Refugee-Migrant-Immigrant

Rachel lives around the corner on the other side of the street. There is a sort of cellar under her flat that she allowed a mother and two children to use for a long time. At first the children were alone with Rachel. The mother and father had separated and the children had been sent on ahead until the mother, who came from Sudan, could follow on. The three of them have now moved out and settled in Kreuzberg and the youngest child is going to a kindergarten that was founded by Adefra — an initiative for black women, it says on the homepage.

Rachel… I suppose she could… She takes a young man in. He is only a little older than her son who, in any case, could do with another "brother" around. Especially since his own had left. Maher arrives, hardly speaks, seems reluctant to speak and is completely unpolitical. She lives with him now and the three of them do not fit together. They are sitting squashed into her tiny kitchen. The authorities cover the rent up to €300. Rachel has been worried for years that she will not be able to carry on working if she doesn't get a qualification. She is caught in the non-qualification trap and the paperwork is piled up on her desk. Maher’s room is cheaper than a hostel. Rachel has cared for refugees professionally, starting in the Balkans war. She's always done it. She says that being Jewish has something to do with it. She also says that she has only known ordinary refugees up until now. Now it is different. Now it is people with university qualifications. She offers Maher free tickets to the theatre. Maher says no thanks.

I receive an email from Gh. Two friends from Syria, from S., have been living in a small Bavarian village for months. They are now able to take a German course, or rather, they would be able to take a German course if they could find a teacher nearby. There are no teachers in the village. The nearest city is a long way off. They don't have a car because social services does not support that. Nor a train ticket. They walk up and down the main street, lie on their beds, listen to music on their cellphones or try to get news from home over the Internet. They have full status as asylum seekers, which allows them to stay and to travel and they are dependent on social services. My neighbour's flat on the floor above has just been rented out. Shame. She rented it to some Israelis. There are lots of them. Lots of young people. Gh writes that they have to get away or they will go crazy. I call a woman I know who has a flat in Kreuzberg. She lives in Italy, works there, wanted to live in Berlin really, but has changed her mind. She runs a doctor's surgery — I say to her, would you like to rent your flat to some asylum seekers – she writes back saying, unfortunately, unfortunately she has to get as much money as she can for her flat so that she can cover borrowing costs… Alessandra is a survivor. A Holocaust child survivor.

Gh speaks to Rachel. Actually, now she only has one room free. After Gh’s visit: her friends will come, both of them. My daughter says that she has to leave early today and transport some people's luggage. She is always transporting somebody's luggage. I ask her to stay. She says that she had seen that they had already arrived… Oh okay, I say. She needs Thermos flasks. She is organising a tea stand for the people waiting outside the reception center. There are long queues. I have hardly used my designer flask. Actually, I have never used it. Should I give it to her? I give her three flasks. Normal Thermos flasks. I'm not some sort of field kitchen. Why on earth did she have to take the night shift from 11 o'clock?

The two of them move in with Rachel. Rachel says that they are good people and that at last something is happening in her house. They throw out the heavy pieces of furniture that have been left behind around and carry things in and out. At last something is happening. The whole tea stand business has come to an end. There were only about 30 refugees at the reception center today. Some of them are sleeping here. In tents. In the middle of Berlin. Thousands of them have registered but have not been able to apply for asylum. Where are they supposed to find a bed or get social assistance? They start queueing up very early in the morning. At first it was almost all men. Now there are women and children. In January alone new arrivals were said to have been around 55% women and children. That was 34% more than in 2015. Europol – the European police authority – estimates that, of the 85 000 unaccompanied juveniles who arrived in the previous year, around 10,000 of them are regarded as missing in the EU. "We don't know where they are," says the head of Europol, Rob Wainwright. I know where one of them is. A few days ago. A 17-year-old boy from Egypt. He jumped out of a moving train near Munich. The authorities had already sent him back to Austria once. When they were trying to take him with them again he opened the window. His mother will open a letter. She will not know exactly what stretch of track it was on which her son died or whether the train was stopped or whether somebody held him in their arms.

Whereas last autumn 10,000 crossed the border on a single day, it has reduced to a few thousand and now it is only 150. That could change again when the weather improves and the Mediterranean is less stormy. Italy is predicting 50,000. On top of that there are those who are returning. People who have been refused asylum in Austria and want to try Italy. Almost all of those who arrive here set off from Libya. Their route: Lampedusa – Sicily.

