

2019-2020

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Recommended APA 7 Citation

Starkweather, S. (2020). Collective identity in Germany: An assessment of national theories. *James Madison Undergraduate Research Journal*, 7(1), 36-48. <http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/jmurj/vol7/iss1/4>

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Collective Identity in Germany

An Assessment of National Theories

Sean Starkweather



"Köln stellt sich quer - Tanz die AfD" by Elke Witzig is licensed under [CC BY-SA-4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

Beginning in the 18th century, the question of what makes a nation has occupied a prominent place in German politics. From the national theories of the 18th-century German Romantics, who identified cultural and ethnic factors as being the key determinants, to modern civic nationalists and postnationalists, who point to liberal civic values and institutions, the importance of collective identity and how it is oriented has remained an important topic for German scholars and policymakers. Using survey research, I assess the accuracy and relevance of these theories in contemporary German society. I find that, contrary to the optimism of modern thinkers, German collective identity remains aligned with the national theories of the Romantics, resulting in ethnic discrimination and heightened fears over the loss of culture through external ideological and ethnic sources.

The potent force of nationalism has deep roots in German history. From the first conceptualizations of a singular nation by the German Romantics to unification and the 1871 constitution to the post-reunification era, the manner in which Germans have perceived themselves as a nation has played a vital role in both domestic and international politics. But while nationalism in the eras of Johann Gottfried Herder and Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Otto von Bismarck, and Adolf Hitler are generally well understood, the character of contemporary German nationalism remains a topic of much debate. While there have always been fringe nationalist parties like the National Democratic Party (NDP), they remained just that: parties on the fringes of public thought. Indeed, the NDP has never succeeded in passing the voting threshold of 5% needed to enter the Bundestag parliament in federal elections (“September 24,” 2017). However, a surge in nationalist sentiments since 2013 threatens the multicultural society Germany has nurtured for 75 years.

This surge has been most associated with the rapid rise of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party following the European debt crisis that began in late 2009. During the eurozone crisis, five European Union member states—Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Cyprus, and most notably, Greece—experienced extremely high budget deficits and public debt, triggering a sovereign debt crisis that threatened financial institutions and the economic stability of the eurozone in its entirety, including Germany (“The Eurozone in Crisis,” 2015). The AfD received just under 5% of the vote in the 2013 federal elections, which led many to speculate that the party would implode soon after its conception (“Will Germany’s,” 2013). Yet, despite initial failure, the AfD shocked both policymakers and opponents in the 2017 federal elections by receiving almost 12.6% of the vote to become one of the largest parties in Germany (Clarke, 2017).

This new phase in German politics begs the following questions: does the AfD’s rise to prominence reflect a deeper trend in how Germans perceive themselves as a national community? Or is the AfD’s recent electoral success simply a notable but ultimately temporary setback to regionalist and internationalist ends? After all, 12.6% of the vote is still not close at all to the combined 53.4% that the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) and Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) received, and is nowhere near a majority (Clarke, 2017). These questions have become especially pertinent in the wake of the February 19, 2020, terrorist attack in Hanau, Germany. The attack was carried out by a right-wing extremist whose xenophobia led him to target two shisha bars that the Turkish community

frequented before killing his mother and himself (Kaschel, 2020). The shootings that saw the tragic deaths of ten people—nine had an immigrant background, and the tenth was the perpetrator’s mother—have brought these questions regarding German collective identity to the forefront of public discourse (Kaschel, 2020).

A surge in nationalist sentiments since 2013 threatens the multicultural society Germany has nurtured for 75 years.

In recent scholarship, Allen (2010) argued that Germans have shifted away from an ethnocentric view of national identity towards a cultural and civic one, and Bassey (2012) expanded on that argument in noting the formative role that the German state has played in constructing this more cultural and civic conception of the nation. More famously, both Dolf Sternberger and Jürgen Habermas have presented theories of constitutional patriotism, which grounds collective identity in the shared norms, values, and procedures constructed through a liberal-democratic constitution. They have rejected the relevance of a national identity, arguing that it will be or has been replaced by a postnational one following World War II. Their optimism towards a shift in collective German identity has been shared by previous administrations and, hesitantly, by the current government headed by Chancellor Angela Merkel.

