

# Barriers and Bridges: Lived Experiences of Immigrant Staff in German Libraries

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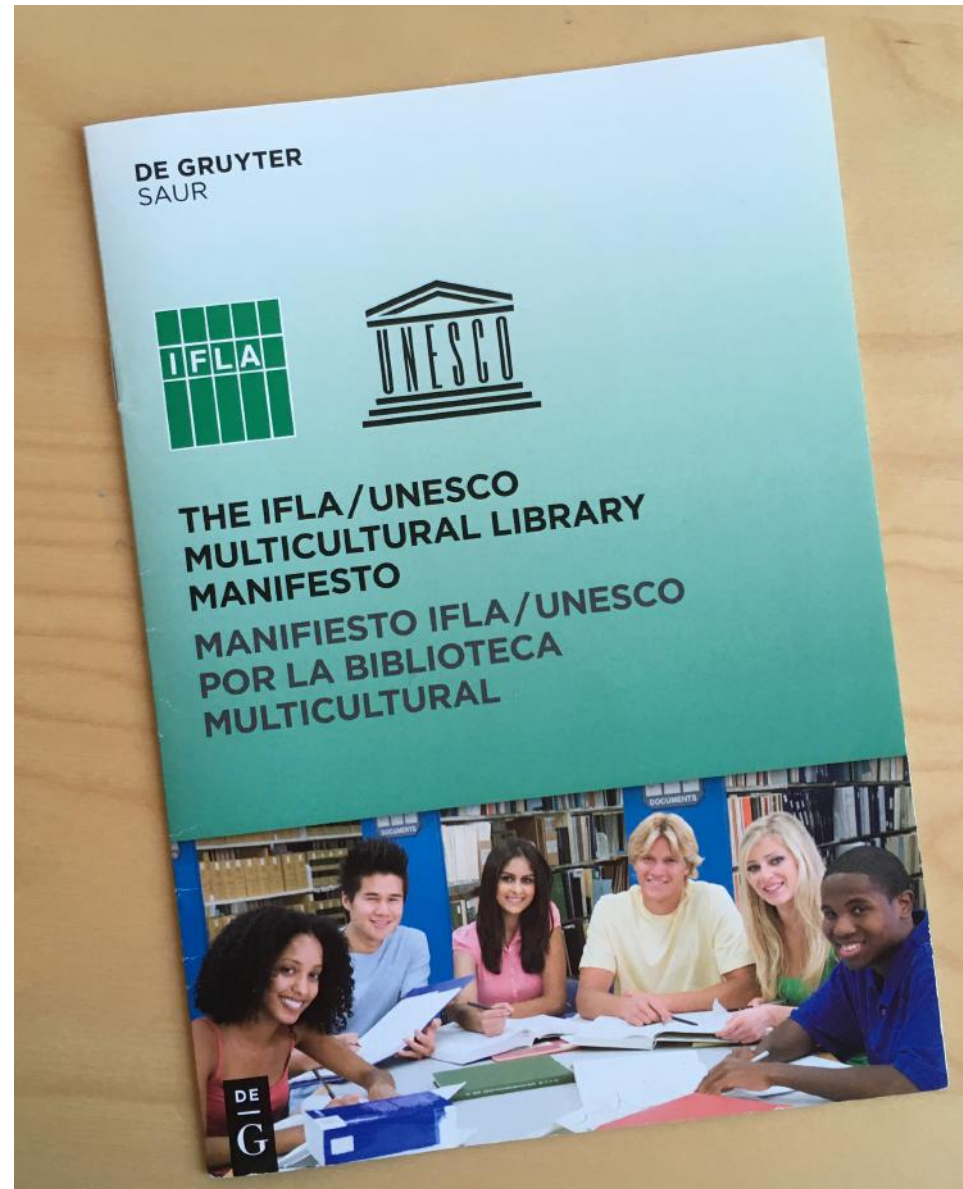
Session 210a: Library services: empowering people to develop  
their inter-cultural identities