Gh came for an interview for a shared flat, brought a tray of cakes with her. The white members of the shared flat had decided to take someone from "elsewhere". They didn't want any more "potato heads". She came to Germany after her boyfriend was killed by a car bomb. They welcomed the Arab Spring, demonstrated, talked, sang. Her father was a lowly official in the civil service until someone denounced him as an Assad opponent. He himself had never said a word, just carried on with his work and was not involved in anything. Now Gh’s mother and father live on what the children occasionally send them. The two sisters and a brother are already living in Germany. One is a journalist and Gh says that she does not want to apply for asylum. She wants to go home one day and help with reconstruction. She has permission to stay as a student but nothing more. Her sister's German friend had provided a guarantee that she would not fall back on the state. I know her. She doesn't have a fixed job and lives from hand to mouth. The word "affidavit" had a sort of magical sound to it in the stories that my mother – who survived after 1945 – told.????? Later Gh asked me if I could provide an affidavit for her best friend. I say yes. It is a hesitant yes. She doesn't need it now anyway. Her friend made it to France.

At first Gh had two or three jobs paying significantly less than the minimum wage, until she received a grant from a foundation. Gh studies all day. She wants to become a biochemist and she wants to pass exams. She earns a little on top of her grant by giving Arabic lessons. She is also a member of a group that wants to try to make it easier for refugees to go to German universities. She calls me "mother" and she calls my daughter "sister". She is 20 years old. She telephones home once a week. She cannot doesn’t visit her parents because that would put in danger and her parents cannot leave. There wouldn't be enough money for that. If ISIS were to reach them: Gh draws her finger across her throat. "We are Druze."

In the evening I am invited to a birthday party. Many people have come to the hall where it is being held and which used to be in the old French zone when the allies still occupied the city. Elka S.’s cellphone rings. She stands, says that she is going to have to go soon. She is on a list of people who have registered to take in others who arrive at night in the buses. All of the authorities’ offices are closed, there is no information, no help. She would have liked to have stayed. Says: "but I don't take in any men. I only take women or families. Nobody can make me take in strange men." Young men make up the majority of the refugees. Back then. Later I put myself on the list. In the many months since then the phone has only rung once: "in one hour please come to camp such and such." Central Reception, Berlin. I have room for two people in my study. "People who know each other", I wrote. They will have to sleep in one bed. I put a cross next to men. And children. I don't have the car today. My daughter took it with her. How am I supposed to get there in the middle of the night and bring people back the next morning? The cellphone tells me: "stand down". "Only three buses today." I delete the text.

At the print studio??? I'm discussing the details about the newspaper we're publishing. "The Other’s View”, a festival in Vienna. Six unaccompanied young refugees, men, are standing on the stage. The director says that they have no way of getting to the rehearsals. They have been put somewhere outside of town. Most of them have. They get nothing. Somebody will have to organise a ride. At the rehearsal the director says that the actors have to hold hands. It's part of the role. She thinks that the young boys from Afghanistan are shocked about that. Because of the girls. She believes that they are all going to be expelled but that nobody has told them. Nobody here is older than 17. At the age of eight my daughter didn't want to have anything more to do with boys… They have never been to the theatre, the director says. I think of the parallel German society. There are some Germans too who have never been to the theatre… The number of asylum seekers who are getting official recognition is at about 50 or 60%. "It has never been higher" says my friend who is working for Aydan Özoğuz, the official in charge of migration, refugees and integration. She is the first non-German to occupy this role. The percentage is higher than it was during the Balkans war. It is a legal provision that people have to be taken in if they are fleeing war or persecution. The Geneva convention on refugees and asylum. It is not about assessment or interpretation. It is about the law.

The typographer goes to a cafe that an artist has hired once a fortnight. She offers coffee, tea and an opportunity to get to know others. She is Ukrainian. The typo colleague is very taken with a 13-year-old. Everyone is talking and somehow it's quite comical, this strangeness and then everyone breaks out in peals of laughter. So, she goes off once a fortnight to talk and laugh with strangers. I once went to laughter Yoga. This cafe business can't be any funnier than that.

Rachel says that she can't come today. A friend of hers who makes documentaries and Martin W. He'll probably be coming. W. is an actor. W. is famous. The documentary maker probably wants to make a film with the new residents And maybe W. can do something for them as well. I am jealous because they both – Gh’s friends – will meet Martin W. I always wanted to meet him.