In contrast to these perceptions, Connor (1994) asserted that traditional German nationalism will inevitably show increasing signs of recovery and that the “obituarials for ethnonationalism have proved immature” (p. 181). To clarify, Connor did not believe that German ethnonationalism would be akin to the racially driven chauvinism that defined the Nazi epoch, but acknowledged parallels. Other scholars have gone further, suggesting that German nationalism has adopted a more ethnocentric form that has become increasingly prominent; the Brookings Institution even published a policy brief on the new threat posed by the AfD’s apparent ethnonationalism (Stelzenmüller, 2019).

These approaches cannot adequately account for the resurgence of nationalism in Germany. In this paper, I examine arguments that the form of nationalism in contemporary Germany is of a strictly cultural, civic, or ethnic nature, and I work to understand the state’s role in inducing such beliefs. I begin by describing the philosophical

frameworks of the Romantics and modern theorists. Later, I present my argument that German neo-nationalism has taken on an ethnocultural form that harkens back to the German Romantics and the theories relating to postnational identities are mistaken. To support these claims, I utilize quantitative and qualitative sources, including voting statistics, opinion polls, statements and speeches by various government officials, and insights provided by scholars. These approaches position me to assess the nature of Germany's neo-nationalism and the validity of its narrower conceptions.

A History of German Nationalism

Theoretical Roots

The study of nationalism can very well be nebulous, so defining a “nation” at its base is important in approaching the question of German nationalism with some clarity. Plano and Olton (1969) defined a nation as “a social group which shares a common ideology, common institutions and customs, and a sense of homogeneity. . . . [T]here is also present a strong group sense of belonging associated with a particular territory considered to be peculiarly its own” (as cited in Connor, 1994, p. 92). In his seminal *Imagined Communities*, Anderson (1983) helped shape how scholars frame questions on nationalism by offering a good starting point. He defined the nation as “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (p. 6). This imagined community is limited on the basis that “even the largest of them . . . has finite, if elastic, boundaries” and sovereign because “nations dream of being free. . . . [T]he gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state” (p. 7). With these insights, we can synthesize a definition: a nation is a porous, *perceived* community whose members believe they share a sense of commonness intimately tied to a certain territory. Whether this perception accurately describes contemporary nationalism and the birth of the new international order will be assessed.

Johann Gottfried Herder and Johann Gottlieb Fichte were among the first to create theories of German nationalism. Herder's transfiguration of the concept of a *Volk* [people] in his 1784 *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* [*Ideas for the Philosophy of Human History*] was compelling and acted as a “radiation-point” around which the “new gospel of nationalism” revolved (Hayes, 1927, p. 722). For Herder, the *Volk* derived not through race or ethnicity, but through the culture that one inherits as a result of being within a particular environment (Hayes, 1927). His idea of an environment can be broken down to three fundamental

factors: physical geography, historical development, and folk-character. Although Herder failed to provide a precise definition of folk-character, it can best be described as the overarching, generalized personality of a particular national group. He argued that the natural state of humanity entails that a single nation should maintain a single national culture and, as Charles Taylor (1994) pointed out, that “a *Volk* should be true to itself” (p. 31). In other words, a nation ought to preserve the integrity of its culture.

With regards to the ideal of authenticity, Herder asserted that the Church, in advocating for the continued use of specialized Latin, inhibited forms of expression through local vernaculars. This, in turn, inhibited the nation from realizing its true self (Schmidt, 1957). On a side note, the popularity of Herder's thought lends merit to Anderson's suggestion that the specialization of Latin played a role in bringing about national consciousnesses that diametrically opposed encompassing religious communities.

Although Fichte defined the nation in terms of language and general culture at a superficial level, his theory ultimately rested on ethnicity.

While Herder stated explicitly that he spoke of culture in a broad sense, there is some disagreement regarding Fichte's arguments as to what made the nation. It is commonly believed that Fichte's 1808 *Reden an die deutsche Nation* [*Addresses to the German Nation*] merely narrowed the scope of Herder's theory in that Fichte saw the purity of the native language, a cultural artifact, determined a national identity (Martyn, 1997). Although Fichte defined the nation in terms of language and general culture at a superficial level, his theory ultimately rested on ethnicity. His appeals to *Abstammung and Abkunft* [descent and origin] occupied a prominent place in his thought, especially in his *Reden*. And though he officially rejected shared language as the principal component of a national identity, Fichte's consistent references to descent and origin betrayed his explicit denunciations of shared blood (Abizadeh, 2005). Indeed, according to Abizadeh (2005), Fichte's call for *die ursprüngliche Sprache des Stammvolkes* [the original language of one's ancestral people] when speaking on the expressive freedom of a nation was inseparable from genealogical purity. As Abizadeh noted, “Language must indeed coincide with descent” (p. 354). The twin ideas of a history and ancestry common to all Germans

