best place to study the sciences in Canada.

“The university atmosphere was quite good,” Wong said. “I enjoyed it because it is quite a good place for research.”

Wong went on to earn a master’s degree in inorganic chemistry at Toronto in 2004. Now, three years later, he has completed the doctorate. But for this he decided to move to Germany.

Wong said the expertise in his area of study – 3-D photonic materials – at the University of Karlsruhe made his decision to study there a fairly easy one: the equipment and funding, better than in other parts of Germany, at the university and research institutes — Centre for Functional Nanostructures and the Forschungszentrum Karlsruhe GmbH — were added perks.

What the University of Karlsruhe has over other universities in Germany is the monetary support of the federal government.

Enacted in 2005, the Excellence Initiative was the federal government’s attempt to improve two major shortcomings of Germany’s university system. Through funding it set out to develop internationally competitive research in university programs and to make German institutions of higher education internationally ranked.

Through two rounds of competition, the federal government is spreading 1.9 billion euros through three lines of funding for research programs that will end in 2011. After accepting more than 600 applications, three organized commissions and one committee went through a detailed process to select the honorees, announcing the first round on Oct. 13, 2006, and the second round on Jan. 12, 2007.

“We give the money to the universities, and they develop a project with the research institutions,” said Andrea Ruyter-Petznek, the federation representative for the initiative. “The universities are the ones who hand out the money to cover the research institutes’ costs for participating in their projects. So they (universities) have a lot of money and can say, ‘Come, you can work with us and get part of the money. If you don’t, we will get somebody else to work with you.’”

Overall, 62 graduate schools earned first-line funding, which averaged about 1
million euros. With this money, the graduate programs at the respective universities are supposed to structure programs in research across a broad field of science.

The second line of awards, averaging 6.5 million euros, plus a general allowance of 20 percent for indirect expenses, went to 57 “excellence clusters.” These clusters are meant to bridge the gap between independent research institutions and universities through special research topics. The hope is to provide educational conditions and career opportunities for the students in their facilities, networks and collaborations.

The final line of funding went to eight “future concept” universities – including the University of Karlsruhe and Free University of Berlin. The reward is 21 million euros plus a 20 percent general allowance for indirect expenses. To earn this award, the university must also have won one research school award and at least one “excellence cluster” designation while also setting out to develop competitive research for long-term projects.

Wong has benefited directly from the initiative’s developments.

“The immediate benefit I received after the technical training courses allowed me to work more independently with lasers and optical equipment in a manner that I was not able to before the training,” Wong said. “The access to management schools will allow me to expand into the business part of science which, for me personally, is highly desirable.”

But the initiative immediately stirred some controversy. First, the name “excellence” somehow became “elite.” Kehr, the UNL biochemistry student, said he doesn’t know how it happened, but the difference is huge in a country with a Nazi elitist past.

“It’s not that I’m against this initiative,” Kehr said. “But you have to think about how you introduce and what you call it. You also shouldn’t be basing excellence on money.”

There was also a regional controversy connected to the initiative because the three largest first-round winners were all located in southwestern Germany with only a handful receiving funding in Eastern Germany.

Even worse, people noticed that the soon-to-be-funded universities had not been picked on potential only but also on their ability to sustain the research they would begin with the federal funding after it ran out in 2011.

De Vivanco, who led Free University during the initiative process, said the reason for the commotion has to do with state versus federal government control issues. The states only agreed to the federal funding project if the funding was ended by a certain date. To protect its own interests, the federal government then had to choose universities that had the potential to carry on their programs after 2011.

Before awarding the third line of funding, Ruyter-Petznek said the panel of judges considered the monetary status of the universities since the federal government was investing so much money. However, she added, it was not a deciding factor.

Whether or not the process was completely fair, the result is an opportunity for at least some institutions to spark research inside the university system, move up in the international rankings and attract more students to German universities.

With this process, the trends of a shrinking youth base could begin to reverse, but it will require a compromise between the states and federal government from the high school through the university level.

For Wong, like for the creators of the Excellence Initiative, it comes down to money.

“At the end of the day, I think German universities are already quite good,” Wong said. “The problem is that they do not receive any tuition and endowments like North American universities. I feel that this has put them in a slight disadvantage. However, despite receiving less funding, the personnel, teaching and research is just as good.

“So I think in the long run, with more funding, German universities will get even better.”
At 7 p.m., Dr. Nicola Dankelmann’s day is coming to a close. Sitting down in her second-floor private practice in the southwest section of Germany’s capital city, the 45-year-old gynecologist has had a long day. On top of seeing her patients, Dankelmann spent extra time catching up on paperwork, now strewn across her desk in uneven stacks. Her voice, though pleasant, hints at fatigue.

Dankelmann, however, cannot call it a day just yet. After all, not everyone in the room is tired. For Paulie, it’s as if the day is just beginning. Dankelmann’s 5-year-old son gleefully bounds around the homey, yellow-and-white office, jabbering continuous streams of monologue, eager to make himself the center of attention.

As Paulie begins to perform his signature antic of the night – cracking imaginary eggs over his mother’s head – the doctor snaps into mom-my mode: Gamey playing along, Dankelmann crinkles her face in disgust as she pulls the gooey “yolk” out of her hair.

For her, making the transition from the world of reproductive health to a 5-year-old’s fantasyland is all in a day’s work.

But Dankelmann is something of an anomaly...
German women have a hard time balancing career and family life. The German school day ends at 1 p.m., and many women are forced to give up full-time careers to be at home with their children.
Germany’s dilemma is that it needs a higher birthrate – these children will replenish the workforce years down the road – but many women are reluctant to have children because they want to work themselves.

“We need children,” Dankelmann said. “That’s a fact. And we need children in good families, so we have to do something.”

Held said that although women are increasingly taking on the dual role of mother and careerist, the prevailing German attitude toward these do-it-all females is tepid approval at best and downright rejection at worst. Germans even developed a unique, derogatory word to hurl at working mothers: Rabenmutter – raven mother – a woman who flies away from home and hearth, neglecting her children.