I can't talk to Nehmat either. She is 67 years old and was a very important journalist in Syria, with a sharp tongue, until the Muhabarat discovered her cover name and she had to flee. First turkey, then into a rubber dinghy, Mediterranean. Nehmat can't swim. I'm not able to speak to her today. Somebody is making a film about her. I don't know if she lived in Damascus in Yarmuk, the Palestinian quarter. Nehmat believes that the authorities give intellectuals a particularly hard time. My Palestinian friend, who must have been in Germany for over 20 years now, does not agree. Neither do I. The authorities probably give everyone a hard time.

It was the business with Nehmat that made me realise how crazy it is that she is here in Germany, in Berlin, here, where thousands of young Israelis are also living. People who also want to be far from the place they come from. The writer Lizzi Doron also prefers to be here since she wrote about the expulsion of Palestinians from East Jerusalem. If Nehmat were able to return to the land of her parents she would not have had to have undertaken this dangerous journey. There are about 350,000 settlers living on her land. They lived there illegally. Everyone knows that; the UN, everyone in the world. They’re living there illegally and have built up a functioning infrastructure. Anyone returning there would have no difficulties and the Israelis would be able to save face. They do not give them the right to return????Sie geben nicht das Rückkehrrecht, aber nehmen die Leute aus Yarmuk auf. ???

The illegal settlers? They would have to go back to the USA, where they came from. That would mean that the USA would have to come to terms with their own fundamentalists and maybe the young Israelis would regain some sort of hope. My friend M. asks if it is not anyway the responsibility of the Americans after fighting so many wars, that they should be responsible for the consequences? Frank Walter Steinmeier, the German Foreign Minister/Secretary of State said recently that this view of things could not simply be dismissed. I can remember the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. I thought it was a disgrace. And then the Taliban came along… But you all know that. If the settlements in Israel were to go then not only would the routes the refugees have to take be shorter but I would be able to speak kindly of Israel. That would be good too.

There is a widespread view in Germany that you, your nation is responsible for most of the terrible things in the world today. That's what my physiotherapist Herr Erdmann says; that the U.K.'s and USA's Internet servers have been sending millions of “welcome" messages out into the world. "That way you know what's what and who wants to kill whom" Herr Erdmann says. It's also a relict of the generation that was defeated and felt insulted. Or – and this is how it seemed to me recently – it is a demonisation of US/American potency as a sort of Golem figure. I am personally very frightened of Mr Putin's presence in Syria. A few Pussy Riots in Los Angeles doesn't really help. Not everything people say can be true. The VW scandal was good for this. We were told that the emissions guidelines were stricter in the USA than they were in Germany. We didn't believe that either. But I'm getting off the point.

Io. is visiting her sisters. The older girl is teaching the younger ones who fled unaccompanied hip-hop and the young one goes shopping with them. At the checkout Io. pretends that she doesn't know that the girls are buying fashionable shoes instead of warm coats. She pays but it is not her private money it is social support. She talks about her work colleagues and that she…, not, that umm… They have got quite close… Very close in fact, but it's all true, all of it, only… apart from one thing: he is a Muslim. The youngest sister was born in Frankfurt am Main. 16 relatives in two rooms, fled the Balkans war. The mother had never been given a work permit to work as a doctor in Germany. When she was small the older sister told them about "Granata" and the big dinosaur bite in their grandparents house. She likes her new work colleague, really likes him, not that anything had happened… but… it's just that he is a Muslim, she says.

The harmless nature of Berlin-Wilmersdorf has to be tested. “Wilmersdorf Aid" is a gigantic business, founded and run by people who have ended up spending their lives involved in it. Volunteers, young people, an efficient business unmatched by any others. They have extraordinary logistics; know exactly when they need beds, how many, and whether they are to get extra ones and tomorrow we will need nappies. They distribute things, they post things, they'll get it done. J. has arrived from the USA with a Ph.D. but she has no time now, has to get to the health ministry so that it can appear innocuous when she distributes food. Hundreds of meals a day. J. has passed her harmlessness test. J. also teaches a course in advanced German. It had been her intention that all would talk freely, not relying on a textbook. She won't try that again, she says. She couldn't bear the stories that her adult students – extraordinarily they are mostly doctors here – she couldn't stand the stories that they told her. Watching the death of a child… Other things… J. belongs to the third Shoah generation. She went back to the textbook.

