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Xenophobia in a Multicultural Society without Multiculturalism

This book is about attitudes of Germans toward ethnic minorities in post-reunification Germany. Based on the study of survey materials, the volume offers detailed analysis and important insights into various facets of xenophobia, ethnocentrism, and the continuous obstacles migrants face in their quest for full integration. Most of the articles are based on the analysis of the 1996 “Allgemeine Bevölkerungsumfrage der Sozialwissenschaften” (General Population Survey of the Social Sciences), commonly referred to as ALLBUS. Comparable to the “General Social Survey” in the United States, ALLBUS consists of a series of regularly repeated bi-annual surveys. It frequently contains a special topics module. In 1996, primarily in response to widely publicized physical attacks against foreigners during the early 1990s, a section about attitudes toward immigrants and ethnic minorities was added. Some of the articles complement their analysis with additional data sets—most notably the Eurobarometer, a survey that collects data on a European scale, underscoring the value of comparative data that allows for inferences outside the national container.

The book is well organized and the perceptive intro-

duction by the editors presents the political, cultural, and economic background against which majority-minority relations unfold. Germany, like other countries in Europe, they suggest, “needs steady immigration to maintain economic strength and support a growing population past the age of work, but it has not yet created the policies and cultural climate that would generate regular streams of economic immigrants” (p. 4). Contrary to some of the rhetoric populist right-wing and some mainstream parties across Europe are voicing about alleged clashes of civilization and identity politics geared toward self-segregation rather than inclusion, the editors (and, for that matter, the findings presented in this volume) leave little room for doubt that the lack of integration (primarily remains) a function of ethno-centric cultural assumptions in the host society and persistent xenophobia among the native majority population.

Preceding the different presentations of the ALLBUS findings are two chapters outlining the demographic and socio-economic background (of immigrants in Germany). Rainer Muenz and Ralf Ulrich provide a comprehensive picture of the “Ethnic and Demographic Structure of For-

eigners and Immigrants.” Their measurements about the size of Germany’s immigrant population are a welcome corrective to published figures by the state. They include ethnic German re-settlers from Central and Eastern Europe. Since official data about migrants are based on nationality, and given that ethnic Germans are entitled to German citizenship upon arrival, they are usually not counted as immigrants. Conversely, until recently long-time non-national residents (such as second- and third-generation Turks born in Germany) frequently remained “foreign” *de jure*. Although this state of affairs is gradually changing due to new citizenship regulations, the rate of naturalization has remained relatively low.

As Stefan Bender and Wolfgang Seifert point out, problematic integration should be attributed to structural features of the labor market and concomitant socio-economic disadvantages that characterize the status of immigrant groups. Massive labor migration of so-called *Gastarbeiter* (a term that reveals the ideological preference of the host society envisioning a temporary rather than a permanent stay for this population) during the 1960s and 1970s resulted in the ethnic segmentation of the German labor market. Bender and Seifert show that foreigners have lower levels of education, are placed at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy, and are thus more susceptible to unemployment. Overall, these factors have limited their occupational mobility rates. This disadvantage is institutionally reinforced through Germany’s educational system, which features a dual track of educational and vocational trajectories. The latter, especially in the context of an increasingly credential society, in effect, reinforces a high rate of class reproduction. As a result, migrants are more vulnerable than natives to structural adjustments, and their integration remains deficient. Such structural factors also help explain the disproportionately high number of self-employed among migrants.

The remaining chapters focus their attention on Germans’ attitudes toward foreigners, migrants, and diversity in general. They feature an impressive range of explanations, involving a host of structural and biographic variables. Socio-economic measurements as well as generational, educational, and geographical factors explain the broad specter of xenophobia. Aribert Heyder and Peter Schmidt explore links between authoritarianism and ethnocentrism in discussing the extent to which different forms of political socialization in the former West and East Germany have affected xenophobic attitudes. In both cases, authoritarianism and ethnocentrism are highly correlated. The significance of spatio-cultural dif-

ferences also informs the chapter by Ferdinand Boeltken, who examines the impact of social distance and physical proximity on attitudinal dispositions. He shows that actual contact reduces the likelihood of ethnocentric orientations. Applying spatial considerations to a regional unit of analysis, Juergen H. P. Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik points to a rural-urban divide with significantly lesser degrees of ethnocentrism among urbanites.