are therefore components of Fichte's theory of nationalism, regardless of whether he acknowledged it or even desired it. Language only constituted a component of the theory, not its entirety. Although Fichte did not offer an ethnonational historiography for the German people, the idea of an ancestral bond between all Germans was compelling, and his work would be invoked by future German nationalists, particularly the traditional conservatives and the Nazis during the Weimar Republic. Hence, many historians have attributed the fervor with which the Nazis pursued their ambitions to theorists like Fichte (e.g., Kaufmann, 1942).

The German Romantics' concept of the nation rested on an ethnocultural foundation. Though Herder's approach rested on a broad culture, Fichte provided a more precise argument as to what gave life to the nation and what differentiates it from other nations by emphasizing people's ancestral history. However, whether the Romantics were accurate in describing the essence of nations can only be determined when contrasted with modern conceptions.

Modern Theories of Nationalism

While ethnocultural theories of nationalism found favor among academic circles prior to the conclusion of World War II, the end of the war in 1945 and the beginning of the Cold War brought forth a number of theories positing that nations are defined in civic terms. To modern theorists, nations derive from the idea that "political attachment ought to centre on the norms, the values and, more indirectly, the procedures of a liberal democratic constitution" rather than less tangible notions of culture, ethnicity, and language (Müller & Scheppele, 2008, p. 67). The division of the German state into the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) on the west and the German Democratic Republic on the east spawned two distinct theories of constitutional patriotism: the "protective" patriotism of Dolf Sternberger, which emphasized the physical structure of a nation, and the "purifying" patriotism of Jürgen Habermas, which emphasized its ethical structure (Müller, 2006). These theories stemmed from a series of lectures given by Karl Jaspers in 1946 wherein he argued that German solidarity could be found only in reflecting on their involvement in World War II and the Holocaust.

It was from the insights offered by Jaspers that Sternberger constructed his theory of *Verfassungspatriotismus* [constitutional patriotism] (Bagchi, 2016). Sternberger argued that collective identity should derive from the institutions of the democratic state and the general concept of the rule of law. As Müller (2006) pointed out, this argument depended on a "militant democracy" capable of defending itself against its

internal and external enemies" (p. 284). Having witnessed the Weimar Republic's collapse and the fragmentation of German society into rigidly defined factions, he saw this political attachment to the state as necessary for social cohesion and stability (Müller, 2006). The idea that there are enemies that the state must be defended against suggests that he was not idealistic enough so as to embrace cosmopolitan notions of identity. Rather, Sternberger's theory danced between the ethnocentric chauvinism of nationalism on the one hand and the idealistic internationalism of cosmopolitanism (Kobyliński, 2017). He saw the primary role of politics as the eternal push towards peace and his constitutional patriotism as the vehicle by which it could be achieved in a democratic state. To emphasize the plausibility of his theory, he offered an interpretation of history positing that traditional European states had been characterized by the presence of constitutional patriotism, particularly Germany under Chancellor Otto von Bismarck.

For Sternberger, the Holocaust brought about the collective emotional conditions that would push society towards constitutional patriotism.

Sternberger employed arguments that made use of the Jaspersian concept of "metaphysical guilt," which referred to the fracturing of solidarity that Jaspers saw across human beings and the collective responsibility Germans felt after the Holocaust (Müller, 2006, p. 280). For Sternberger, the Holocaust brought about the collective emotional conditions that would push society towards constitutional patriotism. Considering the historical precedent and the situation of German society, the shift back to constitutional patriotism following the divergent path that the state took in the 1930s and 1940s was, in Sternberger's eyes, likely and perhaps inevitable after 1945 (Kobyliński, 2017, p. 47).