IFLA Section 32: Library Services to Multicultural Populations

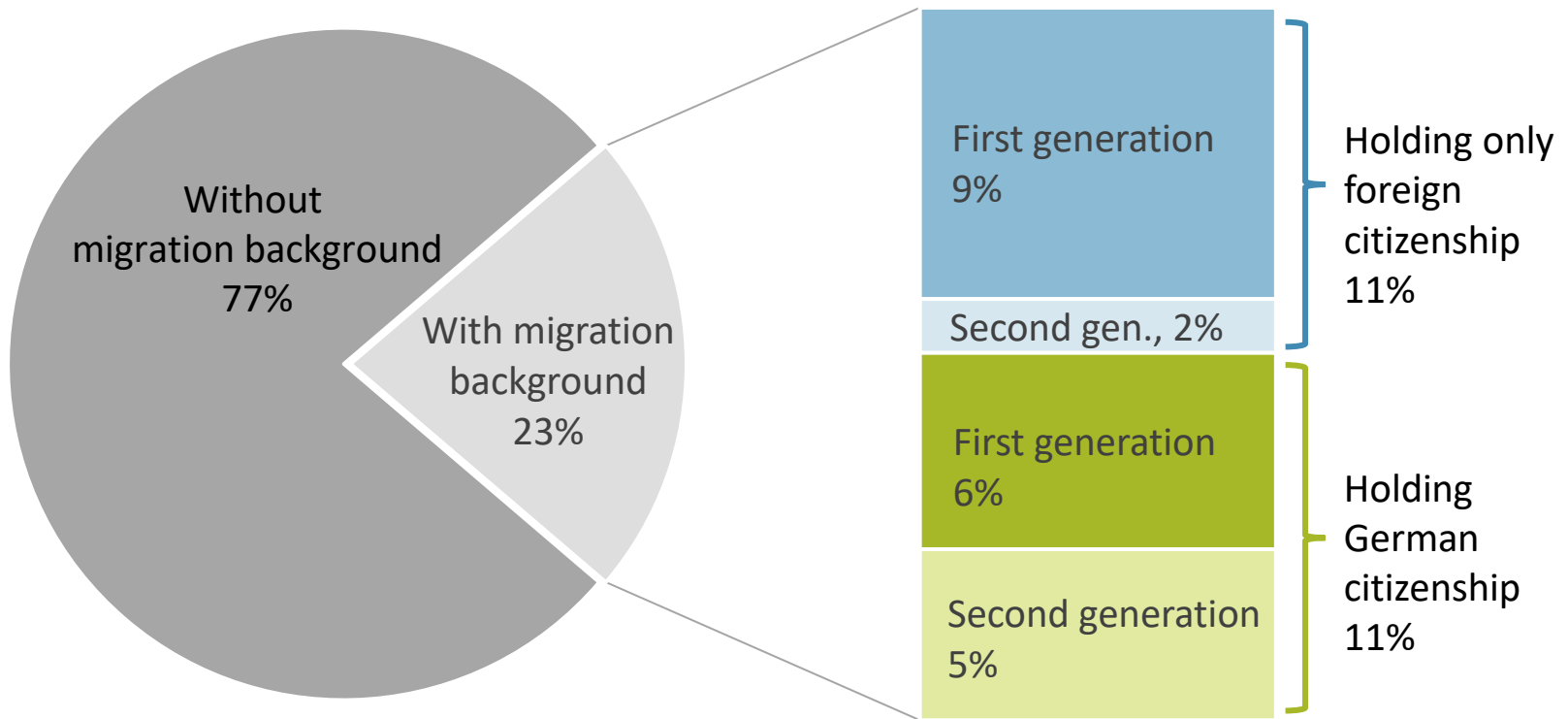
“The **staff of a multicultural library** should reflect the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the community.”