“I get enraged when I even hear that term,” Karoline Beck told Spiegel Online, a German news magazine, in September 2005. Beck, a 39-year-old single mother and self-made businesswoman, continued: “It shows me we really haven’t emancipated ourselves from the Third Reich mentality where mothers were expected to stay home and bear the next generation. These days, no one has to stay home to do the wash. There are machines for that.”

Statistically speaking, though, it’s clear that washing machines are not doing the trick for most German women. Particularly revealing are numbers from the business world, especially the top tiers of large companies. According to a report released in 2006 by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, women occupy just 24 percent of senior management positions in the private sector. Although the statistics from middle-management positions are more heartening – females hold 41 percent of those jobs – an undeniable glass ceiling exists for German women working in large companies.

“They’re not very strong in the business community,” said Michael Cullen, a German historian and regular contributor to Germany’s Der Tagesspiegel, a liberal newspaper based in Berlin.

The ceiling also extends into academia: Although 50 percent of university graduates are female, fewer than 10 percent of tenured professors are women. Such lopsided numbers do not reflect a lack of motivation, though. The German government’s most recent statistics show that just 5 percent of women want to be housewives.

Despite the dismal figures, however, it’s not all gloom and doom for Germany’s women. Today, they are increasingly able to balance work and children. In large part, the country’s heightened focus on gender equity comes from the very top tier of leadership. Chancellor Merkel, the first woman to head the German government, has subtly pushed women’s issues up the political agenda.

“I think she’s changed family politics,” Held said. “That’s something I really give her credit for.”

Although Merkel rarely deals directly with women’s issues, her pick for family minister, von der Leyen, certainly does. Von der Leyen, a mother of seven, is driving efforts to create a family-friendly Germany by promoting higher capacity day care centers and providing “parents’ money” for Germans, which since Jan. 1 grants women up to 1,800 euros, or about $2,400, per month to stay home with their newborns for a year. After the mother returns to work, the father can stay home for another two months and continue to receive the monthly benefit. In theory, the program will prod women to return to work faster than they would under Germany’s generous maternity leave policy. Finally, some Germans say, the government is showing support for working mothers.

“This is a big, big step, which is definitely different from the Social Democratic government that we had before,” said Katharine Walther, the deputy managing director of the European Academy for Women in Politics and Business, which promotes family-friendly policies. “And, I think, it is a message for the whole society that we have a female chancellor.”

Von der Leyen told The New York
German Family Minister Ursula von der Leyen is looking to lead Germany toward new family policies.

*Times* in 2006 that her experience at Stanford University in Palo Alto, Calif., in the 1990s sparked her desire to improve Germany’s treatment of women. In California, she said, her colleagues didn’t blink an eye when they learned of her multiple children. But back in Germany, when her boss heard she was expecting a third child, he told her she would be too drained to work. Her experience reflects the difference between the two cultures’ treatment of women. Although the situation is far from perfect in the United States, to some German women, it looks like American females have it easy. “It’s definitely harder in Germany than in the U.S.,” Walther said.

The two sides of Germany’s governing Grand Coalition have different takes on the role of women in society. While Germany’s Social Democrats are fairly receptive to policies that make it easier for women to be part of the workforce, von der Leyen’s agenda has drawn criticism from her party, the conservative Christian Democratic Union, which historically promoted a “traditional” family structure with a breadwinner father, a homemaker mother and well-groomed children. But no longer can Germany afford to virtually force women to choose between children and work, a situation that is one cause of the low birthrate. For this reason, policies that integrate women into the workforce are crucial.

The roots of gender inequality in Germany stretch back to the beginning of Adolf Hitler’s reign in the 1930s. After gaining the right to vote in 1919, women flourished in the Weimar Republic, making advancements in the arts, education and politics during Germany’s experiment with democracy. But as Hitler gradually consolidated power and eventually became chancellor and then *Führer* in 1933, German women saw their rights slowly contract. Bit by bit, women were put in their place. Hitler’s government tightened abortion laws, which had been liberalized during the Weimar Republic. Nazi leaders discouraged women from working outside the home by creating financial incentives and health care benefits for staying home. They deflated the feminist cause, calling for women to serve only as loving mothers and wives.

“During fascism, women were not allowed to work and had to be mothers,” Walther said. “This was their achievement in life. Still now we try to overcome this, but it’s still there.”

Aware that such policies might anger the sophisticated Weimar women, Hitler and his aides sought to glorify the so-called female role. In a 1933 speech, Joseph Goebbels, Nazi propaganda minister, said, “The first, best and most suitable place for the woman is in the family, and her most glorious duty is to give children to her people and nation, children who can continue the line of generations and who guarantee the immortality of the nation.”

Always eager to promote a master race, Nazi leaders claimed that by choosing “pure” German husbands, women were serving their country. In 1933, Hitler launched the Law for the Encouragement of Marriage, which allowed newly married couples to obtain a government loan of 1,000 marks. For each child they had, the couple’s loan debt decreased by 25 percent. That meant if a couple had four children, their debt to the government disappeared.

In 1949, four years after Germany’s crushing defeat in World War II, the mount-
ing Cold War split the country by ideology. Along with different economic theories came different ideas about the role of German women: In the democratic West, where capitalism flourished with the help of Marshall Plan money, many women retained their roles as homemakers. In the East, however, communist leaders tried to boost productivity by encouraging women to work outside the home. And it wasn’t just empty talk—Eastern leaders followed through by building and supporting a strong, high-capacity day care network across their half of the country. Although many of these child care centers closed their doors after the Berlin Wall fell in November 1989, the eastern part of Germany still has a better day care system.

In East Germany even women with children commonly worked, Walther said. “That is still kind of a structure left from that time. There is still child care. Not enough, but still, there is this history.”

After East and West united, the Eastern side’s support for working mothers was eclipsed by a resurgent belief in stay-at-home mothers, and German women were left with little governmental or societal support. Even now, Walther said, the shadow of Nazi sexism looms large. “It’s a long way to change the mindset, of course.”

In addition, many young Germans embrace traditional gender values. Rather than rebelling against stereotypes, up-and-coming Germans seem determined to follow conservative rules, experts say. Ulla Bock, a sociologist at the Free University in Berlin, told Time Europe magazine in March 2006, “There are these weird breaks in the emancipatory progress, and we are in one. There are more and more young people who want to live according to the old values.”