Jürgen Habermas's theory of constitutional patriotism was inspired by but diverged from Sternberger's at a fundamental level. Unsurprisingly, Habermas's theory reflected the new optimism that had swept Europe's intelligentsia in the late stages of the Cold War: instead of grounding collective identity with the state and the physical institutions associated with it, Habermas pinned his theory on the liberal political principles and values embedded within a constitution (Kobyliński, 2017). He believed that a return to the pre-national patriotism espoused by Sternberger was not

even possible given recent history. Rather, using Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development, he conceived that individuals would develop "post-conventional identities" in which they would construct reasoned moral philosophies and abide by them honestly (Müller, 2006). It is here that Habermas's theory maintains a rationalist line of thought: the restructuring of the traditional German state to adhere to the *Rechtsstaat* [rule of law] and the *Sozialstaat* [welfare state] would enable people to engage in the public sphere so they can reason with one another as free individuals (Müller, 2006). The rule of law would push a substantive view of what constituted universal norms and protect democratic processes, and the welfare state would provide the material conditions necessary for individuals to engage in such democratic processes as equals. Habermas then focused on the question of German guilt, and it is in the controversy surrounding how best to handle this guilt that the question of the nature of German nationalism takes root; this controversy came to be known as the *Historikerstreit* [historian's dispute].

For Habermas, the Holocaust was a lesson for humanity as a whole, and German guilt could lead to an identity based on a common sense of humanity.

In contrast to more conservative thinkers, Habermas regarded arguments that the only way to establish a stronger collective German identity was to embrace a "moderate or accepting view of the Holocaust" as simply old-nationalistic (Menent, 2018). For Habermas, the Holocaust was a lesson for humanity as a whole, and German guilt could lead to an identity based on a common sense of humanity that transcended the forms of identity seen earlier in the century. Thus, the German nation would hardly be a nation at all, but rather a social group of people unified by shared liberal values and a public sphere where they could engage in politics. The factors once believed to help establish a nation—like common language, history, and ancestry—were thus nonfactors in Habermas's view, at least in the post-war era. To him, the diminishing importance of traditional national identities would lend itself to European integration, for there would be a particular good common to different communities in the form of a shared legal system (Menent, 2018).

Though Habermas's later attempts to extend his theory to all of Europe and incorporate the possibility of a European identity has faced much more criticism among scholars, it continues to find support in the post-war era and has been

adopted by a number of eager, idealistic European politicians committed to the idea of a regional community bound together by liberal democratic values.

To recapitulate, the 20th century has seen the emergence of theories of constitutional patriotism that reject conventional, traditional conceptions of national identity associated with the German Romantics and Nazi ethnonationalists. Instead, these modern theories of collective identities are grounded in either concrete ideas pertaining to the state or abstract ones pertaining to liberal democratic values. These theories gained traction in the late 20th century, and while many have since been disillusioned, they remain prominent as a consequence of recent German policy and the perceived potential in the EU's ability to nurture a transcendent European identity. In 2016, Minister of Foreign Affairs Heiko Maas even stated that "[Germany] has a murky past, but our parents' generation has created a modern Germany: cosmopolitan and liberal domestically, good neighbors and peaceful partners abroad" (Brady, 2016). It is apparent that a civic postnational view remains influential, at least within the state. For these modern theories to be determinedly accurate, there must be evidence demonstrating that German guilt has maintained its resilience as a social phenomenon and cultural or ethnic differences are marginal factors that have little to no effect in interactions between individuals.

Although the idea that the end of history had been reached is not nearly as promising as it once had been, and political theorists like Habermas and government officials concede that there remain a number of challenges that regional institutions like the EU must face, they are firm in their belief that the advent of postnational societies or civic-based nations is imminent. Many western European countries have pursued a form of regionalism wherein national identities are superseded by a broader European identity, but no country has pursued this ideal with more fervor than Germany. From the outset, the new FRG under Chancellor Konrad Adenauer has adopted a foreign policy of *Westbindung* [binding of the West], sowing the seeds for a long-term project of incorporating the people into a greater European collective. Currently, many believe that this project has begun seeing success or at least managed to nurture a national identity predicated on civic elements. This is seen most clearly in a statement by Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Germany's longest-serving foreign minister: "the more European our foreign policy is, the more national it is" (as cited in Kirchick, 2018). While I disagree with Genscher's assessment, the arguments presented in its defense speak to the complexity of the questions being addressed.

Questioning German Guilt

Modern theorists have pointed to German guilt as the catalyst for a new constitutional patriotism that would replace the traditional form of nationalism. This position is reasonable considering that Germany experienced a period of nearly complete suppression of nationalist sentiments by both the government and the general public in the years immediately following World War II (Berlin, 2003). The tragedies brought about by Hitler's regime—a regime many supported or were sympathetic to—diminished all traces of nationalism in German society (Breuilly, 1992). However, the initial absence of national sentiments may not preclude a later rise of nationalism and nationalistic behavior. If this is the case, does German guilt ensure that nationalism will permanently remain at the fringes of political life?