Cologne. Because of Cologne a lot of my friends have turned away from helping. One of them writes that he has a daughter who is of rapeable age??? And for that reason they had to, to… To see how it goes. The refugees go around their small communities with their heads hanging and are ashamed. As if we haven't always worried about our daughters… There is always that fear when we watched them going out. And we were reluctant to go and pick them up from here there. I read my poem: do not touch me/ you make me sick/ I can't/ do not come in the dark/ to my bed/ I shout/ show me your face/ never never/ without asking me/ and if I say/ that it's not okay/ then that is that/ understood ???. Published in 2001 in *Hoarfrosted mouth or other messages,* 2001*.* My friend from Ramallah emails that for decades she has always kept her head down and hurried through the streets when she goes out because, in her society, it is normal for women to be molested. She is outraged about the racialized apportioning of blame to Arabs and Muslims. I sign a petition against racism and sexism.

The Swiss have prevented anyone with two passports from being deported if they get caught travelling without a ticket or other such minor crimes. What if somebody were to get involved in a schoolyard fight? We have emphasized democracy, law, the rule of law over the rule of blood and soil. We are relieved. Others are not. In Zirndorf a black pastor leaves his parish because he can no longer stand the constant death threats. The parish is supporting him, but many others are not and things are getting more militant. It is as if Germany is (not only) catching up with the Ku Klux Klan, something which we have been aware of since at least the case of the NSU (National Socialist Underground) murders in Baden-Württemberg. The man has done nothing wrong. He is black, nothing more.

There is an average of 3.3 attacks on asylum seekers’ accommodation every day. The "Generation Terror" that has been able to constitute itself almost free of any legal constraint since the attacks on asylum seekers homes in the 1990s is now acting quite brazenly. They have grown up in a "culture of impunity" (as the journalist Heike Kleffner has called it). There has been an enormous increase in attacks compared to last year and the year before that. I see Ju.s mother at a reading. The young author escaped a fundamentalist Jewish sect in Williamsburg, New York. She describes a world of Hassidic patriarchal darkness. In Berlin she is asked whether she still considers herself, after everything that has happened, to be a Jew. While the young author and ~~her~~ mother explained patiently that she goes with her son to the synagogue, that she loves the city and that she is sometimes too lazy to go to the synagogue Jus., whispers in my ear: did I know that there are 600 crimes a year motivated by anti-Semitism. I say nothing.

Before the group with the tea flasks arrives they hand out the medications that they've collected. The two representatives of the local Protestant deaconry, which has replaced the hundreds of volunteers, decline the offer. Some of the medicine is beyond its use by date and the law prevents people from handing out medicine without a prescription. I take the medicines to Vienna, to one of the emergency reception centres. They take them gladly and they are sorted according to their type. A doctor comes to the centre a few times a week as well as other volunteers and services. There are 800 people accommodated there in a former Ministry building. The building does not have enough sanitation. People who work at the tax office don't often take a shower during the day. The refugees are given tokens, then a bus arrives and takes them to the swimming pool.

Here too the volunteers are in the majority. Team Austria. You can just drop in without registering first. A lot of the helpers are multilingual and have refugee and migrant backgrounds themselves. A student with a Turkish background is very tired during the lessons. He spent the night working in a house for refugees. We organise classes for German at the University. As much German as they need for now anyway… all of Au~~stralia'~~s universities have joined together in UNIKO with the aim of getting proper recognition and access to university for all those who have fled their countries. I get an Excel table every semester. I can enter which classes I will be offering in the coming semester and for how many ???people. Right-wingers have brought a case against this procedure on the grounds that it discriminates in favour of the refugees. Insufficient knowledge of German is still a very high barrier. The building with too few showers has been closed. Now we are afraid that the refugees will be taken somewhere a long way away, to some sort of hostel???camp from which it will be impossible to escape because they have no money and no tickets for the bus or train and are in the middle of nowhere. They are making things as difficult as possible. Yesterday there was a man here from Iraq and, using the translation app on his cellphone, he managed, eventually, to tell one of the helpers that he wanted to go home. A group of us from the course went once to offer our help. They were all asking about somewhere to live, a room, how do they get away from here? I am looking for a retired rector or someone who will be enthused by an idea that has already been put into practice once in the USA: Black Mountain College. It is a place where the refugees who have an educational background in science or art can work together with locals — an experimental laboratory, if you will, and at the same time a sort of first destination for assistance. It offered refugees from Nazi Germany and the rest of Europe a temporary place to stay and work. With the cooperation of American artists there was a notable synthesis between art and science that lasted well into the 1950s. Merce Cunningham, Albert Einstein. The list of famous people is long. We need the same sort of "Black Mountain" college in Europe. The mountains are already there. And I am trying to scrape together the money for a college like that. We have managed to make a start with the student initiative “No Border Academy", which is addressing the needs of refugees everywhere. In addition teachers give classes in the English language. It is voluntary work. At our little Institute we have established remedial language classes too. Anyone can come. They don't need to be registered at the University. We have reached the stage where all Austrian universities have joined the Initiative MORE, which organises German courses for refugees and gives opportunities for people to participate in University classes.