A recent study commissioned by Germany’s family ministry confirmed the conservative revolution: It found that even couples who believe in gender equality are likely to take on traditional gender roles when their first child is born. With this attitude prevailing, the road ahead for aspiring working mothers looks even rougher.

Many German women believe that it’s the country’s weak day care system that cripples their efforts to become working mothers. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development reported in 2001 that Germany’s day cares have enough slots for fewer than 10 percent of the children up to age 3, compared to 64 percent in Denmark, 34 percent in Britain and 29 percent in France. Responding to the deficiency, the German government in April said it plans to triple the number of day care slots for children under 3 to 750,000 by 2013. Although the boost would be a massive improvement for Germany, it would only bring the country up to Europe’s average child care capacity, which provides slots for 35 percent of young children.

The day care problem does not plague Germany evenly. In the former East and in urban areas such as Berlin, the problem is less pronounced. Dankelmann, the gynecologist, said Berlin’s child care system is strong compared to what exists in Germany’s less populous areas. “In big cities, it’s quite normal that women always work,” she said. “And in other regions or smaller cities, many of the women stay at home.”

The day care problem is compounded...
Angela Merkel is the first female chancellor of Germany, but many wonder whether a childless former scientist can empathize with the struggle many German women face: balancing the demands of a career and a family.

by the structure of Germany’s half-day school system. Although the popularity of full-day schools is rising – partly because studies have shown that all-day schooling leads to higher test scores – school days ending at noon or 1 p.m. still dominate in Germany. Such scheduling complicates things for German parents, many of whom cannot afford a nanny and lack child care options. In many cases, a stay-at-home parent is a necessity.

Almost every time, it is the mother who takes on that role because a stigma exists against stay-at-home dads. Although von der Leyen has tirelessly pushed for fathers to become more involved in housework and childrearing, most German men cringe at the thought of domestication because they fear they will lose credibility at their jobs. Held, director of the Leo Baeck University, said society does not yet accept men as full-time fathers.

“Here, you would really be looked down upon,” she said. “Someone would say, ‘Oh, that’s probably someone who’s not really too interested in his career. He just wants to spend more time at home and reading.’ They don’t really see how much work it is to stay at home and take care of your children.”

Marcia Moser, a graduate student in women’s studies at the Free University of Berlin, agreed that German men are far from being integrated into childrearing.

“It’s a problem of social respect,” she said. “Many men who want to stay at home say they are not taken seriously from their colleagues.”

Also controversial is Germany’s maternity leave policy, which allows women to take three years of unpaid leave after having a child with the guarantee that they can return to work for the same employer. On its surface, the plan seems to offer women flexibility without the risk of losing their jobs. Dig deeper, though, and the plan’s faults are glaringly obvious. As Walther of the European Academy for Women put it, the policy is misleading: Although mothers are guaranteed a job when they return, they are not necessarily guaranteed the same job they left behind.

“You can’t hold that position free for three years,” Walther said, noting that women often do not realize they might be demoted as a result of taking maternity leave. “They are not aware that it is a total break for their careers.”

Not only do many women lose high-status positions when they have children, they also lose respect. Before they have children, few German women report overt discrimination at work. After women start a family, it’s a different story. Walther said women with children have to work twice as hard to prove themselves.
They have to emphasize that they’re still interested and ambitious,” she said.

The German workforce is treacherous even for women without any children. For starters, the wage gap between men and women is one of the biggest in Europe. On average, German women working full time are paid 23 percent less than their male counterparts. Among European countries, only Germany, Britain, Slovakia and Estonia have wage disparities greater than 20 percent. In the United States, the difference is about 23.5 percent.

To offset corporate discrimination, German women are formulating alternative plans for making money while raising children, the most popular of which is part-time work. Women hold 85 percent of all part-time jobs, and one-third of all employed women work part time. Wältcher said research done by the European Academy indicates that both women and men who have young children prefer that the woman work part time, the man full time.

“The majority of people, and men, do want women who have a profession and work,” she said. “But a lot of them think that it’s better that she does this only part time. The (number) of men who say, ‘No, I want my wife to stay at home when we’re having children’ is declining.”

Another option is self-employment, which has increased among German women by 60 percent over the past decade, twice the rate of European women as a whole. One such self-employed woman is Dankelmann, the gynecologist in Berlin. In some ways, her experience showcases the benefits of self-employment. She has no male boss to answer to and no colleagues to compete with. Through medical school and years of private practice, she said, she has never felt slighted because of her gender. Had she chosen a different path, though, she said the situation may have been different.

“I never felt any discrimination,” Dankelmann said. “But I was never thinking about getting a chief position in the hospital. In other areas, it’s harder.”

In some ways, Merkel’s position as chancellor reflects how deeply conflicted Germans are about the role of women in society. Although Merkel is a shrewd politician, the media coverage early in her term centered on her clothes, makeup and haircut.

“There was, of course, that unpleasant debate in the press about Angela Merkel’s personal appearance,” said Geertje Huen-dorf, a public affairs representative at the U.S. Embassy in Berlin. “However, it seems like this is not an issue the press plays with any longer.”

Why the change? Reportedly, Merkel spruced up her haircut and freshened her makeup to blunt the criticism. That her appearance was even an issue, though, shows that some Germans still do not take working women seriously, just as some Americans prefer to chat about U.S. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi’s designer clothes rather than her policies.

“That’s a sign of macho society,” Held said. “It’s totally ridiculous.”

Merkel even struggles to gain the support of her fellow German women. For her, there has never been such a thing as female solidarity. During Merkel’s run for the chancellorcy, Alice Schwarzer, Germany’s most prominent contemporary feminist, gave Merkel a warning face-to-face: “Dear Ms. Merkel, show us women that you too are a woman. Of course, you’re welcome to wear pantsuits and play the male lead in the party. But please don’t forget about our concerns.” One way Merkel responded to this was by appointing five women to her 15-person cabinet.
Schwarzer’s concerns mirrored those of many German women who wondered if Merkel, a childless former scientist, could really empathize with the struggle to balance work and family. One of Merkel’s biggest critics was Doris Schröder-Kopf, the wife of her rival for the chancellery, incumbent Gerhard Schröder. Before the election, Schröder-Kopf griped that “Frau Merkel doesn’t represent most women’s experiences.” To some German women, this observation rings true.

