

“Ich schaue jedem ins Gesicht,” sagt sie,
“und denke, ob der auch ein Mörder sein könnte.”
A Turkish resident of Berlin after Solingen.¹

[“I look everyone in the face,” she says,
“and wonder if he could also be a murderer.”]

TURKS AND JEWS: COMPARING MINORITIES IN GERMANY AFTER THE HOLOCAUST

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I.

The quote above from a Turkish resident of Berlin could well be the words of a Jew walking the streets of Berlin anytime in the postwar period. For the latter, the epigram would be a reminder of virulent anti-Semitism and persecution during the Third Reich embodied today in Germans over a certain age. For the former, it marked a contemporary passage from the hate of Jews to the hate of Turks exhibited for many in the attacks now identified with cities like Hoyerswerda and Rostock in the East, Mölln and Solingen in the West. Indeed, Ignatz Bubis, the leader of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, claimed in 1992 that “there is no great difference between xenophobia and anti-semitism.”² We must, however, keep in mind that such grand comparisons are understandably not as nuanced as is necessary for an historically-grounded and socially-founded explanation of both similarities and differences between the two. Xenophobia, literally the hate or dislike of something or someone different or strange, and anti-Semitism, hostility towards Semites (read Jews), are neither always synonymous nor fully explanatory since the issue of racism must also be included in the formula.

There is no question that the German past, specifically the Third Reich and the specifically racist policies of Nazism which led to the Holocaust, hangs over any discussion of so-called foreigners in Germany. A *Spiegel* journalist in fact notes, “Je positiver jemand über das NS-Regime denkt, desto negativer denkt er über Juden und Türken.”³ [The more positively one thinks about the Nazi regime, the more negatively, s/he thinks about Jews and Turks.] Bubis reminds us, as the journalist above, that Jews, the target of anti-Semitism, and Turks, who bear the brunt of xenophobia, are linked in people’s minds, if not at least in real historical terms. Granted that Jews and Turks have an intertwined history in the Ottoman Empire and are consequently tied superficially, at least in

western eyes, as “Orientals,” their similarity in Germany is based largely on their numbers and status—the two largest groups targeted by prejudice and hostility, the former in the 1930s and 1940s, and the latter in the 1980s and early 1990s.

A more compelling, albeit more slippery *tertium comparationis*, however, is their status as “foreigners” in Germany. While there is the danger of eliding all those who are not “German” (referring to the opposition established in the title of this collection) under the broad category of “foreign,” it is the German translation of this term which both enhances and complicates such a discussion. Briefly stated, the English term translates from the cognate into the noun *Ausländer* and more directly into the adjective *fremd*. A *Spiegel* survey analysis presents the problem very bluntly:

Hierzulande...wirkt sich gegenüber den Juden die Grundeinstellung der meisten Deutschen aus; Fremde sind ihnen dann am sympatischsten, wenn sie ihnen fernbleiben. Vor allem aus diesem Grund sind “Juden in Israel” (mit +1.0 Punkten) populärer als “Juden in Deutschland”, “Türken in der Türkei populärer als “Türken in Deutschland” (+1.4 gegenüber +0.2 Punkten). Daß es in dieser Hinsicht keinen Unterschied zwischen Juden und Türken gibt, macht deutlich: Die hiesigen Juden sind für die meisten Bundesbürger nicht Landsleute, sondern Fremde. Sind jemandem die Türken unsympathisch, so gilt dies in der Regel auch für die Juden.”⁴

[In this country the basic attitude of most Germans towards the Jews is that strangers [*Fremde*] are most appealing to them when they are far away. Above all for this reason “Jews in Israel” (with 1+ points) are more popular than “Jews in Germany,” “Turks in Turkey” more popular than “Turks in Germany” (+1.4 versus +0.2 points). That in this respect there is no difference between Jews and Turks makes clear that the Jews [in Germany] are not fellow countrymen, but rather strangers [*Fremde*]. If someone does not like Turks, they probably will also not like Jews]

