Wladimir Kaminer is best known as a witty chronicler of everyday life in Berlin. One reviewer of his books warned potential readers not to read Kaminer in public, claiming the uncontrollable laughter he provokes would draw stares from passersby ("Kaminer, Wladimir" paragraph 8). As an integrated, first generation immigrant from Russia, Kaminer has become a multimedia presence in Germany since arriving in 1990, when he spoke no German. A sound engineer for the theatre and radio by trade, the young author (born in 1967) writes for various newspapers such as die tageszeitung, Die Zeit, and Stern. He broadcasts a radio show entitled Russendisko Club from RBB Radio MultiKulti, serves as a DJ for his famous Russendisko events, and appears as a television correspondent for ZDF’s morning program. Additionally, he has published eight books in German, most of which largely detail his humorous experiences in daily life as an immigrant ("Kaminer, Wladimir" par. 1). While Kaminer’s Mein deutsches Dschungelbuch (2003), which documents his travels through Germany, irrefutably serves its intended purpose to entertain, it can also be read as an exposition of how Germany has become a multicultural state through its immigrants, whether Germans themselves choose to acknowledge this fact or not. This article will show how Kaminer documents the true multiculturalism of German society, first by describing the predictable aspects of what has traditionally been regarded as German culture and then by detailing the extent to which foreigners exist in this quotidian milieu.

1 Kaminer’s works are: Russendisko (2000), Schönhauser Allee (2001), Militärmusik: Roman (2001), Die Reise nach Trulala (2002), Helden des Alltags (2002 – with photos contributed by Helmut Höge), Ich mache mir Sorgen, Mama (2004), Karaoke (2005), and Küche Totalität (2006). Additionally, Kaminer has contributed to collections edited by Christine Eichel (Es liegt mir auf der Zunge, 2002) and Silvia Schneider (Wie ich 60 Eier essen wollte, 2005); he also edited and contributed to his own anthology Frische Goldjungs (2001) and wrote forewords to books by Jakob Hein (Mein erstes T-Shirt, 2001) and Susanne Becker (Sternflüstern: das Sibirien-Abenteuer, 2004).
will also examine the reception of Kaminer's portrayal of a multicultural Germany by critics and the general reading public.

*Mein deutsches Dschungelbuch* is, like most of Kaminer’s other works, a collection of short stories. This volume includes thirty-eight pieces, some of which were also published individually in *Die Zeit*. The impetus for the work, as Kaminer describes it in the foreword, was the assertion by the author’s friends that, in spite of residing in Germany for ten years, he was in fact not truly familiar with the country, since he spent that time in the multicultural haven of Berlin. They admonished: “Du kennst dieses Land doch überhaupt nicht, Berlin ist nicht Deutschland, und der Prenzlauer Berg erst recht nicht. Du hast keine Ahnung, was hier wirklich los ist” (7). Accordingly, Kaminer decided to seek the true Germany outside of the metropolis, in the small towns.

Kaminer’s research into the topic consisted of observations during his many publicity trips around Germany to promote and read from his previous work, which one could argue is not a particularly scientific method to investigate what is truly German. He encounters mainly fellow travellers, those who come to his events, and Germans in the publishing and hospitality industries. The author himself acknowledges this fact: “Von den […] gepriesenen deutschen Frauen habe ich dagegen viele persönlich kennen gelernt, daneben natürlich auch andere Bevölkerungsschichten […], zum Beispiel deutsche Männer, deutsche Taxifahrer, deutsche Hotelangestellte, deutsche Bahnhüchter und deutsche Buchhändler” (62). However, he is a satirist and not a social scientist, and his constant travelling does seem an appropriate backdrop for a book that has much to say about migrants and foreigners. It is also interesting that these “other” Germans are encountered in even the smallest towns.

Kaminer’s designation of his collected essays as a *Dschungelbuch* is also significant, although the author makes light of this fact. In an interview with the *Berliner Morgenpost*, Kaminer at first rejects any connection between his work and Rudyard Kipling’s original *Jungle Book* (“Russen lieben” par. 3). As the interviewers press him on the point, Kaminer laughingly accepts the association: “‘Der Schwabe ist also nicht der lustige Bär Balu, der Bayer nicht die böse Schlange Ka …’ ‘Und ich Mogli? Doch, so kann man es sehen. Hab’ ich nichts dagegen’” (pars. 4–5). In the book itself, the author describes his project in the following manner: “Ich […] arbeite an einem so genannten ‘Deutschen Dschungelbuch,’ einer Studie über das Land und die Menschen hier” (250).