“I do not relate to her,” said Cordula Von Hinuber, a 28-year-old event planner in Berlin, commenting that as a woman who hopes to marry and raise children someday, she doesn’t see Merkel as the ideal female leader.

On the flip side, though, many German women credit Merkel with putting the debate out into the open. Moser, the graduate student, said the Schröder-Merkel race thrust family politics into the spotlight.

“I think the fact that it’s discussed so much shows how much the people need to reflect on that,” she said.

Gender politics seep into other facets of German life, including military policy, which holds that all men are required to serve while women are not. Even though the rule is a holdover from the Nazi era, officials from the Center for the Transformation of the Bundeswehr said that women are excused from service because it is the “gentlemanly” thing to do. Capt. Friedhelm Stappen, the center’s commander, said that women make up just 5 percent of the professional military, and most of them work in medical services. Even Germany’s strongest feminists, though, aren’t fighting tooth and nail for the chance to serve in the military.

Moser said, “My opinion is this regulation is a clear (positive) privilege for women.” She added that instead of discussing whether women should be required to serve, the national debate centers around whether the army should become volunteer-only.

Old ideas about marriage linger as well, said Marcus Heithecker of Germany’s Welt, a moderately conservative newspaper. Just as an American woman is said to “expectations of family members to restore the family’s honor, which these women allegedly tainted by adapting lifestyles too Western.

One of the victims was Hatin Surucu, a 23-year-old Turkish mother who abandoned her Islamic head scarf and took classes at a technical school. After she began dating German men, her family decided that her way of life was simply too corrupt, and police believe that her three brothers shot her to death at a bus stop in Berlin. Pataya, a Turkish women’s group in Berlin, has on record 40 similar “honor killings” in Germany since 1996.

Officials and citizens remain concerned that these murders represent an out-of-control, abusive patriarchal outlook that goes unquestioned in the Turkish community. Spiegel Online reported that a 14-year-old Turkish boy responded to the killing of Surucu by saying, “She deserved what she got. The whore lived like a German.”

Frightened that such comments reflect the broader mentality of Turkish men, European Union officials have mandated that if Turkey is ever to join the union, it must improve its treatment of women. Cullen, the historian, said he believes such political pressure will improve day-to-day life for Turkish women in Germany.

“They’ll have to come up to snuff,” he said. “The Turkish men are very macho, and women are kept very, well, in the dark.”

Walther, of the European Academy, isn’t so quick to point fingers. True, she said, some Turkish women are treated poorly, but German women don’t escape these problems, either.

“We also have a lot of German women who are treated badly by their men,” she said.

Because Germany’s aging population has led to a demand for young workers, the integration of women into the workforce is no longer a question of “if,” it’s a matter of “how.” Without a doubt, the biggest question is how Germans will overcome the old adage of the “three K’s” - Kinder, Küche, Kirche (children, kitchen, church) – that traditionally defined the role of women. Academics and everyday women alike want to see family politics taken more seriously.

In addition to taking gender inequity more seriously, Cullen suggests there is more than one way to look at the issue. Although it’s nearly universally agreed upon that working women in Germany face a bumpy road, the situation is not wholly the result of sexism, he said. Perhaps women don’t want to spend their lives climbing the corporate ladder.

“In Germany it’s a middle-of-the-road kind of thing,” Cullen said. “Maybe they don’t want to be the chairman of the board or chief executive officer. Maybe they don’t strive for that kind of job because you never have the chance to breathe, or read, or go for a walk.”

True, not every woman wants to be a CEO, but many German women do hope for the chance to be like Dankelmann, who maintains a successful career and motherhood could be a challenge.
On many counts, the European Union’s 50th birthday party was a smashing success. Held in Berlin in late March, the two-day “Europa-fest” marked the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome, the EU’s founding document. With a dazzling array of art and history exhibitions, musical performances, speeches and food booths featuring trademark items from EU countries, the event was supposed to invigorate European pride. By day, about half a million visitors drank and snacked on a smorgasbord of European favorites, including Austrian Sachertorte, Latvian barbecue and Czech beer. By night, they gazed at a postcard-perfect fireworks display over the Brandenburg Gate. To appeal to young people, event organizers planned “European Club Night,” during which 27 of Berlin’s clubs represented the 27 EU states. All night long, club-goers hopped from country to country, dancing to British techno pop one hour and Luxembourg hip-hop the next.

As thousands of people from all corners of the EU ambled along Berlin’s streets that weekend, it seemed that the “European Idea” – a concept of economic integration as an antidote to war – was alive and thriving. At the very least, enthusiasm about the EU seemed stable.

But after the birthday bash was over, polls told a different story about the EU’s popularity. Appearances, it seemed, had been deceiving. Post-celebration, many European newspaper reporters agreed that the excitement was generated by the gala’s events rather than pleasure with the EU’s progress. Increasing controversy over enlargement, the EU constitution and institutional gridlock has fueled skepticism among many Europeans who feel that the union is detached from citizens’ everyday lives.
In particular, attitudes toward further EU expansion are souring. According to a 2006 Eurobarometer report on attitudes toward EU enlargement, 66 percent of German interviewees disapproved of further union growth. In addition, current leaders in France, Germany and Austria have shown a strong distaste for more expansion. Because of this stream of negativity, some believe the EU is at an impasse.

“It is at kind of a standstill in the sense that many European people think that we need to take a deep breath and deal with the countries that are already in,” said Gary Marks, a political science professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the former director of UNC’s Center for European Studies.

With the pace of EU enlargement finally slowing, Europeans are forced to wrestle with the institution’s future. This fork in the road is illuminated by the EU’s relationship with Turkey, whose bid to join the union is symbolic for many reasons. Like many Eastern European countries, Turkey is poor and populous, characteristics that are threatening to Western countries leery of immigrants. Perhaps more alarming to the EU’s leaders is that Turkey is 99 percent Muslim. In a union searching for identity, such a strong Muslim presence jeopardizes what little commonality the Western countries share – namely, their Christian roots. And admitting Turkey also would raise questions about Europe’s geographic boundaries. Where, people ask, does Europe end?

