HANDOUT 3.3.5 TRANSCRIPT: INTERVIEW OF PROFESSOR VOLKER HEINS, HEAD OF THE INTERCULTURAL RESEARCH AREA AT THE INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY OF THE HUMANITIES IN ESSEN (KWI)

THE FUTURE OF GERMANY AS A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY.

What do you consider to be the greatest challenge in navigating cultural diversity?

Today we are dealing with a cultural diversity that is not going away. For a long time, many thought diversity was going to be a temporary condition. They thought a new unity would emerge from this diversity. Now we have a cultural diversity that is not going to melt away. It is going to lead to some higher form of unity. Diversity has always been there, diverse societies as well. In the past, these were largely hierarchically structured social formations. Whereas today, our task lies in connecting cultural diversity to freedom and equality. This is what we have to continue to work toward.

How can we leverage cultural diversity as a strength?

In order to conceive of diversity as a strength, we must do more than just have the right policies and foster tolerance. We must form friendships and relationships in everyday life – at the office, among neighbors, in schools. Inter-ethnic friendships, if you will. It's important that everyone aims to overcome ethnic barriers at the same time. This would create the indestructible core of a pluralistic society that would prevail even in the face of crises.

How do you see Germany's future as a culturally diverse society?

First of all, here in Germany we will have cities in which the minorities, taken together, will form the majority. That is, minorities of people who were born abroad, who have non-Christian faiths and non-European roots. This means that cities like Frankfurt and Stuttgart, for example, will become more similar to Amsterdam, Brussels and London. And, at the same time, there will also be divisions in this society. We will not be able to reach any major consensus on these questions.

What is the key to living together successfully amid cultural diversity?

Empirical studies were carried out in major German cities with mixed neighborhoods and heterogeneous urban districts featuring a balanced ratio of minorities. That is to say, in areas where there is no single minority that totally dominates any other. The city of Offenbach is often used as an example, but there are similar neighborhoods in Berlin. These studies showed that in cities with these conditions, cultural diversity can influence and co-create the terms of its own acceptance. We know that tolerance levels are quite high in such neighborhoods. Friendships are formed beyond borders, and so on. This is a cause for optimism.

Source: "Volker Heins on the future of Germany as a pluralistic society." *Bertellsman-Stiftung.com*, 2018, Berlin, https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/media-center/media/mid/volker-heins-on-the-future-of-germany-as-a-pluralistic-society/.