Allen (2010) pointed to the failure of the “New Right” in procuring significant support among the general population as one indication of the German people's shift away from an ethnocentric view of the Volk. While believing in overtly positive responses to these questions may have been reasonable, Connor (1994) provides an argument that tempers the implications of Allen's (2010) claim:

Germans [had] held their ethnonational proclivities in tight rein. But as memories recede, as the realization grows that Nazism and German nationalism are not inevitably synonymous, as pride of postwar material and cultural achievements takes on the hue of pride in German achievements, as older Germans come to believe that Germany's period of atonement and parole has lasted long enough, and as a postwar generation that believes it cannot be held in any way culpable for the mistakes of its parents comes into power, German nationalism manifests commensurate signs of recovery. (p. 181)

Because the initial disappearance of German nationalism was the product of German guilt, there is a finitude that characterizes the suppression of nationalism. Specifically, the temporal aspect of this suppression, which has involved the voluntary participation of the people under the state, is such that time nullifies the effects of German guilt. Thus, when Alexander Gauland, then an AfD candidate for the Bundestag, stated that Germans “have the right to be proud of the achievements of the German soldiers in two world wars” and when AfD's chief in Thuringia Björn Höcke declared the Holocaust memorial in Berlin a “monument of shame” and called for a “180-degree turnaround” with regards to German

guilt, the responses were not a unified outcry against such sentiments being clearly nationalistic, but a mixed batter of utter outrage, sympathy, and agreement (as cited in Dearden 2017; as cited in Huggler, 2017). Höcke later clarified that the Holocaust “is part of our history. But it is only part of our history” and that “guilt consciousness alone cannot create a healthy identity, but only a broken one” (as cited in “Fury as AfD,” 2017). Yet even his clarification directs attention to the problem of German national identity as it relates to the feelings of guilt, and more importantly, it hints towards the temporal aspect of guilt. As time passes, events fade into the backdrop of history, and the tragedies once believed to be embedded within the German character become dulled within the memories of the German people.

While the New Right may have been at the fringe earlier, it is presently a powerful force to be reckoned with.

Consequently, the state's attempts at forcing public conscious reflection have been met with increasing confusion and resentment. A divide exists between the state's perception of how the German nation ought to be defined and the perception held by many of its people. Although Allen (2010) was correct in asserting that Germans have shifted away from a strictly ethnocentric understanding of the nation, his implicit conclusion that shared history plays no role does not account for the time factor, which cannot be ignored considering the emotive nature of guilt. The rapid rise in popularity of the AfD lends merit to this idea, for the relative weakness of right-wing parties in the early 21st century has, over the course of a decade, shifted into relative strength. The AfD is seen as an ever-increasing threat by the left-wing and moderate parties, especially after the 2017 federal election. While the New Right may have been at the fringe earlier, it is presently a powerful force to be reckoned with.

A Popular Nationalism

What are the reasons for the feelings of disenfranchisement and concern that led to the rise of popular nationalist parties like the AfD? To what extent do they speak to the nature of Germans' view of the *Volk*? Some scholars point to economic factors, such as low income and unemployment, as being responsible for increases in nationalist sentiments (Hill, 2017; Staudenmeier, 2017). Unfortunately, these factors do not adequately explain the increase in support for the AfD

and certainly not the revival of nationalism. To determine the underlying factors, it is necessary to analyze public opinion in a broader sense, and polling and survey data offer good windows of opportunity for determining the content of German collective identity. In analyzing this data, notions of a German nation predicated on civic values and institutions begin to fall apart, and the reality of an ethnocultural conception of the nation becomes more evident.

Surveying “Germanness”

Language and religion are typically seen as the cornerstones of German culture, although the arts occupy a clear place as well. It may be pointed out that Catholic-Protestant divisions contradict the notion that religious affiliation is a primary binding factor; however, this superficial divide is superseded by a general sense of shared faith in Christianity in the face of the perceived threat of Islam. One of the most significant concerns held by Germans is the “loss of culture, values, and the way of life we grew up with”: in 2017, 19% believed that it was the greatest threat to the future of their children, and 95% of those who voted for the AfD believed that Germany would experience a real loss of culture (Center for Insights in Survey Research, 2017; “Umfragen zur AfD,” 2017).