“A lot of people say Turkey isn’t in Europe, it’s in Asia,” said Gerritt Book, a freelance tour guide in Berlin. “If we let them in, then where do we stop?”

Of all the EU countries, Germany’s position in this debate is uniquely sensitive. With a Turkish population of nearly 2 million, Germany must balance the need for domestic stability with skepticism about Turkey’s EU viability. Already, German-Turks are growing restless with Germany’s cold shoulder toward Turkey, which they say indicates a deep prejudice against Muslim countries. Some have even developed an eye-for-an-eye attitude toward the EU.

“There’s a great anger,” Safet Cinar told Exberliner magazine in January. Cinar, the spokesperson for the Turkish Union in Berlin-Brandenburg, continued: “The Turks say if they don’t want us, then we don’t want them.”

Many in Turkey wonder whether EU membership is really worth all the fuss. Maybe Turkey would be better off without the stringent economic regulations that characterize the EU and that some Turks believe will lead to its downfall.

“The result of globalization will force the EU to its knees,” said Burak Can, a Berlin lawyer of Turkish descent. “So, why become a member of an organization which cannot compete with globalization?”

The European Union came of age slowly. In one sense, a deep fear of Germany spurred its creation. Under former Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, West Germany’s war-torn economy generated momentum in the spring of 1950. Seeking continued success, Adenauer’s government– backed by Britain and the United States– pushed to reopen two steel mills in eastern Germany.

The prospect appealed to the devastated western regions of France and Belgium, which could profit from coal sales to the mills. For Holland, the mills meant a shipping surge to their struggling ports. And for Germany itself, rebuilding wasn’t a question of if but rather of when and how.

“Germany had the largest industrial base of anybody in Europe,” said Thomas Borstelmann, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln history professor. “You couldn’t pastoralize Germany the way the Russians wanted to do. … You couldn’t make Germany a farmland.”

Still, though, many Europeans – particularly the French – flinched at the combination of Germany and powerful steel mills. With memories of war fresh in their minds, Germany’s neighbors feared even the slightest sign of consolidated power next door.

Perhaps most afraid of reindustrialization – and enormously guilty about their military past – were the Germans. Although some established business communities and lingering nationalists promoted rapid redevelopment, most Germans approached
A
t with wary hearts.

"Since World War II, Germans have been profoundly ambivalent about building German strength in any way because they're incredibly aware of their history and very guilty about it," Borstelmann said. "The German psyche is traumatized by World War II, definitely."

From this fear and guilt emerged the idea of a united Europe that ensured the best of both worlds: prosperity and peace. Economic integration would bolster European economies and, theoretically, preclude vicious warfare because economically interdependent countries would hurt themselves by attacking their neighbors.

"It would be very hard for countries with common markets to go to war with one another," said Eric Tillman, an assistant professor of political science at UNL.

Put another way, economic coopera-

tion would boost Europe’s power while also checking Germany’s.

Many German experts share that view. "I think that the EU was very much designed to mediate Germany’s power in a concert of nations so that it wouldn’t be too strong and carve out a role for itself," said Michael Cullen, a German historian and regular contributor to Germany’s Tagesspiegel newspaper.

In the spring of 1951, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands solved the steel mill conundrum by forming the European Coal and Steel Community, which sparked fast-paced European unification. In 1957, the same six countries signed the Treaty of Rome, establishing the European Economic Community. In 1973, Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom joined. Greece became a member in 1981, and Spain and Portugal joined in 1986. Finally, in 1992, the Treaty of Maastricht officially established the EU, composed of these 12 countries.

The European dream, it seemed, had become a reality.

Although daily conversations about the latest news from Brussels – the EU’s headquarters – are uncommon on the streets and in the subways of Europe, the union’s omnipresence is evident in other ways. Easier travel among member countries, many Europeans say, is the body’s greatest triumph. West German native Anna Held, executive manager of the Leo Baeck Summer Institute, said it’s exciting for Europeans to travel to nearby countries without the hassle of showing identification or filling out paperwork. After all, she said, these places are no farther from Germany than Iowa or Kansas are from Nebraska. Thirty-one-year-old Held said she can’t even remember a time when she had to stop at border checkpoints.

The switch to the euro further enhanced the ease of travel. So far 13 EU countries have adopted the new currency, and the rest are on track to do the same. Book, the freelance tour guide, remembers the first time he traveled after the currency change, a seamless trip from Germany to Greece.

"I put my passport and ticket on the check-in counter, and they didn’t want to see my passport," he said. "They just looked at my ticket. I got off the plane, took a cab and didn’t have to change money."

Although the EU provides these conveniences, it sometimes fades into the background of everyday life. Just as Nebraskans sometimes seem insulated from Washington’s cutthroat politics, Europeans don’t necessarily keep track of the ins and outs of the EU.

"In 95 percent of the cases, the EU is just not there," Cullen said. "It’s present like the weather. You really don’t notice it until it gets crazy."

The biggest problem, Cullen said, is the disconnect between average Europeans and officials in Brussels. Many Europeans believe EU politicians ignore the man on the street, Cullen said, and some average citizens scoff at laws so specific that they regulate such things as the size of condoms and the curvature of cucumbers.

"They have regulations about the size of an apple, the curve of a banana – really stupid things," Book said.

EU member states often capitalize on such complaints, blaming Brussels for local problems the same way American senators blame Washington for state troubles.

"It’s a little bit similar to the U.S., especially in the currently approaching presidential campaign, when a lot of people run against Washington," said Thomas Risse, a trans-Atlantic specialist from the Free University of Berlin who currently works at Harvard. "A lot of policymakers (in Europe) campaign against Brussels, which is painted as distant, detached and ineffective. They want praise for their own policies rather than give Brussels the credit."

For their part, EU citizens remain unsure about whether to identify themselves as Europeans or nationals of their home countries. The results of a 2004 Eurobarometer survey showed that 42 percent of Europeans over the age of 18 identified solely with their home country. Fifty-eight percent said they felt at least some European identification.