Of course, the person who chose the appellation of *Dschungelbuch* (“so genannten”) is Kaminer himself, and the casting of Germany as a colony being conquered by waves of immigrants has been proposed before. In a 1991 essay on *Ausländerliteratur*, Ülker Gökberg speaks of a type of reverse colonization: “The direction of the occupation is indeed inverse: the 4.5 million foreigners intruded into the German society, and not vice versa; their authors began gradually occupying
the realm of German literature, even if marginally” (152). Many critics have noted that Germany has become a de facto multicultural society without the Germans’ acknowledgement of the change. This phenomenon is what makes Kaminer’s anecdotes striking; immigrant culture is subtly included in the normative paradigm, a presence that is not cast in opposition to the dominant traditional (white) culture but that merely becomes woven into the fabric of German daily life and accepted as a part of it.

The stories in this Dschungelbuch are populated by two groups. The first are the Germans, significantly often referred to as Einheimische in Kaminer’s travels to small towns. An investigation of this group is the stated purpose of the collection. The second group are the foreigners, and they can be divided into two types. On the one hand there are those who are merely travelling through Germany as tourists and are thus non-threatening. On the other hand there are others who have taken up residence in Germany as immigrants, legal or illegal workers, and asylum seekers.

Introducing his volume that looks at Germans from without and within, Kaminer relates an anecdote that illustrates the dangers of amateur ethnography, in which he is about to engage. He tells of a travelling Russian author who came to the following conclusions based on his observations of the occupants of a single train compartment: “‘Die deutschen Frauen haben rote Haare und schlagen gern ihre Kinder,’ schrieb der russische Reisende [...] ‘die Männer haben eine Glatze, sie sind ruhig und lesen leidenschaftlich gerne Zeitung’” (12). Some critics will undoubtedly argue that Kaminer’s conclusions are equally superficial and inaccurate. This is, of course, exactly the type of first impression to which foreigners living in Germany are subjected on a daily basis, and he admits at the outset the rather unscientific nature of his investigation of Germans. By offering such stereotypical observations ironically, he allows readers to see the problematic nature of these superficial judgments of other cultures.

At this most shallow level, the clichéd aspects of German life found in any tourist manual are dutifully catalogued in the book. Kaminer’s visit to Chemnitz coincides with a meeting of the “Deutsche[r] Gartenzwerg-Kongress” (22); in fact, an image of a reading garden gnome graces the cover of the Dschungelbuch. In Neuss, the locals have established a “Tag des Bieres” during which the local band “Muckefuck,” named after the equally stereotypical eponymous (East) German coffee alternative, is scheduled to play (105). A visit to Munich uncovers more beer and accompanying sausage (162). More surprisingly, the author encounters a store offering Bavarian Dirndl and Lederhosen to tourists in Berlin, who view German culture monolithically and all Germans to be alike, much as the Germans themselves view various foreigners travelling or living in Germany (162–63).

Less obviously stereotypical but nevertheless recognizable aspects of German daily life are also included: for example, the tendency to note what famous people lived in or visited a city (28–29) or the phenomenon of the “Bild-Zeitungs-Wahnsinn”
German industrial powerhouses Daimler-Chrysler and SAP are mentioned, and a narrative about a long-running Volkswagen moves the German storyteller to comment with pride on the quality of German products: “deutsche Handarbeit eben” (235). Finally, the booming tourist traffic consisting of elderly West German women is praised: “Was wäre die ehemalige DDR ohne diese ganzen Omas, die es sich zur Lebensaufgabe gemacht haben, alle Sehenswürdigkeiten Ostdeutschlands abzuklappern?” (87). These grandmothers, whom Kaminer seems to encounter everywhere during his travels, serve as a German counterpoint to the foreign tourists who will be discussed later in this article.

Kaminer offers comical observations as someone who has frequently travelled in the country. For example, he puts forward the theory that every German small town shares the same layout and describes it in precise detail; for example, the obligatory two restaurants featuring Chinese and Italian cuisine (88–89). In larger cities, he diagnoses the presence of a group of punks, accompanied by a pack of dogs and begging for money, as a cultural barometer for the town; if no such group is found, the cultural opportunities will likely be limited (149).

Less pleasant aspects of German society are also mentioned, such as the constant construction zones in East Germany, where Kaminer detects an abundance of unemployment and government subsidies (139–41, 154–55). Then there are the stereotypes that most Germans would probably like to forget. In a chapter on Brandenburg, the author offers a diagnosis on the region that could easily be read as a generally held stereotype of Germans: “Mancher Reisende wird denken, daß unter gäbe es nichts außer Kühen und Nazis. Ein Klischee!” (95). Yet overt racism is certainly detected in Mein deutsches Dschungelbuch; while the treatment of the subject remains lighthearted, some anecdotes unveil truly disturbing aspects of German culture. Milder comments include Kaminer’s imagined response to how those seated at a local Stammtisch would receive him should he sit down with them – “Was war das denn für ein netter Junge, bestimmt ein Ausländer, der sollte öfter mal herkommen ...” (124) – and another on the dangers of wine and song: “Diese Mischung ist gefährlich und kann Bundesbürger schnell in Amokläufer verwandeln” (63). Elsewhere, racism seems to be obvious except to the Germans who are perpetrating it, for example, when Kaminer reads a newspaper report on a local robbery: “Die Polizei staunte: ‘Beide Räuber sprachen akzentfrei Hochdeutsch’” (151). In a postscript, police search the train on which he is travelling as he leaves the town, and he notes ironically that for once his heavy accent does not make him suspect.