IFLA/UNESCO Multicultural Library Manifesto

Leslie Kuo, Talk, 28 August 2018, IFLA WLIC | Photo by Leslie Kuo



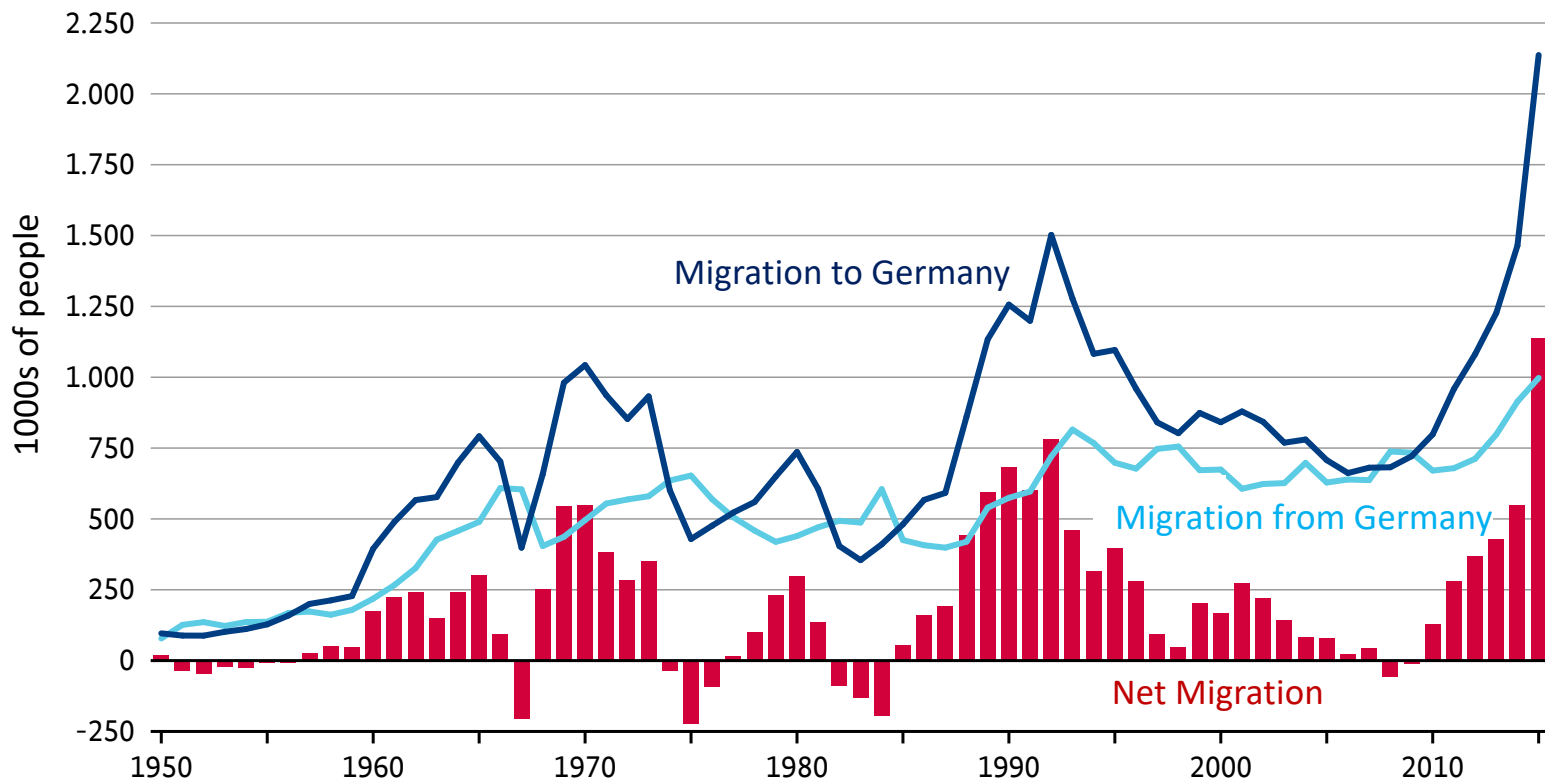
# 23% of German residents are immigrants as defined in public policy



Total population: 82.4 million

# Immigration has been on the rise for decades. Is this reflected by library workers?

Migration to and from Germany, 1950-2015



## Population studied

Library workers  
with migration  
backgrounds  
among the ~1100  
staff in **Berlin's**  
**80 public libraries**