Another remarkable feature of the EU is the willingness of its member countries – with the exception of Britain – to cede national sovereignty for the greater good of Europe. Many Americans cringe at the thought of sacrificing the slightest bit of sovereignty to a multi-national organization, whether it be the United Nations, NATO or the International Court of Justice. For this reason, Germany’s willingness to work through the EU boggles the minds of many Americans, who would consider a common U.S.-Mexico-Canada governing body not only laughable but also degrading.

For Germany, though, it’s a different story. EU membership offers Germans immense psychological relief. It’s a way, UNL history professor David Cahan said, for them to escape their Nazi past, making it easier for them to cede a little bit of sovereignty.

Risse elaborated: "Germany, in that sense, is totally different from the U.S.," he
said. "Germany was prepared to give up its sovereignty. Germany has learned to pursue its interests through the EU."

And not only is Germany willing to meet its goals through the EU, it’s also willing to share the credit.

"If we get what we want, we’ll raise the French flag – and wave it twice,” said Karsten Voigt, coordinator for German-American cooperation in the German Foreign Office.

Clearly, then, the EU excels on many fronts. At the end of the day, despite complaints of administrative red tape, pointless regulations and excessive expenditures, most EU citizens praise the organization.

"I think the EU is great because you have total free movement within Europe, and that is a huge advantage," said Viola Drath, a longtime German journalist in the United States. "You can really move around Europe from country to country without interference."

There is, of course, a darker side to the European dream. As the EU rapidly expanded, adding 15 countries between its founding in 1992 and 2007, it lost its economic and cultural homogeneity. What resulted was a union splintered by wealth and different levels of modernization.

"When you look at the broader EU, you’re talking about a huge population and big disparities in cases like economic development,” said Tillman, the political scientist. "As it stands, you kind of have a two-tier European Union."

In a way, then, countries such as Turkey, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Albania and Macedonia – the seven countries on the EU’s waiting list – worry leaders because their membership may mean increased immigration from poor countries to wealthier ones. Countries such as Germany and France worry their relatively strong economies will entice poor EU citizens to immigrate in large waves. Basically, some European countries – particularly Germany – do not want any more immigrants.

But this prejudice against foreigners deepens the economic woes of countries like Germany, which face aging populations and low replacement rates – problems legal immigration can fix.

"They (Germans) want it both ways," Cahan said. "It’s complex ... They want a dynamic economy, but a lot of them don’t want too many foreigners to come into the country."

Power distribution within the EU is another concern. From the beginning, the Franco-German partnership formed the heart of the European commitment, and both countries wielded great influence in the union’s early days. But rapid expansion spread power thinner, diminishing Germany’s clout.

"Before, when the EU was 15 countries, there was hope that France and Germany would lead the EU,” Cahan said. "But new countries were added that were poor Eastern European countries. Both French and German power in the EU was diluted. ... This kind of split the EU."

In a sense, this divide within the union has caused the current standstill. The enlargement question splits European officials and observers, who take sides in what Washington Post correspondent T.R. Reid, in his book, The United States of Europe, calls the "broader" versus "deeper" debate. Supporters of the "broader" approach continue to pursue EU expansion, whereas "deeper" advocates seek greater EU involvement within the existing states. As always, money is a concern: Financial limitations are a major barrier to further growth.

"The incorporation of the Eastern European countries in the last years has already been too expensive, and nobody knows how to pay for it," said Hartmut Zinser, a religious studies professor at the Free University in Berlin.

For Cullen, the German historian, the "deeper" approach makes the most sense. If the EU doesn’t slow its expansion, he said, it risks legislative paralysis.

"It’s probably reached a point where it is somewhat muscle bound," he said. "It can’t move because it is so big and so strong. The thing is that so many things need unanimity. That means some things are very slow."

From the first days of Germany’s EU presidency in January 2007, German Chancellor Angela Merkel moved enlargement down the priority list, instead focusing on revitalizing discussions of a European constitution. This move fueled speculation that Merkel – who until her election as chancellor touted a “privileged partnership” with Turkey rather than full EU membership – opposed the integration of a Muslim country. In addition, some people interpreted Merkel’s complaints in August 2006 that the European constitution draft failed to reflect Europe’s “Christian roots” as an insult to Turkey.

"How should a Muslim country identify with the EU when its constitution is based on the Christian religion?” said Can, the German lawyer of Turkish descent.

Another reason, Merkel emphasizes Christianity, he said, is to promote a cohesive European character.

"I think she wants to give EU countries and citizens a feature they can identify with,” Can said. "She wants to create a feeling of 'togetherness' among the EU citizens.”

In the process, however, Turkey and other Muslim countries are being left out in the cold. Dubbed a “Christian club” by
some, the EU to date includes no Islamic countries. The resistance to admitting a Muslim country is causing anger among some Turkish Muslims living in EU countries, who resent the rejection of Turkey based on religion.

“We are not monkeys,” said Ahmet Nazif Alpman, the Turkish counsel general in Berlin. “We are human beings, and they have to understand we can perfectly integrate (into) the European Union.”

Negotiations between Turkey and the EU are already almost three years old. Membership discussions were officially launched in October 2005, but friction over human rights abuses, freedom of speech and Turkey’s domestic policies strained the process. Tensions boiled over in December 2006, when EU officials partially froze Turkey’s membership talks after Ankara refused to open its ports and airports to traffic from Cyprus, which it refuses to do until the EU helps to relieve the Turkish Cypriot community’s economic isolation. Although the European Commission produced a regulation in 2004 that would instigate direct trade between union countries and the Turkish Cypriots, the Cypriot government has refused to adopt the ruling.

In March 2007, EU-Turkey membership talks resumed. Although German officials said they hoped to open several new chapters of negotiations – 35 of which are required for full membership – Turkish officials and citizens seem increasingly disillusioned. Most recently, Turkish leaders expressed hurt over not being invited to the EU birthday party in Berlin, arguing that an invitation would have illustrated once again the unity of the European family.

Disillusionment, it seems, goes both ways. Germans, too, seem increasingly reluctant to embrace Turkey as a potential EU member. Some people worry that Germans’ attitudes toward Turkey are based on their impressions of the nearly 2 million-member Turkish immigrant population in Germany. This may lead to a mistaken belief that the culture of the immigrants mirrors the culture of modern-day Istanbul.