Finally, the author shares the contents of a disturbing book he is offered as a gift by well-meaning bookstore employees in Fulda under the innocent rubric of Regional-Literatur. The work blames the maltreatment of the locals by the conquering Americans on a Fulda Jew who escaped the city during the Third Reich and who supposedly wanted revenge. In this story, Kaminer’s reporting
style, which mimics the tone of the book, serves to highlight the matter-of-factness in the original making the Jews responsible for the unjust destruction of an upright German town.

It also becomes clear in Kaminer’s work that German culture is not as unified as the citizens might believe. East Germans in the city of Halle tell the author about their unsuccessful encounter with West German capitalism and refer to West Germans as “die drüben” (61). When they mention that West Germans will now also have to drink East German sparkling wine, he notes: “[sie] reiben sich schadenfroh die Hände” (61). Since the East-West division is still fresh in German minds, another woman is astonished when Kaminer has to ask her which side of the former border he is on (142).

Small-town rivalry is also evident as a resident of one town accuses another of being so small as to have only one exit on the highway, to which an old man in the besmirched village responds: “Zwei! Zwei Ausfahrten haben wir! Nord und Süd!” (152). In Bavaria, a local complains about the quality of Christmas decorations in Berlin: “Haben denn die Arschlöcher überhaupt keinen Geschmack?” (233), and Kaminer defends his chosen hometown and informs the southerners: “Ihr seid doch alle weihnachtsgeschädigt” (234). In the north, however, an audience member at a reading of Kaminer’s work remarks that they would rather have heard stories about southern Germany, as the pull of the exotic unknown manifests itself even on a smaller scale (56).

Kaminer notices in many German cities a culinary trend towards the foreign. He notes that city officials in Nürnberg want to deemphasize traditional sausage and beer in favour of items that reflect the city’s “Völkerverständigung”: “Die Speisekarten versprechen eine Orgie der Exotik” (202). Even traditional cooking is internationalized in Wiesloch: “scharfe Maultaschen auf mexikanische Art, Maultaschen à la France, Maultaschen Bella Italia, chinesische Frühlings-Maultaschen und so weiter” (197). Even such small confrontation with exoticism on a gustatory level makes Germans anxious. When German diners at surrounding tables are hesitant to try items from the “Himalaja-Wochen” menu in one hotel, Kaminer rejects their provincial attitude (“Was für Spießer!”) and orders from the special menu as an example to them, terming his action “ein wichtiger Schritt in Richtung Völkerverständigung” (51). Later, he becomes ill and, in an imitation of typical German sentiment, blames his stomach troubles on the exotic food. When he checked into this hotel the previous day, a hotel employee informed him that they had made “alles ein bißchen orientalisch” for the special Himalayan event (50). A similar thought leads to his public reading being marketed as part of an event on the topic of “Exotik” (136). German society in general still attempts to compartmentalize the cultural offerings of the immigrants and does not wish to allow them to become integrated as part of the dominant traditional culture. Kaminer’s book, however, is evidence that they are failing; the immigrant is becoming the colonizer.
In an enlightening anecdote told by a cameraman on Kaminer’s television crew who has just returned from Afghanistan, Kaminer’s reading public is told a story in which just such a paradigm shift occurs, and the Germans are cast as the unwelcome foreigners. Hoping to buy fabric for a suit, the cameraman asks his translator for an appropriate question that he could use to shop at the market. The German balks when the translator writes down two full pages to convey such a simple request, and the Afghani responds: “Ihr Europäer redet miteinander meist nur in kurzen Sätzen. Das hört sich wie Schimpfen an und ist total unhöflich” (164). In a further affront to the concept of German and Western culture as the only correct paradigm in the face of foreign traditions, the translator later wonders: “was könne man von ungebildeten Ausländern erwarten” (164).

With the stated goal of Dschungelbuch being to provide a portrait of contemporary Germany, Kaminer has of necessity also written a great deal about non-Germans— the “others” consisting of foreign tourists and residents. His observation about the reception of Fremde in Halle can be extended to the acceptance of foreigners throughout Germany; they are regarded as “Hoffnungsträger und Hassobjekt zu-gleich” (57). This seeming contradiction was already noted in 1989 by Dietrich Thränhardt in an essay in which he refers to Erwin Scheuch’s categorization of Germans’ reaction to foreigners. Scheuch divides nonnationals into four groups. These include “noble foreigners” such as the British and Americans, who are welcomed, “foreigners” such as the Spaniards and Greeks, who are viewed as “neutral,” “strange foreigners” such as the Italians and Vietnamese, who are tolerated, and “rejected foreigners” like the Africans and Turks, who are repudiated (13). Certainly, these categories do not completely reflect the current society. One wonders, for example, how fellow European Union citizens would now fare or even Americans, given the consequences of the second Iraq War. Russians were not even mentioned in the 1989 study, as they began to immigrate in large numbers only after the end of the Cold War, as Spättaussiedler and Kontingentflüchtlinge (the group to which Kaminer himself belongs). However, the concept that some immigrants and minorities are more desired than others is still active in German society and reflected in Kaminer’s anecdotes.