The “foreigner,” both Jew and Turk, is both alien and strange, especially when s/he is farther rather than closer. Such “strangeness” is appealing when it is distant, mysteriously transformed into the touristic and even exotic, which ironically often makes the Germans enthusiastic visitors in far-flung foreign, yet appealing destinations, such as Turkey and Israel. Usually designating a citizen of another nation who now does in fact indeed live closer, *Ausländer* is

not only then a misnomer, but also less ontological than the word *fremd*, which connotes an estranged sense of being whether one comes from *Inland* or *Ausland*. Such “strangeness” can be, as the article points out, the reaction of the Germans, as well as the “foreigners’” feelings about themselves. Jews who have a long history as being Germans, may still feel as strange in their own country as those from abroad. Especially today, with the influx of Soviet Jews under the privileged status as *Kontigentflüchtling* and the “naturalization” of Turks as Germans, neither of these two major minority groups are “native” to Germany or “naturally” Germans. Consequently, Jews and Turks often remain “foreigners” or “strangers” in Germany no matter what their citizenship or legal status. They are more *fremd* than *ausländisch*, more alienated than misplaced. They simply feel that they do not belong.

The notion of belonging is foundationally about trust and raises fundamental questions about community (*Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*), identity, family, and the impact of spatial as well as existential displacement on stable filiations cemented nationally, ethnically, culturally, and religiously. Anthropologists E. Valentine Daniel and John Chr. Knudsen in the introduction to their collection *Mistrusting Refugees* quote their colleague Marjorie Muecke who states that “the experience of the political refugee is profoundly cultural because it compels refugees as individuals and as collective victims/survivors of massive chaos to resolve what Max Weber [1915] identified as the problem of meaning, the need to affirm ‘the ultimate explicableness of experience’.”⁵ While Jews and Turks in Germany do not exactly fall under the category of “refugee,” it is indeed striking that they too experience their “strangeness” or alienation as a cultural problem of making meaning [*Sinndeutung*] from their real experience living in Germany. Either literally or figuratively, spatially or temporally, they too must “make sense” out of the confusion in their lives caused by actual displacement, country to country, as with first generation Turks or Russian Jews, or by symbolic dislocation, past to present. For the Jews, the Holocaust fading into the past means memory must be preserved to find new sites for expression. For Turks the move to Germany for the first generation and their children and grandchildren’s lives away from “home” means constant attention to defining oneself in an often hostile environment. Therefore, tensions and conflicts of individuals seeking to establish and erase boundaries in order to find their place in the German landscape often create opposition and aggression as demonstrated in the attacks. Trying to find or construct meaning out of chaos obviously unsettles their fellow countrymen and women. Those who criticize or condemn these acts of violence are also often reacting from their own struggle to understand what seems to be senseless aggression. To accomplish this task, many invoke historical comparisons which give them a

reference point for their anger. Consequently, the outrage expressed by (Jewish) Americans in particular seemed exaggerated and out of proportion in relation to the acts themselves.

For example, American Jews in particular and the American press in general reacted swiftly and forcefully to the attacks which clearly reminded them of the 1930s and 1940s. Some people used the word “atrocities,” to describe Solingen, a term usually reserved for the magnitude and horror of the Holocaust. The conservative *Washington Times* in a reaction to Rostock invokes *Kristallnacht*, the so-called Night of Broken Glass, initiating systematic persecution of Jews in 1938.⁶ And after the deaths in Mölln, a *Washington Post* writer, Eugene Meyer, states, “The government of Chancellor Helmut Kohl has responded—belatedly, some say—to the rise in violence. But the Holocaust haunts descendants of the Nazi victims and troubles many Germans as well as the friends and relatives of Turkish ‘guest workers’ who live there.”⁷ Surveying German, Jewish and Turkish opinion, Meyer’s article, while reflecting the ambivalence of many, still seems very fearful of the rising spectre of Nazism. A number of local rabbis quoted in the piece express their anxieties in the language familiar to an American audience which identifies Germany exclusively with the Nazis and the Holocaust. One rabbi, reminiscent of Daniel Goldhagen’s thesis of “eliminationist anti-semitism”⁸ inherent in the German population, declares, “The violence, ugliness, hatred of the foreigner and all the things we see emerging again really raise some terribly, terribly painful questions about the character of the [German] people.” Another rabbi speaks more dramatically, “It’s horrendous...These are shades of the Holocaust of Germany’s past.”⁹ And A.M. Rosenthal of *The New York Times*, warns with more fear and paranoia, “And the attacks on foreigners, particularly those of dark skin, are not just sudden bursts of violence. They are as much a part of Nazi strategy as were the first attacks on the Jews.”¹⁰ And finally a truly reactionary response by a respected law professor at Harvard, Alan Dershowitz, “why does the civilized world seem so shocked at the resurgence of nazism in Germany?” He concludes, “Nazism will recur in Germany every time there is a crisis, unless the German leaders begin to speak the painful truth to their people...”¹¹ Looking back now five years, one might be more sanguine in reacting to these events that have not proven to be as dangerous as some of these commentators once feared. However, it becomes obvious how significant comparisons were for establishing an emotional vocabulary for “coming to terms” [*Bewältigung der Vergangenheit*] not with the past, but with the shocking events on German soil. While a Jewish American audience is particularly susceptible to such generalizations, it is more helpful to understand their reaction as an inability to

