

Kanak TV

Lydia M. Koglin

Abstract in English

Kanak TV is a film project that was invented by the members of Kanak Attak in Cologne, Germany, in response to the media image of “migrants”. The Kanak TV short films and documentaries are available on their website and are often shown to young students, at festivals and exhibitions. Their aim is to intervene in the current discussion about migration in Germany.

Abstract in italiano

Kanak TV è un progetto cinematografico ideato dai membri della Kanak Attak di Colonia (Germania), in risposta all'immagine degli immigrati fornita dai media. I cortometraggi e i documentari della Konak TV sono disponibili on-line e sono spesso mostrati a giovani studenti durante festival ed mostre. Il progetto mira a intervenire in modo significativo nell'attuale discussione sulla migrazione in Germania.

Area: Media

Kind-category of project: Film project

Kind-category of actor: Country-wide network of local groups

Country: Germany

Year: 2001- (Is it still ongoing?)

5 key-words: media, TV, migrants, identity, political network

Description of the project

Kanak Attak

Kanak TV is a media project initiated by the German Kanak Attak network that was founded in 1998. Kanak Attak was created to present a new migratory self-awareness to the broader public. With their manifesto, that was published the same year, Kanak Attak clearly dissociates itself from common ideas of “mültükültüralizm” and a “post-modern concept of Interculturalism”. Using the politically incorrect and out-dated word “Kanak” – sort of an equivalent to the American “nigger” – as a name, Kanak Attak has set a statement that is provoking yet also demonstrates their confident self-conception. They describe their objectives as follows:

“Kanak Attak” is a community of different people from diverse backgrounds who share a commitment to eradicate racism from German society. Kanak Attak is not interested in questions about your passport or heritage, in fact it challenges such questions in the first place. Kanak Attak challenges the conservative and liberal orthodoxy that good “race relations” is simply a matter of tighter immigration control. Our common position consists of an attack against the “Kanakisation” of specific groups of people through racist ascriptions which denies people their social, legal and political rights.

(kanak attak manifesto, http://www.kanak-attak.de/ka/about/manif_eng.html)

Kanak Attak is a German nationwide project with eight local/regional groups in the cities of Berlin, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Cologne, Tübingen, Stuttgart, Munich, and

Freiburg. Each of these groups organise local meetings, conferences and the exchange with the other groups. Kanak Attak is very active in participating in political events as well as creating opportunities for migrants to gather and exchange thoughts.

Apart from meetings and events such as lectures, readings etc. Kanak Attak also provides information on its website: articles about legal obstacles for migrants, information about current political events, and also satirical contributions to the discussion about legalisation (e.g. a guide to marriage “what is the colour of your toothbrush”, T-shirts).

Kanak TV

Kanak TV was initiated by members of the local Kanak Attak group in Cologne. Like Kanak Attack the TV group has political interest in promoting a different point of view about immigration into Germany. Through the means of filming and producing short documentaries they focus on the genre of visual arts. Miltiadis Oulios, one of the founding members of Kanak TV describes the beginning of the project: “we were meeting with the Kanak Attak group here in Cologne, we were about 10 people discussing what we could do about the current situation regarding migrants. We didn’t want to do anything that was expected from us, like protesting or something like that.”

The slogan “migratory self-authorisation” was chosen as a motto for Kanak TV as well as well as for Kanak Attak. They aim to question the way migrants are usually depicted in media and treated in public. They aim to uncover racism and partly also the “fight against racism” as a social construct that builds up and constantly repeats a social hierarchy that marginalises groups of people, especially those with a migrant background.

Their work deals with the question how images are being made, manipulated, and used to promote a certain picture of “the foreigner”. At the same time they are using the medium of film to create anti-images (or juxtapositions “Gegenbilder”) and to de-construct the common but fundamentally mistaken perspective on immigration.

“We reject every practise that gazes at, measures (?), and puts migrants into categories. Instead we turn the view on ‘Alemanni’ who think it is normal to prove and question others and reduce them by a view form above.”

(kanak TV manifesto, <http://www.kanak-tv.de/index.html>)

The movies are mostly documentaries featuring interviews or portraits. The ideas as well as the creative approach come from the members of the film group. The reports typically use confrontation and confusion – for example when a young female reporter asks a guest at a party if she minds being served only by “kanaks”. As a result of their work Kanak TV has produced several short movies that give an interesting and surprisingly entertaining insight into their point of view.

A short overview shows what themes are featured in the movies of Kanak TV:

- “40 Jahre Einwanderung” (forty years of immigration), 9 min., 2001

On November 10th 2001 the city of Cologne celebrated the fortieth anniversary of the first contract with Turkey sending “Gastarbeiter” (guest workers, migrant workers) to Germany with a splendid gala sponsored by the Ford automobile company. Besides the Mayor lots of the local celebrities took part in the event covered by the Kanak TV camera team.