Of the two sorts of foreigners found in Kaminer’s work, tourists and foreign residents, the former are the benign sort. They are foreigners as temporary apparitions, just passing through Germany and thus not threatening to either the dominant traditional culture or available jobs. They are also citizens of first-world countries, which diminishes the chance that they might wish to stay and take up residence. Kaminer’s work describes both tourists and residential foreigners to some extent as stereotypes, yet tourists seem to exist much more in one-dimensional caricatures in these anecdotes, from the mysterious Japanese to the loud American. Kaminer devotes an entire chapter to the Japanese in a description of Rothenburg ob der Tauber. His portrayal of the group exhibits the usual clichés: “Sie sind überall, bewegen sich nur in Gruppen und knipsen alles um sich herum, als wären sie in Disneyland” (31).
Interesting, however, is their interaction with the Germans. Although they are only tourists, a friend of Kaminer’s describes the Japanese as an invading force: “Sie bilden eine absolute Mehrheit in der Stadt. Die Läden, der Stadtverkehr und die Hotels sind extra auf sie ausgerichtet, die Straßen zum Teil sogar Japanisch beschriftet” (33). However, this friend has not actually been to Rothenburg to witness this development and asks Kaminer to report back on what he finds. The German’s perception of the foreign tourists and their infiltration of the city is emphasized rather than any concrete knowledge. In a comic turn on the “German as foreigner” theme, his friend also has little luck blending in with a group of Japanese tourists in order to learn more about their experience in Germany. The friend is “sehr schnell als Fremder entlarvt. Die Japaner benahmen sich wie immer freundlich, aber zurückhaltend” (32). What Kaminer encounters in Rothenburg ob der Tauber is not necessarily that the streets are overrun by Japanese, but he does comment on the city’s exaggeration of the native German culture in order to make it more appealing to tourists. For instance, the city keeps its Christmas market open all year long so that the Japanese can take home authentic Tannenbäume. In this case, the invasion of transitory foreigners is not a threat to the predominant culture but a reinforcement and exaggeration of it, and the visitors are tolerated and even welcomed because of the economic benefits.

Americans are also prominent in Kaminer’s anecdotes. They are ubiquitous and obnoxious throughout, and references to America and Americans are generally tied either to the somewhat distant past or to the most recent present, to the era and aftermath of the Second World War or the current war on terror and the Americanization of global culture. Just as Americans earlier wreaked havoc in Germany by bombing cities (65), looting (17–18), and callously turning Erfurt over to the Russians in exchange for Berlin (223), they are now bombing Afghanistan (42–44) and waging war in Iraq (223). Meanwhile, American cultural exports to Germany are represented in Kaminer’s work by the music of Bon Jovi (65), sprawling suburban shopping malls accessible only by car (74), McDonald’s (74), and an “amerikanische Bar mit Cowboy-Fotos” (248) in Münster. Furthermore, Kaminer notes that everyone in Sindelfingen speaks English, as the visiting Americans from Daimler-Chrysler have not learned German (193). In general, the image of America that emerges from Kaminer’s text is a negative one, best summed up by elderly Germans wistfully reminiscing in Kaiserslautern: “Auch Amerika ist nicht mehr das, was es einmal war” (71) – a statement that could perhaps also be made about German-American relations as reflected in the Dschungelbuch.

Other tourists are mentioned to a lesser extent but are given a similarly superficial narrative treatment. A family of Koreans, just like the Japanese, look mysterious yet unfathomable when Kaminer and his wife encounter them in a train station, standing without purpose alongside their luggage (115). Another allied force, the British, is represented by a brief and neutral appearance as a tourist group in a Sinsheim hotel, possibly “auf der Durchreise” (89), but certainly too
tired to interact much with the German locals. These are foreign tourists as mise en scène, exotic but non-threatening.

In contrast to the rather stereotypical depiction of tourists in Kaminer’s anecdotes, foreigners who live in Germany are portrayed as real people. Just as in his descriptions of Germans, he is not reserved about depicting all sorts of foreign residents who are generally neither particularly lauded nor vilified; they are simply people. He additionally notes small ways that indicate the large and ever increasing presence of immigrants in Germany. For example, signs advertising affordable phone calls to foreign countries subtly announce the presence of large numbers of immigrants in a city, “Denn mit fernen Ländern zu telefonieren ist auf keinen Fall eine typisch deutsche Sitten” (148).