The issues that Germans value reveal how the AfD grew its voter base so rapidly in just four years.

This perceived danger can, to an extent, be seen as stemming from the influx of Muslim refugees since 2015. Notably, 16% of respondents in a Center for Insights in Survey Research (2017) poll saw the refugee crisis as the biggest problem facing Germany and 20% believed it was the biggest issue facing Europe as a whole. Another survey found that 71% of all respondents were in favor of limiting the number of refugees in the long run, and 79% felt more needed to be done to integrate refugees (“Umfragen zur Flüchtlingspolitik,” 2017). It should be noted that 54% of respondents believed that the refugees were an enrichment for the country (“Umfragen zur Flüchtlingspolitik,” 2017). Still, 57% of all survey respondents and 92% of AfD supporters were worried that the influence of Islam was too strong (“Umfragen zur AfD,” 2017; “Umfragen zur Flüchtlingspolitik,” 2017). Perhaps due in part to this perception, 52% of Germans either entertained the idea or were in favor of a “dominant culture” (“Over 50% of Germans,” 2017). Given that a significant portion of those who voted for a left-wing or center party

in the 2013 elections switched affiliations and voted for the AfD in 2017—of the nearly 6 million votes that the AfD received in 2017, over 1 million of those votes came from those who voted for the CDU in 2013—the issues that Germans value reveal how the AfD grew its voter base so rapidly in just four years (Burn-Murdoch et al., 2017). Considering that the AfD desires cultural preservation and calls for the government to actively protect German culture as the “predominant culture” in its “Manifesto for Germany,” it is reasonable to presume that those concerned with the loss of German culture may feel the pull-factor of the AfD and the push-factor of what they perceive as the negligence of the parties they voted for in earlier elections (Alternative für Deutschland, 2017; Center for Insights in Survey Research, 2017; Holscher et al., 2017).

The array of survey data suggests that the sentiments and policy prescriptions typically attributed to the AfD and other far right-wing groups are much more prevalent than believed. Cultural artifacts remain vital components of German collective identity. Germany’s neo-nationalism, therefore, cannot be condemned out of hand as simply a radical ideology maintained by fringe movements. Rather, it must be recognized as a genuine reaction to a perceived sudden shift in the normative social dynamics that characterize German life.

It is important to note that Germans seem not in favor of rejecting or deporting all incoming refugees, but of expediting the process of deporting asylum seekers who have already been rejected. Additionally, Germans are willing to accommodate refugees insofar as the refugees are willing to integrate into society. This willingness is marked by a general acceptance of institutional methods for integrating and potentially assimilating refugees among other immigrants. In a recent survey, 76% of Germans without a migrant background agreed that immigrants ought to “adapt their behavior to German culture,” and 83% with a migrant background responded the same way (Chase, 2016). Though the disparity is not too great, it suggests, as Federal Minister Peter Altmaier stated, that the desire to assimilate on the part of immigrants in a broad sense is “abundantly and distinctly present” (as cited in Chase, 2016). Even though this data demonstrably undermines the postnationalist vision, it also shows the cultural aspects that underlie “Germanness.”

Immigration

While the proposition that German neo-nationalism has assumed the ethnocultural trappings of Herder and Fichte as it did in the late 18th and early 19th centuries can be argued

simply on grounds of general public opinion, it is in studying the real dynamics between ethnic Germans and those with migrant backgrounds on a more intimate level that the nature of neo-nationalism in Germany becomes more apparent. Both steady flows and sudden influxes of immigrants are nothing new to Germany. As Bade (1995) observed, “since the late nineteenth century, transatlantic emigration from Germany has decreased while continental labor immigration has increased” (p. 515). More relevantly, Goodman (2007) asserts that “the postwar story of German economic and social change has been very much informed, possibly dominated, by *de facto* immigration” (p. 100). Indeed, the *Wirtschaftswunder* [economic miracle] of the 1950s led to labor shortages that required the FRG to pursue policies that encouraged immigration of Turkish *Gastarbeiter* [guest workers]. But there is a major difference between immigration into Germany in the late 19th century and in the postwar era: in the former period, the government reacted in a hostile manner to the influx of early immigrants, especially in Prussia (Bade, 1995). It was during this time that Germany was led from ethnocultural to ethnonational conceptions of the nation as the government of the late 19th century “bound civil rights to the principle of ethnic descent,” thereby reaffirming *jus sanguinis* [the principle of ethnic heritage] (Bade, 1995, p. 522). By extension, the emphasis on ethnic background in relation to questions of citizenship laid the groundwork for the ethnic nationalist fervor that took Germany by storm in the 1930s through the outspoken rhetoric of politicians like Heinrich von Treitschke and, of course, Hitler.