Xenophobia and (to a much lesser degree) racism usually receive widespread attention around electoral successes of the far right in Europe, especially Germany. While commendable, this episodic approach is misleading, since it frequently implies comparisons to interwar fascism or Nazism. The Weimar Republic operates as a dual signifier for memories of a functioning democratic state and the perils of a dysfunctional democracy. By setting such a high threshold, the episodic comparison undermines good intentions to reign in racist outburst. The benign electoral success of far-right parties and the widespread official condemnation by mainstream politicians reinforces a sense that the margins (and by association xenophobia) are under a tight grip of political and state control. This volume largely clarifies that the two are not necessarily co-extensive. State-sanctioned opposition to right-wing extremism and the widespread persistence of anti-foreigner sentiments are not mutually exclusive. Persistent discrepancies between private and official attitudes are hardly limited to the topic of xenophobia. The public-private discrepancy is also echoed in how the National Socialist past is remembered. Despite ongoing state-sponsored educational and political efforts informed by collective responsibility, atonement, and restitution, memories generated in non-official and private contexts frequently remain resistant to the official moral pedagogy. The album of family memories often involves a denial of actual participation in the Nazi past.[1] Greater awareness of this situation is surfacing in recent controversies about the role of German victimhood, mostly in conjunction with the sixtieth anniversary of Allied firebombings of Dresden and other German cities.

To be sure, a relationship between ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and party preference exists, as Ulrich Rosar shows in his chapter, “Ethnocentrism and Support for Extreme-Right Parties.” But even here, when exploring the entire ALLBUS series and thus placing ethnocentrism in historical perspective, Rosar suggests that the link between ethnocentrism and support for parties on the extreme Right is somewhat tenuous. Werner Bergmann and Rainer Erb’s findings about “Anti-Semitism in the

Late 1990s,” raise doubts about socio-economic determinants of xenophobic dispositions. Attitudes towards Jews have long served as an emblematic and often implicit measure of how tolerant Germans are of the “other,” despite the fact that the number of Jews constitutes a negligible minority of no more than 100,000. Bergmann and Erb further disentangle the xenophobia-ethnocentrism-antisemitism nexus by focusing their attention on a historical dimension (changing explanations of antisemitism across time), a geographic one (distinguishing between antisemitic sentiments in West and East Germany) and possible path-dependent approaches related to different experiences in the West and the East. While they point to a confluence of antisemites among the older (Nazi) generation and broad support among the less-educated, their main finding is prescient in that it stresses the increasing significance of antisemitism as an ideological complex, rather than merely a social reflex. As such, it resonates with a post-9/11 development that seems to fortify affinities between anti-Americanism and antisemitism.[2] The link of antisemitism and anti-Zionism to anti-capitalism and anti-Americanism existed in both parts of Germany. In the GDR it was mostly a state-sponsored affair, whereas in the FRG it was primarily cultivated at the grassroots level on the fringes of the left and the right. These developments support the argument that a deliberate ideological choice rather than clear-cut social determinants help explain the persistence of antisemitism in unified Germany. Official sanctions say little about the deeper cultural and social sources of anti-foreigner sentiments. One of the many merits of this volume then is that it neither succumbs to the aforementioned episodic approach, nor does it, for the most part, focus its empirical attention on the fringes. It thus avoids the misleading conclusion that if xenophobia and racism remain politically inconsequential, their cultural and social impact cannot be lasting either.