There are the immigrants who do not have the best jobs, such as an Indian (14) and a pair of Arabs selling food at stands on the street. Kaminer patronizes the stand of the latter, after he notices that they are having trouble attracting customers after September 11 because of their public reception as “Doppelgänger von Saddam Hussein” (40–41). He also chats with a Pakistani taxi driver “auf Schuldeutsch” (215) after listening to the man talk to his wife in Urdu on the telephone. A Siberian street musician plays melodies from Kaminer’s youth on a guitar, and the author greets his appearance not as an unusual event but rather as part of daily life in Germany: “Ich war wieder mitten im Leben. Spiele weiter Ewgenij aus Siberien!” (104).

Kaminer’s work does not, however, portray a kind of instant and imaginary brotherhood among all immigrants. A group of Turkish youth in Swabia stare at him as though he were a spy (30). In another episode, Kaminer’s own reaction to a group of Yugoslavian hotel owners borders more on the stereotypical caricature reserved for tourists in these anecdotes. He finds that the Yugoslavians look like terrorists and cannot speak German. He also casts the men in a sort of vampire-movie parody; the foreigners “rieben sich die Hände und warfen hungrige Blicke auf mich” (146). In another encounter, the author identifies himself with other Germans rather than with a foreigner, as he joins onlookers in watching an Arab with amazing luck at an automatic gambling game. The immigrant’s good fortune is described in clichéd terms as intrinsic to his foreignness: “Wie sich ein Beduine als König der Wüste mit seinen Kamelen und Frauen versteht, so verstand sich der Spieler vom Hamburger Bahnhof mit den Automaten” (50).

German interaction with the immigrants is also portrayed as remarkably varied. Some Germans are supportive and welcoming, including the well-meaning but condescending sort, while others see immigrants, especially illegal ones, as the enemy. In Mölln, Kaminer learns that the city became famous for a violent attack on Turks and that the local community responded by organizing an international meeting place. The local coordinator complains that it is difficult to generate interest in the city because of the conservative nature of the residents. He then makes the telling comment: “Auch die türkischen Mitbürger wählen alle CDU” (48). Thränhardt notes that this
euphemistic expression (“Mitbürger”) is a typical method to avoid calling the Turks and other foreigners what they actually are: immigrants or \textit{Einwanderer} (12). Even those Germans interested in helping immigrants have assimilated the language that keeps them symbolically at the edge of society.

Kaminer encounters another group dedicated to the plight of foreigners in Germany. These former communist revolutionaries proudly tell of their assistance to refugees. When he learns that the immigrants were from Chile and not Yugoslavia or Afghanistan as he expected, he discovers that the “Flüchtlinge” have in fact been living in Germany for twenty years; one recently celebrated becoming a grandfather in his adopted country of Germany. Yet, the members of the organization that helped make their escape possible still refer to them as refugees and not immigrants in spite of their integration into society.

There are a few examples of other immigrants who have been accepted. One Croatian woman married a German who praises Croatia’s people and culture (85–86). Another of Kaminer’s German hosts has a Russian wife (234–35). Kaminer notes in passing that many South Korean nurses came to Bavaria in the 1960s to fill a labour shortage and have been living there ever since. Finally, he relates the story of a Russian dentist in Quedlinburg who has successfully integrated in spite of the anti-immigrant atmosphere in the city. Her patients even include right-wing extremists, who tell her: “Du gehörst zu uns!” (155). He reports these same men’s attitude toward the Yugoslavian refugees in the city as individuals: “die [...] vor sich hin vegetieren und angeblich Drogen an die Schüler verkauften” (155). Notably, the examples of accepted immigrants are all women who are perhaps not as threatening as male newcomers, given historical fears of miscegenation by male invaders.

In a description of other anti-immigrant behaviour, Kaminer compares last ditch efforts to defend against the Soviet army in 1945 to current attempts to combat illegal aliens from Eastern Europe in Brandenburg, noting: “Die Gefahr aus dem Osten gehört hier seit eh und je zum Alltag” (94). The author imagines that residents of one small town erected a fake bus stop to catch foreigners trying to enter Germany. As the illegal immigrants would queue up, the locals would be able to apprehend them. He describes the local Germans’ efforts as a “Jagd auf illegale Einwanderer” (94), but ironically comments that those in the front line against illegal immigration go unrewarded by the European Union: “Es gibt immer noch keine Prämien für gefangene Illegale” (95). The story about the bus stop is obviously a humorous invention by the author, but nonetheless reflects the anti-immigrant attitudes of those living at the border.