“They (Germans’) view of Turkey is influenced by the immigrants here – people out wearing a head-scarf and not very skilled,” said Held, the West German native. “People who come here from Turkey are shocked to see the sort of (immigrant) people who are backward or backward thinking.”

Some Turks’ accusations against the EU question the moral character of its members. Perhaps nothing would hurt today’s Germans more than associating them with Hitler’s ideologies, but strains of his beliefs are evident in the EU’s treatment of Turkey said Sedat Laciner, director of the International Strategic Research Organization, a Turkish think tank based in Ankara, Turkey.

“Not only Hitler but also almost all European countries were racist,” he said. “And now the new Europe is being established on the differences between the religions.”

Compounding the problem of religion is the problem of size. Currently 71 million people call Turkey home, and in the next 20 years that number will increase to 80 million to 85 million. By comparison, Germany, currently the EU’s most populous


state, claims 83 million people today, but that number is expected to drop to approximately 80 million by 2020. Because Turkey is so large, it would carry significant voting power in the Union. The established members – particularly Germany and France – fear granting so much power to a populous country rooted in values so drastically different from their own.

"These countries do not want Turkey to dominate the decision-making process," said Fatma Yilmaz, a Turkish researcher at the Ankara think tank.

A March report in The Economist echoed Yilmaz’s statement: "Many Germans note with horror that, if Turkey ever joins, it is likely on present demographic trends to become the most populous member by 2020, with more voting weight ... than Germany," the article said.

In both Turkey and the EU countries, Turks are divided as to whether their nation should join the union. Can, the Berlin lawyer, said the majority of Turkish people living in Germany feel unwanted by Germany and the EU. Through the EU negotiations, they say, Germany is showing its true colors.

“They think Germany – their home country – does not accept any ‘different’ people with different cultures even though they helped to rebuild the country," he said, referring to the 1960s guest worker program that brought the first wave of Turks to Germany.

For other Turks in Germany, rejecting EU membership is one way to salvage some dignity in the face of constant discrimination from non-Turkish Europeans.

“They feel niedrig (low) in Berlin,” said Ibrahim Avlar, a Turkish travel agent in Berlin’s Kreuzberg district, in Exberliner magazine. “Refusing membership is a way for them to keep their pride.”

Can said he thinks Turkey should stay out of the union because its strict economic regulations would cripple the country’s future. It would be pointless, he said, for Turkey to join an organization that is struggling economically. Instead, Turkey would be better off deepening its cooperation with the United States and mid-Asian countries like Azerbaijan, Israel and Kazakhstan, he said.

In Turkey, the results of a November 2006 poll by the Turkish think tank showed support for EU membership to be around 50 percent. Reasons for supporting accession vary. Researcher Yilmaz said she would like to see Turkey join the union only because it would trigger internal economic and political reform. Dilara Tahiroglu, who moved to Berlin from Turkey a year ago to get her master’s degree in economics, echoed Yilmaz’ comments.

"The important thing is that Turkey changes," she told Exberliner magazine in January.

Laciner, of the Turkish think tank, said he doesn’t care whether Turkey joins as long as it achieves a strong economy and democracy, both of which it can do without the EU.

Alper Kokmen, who grew up in Turkey, spent two years living in Belgium and studied for one year at the UNL, agreed that EU membership isn’t vital for Turkey.

“I don’t think joining the EU is much of a big deal,” he said. “I mean, it is not a matter of life and death.”

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Alper Kokmen, who grew up in Turkey, spent two years living in Belgium and studied for one year at the UNL, agreed that EU membership isn’t vital for Turkey.

“I don’t think joining the EU is much of a big deal,” he said. “I mean, it is not a matter of life and death.”

Cem Ozdemir, a Green Party leader in Berlin’s Kreuzberg district, in Exberliner magazine. “Refusing membership is a way for them to keep their pride.”

Can said he thinks Turkey should stay out of the union because its strict economic regulations would cripple the country’s future. It would be pointless, he said, for Turkey to join an organization that is struggling economically. Instead, Turkey would be better off deepening its cooperation with the United States and mid-Asian countries like Azerbaijan, Israel and Kazakhstan, he said.

In Turkey, the results of a November 2006 poll by the Turkish think tank showed support for EU membership to be around 50 percent. Reasons for supporting accession vary. Researcher Yilmaz said she would like to see Turkey join the union only because it would trigger internal economic and political reform. Dilara Tahiroglu, who moved to Berlin from Turkey a year ago to get her master’s degree in economics, echoed Yilmaz’ comments.

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REPORTERS

KATIE BACKMAN, of Omaha, Neb., is a senior news-editorial and Spanish major and expects to graduate in May 2008. She has had reporting internships at the Grand Island Independent and the Omaha World-Herald and has worked at the Daily Nebraskan as a reporter and assignment editor.

JOEL GEHRINGER, of Papillion, Neb., is a senior news-editorial and political science major and expects to graduate in December 2008. He has worked as a reporter for the Daily Nebraskan and has had a reporting internship at the Lincoln Journal Star and a Dow Jones copy editing internship at the Arizona Daily Star in Tucson.

KYLE HARPSTER, of Ewing, Neb., is a senior news-editorial major and expects to graduate in May 2008. He has worked at the Daily Nebraskan and has had reporting internships at the Grand Island Independent and the Omaha World-Herald.

KATELYN KERKHOVE, of Omaha, Neb., is a senior news-editorial and broadcasting major. She has had an internship at the Norfolk Daily News and has worked at the Daily Nebraskan, where she is currently an assistant sports editor and senior reporter. She expects to graduate in May 2008.

TIFFANY LEE, of Lincoln, Neb., graduated with a degree in journalism in May 2007 and is now in law school at the University of Nebraska. She worked as a copy editor at the Daily Nebraskan and had a copy editing internship at the Daily Herald in Arlington Heights, Ill.

HILARY STOHS-KRAUSE, of Milwaukee, Wis., is a senior news-editorial major. She has had internships at the Lincoln Journal Star and with the Chicago International Film Festival and has also had articles published in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and the Wisconsin State Journal in Madison. She has also worked for the Daily Nebraskan, where she is currently features editor. After a semester studying in Spain next spring, she expects to graduate in December 2008.