Accordingly, most of the authors take a broader view on these issues by situating existing xenophobic sentiments in the overall framework of majority-minority relations and related aspects of migrant integration. By emphasizing that the integration of migrants is a two-way street, most of the authors avoid the pitfalls that mar studies which tend to focus on migrants’ lack of assimilation as a function of their reluctance (or the alleged incompatibility of their “cultural values”) to integrate themselves. Despite extensive evidence to the contrary, convictions about the exclusivist motivations of migrants remains a constant trope of anti-immigrant rhetoric. The balance between exclusion and the self-

fulfilling prophecy of a quasi-civilizational discourse is becoming a stable feature of European societies. Ultimately, the rejectionist rhetoric that characterizes many right-wing populist European parties—which are increasingly capturing the imagination of the center—reveals a somewhat schizophrenic fear: on the one hand, these immigrants supposedly cannot assimilate (due to their inherent differences); on the other hand, ethno-centric views are sustained precisely by the “threat” of successful integration, perceived here as a source of pollution of the majority culture. In North America this argument, even when popular, is largely made from a defensive standpoint. In most European countries, and certainly in Germany with its strong ethno-cultural tradition, the argument relies on anachronistic perceptions of homogeneous nationhood. The frequent rejection of multiculturalism in multicultural societies thus persists.

It is hardly surprising that the extent to which a majority culture discriminates against ethnic minorities is likely to correspond with disengagement and ethnic self-segregation on part of the minority group. This mutually reinforcing dynamic, rather than presumably primordial qualities of either group, explains the difficulties non-native permanent residents face in their attempts to integrate. This difficulty is the subject of the chapter by Steffen Kuehnelt and Juergen Leibold, “The Others and We: Relationship Between Germans and Non-Germans from the Point of View of Foreigners Living in Germany.” Recognizing the importance of the limited willingness of the host society to welcome immigrants, they offer a glimpse into how Germany’s extensive population of permanent resident aliens perceives its host society. Based on the fact that Turks, as the largest immigrant minority, are most likely to suffer from some discrimination, they show that long-time Turkish residents have more negative views of how they are perceived by Germans. As Alba and his fellow editors point out in the introduction, the main problem refers to “the difficulties of incorporation in nations where there is a settled understanding of what constitutes the cultural and social mainstream. In both, the assumption is widespread that the incorporation is one-sided, requiring the adoption by immigrants and their children of the language and predetermined culture of the native society; little scope is allowed for contributions by the languages and culture brought by the immigrants themselves” (pp. 4-5).

The persistence of this “cultural bias,” as it were, is confirmed by most of the other articles, which focus their attention on the intensity and extensity of ethnocentrism and xenophobia. Turks are frequently singled out, un-

derscoring the fact that immigrants are not treated as a homogeneous group. Nor does their legal status seem to matter much. One of the central findings then relates to how the foundations for xenophobia itself are changing in a context where culture is becoming a prominent feature of group antagonism. This shift from racial prejudice to cultural antagonism is echoed in many of the chapters. Comparing cross-country data from the Eurobarometer, Michael Terwey concludes that “compared to other nations in the EU, Germany shows a high proportion of population who are not welcoming toward immigrants and who do not expect minority groups to enrich the country’s culture” (p. 91). Adaptation to the life-styles of the majority culture has assumed a central role. This shift toward culture is also expressed in the findings of Martina Wasmer and Achim Koch, who examine attitudes toward civil rights for Non-Germans. Here too, discrimination does not apply across the board, but is reserved for those perceived as most “foreign.” Again, this sentiment has little to do with the legal status of foreigners, but rather with the extent to which they are perceived as strangers unable to conduct a “German life-style.”

It is not entirely clear what exactly that life-style consists of other than command over the German language. And it is precisely the vagueness of these self-attributed cultural traits that help explain their widespread attractiveness as an exclusionary and ultimately discriminatory mechanism that sustains xenophobic attitudes. One striking example for this dynamic has been the so-called *Leitkultur* debate. Its advocates (mostly on the right) have focused public attention to the putative incompatibilities of different cultures. It has, by now, become a veiled critique (no pun intended) of Islam and the Turkish minority. *Leitkultur* is primarily an attempt to reproduce a monocultural model of Germanness in the context of an increasingly multicultural society that self-consciously celebrates a politics of cultural (and religious) identity. Ironically, it is precisely the reunification of Germany and with it the ongoing animosity between West and East Germans that prevents any application of a presumed *Leitkultur* to a homogeneous conception of nationhood.