To reveal the reduced and constantly reducing use of the idea of migrant life and culture Kanak TV reporters mirrored the questions that are usually directed to migrants back to Germans: “by doing this the seemingly natural viewpoint which is usually held by ‘the Germans’ when looking at ‘the others’ was supposed to be uncovered and explored to the point of absurdity.” The Kanak TV members observed that most of the Germans were using exactly the same arguments migrants have been using for years when they try to justify their state of being and had to fight against unification and the categorisation of identity.

Interview extracts from the documentary “40 years of immigration”:

Kanak TV reporter: Where do you come from?

Guest: Excuse me?

Kanak TV reporter: Where do you come from?

Another guest: I am a teacher at a primary school

Kanak TV reporter (insisting): But you are from Germany?

Guest: Yes, I am from Germany, Cologne

Kanak TV reporter: Is beating up women – like Dieter Bohlen, a famous German singer did – part of your German culture?

One guest: No, certainly not

Another guest: Well, it happens, naturally... no, I mean not naturally. But it happens...

Another guest: I think, that’s a very suggestive question.

Another guest: That is happening in all cultures. You can’t say it is typically German or typically English. You find it everywhere on this world.

- “*Weißes Ghetto*” (white ghetto), 8 min., 2002

“Cologne-Lindenthal is a relatively prosperous and homogeneous neighbourhood: you won’t find a single person with a migrant background in the streets. What is happening there? Are these Germans separating themselves from the rest of the world? Is Lindenthal a white ghetto?”

These are the questions that Kanak TV reporters ask themselves and the residents. With the theme of this short documentary they refer to the debate within the German media about so called “ghettos”: living areas with a high percentage of migrant inhabitants that are usually seen as centres of violence. By doing so, they approach a topic that is often forgotten in this context: the “segregation” and formation of neighbourhoods in which almost no migrants live.

- “*Das Märchen von der Integration*” (the fairy-tale on integration)

This is a fictional story about a migrant woman on her way to be integrated into the German society. Her tasks are set by the German government – so it appears in the movie – and range from “hold a conversation with a German person for at least 4 minutes”, “eat a typical German dish and finish it all”

- “*Recolonize Cologne*” (the recolonisation of Cologne), 45 min., 2006

The latest movie of Kanak Attak is not available on the internet yet. One can currently watch it in different public places however.

Results – Influence on public debates about immigration and integration

Four short movies originated from the activities of Kanak TV. Additionally, the written manifesto and the text “steps” express the elaborated ideas and objectives that stand behind the project. But the results of Kanak TV are more than the construction of an entertaining website. The movies are frequently shown at film festivals and at other occasions such as exhibitions (“*born to be white*”, Wien, 1. 6. 2005 – 22. 7. 2005; “*Projekt Migration*”, Cologne, 1. 10. 2005 – 15. 1. 2006), theatre-shows etc. Consequently Kanak Attak manages to present their point of view to a broader public and to actively take part in debates.

When and how long: structure and steps of the project

Kanak TV was founded in 2001 with their coverage of the gala celebrating the 40th anniversary of the guest worker programme. Since then meetings and film productions take place occasionally. About 10 people are involved in the work of Kanak Attak, mostly without specialist training in filming or editing. However one professional cameraman does assist the Kanak TV reporters.

Place and context

Migration to Germany

During the 1950s the German government fixed the first “Gastarbeiter”-contract with Italy. This agreement allowed thousands of unemployed workers from Italy and later also from Greece, Turkey, Portugal, and Yugoslavia to travel to Germany and find work there, in a country that experienced an economic boom and was in the need for (cheap and willing, male, bad paid...) workers. By calling them “Gastarbeiter” (guest workers) it was clear that their status was only transitory and that they were supposed to go back to their country of origin after having finished the work in Germany. But this did not happen: many workers proved to be too important for the factories, especially for the automobile production and so it would have been inefficient to send a worker home once he had learned the acquired skills. Up until the 1970’s about 5 million workers and their families migrated to Germany. Giving up the rotation principle and making it legal for “Gastarbeiter” to gain a “permanent resident status” Germany finally became a country of immigration – a fact that wasn’t paid much attention to for many years. The integration of first generation, but also second or third generation migrants were long ignored by political or social programs.

Recently the role and problems of people with a migratory background have been discovered by the politicians and the media. An intense discussion about how to deal with the “after-effects” (a relatively high percentage of school children speaking insufficient German; the formation of neighbourhoods that are dominated by, for example, Turkish speaking inhabitants such as Berlin Kreuzberg) has been going on since.

Kanak Attak as an organ of migratory self-authorisation

It is at this point the activist Kanak Attak and also Kanak TV want to intervene. When talking about identity and the sense of belonging to a certain group migrants are often

lumped together in ethnic entities and find themselves labelled as “others”, migrant activities and the maintenance of their original culture are euphemistically celebrated in “multikulti-festivals”. As they describe it: *“we don’t want to be reduced to our ethnicity, instead, we think that our attitude is much more decisive and that is why we do Kanak Attak. We participate because we have the same position and not because we have the same ethnic background.”*

Target

With their short movies and documentaries they want to reach everyone, to quote: “the more German and self-pleasing the audience, the more sardonic the laughter” (from the Kanak TV website). Their aim is to surprise and even shock the audience and to encourage the discussion about migration in Germany.