Given Kaminer’s own status as an immigrant from Russia, it is no surprise that immigrants from that country constitute the largest group of foreigners discussed. In a 1996 essay, David Horrocks and Eva Kolinsky note: “In literature, the ‘migrant’ originating in one culture and writing in the language of another can be said to occupy a special role as a mediator between the two” (x). In Kaminer’s case, this mediator role hardly seems necessary any longer. He describes how German
officials in a Berlin train station can all speak Russian (161) and how Russian punk musicians have begun writing in German to give their music an edge (20–21). In his introduction, he laments that Russians have found their way even to provincial Germany, which he is investigating in hopes of finding the true nature of (pure) German culture. The veritable invasion of Russians has also taken away some of his own exotic mystique as a foreigner: “Meine Landsleute, die es in jedem kleinen deutschen Dorf mittlerweile gibt, haben mir nahezu überall den Überraschungseffekt versaut. Wohin ich blickte, fand ich Russen und Russendiskos – an den gottverlassensten Orten” (9). This is also true for Russian culture, as Mein deutsches Dschungelbuch is filled with comparisons of Germany to Russia.

Some of the connections that Kaminer makes are purely superficial. A Marx memorial in Chemnitz is larger than equivalent monuments in Russia (24). Hamburg is similar to its partner city St. Petersburg, not least because both cities exhibit “deutlich zu viel Polizei” (54). The architecture of Halle reminds him of the socialized housing of Moscow (57–58). The hyphen in the appellation Baden-Baden causes him to recall similarly double named cities in Russia (130). The fondness of Munich residents’ quick access to foreign countries brings Odessa to mind: “Dort zogen sich die Menschen auch bunt an, sie tranken Bier aus Zwei-Liter-Behältern und brüsteten sich damit, ganz nahe an der Türkei zu sein: Man könnte einfach rüberschwimmen, wenn die Grenzsoldaten mit ihren Maschinengewehren nicht dazwischen wären, meinten sie” (159).

Other links between Germany and Russia are historical, such as the connection between the nobility of Oldenburg and the Czar Peter III (which also reminds the reader of the feebleness of the “pure German blood” claim). Regarding Baden-Baden, Kaminer advances an ironic theory that makes German gambling responsible for Russia’s history of unrest: “während die Russen ihr Geld verspielten, durchdrehten, die Sinnlosigkeit des Roulettes auf ihre Literatur übertrugen, in ihrer Verzweiflung Romane schrieben, die in Russland großen Unmut säten, drei Revolutionen hervorriefen und das Land für ein ganzes Jahrhundert ins Verderben stürzten” (133).

The overwhelming number of historical connections in the anecdotes, however, come from the Soviet era. Kaminer spies a picture of Lenin holding a copy of Pravda still displayed in a leftist newspaper office (29). A German tour guide mentions the destruction of Rathenow by Soviet troops in World War II (119). There is a veiled and fleeting reference to the Prager Frühling by a German who practiced her Russian skills on tank drivers in the city in 1968 (134–35). The economic downturn in Naumburg is linked to the Soviet withdrawal of troops after the Cold War (97).

Some Germans seek a more personal connection to Kaminer based on shared history. At one reading, a man who grew up under National Socialism asks him to give him advice on how to come to terms with the experience, since the author also grew up under a dictatorship (195). A bookstore owner confesses that Kaminer is the first Russian he has met and that he was otherwise terrified of Russians as a child
because his father told him that they were planning on invading the West by way of underground channels (209). Given the frequency with which Kaminer encounters all things Russian in Germany, one might suggest that the feared invasion has taken place after the Cold War in the form of immigration.

Russians frequently attend Kaminer’s readings in Germany (80, 84, 194). Of such a group at one event, he says: “Wir erzählten uns gegenseitig Legenden und Mythen der Arbeiterklasse” (80). Kaminer also meets some of the 400 Russians studying at the university in Marburg. After seeing a cockroach, they note with ironic ethnic pride that it was the Russian students who brought cockroaches to Marburg. At the end of the evening, the author jokingly tells them: “Ihr seid eine Bereicherung für diese Stadt” (182), thus turning the stereotype of immigrants as disease bringers into a parody of the “cultural enrichment” that is often cited as a positive benefit of immigration.

Contributing to Kaminer’s observations of foreigners in Germany are of course his own experiences as an immigrant. In some anecdotes, he notes that he still finds some local dialects unintelligible, although native speakers of German also occasionally have this problem (14–15, 230). On a train ride, he closely observes the German conductor because the man reminds him of a Russian actor, and the conductor asks him not to stare at his bald head since it does not reveal anything about his political views (142-43). Obviously, the man would not have assumed that a fellow German would have considered him to be a neo-Nazi; Kaminer’s appearance and accent mark him as an outsider in a land without a historical acceptance of immigration, regardless of his actual status as a citizen.