The accordion player from Sound Forum Vienna has to get to Germany. There is an announcement every 15 minutes at the central station. All train services from Salzburg to Germany have been cancelled. He takes the train via Passau. Stop. 45 minutes. Wait. The border police patrols every carriage and removes any refugee they find. He took this route once before and two young men had laid themselves on the floor, covered themselves and kept as still as pieces of furniture. The border police pretended ??did not notice them. The accordion player bought them both bread rolls and coffee. They wanted to get to Munich.

It's no longer possible to do this. Identity checks before entering the country or moving on anywhere else are carried out rigorously. For a little while the Austrians sent buses full of people off in the direction of Germany, at night, in the cold, and shoved their human cargo out in the fields flanking the Danube. People jumped into the water, regardless of the snow and ice. A few months later. At Vienna airport one of the Austrian Airline staff croaks into a microphone: due to the recent suspension of the Schengen agreements in Europe all passengers are requested to have their valid travel documents with them. The microphone was turned off. When the passengers present their documents the stewardess turns away. There is no time for that before departure. The economy is afraid of costs, delays, economic damage. People who work on the other side of the border now need twice as long to get to work. It says in the newspapers that they are hoping to reintroduce the Schengen agreement by the end of the year. It is a happy coincidence that the economy may be damaged.

Even though Sweden erected the first barriers and in Austria the so-called "people trafficker" trials are underway, in which refugees who had long been occupying the Votive Church were dragged before the judge and accused of being traffickers themselves, Germany was only really able to rely on Austria and Sweden within the EU. The trafficker, well, the trafficker traffics people from A to B even if there is a legal barrier between those two points. The writer Abasse Ndione wrote about people trafficking in his book The Piragua where he says: "there is a member of just about every family in Senegal who has got in a boat and tried to make their way to Europe to seek their fortune." If they could, people would almost certainly drag Europe's fortune back to Senegal. Of course they would. I don't have to tell you that these processes are not only to do with dictatorships and corruption but are about the distribution of wealth in the world. If you have to go, you have to go and nothing will stop you. Raoul Schrott, my colleague has reported how he found a young man from Eritrea in the deserts of Egypt who had died of thirst and who had a slip of paper in his trouser pocket with the address of his aunt in Mannheim on it. And he is full of sadness about this courageous young man who set off on his own and didn't make it.

Do we have to arrest somebody who lets a refugee get into their taxi so that they can register at the next police station? Was the taxi driver paid and if so is he a trafficker if he picked up others on the way, and should he not charge anything in order to avoid doing anything illegal? My friends are occupied with such questions as well. They organised a private convoy from Austria to Hungary because Orban’s government torpedoed the refugees’ chances of further travel by stopping the buses and other forms of transport. But the convoy was successful and the people were brought out in private cars. Later they received the Lisa Fittko Prize — My Journey Over The Pyrenees 1940/41 — and were celebrated in the Munich Theatre. Lisa Fittko helps refugees. She was an Austrian resistance fighter against the Nazi dictatorship. Now NATO ships are deployed in the Mediterranean to take action against people traffickers. When you take action against the traffickers then you are also taking action against the refugees; those who are stranded in Turkey, some of them for a long time. Why have no official visa offices been opened in these countries: threefold occupation? Why has Nehmat not been able to use the legal opportunities open to her? If she had been able to get a visa then she would have been legally guaranteed. She would have boarded a plane and not a rubber dinghy.