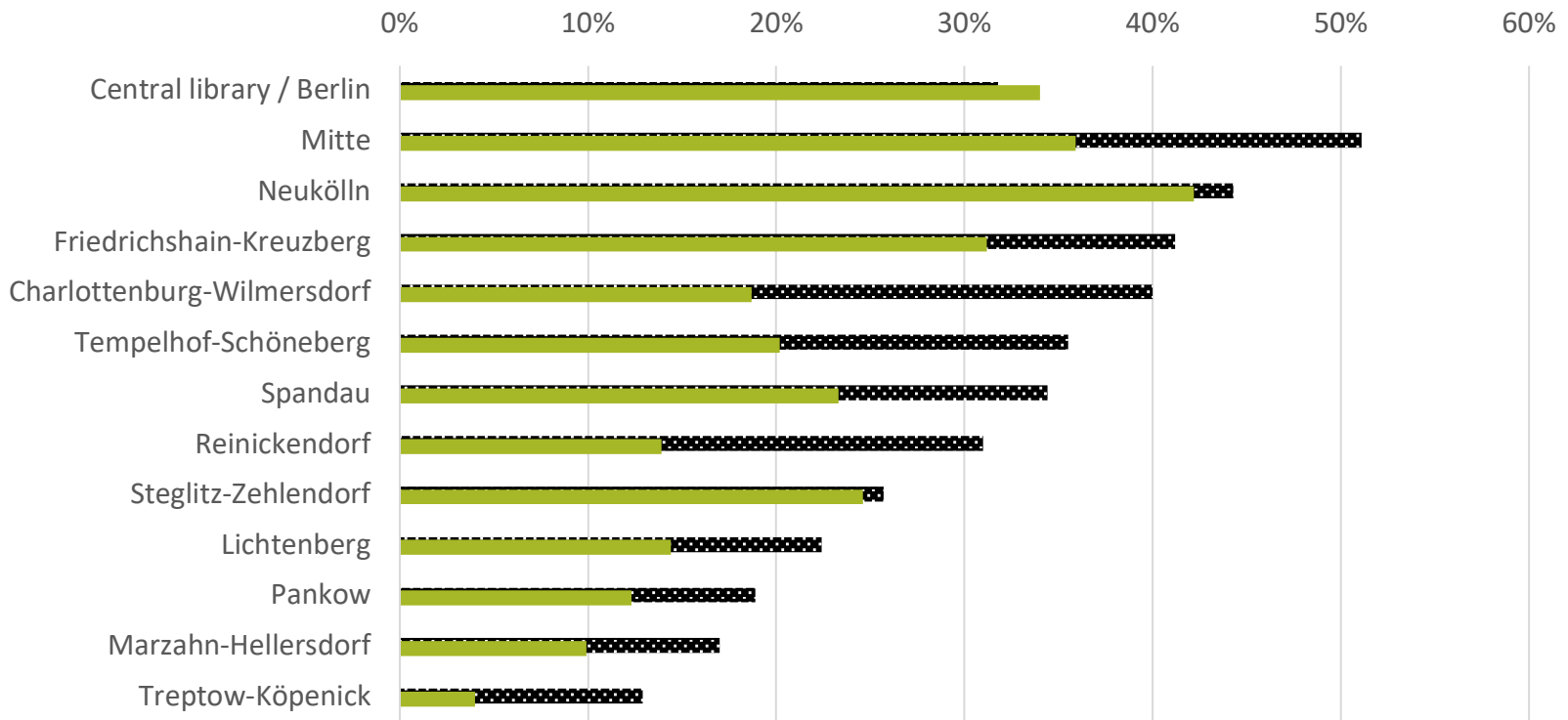
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Image: cover of the 2015 annual report of the public library  
network of Berlin (VÖBB). Photo © 2015 Barbara Dietl.