adapt to changing conceptions of what it means to be German. Goldhagen's book has unfortunately contributed to such stereotypes.

At that volatile time other comparisons from Europeans were made as well, which reflects, however, a more critically-minded attempt at avoiding stereotypes. The September 10, 1992 *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reported that one of Italy's leading journalists, Arrigo Levi, in an article about xenophobia in the *Corriere della Sera* entitled "Wir alle sind Deutsche." [We are all Germans] warns his fellow Italians about xenophobia and the dangers of stigmatizing all Germans as Nazis. Levi complains that the Italians are too easy on themselves, "die Formel zu wiederholen, die Deutschen seien eben die Deutschen, da sehe man den Rückfall in die finstere Vergangenheit des Nationalsozialismus"¹² [by repeating the formula, that the Germans are just the Germans, and therefore one sees the return to the dark past of National Socialism]. Are the neo-Nazis and skinheads like the Nazis and the asylum seekers and foreigners like the Jews? For the Italian-Jew, Levi, the explanation of today's xenophobia by yesterday's anti-Semitism apparently blinds his countrymen to their own fear of immigrants, in this case towards the Albanians who were sent back by the thousands. Here Levi compares the Italians to the Germans; he draws his fellow Italians attention to the dangers of using the Germans as a metaphor for xenophobia, of using Nazism as the standard against which all evil is measured. While Nazi vocabulary was constantly and consistently deployed in reports in Germany and especially the United States about attacks on foreigners, the meanings of these comparisons are rarely questioned. Are these comparisons linked to constructing a German identity and German's self-understanding today in relation to the Nazi past? The images, discourses, and rhetoric that is exploited to instill such emotional links are largely left unexamined. I would ask: What are these links? How are they constructed? And most importantly, what function and meaning do they have for us today, especially in an intellectual milieu which challenges static notions of identity.

II.

Reports about the attacks on asylum seekers in Rostock in 1992 emphasized the miserable social and economic conditions in which many East Germans in this once active sea-port lived. Led by skinheads and neo-Nazis, the frustrated and angry citizens—even more actively and in greater numbers than in Hoyerswerda (1991)—took out their resentment on the new scapegoats: Romanian gypsies, Vietnamese, Angolans. Many more citizens stood by and cheered as the temporary homes of these immigrants were set on fire, while they

were attacked, and even murdered as in the case in 1990 of the Angolan guest worker Amadeu Antonio, whose murderer was given a light sentence. Accusations against such leniency are hurled at the courts, the government, and the police.

The left protested with anti-racism demonstrations and the correspondent from the respected *Washington Post* emphasized how many of these protesters “sport[ed] pink or purple hair and nose rings,” (A35) “many of the demonstrators were black-hooded anarchists known as *Autonomen* who angrily heckled the Lichtenhagen residents as racist.” These demonstrators “marched ...waving communist flags and chanting anti-Facist slogans such as East or West. Down with the Nazi plague.”¹³ The right wing attacks are led by self-styled neo-Nazis wearing hobnail boots and sporting Nazi insignias yelling “*Sieg Heil*” and “*Deutschland nur den Deutschen.*” In this news report and from conversations I had with colleagues in Germany, those protesting the violence against foreigners were being hindered (or at least not encouraged) from counteracting these attacks, or as in this news report the protesters were rendered unbelievable because of their appearance and behavior. Beginning with Hoyerwerda and intensifying later, references are made on both sides to Nazism, its racial ideologies, and its tactics. Words are loosely invoked, such as *Kristallnacht*, *Pogrome*, and *Judenverfolgung*. Nazism with its competing political vocabulary of anti-Fascism had become an all-encompassing metaphor. On the one hand, right wing neo-Nazis can stir up their followers with a well-timed “*Sieg Heil*,” and on the other, left wing anti-Fascists can decry the “new Nazi plague.” The continued success in America of films on Nazis, especially a Jewish one as in the popular film *Europa, Europa*, makes it no surprise that the subject of Nazism continues to resonate: from the seriousness of attacks on foreigners (and Jewish monuments) to the entertainment values of the movie industry and American media that capitalize on what Susan Sontag years ago called “fascinating fascism.”