Methodology

Kanak TV tries to show their movies a broad public. They participate in festivals, exhibition, and public readings. The movies are also shown to groups such as students, in clubs etc. on request. On their website they encourage people to spread their movies on the internet, they offer free downloads of the movies, and one can also order the videotapes at cost price.

Authors, Funding and Networks

The members of Kanak TV are volunteers participating in the activist group. There is no governmental or other group behind the network, consequently, the funding and maintenance of the network is done with private engagement and support.

Strengths

It is obvious that the practises of the Kanak Attak network as well as Kanak TV are original and provoking at the same time. With their approach they contributed to the debate about migration and identity in a new way. It is especially important to mention that this is way in which migrants or children of second or third migrant generation can take an active part in the discussion about their status and representation. Kanak TV appears to be innovative in regards to the media they are using as well as to the message they want to spread.

Visual approach to the debate

The Kanak members have set themselves the target to show the public other ways of seeing immigration and through this overcome old habits of categorising. The project of Kanak TV can also be seen as a reaction to the common handling of migration in German media, such as tabloid press or television. By choosing the medium of film Kanak TV is especially dedicated to real and/or mental images of migration.

Creativity

Additionally the creative part needs to be highlighted. Making up themes and a storyline enforces the discussions and contemplation about, for example, identity or the points of view of people involved in the project. Because the reporters usually

don't have the same ethnic background, different migratory perspectives and experiences are mingled, compared and brought together.

Circulation

The visual and documentary approach also allows others to watch the output of the creative work of the members of Kanak Attak. Their use of the internet as a means to spread the movies contributes to their desire to reach as many people as possible with their ideas.

Critical points

The critical points that are being mentioned here mostly come up because Kanak TV is a unique and original project. The storyline and the themes of the movies are developed and worked out by the members of Kanak TV. The filming, cutting and all the other actions that are evolved in the process of making the movie available for the public (e. g. on the internet website) depend on the personal engagement of the different members. Consequently the success of the project rises and falls in relation to their commitment and inventiveness.

In fact, the movies are entertaining and ironic as well as provoking, depending up on which side one stands. Being fairly intellectual and political active, the members of Kanak Attak first of all address an audience that has a similar awareness of the inadequate discussion about the problem of integration. On the other hand the interviewed guests at the gala (thrown in honour of the 40th anniversary of the Gastarbeiter-movement) couldn't really handle the offensive and provoking approach Kanak Attak took, also, many viewers of their movies are left alone with the statements made by interviewees. By surprising people in unexpected situations and confronting them with provoking questions they benefit from the spontaneous and unreflected responses. However, catching the involuntarily interview partners off guard creates a situation that is unfair and doesn't allow the respondent to rethink their answer and it also shows the interviewer in a much better light. This is part of their strategy and as their manifesto reads "this is the end of a culture of dialogue" Kanak Attak doesn't want to appear as a group of "authentic and exotic human material" that just brings a little colour into German everyday-life, as this downplays the importance of elaborated integration. Consequently their approach doesn't focus on the exchange and discourse with the audience. As the Kanak TV member Miltiadis Oulius mentions: *"there were people who really liked our idea, saying 'finally someone finds a new way to deal with this'. But at the same time, there were others who on one hand liked the movies but on the other hand were thinking that the movies would support racist attitudes because people felt provoked."*

The change of perspective that Kanak Attak aims at is theoretically and practically not as easy as it sounds. But the path they are taking is definitely a new and refreshing way of responding to a flood of images that usually are associated with "immigration" by the public, the media, etc. Doing this they reflect on different themes in order to make the viewer rethink and de-construct the usual ways in which immigration is depicted and discussed.

Conclusion: what is "exportable" in the project?

Themes

Kanak TV is certainly a project which will continue to inspire other projects as it spreads, but one has to consider that it is highly dependent on the commitments of its participants.

Furthermore, Kanak TV is picking up topics from every day events and is reacting to currents developments, such as the changing status of migrants under German law. So their work is not monotonous but rather reflects contemporary issues. Another strength of Kanak TV is their contribution to the debate about the image of migrants that is created by the media.

Methodology

Probably the two most important things to be mentioned here are firstly the creative approach and secondly the fact that everyone involved in the project is challenged to reconsider his own position and experience. Furthermore the fact that the movies are shown on the internet makes their project interesting and visible for a large group of people.

OTHER COMMENTS

<http://www.antiberliner.de/?p=21>

Interview with a Kanak Attak member (ger.)

www.ak-migrationspolitik.de/paperkristinschwierz.pdf

PDF article about Kanak Attak (ger.)

LINKS

<http://www.kanak-tv.de>

Kanak TV website

<http://www.kanak-attak.de>

Website of the Kanak Attak network