Foreign-born authors in Germany have long complained that what the German literary market wants from them is the token exotic (Gökberg 153). Kaminer, too, seems to suffer from this tendency to some extent. A school invited him to an event entitled: “Aber diese Fremden sind nicht von hier – Migration im 21. Jahrhundert”
He notes: “Zuerst kam mir diese Einladung etwas gruselig vor” (110). He goes on to explain that he found the invitation spine-chilling because he had been watching vampire movies and the seminar was to take place in an old castle, but his statement could also be interpreted as a reference to his being summarily grouped as a “foreigner.” The title of the seminar originates in the *Asterix and Obelix* comic series, in which a character complains that he does not mind the foreigners who have already integrated but that he does not want more to come, and it reflects exactly the German attitude revealed in Kaminer’s anecdotes.

In Baden-Baden, Kaminer’s book tour is packaged among other events in a program focusing on the exotic, “zwischen dem Diavortrag ‘Die Wüsten des Irak’ und dem Diavortrag ‘Paris bei Nacht’” (136). A Potsdam conference on German-Russian relations breaks down into an exchange of clichés: Germans are hard-working, Russians are humorous (168). Ultimately, although he reports these generalizations, he does not seem to be bothered greatly by his status as outsider:


Indeed, Kaminer’s foreignness is part of his allure and intrinsic to his artistic and public persona. The fact that the ZDF employs him as a correspondent despite his heavily accented German implies some degree of increasing tolerance for foreigners in the German viewing public. Of course, one could argue that his work could be regarded as another appeal to the German interest for the exotic as experienced from a distance. However, he is not a correspondent on things foreign, but rather a reporter on the city of Berlin; he is sharing his expertise as an insider in the city. At any rate, if his multimedia success is due largely to the charm of his foreign identity, he is to some extent the master of his own fate. Asked in an interview if he is German or Russian, he responded: “Meine Heimat ist die Sowjetunion. Meine Muttersprache ist russisch, privat bin ich ein Russe, beruflich ein deutscher Schriftsteller und mein über alles geliebter Wohnort ist Berlin” (“Feurige Tänzer” par. 1).

Reception of *Mein deutsches Dschungelbuch* is problematic, and there is little indication that critics have recognized the subtext of Kaminer’s portrayal of a modern Germany populated to a great extent by foreigners, instead focussing on its supposed novelty as a description of Germany from a non-native speaker with an outsider’s perspective. From its beginnings as *Gastarbeiterliteratur*, works penned by workers with no formal training in writing, German literature by foreign-born authors has
been plagued by accusations that it lacks in quality. Ülker Gökberg noted that, even though works of ‘Auszänderliteratur’ have gained in popularity, ‘these works are hardly considered a part of the ‘actual’ literature of the Germans, Austrians, and the German-speaking Swiss’ (152). This is perhaps why Kaminer’s book is quite literally haunted by the memory of famous German writers whose works make up the canon. In a farcical description of Gerhart Hauptmann as a nocturnal apparition, Kaminer imagines that he hears the German author admonish: ‘Ich solle abhauen, er habe mich nicht eingeladen’ (44). The text is unclear as to whether the ghostly Hauptmann is questioning Kaminer’s presence in his guest house or as a writer on the German literary scene; he is, after all, engaged in a book tour promoting his work.

Kaminer is not the only young author in the book to be pursued by the memory of past greats. A bookstore owner tells of a German author who does not want to read from his own book, which he judges to be inferior, and requests to be allowed to read from Heinrich Heine instead (64). Given the overall themes of Kaminer’s collection, this is ironic since the National Socialists did everything within their power to remove the German-Jewish author from the nation’s literary history. Other literary references abound. The Rhine tourist ships ‘Goethe’ and ‘Schiller’ conjure up their literary namesakes. Marcel Reich-Ranicki’s massive Der Kanon collection is satirized: ‘Die beste Geschenkidee für einen schadenfrohen Weihnachtsmann. Ich versuchte mir das Gesicht des Glücklichen vorzustellen, der diesen Kanon unter seinem Weihnachtsbaum fand’ (137). Kaminer also mentions in passing his unfamiliarity with Friedrich Hölderlin (29) and his decision to take Johann Wolfgang von Goethe as a role model (137).

It should be noted that commercially Kaminer is an unqualified success, and his works have been translated into Russian, English, Czech, and Spanish. In interviews, Kaminer is self-deprecating, minimizing the literary quality of his texts with comments such as: ‘Ich bin kein akademischer Schriftsteller’ (“Leser wie”) and “Die Russen haben keine Ahnung von Literatur!” (“Die meisten Russen”). At least one critic is willing to compare him to canonical authors: “Und vor allem: Kaminer schreibt so komisch, wie es ihm derzeit wohl kein anderer deutscher Großschriftsteller (nicht einmal Grass oder Walser) nachzutun vermöchte” (Schümer). Ingo Petz evaluates Kaminer’s writing in a dubiously complimentary manner as “[d]er schnoddrige Blick des naiven Fremden” and finally sums up: “Kaminer fackelt nicht lange. Und deswegen ist er auch kein Handke, kein Köppen und kein Grass. Gott sei Dank!”