In contrast, immigration in the postwar era was encouraged by the FRG, even after reunification in 1990. Yet, despite the state’s genuine and commendable attempts to bring about a new age of multiculturalism and define the German nation in terms of civic values and democratic institutions, the public has nonetheless been much more reserved. The case of the Turkish population provides a rich instance in this regard.

Integration

The FRG does not track race in its census. However, independent analyses have been conducted that involve a number of different variables, like intermarriage, naming habits, and name-based discrimination. The rate of ethnic intermarriage is a powerful indicator of a minority’s assimilation into their new society; it is certainly one of the most easily observable signs of assimilation as well (Gerhards & Hans, 2009). It reflects the amount of interaction between members of different ethnic groups and their willingness to accept and accommodate one another (Janßen & Schroedter, 2007). According to the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), the intermarriage rate among first-generation Turkish men

in 2008 was 7.1% and 12.1% for second-generation Turkish men; first-generation Turkish women had an intermarriage rate of 2.6% (Nottmeyer, 2009). The MPI even asserted that the increase in intermarriage between first- and second-generation Turks in Germany indicated “the second generation’s greater commitment to and integration into German society” (Nottmeyer, 2009). Intermarriage rates between Turks and Germans have, in fact, risen since 2008. As of 2017, the rate among Turkish women was 14% while the rate among Turkish men was 19% (“Love in Germany,” 2018). This increase in intermarriages suggests not only a willingness among the Turkish population in Germany to integrate, but that there are increasingly more ethnic Germans willing to accept and accommodate Turks into German society. This seems to vindicate, to a small degree, the cosmopolitan claim that Europeans are moving beyond traditional nationalisms.

Some have wrongly used these findings to push an anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim rhetoric.

It must also be considered that the ethnic component of collective identity can potentially detract with regards to Turkish integration. A 2018 study by the Center for Turkish Studies at the University of Duisburg-Essen found that 89% of Turks feel they belong either “strongly” or “very strongly” in Turkey, greater than the 81% that answered in the same manner regarding Germany (Sauer, 2018). This dual identity leads to Ross’s (2009) assertion that “the strong ethnic ties and identification with the homeland that characterize German-Turks provide meaning and comfort in daily life, but appear to impede assimilation” (p. 710). Some have wrongly used these findings to push an anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim rhetoric. Kern (2016), for example, emphasized that ethnic Turks are, on average, “economically and educationally less successful than other immigrant groups.” Taken alone, this statement appears to be simply factual. However, when grouped with survey data that highlight only the negative elements of the Turkish population in Germany, the result is a view slanted to enhance a preconceived political ideology, which neglects the real progress made by German Turks towards assimilating and integrating. Although it may appear ethnic Turks are “resisting” assimilation and less inclined to assimilate compared to other minorities, the Turkish population’s relative acculturation is roughly equal to other immigrant populations that originate from countries that are culturally closer (Gerhards & Hans, 2009). In simpler terms, as Pokorny (2017) noted,

Hans (2010) shows that the majority of immigrants do in fact assimilate into German society. The first generation generally does not assimilate completely, but some members of the second generation become totally assimilated. When it comes to the consumption of high culture, Hans (2015) notes that third-generation immigrants are no different from young Germans. (p. 11)

Despite this reality, many Germans have tended to distinguish themselves from German-Turks, as evidenced by the famous departure of Mesut Özil from the German national football team; Özil was quoted as saying, “I am German when we win, but I am an immigrant when we lose” (as cited in “German Turks still rooted,” 2018). Inter-ethnocultural relations may have improved, but there is clearly much progress to be made.