A small group of Jews living in Germany meets. It is a sort of get together, nothing official. The theme is refugees. I attend, want to think about how Jewish people… One of them says "when we arrived nobody bothered about us." The woman has a Russian accent and came to Germany in the early 90s as a permitted refugee. There followed a detailed account of why it was impossible to stay in Kazakhstan, the rundown, broken system, and whether we could even imagine, and extremists of all kinds… The woman now has an important position in the education system of the Jewish community. This forms the basis of some serious doubts that Germany should take in people from Syria. Can we know who they are? Later we discovered that donations have been collected in school and that her own son hardly comes home at night any more. Without telling his mother he has joined “Wilmersdorf Aid" and is active day and night. A woman rabbi reports how she took Muslims in to her community at Hannakah. She has to be careful. She doesn't want to overstep the mark and lose her job. Some have already lost their jobs in the Jewish community, particularly in Berlin. A former editor explains that one has to take the people's concerns seriously. Oh yes, you have to do that. This kind of language and the codes that it contains points to Pegida, the populist right-wing movement that has been on the streets recently and that is against the state, against democracy, against the police and against Islam in Germany. Islam doesn't belong in Germany… And here is an interesting linguistic confusion: a Pegida spokesman? says into the reporters’ microphone that 6 million Muslims are too many. That is a number that is far bigger than the actual number of Muslims living in Germany. What am I supposed to think? Is there a link between the Muslims living in Germany and the 6 million dead Jews? They had to be made into "aliens" first and blamed for making Germany not Germany any more. And at the end of the slogans there came mass murder. A Jewish Russian German writer reports that it is all made up anyway. Her Syrian husband simply went to the embassy and got a proper visa for Germany. That is the way to leave the country. A Communist woman is very disappointed in the people who have been accommodated in the bunk beds and gym halls. "They just lie around playing incessantly with their cellphones and don't even raise their heads." I leave the group. There is nothing to be done here. It will never come to the conclusion that the Jewish Central Council should play a part in the refugee support organisations which are springing up everywhere, and in which both of the Christian churches, Catholic and Protestant, and their various support organisations are participating. "But they are enemies of the Jews… It's a threat for us."

I hear a similar thing at a meeting in Hamburg. A woman of indistinguishable age begins to tell the story of how she and her family have suffered and how she was still as traumatized as her parents. Auschwitz, how present it is in the family still. They came from the former Czechoslovakia. For that reason she is afraid of the refugees, afraid of the Muslims, the terrorists and anti-Semitic attacks on Jewish establishments has increased. As a Jew she rejects Angela Merkel's policies. Supportive noises in the room. The discussant on the podium with me, third generation, is an eloquent speaker. He is not prepared to talk about that subject. I spoke with carefully chosen words. I could hear the opinions that I heard recently from the Catholic Bishop. He spoke of compassion and of the lowly amongst us, and I feel drawn to them as well, and to compassion. He spoke in the name of Jesus. I studied Emanuel Levinas once. Am I free to say YES or NO to taking in the refugees? Levinas speaks of the Face of the Other that is offered to me, naked and vulnerable; an invitation to an act of violence. But it is that very face that also prevents violence. The face speaks and we encounter each other face-to-face. By looking at him I am the one who takes over responsibility. I cannot hand it on or refuse it. It is our form of sociality.

I don't know if my crazy Jewish friend Wendy has read Levinas. Probably not. She, a Jewish woman from New York, in other words, she is exactly how we in Germany expect Jewish women from the US to be. She goes around with such shameless Jewish self-confidence of a sort that we don't have. She took her holiday at the end of the year with a small group of therapists, acupuncturists and the yoga teachers. They flew to Vienna, stayed with various people, got up in the mornings and went to the reception centers. It was Christmas and so the voluntary workforce was depleted even more than usual. This Christian Christmas is an extraordinary family orientated business. My friend, the Arab Spring activist who only just managed to escape the ruling clique in Bahrain with his life says that he has to leave Germany at Christmas. He can't stand it. It is as if the whole country has imploded and turned into a family home surrounded by fir?? trees.

Back to Vienna: Wendy and Birgit and a few other women went round the centers, usually without any warning. That sort of thing tends to lead to announcements like the one made in Traiskirchen that they were able to cope with their visit. They went to lots of other places and showed people how to do acupressure or come to terms with their trauma, drew and sang songs with the children and there was sometimes a little yoga thrown in. A crash course for those who just wanted to live. In the end it was not only the refugees who profited from their visit but also the voluntary helpers. They joined in. They still speak today about that wonderful Christmas when those women suddenly arrived at the West station in Vienna.