In fact, most German reviewers seem to regard Kaminer as a foreigner first and an author second. The great majority of articles gloss over his status as an immigrant rather than as a visitor; they use phrases such as “seit 1990 mit der Familie in Berlin zu Hause” (Breuer) or “der Russin in Berlin (Ost) ansässig” (Bager). A few exceptions do exist. A Spiegel interviewer inquired directly about Kaminer’s status as a German citizen, in which he affirms his citizenship (Kaminer,
“Leser wie”). Christian Schachinger refers to Kaminer as “von Moskau nach Berlin emigriert,” and Mario Kubina in an interview on Random House’s Intranet also correctly identifies Kaminer’s immigrant status as an “eingewanderter russischer Schriftsteller” and goes a step further in asking if this is an annoying designation (Kaminer, “Die meisten Russen” par. 7).

Because Kaminer’s text is also available as a book on CD, many reviewers further call attention to the author’s outsider position as a foreigner in seemingly well-meaning but condescending critiques of his spoken German. Lars L. von der Gönna notes: “Kaminer selbst liest: herbes Russendeutsch in mitreißend-charmanter Ignoranz jeder überlieferten Betoningstradition.” Regarding a live reading from the *Dschungelbuch*, Kirsten Makac makes a similar comment: “Mit seinem freundlichen russischen Akzent, dem das deutsche ‘Ü’ völlig fremd ist.” Kaminer’s written German (“in der Ausdrucksweise etwas verstaubtes Deutsch”) also seems to irritate Christian Schachinger, who (wrongly) imagines that Kaminer’s language skills derive from a stilted variant of German “wie man es wohl gelernt hat, wenn man in der Sowjetunion Anfang der 80er Jahre die Fremdsprache seines sozialistischen Brudervolkes lernen musste oder wollte.” Early Turkish authors encountered similar criticism: unusual language use that is hailed as creative in the works of native German authors is attacked as a lack of language mastery in literature by immigrant authors (Winkler-Pöhler 53).

While the occasional review mentions one or two examples of foreigners or the exotic in Kaminer’s anecdotes (Könaü; Pereira; Prahs), all fail to recognize the overall presence of foreigners in this description of German life, and the great majority of reviewers instead treat the book solely as an investigation of what is traditionally and typically German. Additionally, they emphasize that Kaminer as a foreign outsider is in a unique position to examine characteristics of nationality, most tending not to regard him as the immigrant German and long-time resident he is (a rare exception is Fritzsche, par. 1). Several reviews even repeat the inconsiderate treatment of the author as foreigner that Kaminer satirizes in the book. The headline of one article trumpets: “Ein Russe sichtet Harpstedt” (Breuer), in a manner identical to that in which local newspapers announced his arrival for book readings. Critic Caroline Bock does not realize that what makes the audience’s repeated questions at book readings in *Dschungelbuch* irksome is the fact that they revolve around Kaminer’s status as a foreigner rather than his literary work; she praises him as an author “frei von arroganten Attitüden” (“Lesereisenschnellschuss”). Finally, the interviewer for NDR Nachrichten actually demanded the answers to these offending questions: “Leider bleibt er uns [...] die Antworten auf die drei ihm am häufigsten gestellten Fragen schuldig, nämlich wo er Deutsch gelernt hat, wie lange das schon her ist und in welcher Sprache er träumt” (Kaminer, Interview). He answers simply: “Ich glaube, ich träume in Bildern. Deutsch habe
Wladimir Kaminer’s *Mein deutsches Dschungelbuch* 335

ich in Berlin gelernt, und das ist schon sehr lange her.” Clearly, German critics fail to notice the multicultural aspect of his work, the nature and ubiquity of immigrants in modern Germany.

In 1989, Heidrun Suhr noted that the works of Turkish writer Aras Ören “offer the aesthetic anticipation of a functioning multicultural society” (87). In Kaminer’s *Mein deutsches Dschungelbuch*, one finds the arrival of this society. Although his stated goal is to explore German culture, it is clear that one can no longer do so without including immigrants and their role in daily life; the foreigners have become the colonizers. Kaminer not only makes immigrants visible in his anecdotes, he also highlights in what ways the much discussed dominant traditional culture is an artificial construct that implies the unity of majority white Germans.

To be sure, Germans in Kaminer’s anecdotes still refuse to acknowledge minority culture and attempt to marginalize it, to relegate it to special menus or events dedicated to the exotic, thereby implying that the foreign is exciting for brief and limited periods but does not reflect the norm. Reviews of *Mein deutsches Dschungelbuch* also fail to recognize the multicultural presence in this description of modern Germany. In his work, however, foreigners are mainstreamed; instead of migrant culture defining itself against monolithic white German culture, it now is as much a presence as the supposed dominant culture. Thus, it is all the more appropriate that the book ends with Kaminer serving as a linguistic diplomat for the Goethe Institute abroad; ultimately, the true German of the twenty-first century is in actuality an immigrant.

**Works Cited**


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