Further compounding the growing insignificance of ethnic conceptions are findings in the 1996 ALLBUS that indicate a growing rejection of ethnic German *Spaetaussiedler* (mostly from the former Soviet Union) who constitute the largest group of re-settlers since the mid 1990s. Most Germans perceive *Aussiedler* as immigrants rather than as bearers of a particular sense of Germanness. A large majority of Germans now favor a more restrictive approach regarding their immigration rights.

This ambivalence toward ethnic Germans further undermines a meaningful reference to an organic vocabulary.[3] Overall, rejection of “others” is not predicated on their citizenship status but on how Germans perceive of them in life-style similarities. Similarities and difference, based on common experiences in the Federal Republic rather than ethnocultural foundations, shape Germans’ perceptions of other groups.

Together these findings point to the persistence of xenophobia, albeit in a new guise. Changing foundations of prejudice and necessary methodological adjustments are the subject of Richard Alba and Michelle Johnson’s contribution. Their chapter stands out insofar as it not only recognizes the changing conditions for studying xenophobia and other prejudices, but also historicizes the measurements themselves: “[p]rejudice evolves in its forms, and so must the instruments that measure it.” (p. 119). Furthermore, Alba and Johnson explicitly refer to a comparative framework, drawing on changing patterns of prejudice and corresponding changes in measurement in comparable surveys in the United States.

The impressive analysis of their chapter reminds the reader of a missing theme in this volume: a more explicit theoretical orientation based on a systematic comparison to other cases (both European and North American). Given that the volume revolves around issues of integration, it is striking that the authors make practically no reference to theories of assimilation (the term is not even listed in the index). This lack is the more surprising, given that one of the editors, Richard Alba, is among the leading immigration scholars whose recent work on assimilation, both theoretical and empirical, is seminal for our understanding of the conditions necessary for integration.[4]

One possible reason for this regrettable omission may be related to the fact that the book revolves around a data set by now almost a decade old. Originally published in German in the year 2000, the book omits a number of themes that have since emerged as crucial factors in debates about xenophobia in general, and anti-foreigner attitudes in Germany in particular. While the single chapters are, of course, constrained by the passage of time, adding a conclusion to the English edition could have remedied some of these limitations. The book would have benefited from such an updated concluding chapter by situating its impressive findings in the emerging context of globalization, European Islamophobia and cultural identity politics.

Xenophobia emerges as a multifaceted phenomenon

that can be sustained by different forms of rhetoric. As the various findings in this volume demonstrate, ethnocentric components or racial assumptions are no longer the only features of exclusion. Rejection of the “other” includes Jean Marie Le Pen’s inverted multicultural polemic about the French “right to difference” as well as new forms of populist anti-Muslim rhetoric by Pim Fortuyn or Theo van Gogh who reject difference in the name of a universalism predicated on European Enlightenment values. Van Gogh’s assassination as well as the cycle of violence and retribution it provoked in the Netherlands are symptomatic of a Europe grappling with cultural difference, a continuous sense of migratory threats from the outside and the limits of tolerance. It is a Europe where the notion of “fortress” is no longer merely a metaphor, but increasingly reflective of intolerant public opinion and restrictive EU policies.

Germans or Foreigners? provides important insights into the social, economic, and cultural foundations that help explain the political salience of “difference.” The broad range of subjects and the multivariate approach make this volume an indispensable resource for everyone interested in majority-minority relations in contemporary Germany and Europe in general.

Notes

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[1]. See Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller, and Karoline Tschuggnall, *Opa war kein Nazi. Nation-alsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 2002); see H-German review by Christelle Le Faucheur at [\\$>\\$](http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=260091083175765).

[2]. For a detailed discussion about this phenomenon see Andrei Markovits, “Anti-Americanism in Europe: From Elite Disdain to Political Force,” in *Old Europe, New Europe, Core Europe: Transatlantic Relations after the Iraq War*, eds. Daniel Levy, Max Pensky, and John Torpey (London: Verso, 2005), pp. 198-207.

[3]. See Daniel Levy, “The Transformation of Germany’s Ethno-Cultural Idiom: The Case of Ethnic German Immigrants,” in *Challenging Ethnic Citizenship: German and Israeli Perspectives on Immigration*, eds. Daniel Levy and Yfaat Weiss (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), pp. 221-238.

[4]. Richard Alba and Victor Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).