I don't talk to my neighbour much any more. We sometimes used to sit and drink tea together. What does he want, I thought, when he rang the doorbell? I thought he was going to bring me back a pound of buckwheat flour from France. His wife has her holiday soon. She is a teacher and the two of them always go to France. They have built a house there. My neighbour is always building something. As long as I've known him, he's been building something. 10 years now. There is a pile of saplings stacked outside his door. He's going to take them with him. They are cheaper in Germany. His mother-in-law and his wife are from Hungary and fled from communism. His house belongs to him. It's not rented. In Germany it is usual to rent rather than buy. So he is a man of property. His wife earns the money, a small pension for him, a larger one for the mother-in-law and he gets some money because he is her carer. One grown-up son. He didn't bring me any buckwheat flour. His throat is red with anger when he talks about "that Merkel" and about how she is destroying everything, destroying Germany, destroying Europe and he says "I'm going to kill her." Then he says that he hopes someone kills her. And the French are right not to take anyone else in. And it will be the ruin of Germany and this is not a country based on immigration. I question what he's saying. We argue. And then finally he says: "I have had enough of do-gooders. They are going to ruin the country." When he has left I wonder whether I should keep the conversation to myself. On the other hand I should probably report him to the police for hate speech and for threatening to kill someone. I mean, aren't you supposed to report such statements? My friend who works for the Minister of Integration and Migration says that the authorities now send all threatening emails on to the police.

Blatant threats and hate speech. They don't even try to hide their names. One teacher asks why asylum seekers are allowed to steal up to €10 and so on and so on. We parted in bad temper. I didn't report him to the police but, for the first time in my life, I thought about whether I should report a private conversation and not one held in public.

Some companies have agreed to offer and to finance German courses: a crash course in technical studies for young asylum seekers. The economy has neglected training and education for a long time… This could work out well. And they haven't done anything about the education of second and third generations of Turkish and Arabic immigrants living in Germany. There is probably no other country in the world that has such remarkable discrimination in its education system. Firms are offering one-year apprenticeships followed by one-year crash courses in German. The process is much more time-consuming than they had imagined and all of them, the refugees and the firms say that they need some legal security. If the procedures are going to take this long and there is still no legal security at the end that the people will be able to complete their education, then there is no point to it. The man who fixes my car occasionally nods his head knowingly. At the beginning of the 90s he trained two young people from Bosnia. When they went back they were trained mechanics. Somebody proposes that points should be added to some sort of work schedule if they do voluntary work. Then have never been so many voluntary workers. At least a third of my students, for example. Many of them are very young. They also seem not to have any particular political or religious view of the world. They just get on with stuff. That is new. For weeks the media ran reports about people who live in Germany and themselves have experience with being refugees or expellees. How many left the GDR with nothing but the clothes they stood up in. And still there are some who say that there is no comparison. "We're all Germans aren't we?" No Mediterranean to cross, that's true. Just barbed wire and walls.

I have to look after Gh. She is ill with a fever, the flu. I really wanted to talk to her more about jeabs and jackets and food that one isn't allowed to serve any more because it does not conform to European food regulations. We don't know what to say to each other. We wait. The borders have to be opened again. People in need of protection can't simply be rejected without any sort of investigation. We shouldn't be trying to undermine the UN Charter on human rights. Then I think about the refugee summit in 1938 in Evian to discuss the fate of the Jews from Germany and Austria.… The Roosevelt initiative was a failure. This time we cannot fail.

My mother's first husband and the father of my older sister, Hannelore, were able to survive Hitler's Germany with the support of 38 various people. That's what's in the files. Strangers took her in and hid her when she was five years old. By doing so they put themselves in danger. I wrote a poem. Deutschlandradio Kultur broadcast it on 13 July 2015.

POEM?

I am sitting in the America Memorial library in Berlin, a gift from the United States in 1954 and a symbol for education and freedom of opinion. And it is a symbol for the young generation of those times. There are some older schoolchildren from Kreuzberg here doing their homework. "A lot of our refugees", says Rachel, "go there too." "Our refugees"? Somebody asks for a Russian translation. Others are sitting here silently in front of German textbooks. It is the friendliest library in Berlin. It is bursting at the seams and has to be extended. In some ways I like to see the whole country as being like this library. It needs support. It would help a lot if the USA were to take in more refugees. Maybe that would ease things up for Europe. And maybe they would like to help found a "Black Mountain College" in Europe and to expand the library, if you understand what I mean.