PHOTOGRAPHER

TERRA PRINCE, of Omaha, Neb., is a senior news-editorial major and expects to graduate in May 2008. She has had photography internships at the Lincoln Journal Star and the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and has worked at the Daily Nebraskan, where she is now senior photographer.

EDITORS

MATT EICHINGER, of York, Neb., is a senior news-editorial major and plans to graduate in May 2008. He has done an internship with Fellowship of Christian Athletes’ Sharing the Victory magazine and worked as a sports writer for the York News-Times.

EMILY INGRAM, of Franklin, Neb., is a junior news-editorial and advertising major and plans to graduate in May 2009. She has worked as a copy and slot editor for the Daily Nebraskan and has had a copy editing internship with the Lincoln Journal Star.

TANNA KIMMERLING, of Beatrice, Neb., is a junior news-editorial major and plans to graduate in May 2009. She has covered entertainment for the Daily Nebraskan, had an internship with the Daily Sun in Beatrice and has written for the Norris News Magazine in Beatrice.

HEATHER PRICE, of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, is a senior news-editorial and English major and plans to graduate in December 2008. She has worked as a copy editor and features writer for the Daily Nebraskan and has had articles published in the Fremont Tribune.

EWELINA SKAZA, of Warsaw, Poland, graduated in May with a news-editorial degree and plans to attend graduate school in Europe. She wrote for the Daily Nebraskan and has had articles published in the Seward County Independent.

DESIGNER

BRADY JONES, of Harrisburg, Neb., is a junior news-editorial and political science major and plans to graduate in May 2009. He has worked for the Gering Courier, in Gering, Neb.

ADVERTISING AND PROMOTION

NELS SORENSEN JR., of Fairbury, Neb., graduated in May with a degree in journalism. A former graphic design intern at Lambriar Vet Supply in Fairbury, he now works there full-time.

STEPHANIE SPARKS, of Lincoln, Neb., earned a Master of Arts in marketing, communication studies and advertising in May. While in graduate school, she had internships with the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation and Lincoln Community Learning Centers and was a graduate assistant for the College of Journalism and Mass Communications. Stephanie currently works in marketing communications for Kenexa Technology, Inc.
CONTRIBUTORS

DOCTUMENTARY

Rachel Anderson, of Grand Forks, N.D., graduated with a degree in broadcasting in August 2007. She has had internships at WDAZ Channel 8, the ABC affiliate in Grand Forks; at ABC television in Washington, D.C.; and at NET Television’s documentary and long-form unit. She spent the summer working with a small group of journalism students, sponsored by the Fulbright Scholar Program, in Cairo, Egypt, writing for publications in Egypt and the United States and for the Internet.

Megan Carrick, of Franklin, Tenn., graduated with a degree in broadcasting in May 2007 and is now in law school at Creighton University. She worked as a producer for Star City News Live Election Coverage at the College of Journalism and Mass Communications in 2006 and had an internship at News Channel 5 in Nashville, Tenn.

Justin Petersen, of Omaha, Neb., is a senior broadcasting major and expects to graduate in December 2007. He has worked at the college’s radio station, KRNU, and HuskerVision, and he has had an internship at NET Television. He is also working with UNL’s Hixson-Lied College of Fine and Performing Arts to produce a documentary on Johnny Carson.

Chris Welch, of Omaha, Neb., graduated in May 2007 with a degree in broadcast journalism and political science. He has worked as a reporter at KTIV-TV in Sioux City, Iowa, and has also contributed to CNN.com. He has had an internship at NBC News in New York and was also the winner of the National Television Broadcast News competition of the Hearst Journalism Awards. He has been named a Top Ten Scholar by the Scripps Howard Foundation.

FACULTY


Charlyne Berens, a journalism professor and chairwoman of the news-editorial sequence, was co-publisher and editor of the Seward County Independent before joining the journalism faculty. With Timothy G. Anderson, she supervised the reporting and photography students.

Nancy Anderson, teaches in the news-editorial sequence. She formerly worked as an editor at Newsday and New York Newsday. She supervised the editors and designer of this magazine.

Frauke Hachtmann, a journalism professor in the advertising sequence, formerly worked in marketing promotions in Germany and was media coordinator for the University of Nebraska Athletic Department. She supervised the advertising students and helped with translations for this project.

Bernard McCoy, a journalism professor in the broadcast sequence, formerly worked as an investigative reporter and anchor for WBNS-TV, the CBS affiliate in Columbus, Ohio, and as a contributing writer for the Columbus Dispatch, also in Columbus. Along with Michael Farrell, he supervised the documentary students.

Michael Farrell, manager of Television Production for NET Television, is a 37-year veteran in public broadcasting, 35 of which have been spent in production in Nebraska and the Great Plains. His most recent award-winning production was In Search of the Oregon Trail. Along with Bernard McCoy, he supervised the documentary students.

SPECIAL THANKS

Bruce Thorson, photography professor, for his assistance in editing photographs.

Marilyn Hahn, communications specialist at the journalism college, for her production help.
The Gilbert M. and Martha H. Hitchcock Foundation

Since 1975, the Gilbert M. and Martha H. Hitchcock Foundation has provided important funds for the master’s program in UNL’s College of Journalism and Mass Communications. Its initial gift of $250,000 has grown to $1 million, and the foundation helped fund the Andersen Hall renovation.

In 1885, Gilbert M. Hitchcock founded the Omaha Evening World newspaper. Four years later, by purchasing the Omaha Morning Herald and combining it with the Evening World, Hitchcock launched the Omaha World-Herald.

Gilbert Hitchcock died in 1934 and Martha Hitchcock took up her husband’s torch. In 1944 she established the Gilbert M. and Martha H. Hitchcock Foundation to honor her husband’s memory. She died in 1962 and left $5 million to the Hitchcock Foundation. In 1975 the foundation’s board decided to support the journalism graduate program.

Hitchcock Foundation dollars help both graduate students and faculty by providing fellowships for graduate students and seed money for professional projects by faculty. It is and has been the goal of the Hitchcock Foundation to educate graduate students and keep them within the territory serviced by the Omaha World-Herald.

Neely Kountze, the Hitchcocks’ great-nephew, is currently president of the Hitchcock Foundation.