Hyphenation

Although there are a number of modes by which to demonstrate ethnic socialization between ethnic Turks and Germans, ethnic acculturation is most simply demonstrated via naming habits. Gerhards and Hans (2009) found that while Turks were less likely to give their children German names, having close interethnic relationships of any kind with ethnic Germans greatly increased the likelihood that a Turk would opt for a German name for their child, and “a high share of Turks married to German partners adopt naming habits completely in line with ethnic Germans.” Moreover, given that names are associated with particular ethnic groups, this also reinforces the idea that there is in fact a strong ethnic component to collective identities and how they are developed.

The existence of name-based discrimination is a powerful indicator of the importance of ethnicity as it relates to identity. Names have long been an identifier of ethnic background. In Bosnia, for example, last names specifically were used to identify friend and foe as the new country collapsed into civil conflict in the early- to mid-90s (Nye & Welch, 2017). While name-based exclusionary behavior in Germany is not nearly as dramatic as in Bosnia, there is strong evidence that ethnic discrimination against individuals with identifiably Turkish names still exists in German society, particularly in schools and the workplace. In schools, Bonefeld and Dickhäuser (2018) found that “when a student was assumed to have a migrant background [through names], the dictation was graded less favorably compared to a student without a migrant background, namely by 0.3 grade steps” (p. 7). Bonefeld and Dickhäuser (2018) noted that this disparity is more likely a result of a positive bias toward students without

a migrant background than a negative bias towards students with a migrant background. This bias may play a role in students with migrant backgrounds attending lower-track schools compared to native ethnic Germans.

The ethnic component of collective identities is still important in how people interact in German society.

Ethnic discrimination also exists in the workplace. Kaas and Manger (2012) found that applications marked by an identifiably German name were 14% more likely to receive callbacks from larger firms and 24% more likely to receive a callback from smaller firms than similar applications marked by an identifiably Turkish name. Again, the name-based discrimination found in the study was less severe than in other countries, like Greece against Albanians, Sweden against Arabs, and the United States against African Americans. These disparities in how students and applicants are treated based on their names indicate that the ethnic component of collective identities is still important in how people interact in German society (Bonefeld & Dickhäuser, 2018).

Conclusion

German neo-nationalism, which has revealed itself gradually since 2013, has taken on an ethnocultural form that reflects 19th century theories on what constitutes a nation according to the German Romantics. This is the case despite the FRG’s attempts to develop a multicultural society in which German identity is grounded in democratic institutions. Many politicians, theorists, and laymen alike argue that ethnocultural conceptions of the nation are anachronistic in the contemporary era and only the radical segments of the German population retain such conceptions. By and large, however, Germans have exhibited great concern as to the preservation of cultural artifacts, like language, arts, and religion, which they perceive may be under threat, especially following the influx of Muslim refugees in recent years.

Ethnicity remains an important part of Germany’s social dynamics, and judgments about the character of an individual are still made on the basis of ethnic/migrant background, even though the practice is not as prevalent as in other countries. It can therefore be said that German collective identity is not as firmly grounded in a constitutional patriotism or a form of postnationalism as many would like to believe. Instead, German collective identity involves strong cultural and

ethnic elements that define how Germans view the *Volk*. This is reminiscent of the theories of Herder and Fichte that played important roles in how the 1871 German Constitution was framed with regards to the national question. The FRG's failure to construct a more civic-based definition of the nation speaks to the people's unwillingness to detach themselves from their cultural and ethnic heritage—the lasting outrage against Merkel and Altmaier's handling of the refugee crisis is evidence of this intractability.

To the dismay of those hoping for a civically-defined national community, traditional collective identity in Germany has proven remarkably resilient after decades of state-led efforts at nurturing a more civic-oriented society; the perceived importance of one's cultural history and ancestral origins will remain at the heart of the German nation, much to the detriment of Germany's ethnic minority populations. However, the real shift in perception should not be neglected. Germans do not take as kindly to the AfD as 1930s Germans did with the NSDAP and often object to the party's rhetoric. Equally importantly, many of the socioeconomic issues that have fermented nationalist sentiment are resolvable by the state, and an increasing number of Germans intermarry with those of differing ethnicities. Thus, there is still yet hope for a postnational constellation, even if recent history suggests otherwise.

Author's Note



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Sean would like to thank Mr. Jameson Johnson of the US Africa Command and Mr. Jason Moses of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence for their direction and invaluable insights on contemporary German society and politics. He would also like to thank Dr. Hak-Seon Lee from the Department of Political Science for his encouragement, as well as the *JMURJ* Editorial Board for their understanding, advice, and commitment to perfection. This publication would not have been possible without their continued support.

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