

## Defending tolerance and diversity

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Admittedly, as Berliners, our attitude can sometimes be insufferable. We like to talk up the city's cultural richness, its appeal to young people and artists from all over the world and its actual and imagined tolerance, all in the hope that some of the city's gloss will reflect back on us. Of course we all thought it was great when city mayor hopeful Klaus Wowereit introduced himself at the SPD party conference in 2001 with the words: "I am gay – and it's a good thing!" and when he openly lived out his sexuality, his relationship and his lust for life throughout his time in office – even as the social deficits of social-democratic and leftist politics in the city became increasingly obvious as his tenure as mayor went on.

And there is truth to the image of Berlin as a stronghold of tolerance. A young Mexican friend tells me how as a student back home, being gay and being different meant he was driven to the brink of suicide, but that here in Berlin he has found more than just a refuge; he has found a place where he is happy to live. I am glad to hear his story and stories of the many others like him in Berlin. But this is just one side of things.

The other side of the story, however, emerges in stories like that of 16 year old Berlin resident Nassar, a gay Lebanese boy who faced being forced into marriage by his family. When he refused to go along with it, his family swiftly made plans to forcibly send him back to Lebanon. They didn't want a "queer" in the family. His father is said to have told him that people like Nassar should get a knife to the throat.

Nassar's fate is not an isolated phenomenon. Forced marriages are not just an issue for young Muslim women; there is a rising number of reports of cases involving young men. The number of killings motivated by homophobia is also on the rise. All too often these acts are described as "honor killings", a horribly euphemistic and inappropriate term. Homosexuality contradicts the traditional gender roles and the prevailing masculine ideal of men as being strong and dominant. While this attitude may often be found in migrant communities, we should be careful about pointing fingers. It's not as if such attitudes have long been eradicated from mainstream German society.

The Nasser case can be seen against a background of reports of attacks by migrant youths on gay people, particularly in the central parts of Berlin where racists and neo-Nazis rarely step foot. The number of homophobic attacks is frighteningly high. In its 2013 annual report the gay anti-violence project Maneo reports 290 such incidents – and that's just the cases that are reported.

As citizens of Berlin we have built up a cultural diversity in the city over the last years. But we cannot afford to be complacent. We must defend our city – from the homophobic as well as from the racist and anti-Semitic attacks of recent times.