Berliner Öffentliche  
Bibliotheken  
für die Zukunft

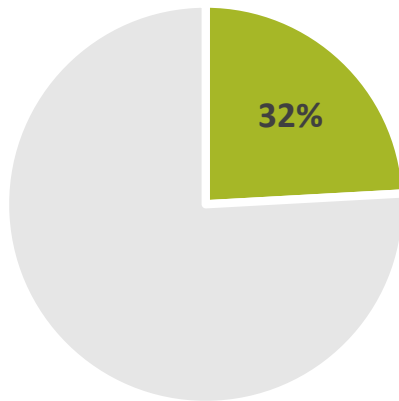
# Berlin: 1 city, 13 library systems, serving very different communities of users

Representation of immigrants by library system / district:  
**among library users** and **in overall population**

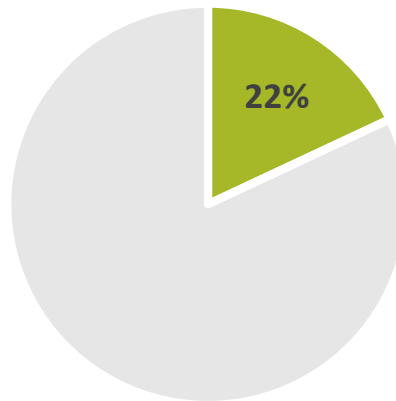


# Immigrants are **underrepresented** among library users and staff in Berlin

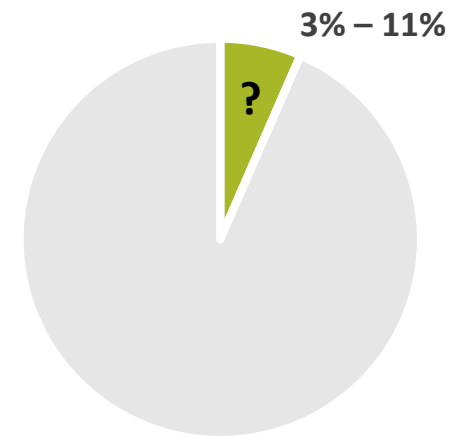
Overall population



Public library users



Public library workers



Leslie Kuo, Talk, 28 August 2018, IFLA WLIC | Graphic by L. Kuo based on the following data. Overall population data, *ibid* (see previous slide). Public library user data, Schank and Nestlinger, "Bibliotheken in Berlin: unverzichtbare Orte einer interkulturellen Stadt," *Bibliotheksdienst*, 2014. Public library workers: no data is officially gathered by the Land of Berlin on the migration background of its government employees. The estimated range here is based on my study and census data on civil servants in Berlin from the Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg.

# A study of lived experiences

## Research question

What challenges and opportunities do immigrant library workers in Germany experience?

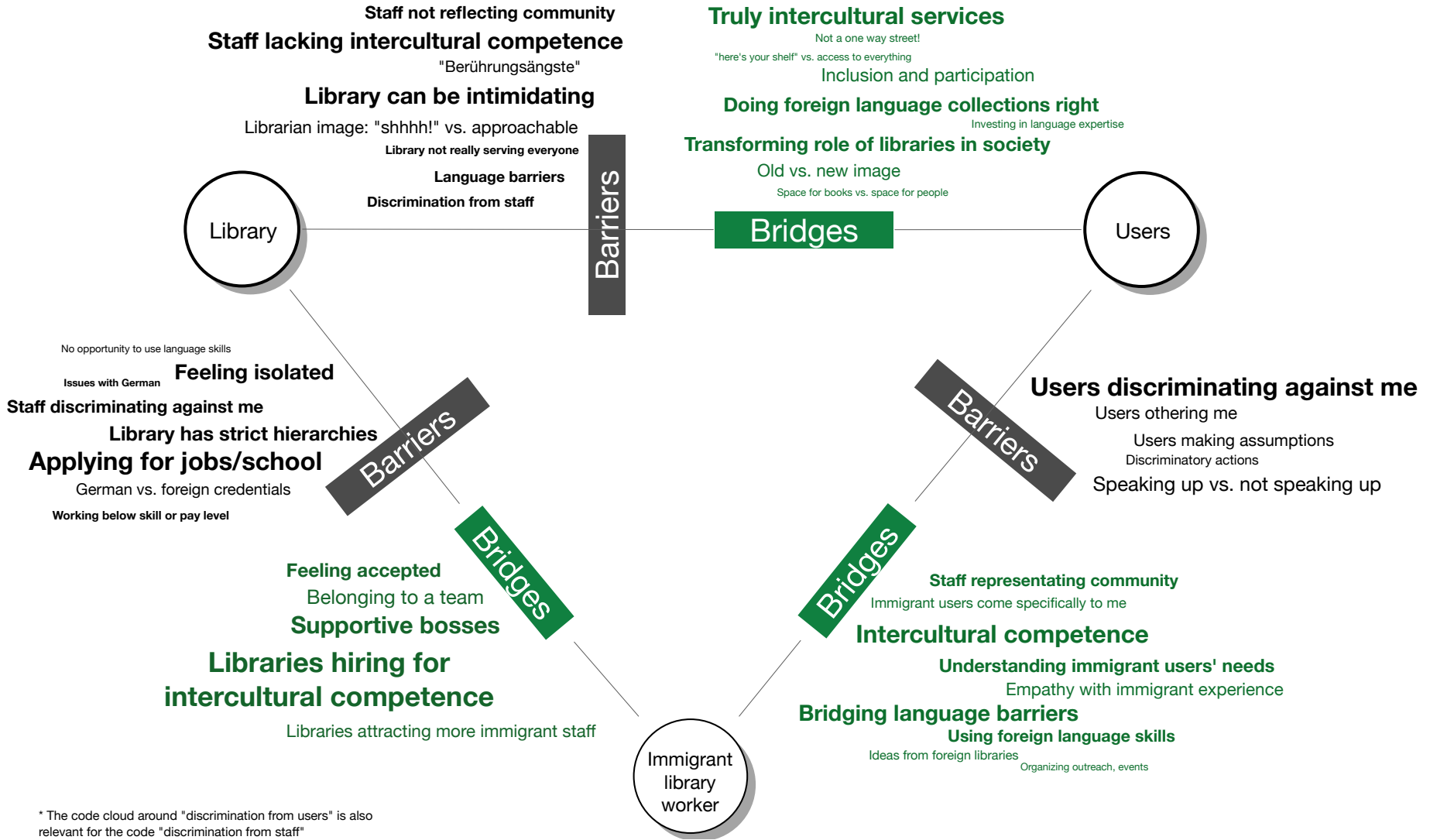
## Theoretical basis

phenomenology, Critical Race Theory, #critlib

## Qualitative methodology

Survey + 12 interviews + analysis





español italiano  
türkçe РУССКИЙ



## Immigrant library workers build bridges to users

1. Empathy with feeling out of place
2. Language skills
3. Bridging language barriers
4. Different perspective
5. Standing for inclusion



## Immigrant library workers face barriers at work

1. Being the only one
2. Structural and hiring discrimination
3. Interpersonal discrimination
4. German language, culture (new immigrants)
5. Losing hope

Leslie Kuo, Talk, 28 August 2018, IFLA WLIC | Photo © 2016 Isaiah Lopaz. "Where do you really come from," color photograph. Photographed by Richard Hancock. Used with kind permission of Isaiah Lopaz.

# The message for libraries:

1. **Listen** to immigrant staff
2. **Value** the bridges they build
3. **Break down** the barriers

# How to learn more

**More about this study:** [leslie@lesliekuo.com](mailto:leslie@lesliekuo.com)

Jaena Alabi. **“Racial Microaggressions in Academic Libraries[...]**” (2015).  
doi: 10.1016/j.acalib.2014.10.008.

Rose L. Chou and Annie Pho. **“Intersectionality at the Reference Desk: Lived Experiences of Women of Color Librarians”** (2017). Pre-print: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/30r7s9nw>

Maha Kumaran and Heather Cai. **“Identifying the Visible Minority Librarians in Canada: A National Survey”**. doi: 10.18438/B8ZC88.

Juleah Swanson, Azusa Tanaka, and Isabel Gonzalez-Smith. **“Lived Experience of Academic Librarians of Color”**. (forthcoming). Pre-print:  
<http://crl.acrl.org/index.php/crl/article/view/16850>

Mark Terkessidis. **Die Banalität Des Rassismus. Migranten zweiter Generation entwickeln eine neue Perspektive**. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2004 (print monograph).

# Thank you!

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