Before the attacks on foreigners and asylum seekers began, it had become common parlance to make comparisons between the most visible group of foreigners, the Turks, and the Jews, the former being the largest disdained minority whose name in fact has become generic for foreign. Before the dramatic changes in Europe that opened up the borders and spawned the masses of immigrants from the South and East into western Europe, xenophobia was less violently expressed, but nonetheless felt, by the thousands of guest workers residing permanently in West Germany. In East Germany, foreign workers were “officially” protected by international socialist people’s solidarity that kept them isolated in living quarters reserved exclusively for them. In short, the

GDR population had little contact with the Angolans, Mozambiquans or Cubans living in their country.

The Turk became the symbol for all that was foreign and different in Germany: dark-skinned and dark-haired Muslims who often dressed strangely and refused to change their habits to accommodate their hosts. Leslie Adelson notes, “the *Spiegel* cover article that responded to the devastating news from Solingen characterizes German Turks as *Ikonen des Fremden* [icons of strangeness].¹⁴ Adelson also cites Faruk Sen, Director of the Center for Turkish Studies at the University of Essen, who in the same article declares, “daß die Fremdenfeindlichkeit in Deutschland eine Türkenfeindlichkeit ist, weil sich die Agressionen in erster Linie gegen Andersaussehende richten.”¹⁵ [hostility against foreigners in Germany is hostility against Turks, because aggression is above all directed at those who look different]. The anthropologist Ruth Mandel deepened the discussion when she studied a major symbol of this *Andersaussehen* [looking different]—the Turkish headscarf as an insignia for the Turk’s difference, in her words, “where [on the left and on the right] we see the often conflicting meanings embedded in a single object as it becomes valorized in different spatial and temporal contexts.”¹⁶ However, for the mostly secularized German Jews in Hitler’s Germany—few wearing caftans and sidelocks—the yellow Jewish star was needed, as the historian John Efron pointed out, to set them off from the German population, to mark them as a recognizable group, because they were precisely not different enough.¹⁷ Jewish males were, of course, susceptible since the absent foreskin—and this was precisely the central motif of *Europa, Europa*—made the penis a literal signifier for Jewishness. Turks, also circumcised like the Jews, are Caucasian but continue to be distinguished because they look different than the “Aryan” German population, who ostensibly are blond and blue-eyed. Both stereotypes are false since as any visitor to Germany or Israel knows, many Germans are dark-haired and many Jews are blue-eyed.

The visibility of the foreign is constructed by language and symbolic representation of the foreign in both words (discourses) and images, as I illustrated earlier. I mean here that German aggression towards Turks and Jews is not literally action taken only toward “real Turks” and “real Jews” but constructed, or at least mediated through the representations and imaginings about these minority peoples in the minds of the nation’s citizens. It is well-established that anti-Semitism develops even where very few or even no Jews exist. But the knowledge or memory of a Jewish presence must be there to sow the seeds of this form of xenophobia. Today’s Poland is a good example.

I do not want to imply that the reality of foreigners is merely discursive, since that would be to deny the materiality, the literal flesh that has been burned

and blood that has been shed as a consequence of attacks. However, attitudes toward Turks and Jews, as separate and as linked groups is dependent more than many in Germany are willing to admit on how people look, the ways they are represented, whether it be color, dress or gesture. These facets of habitus are often identified with traditions that do not fit the norms of what it conventionally means to be German, that is white and Christian, even though such characteristics do not fit the reality of the German population. The Germans are apparently as susceptible as American (Jews) to remaining fixed on a static notion of identity. That the Jews are a different religion and Turks are usually Muslim is so obvious as a marker of difference that not much more needs to be said. More important is perhaps the symbolic presence of such strangers in a *Heimat*, a notion of homeland, that is overdetermined with nationalistic ethno-racial overtones and rendered exclusive by a dominant majority.¹⁸ The *Spiegel* journalist above noted, “Fremde sind ihnen [Germans] am sympathischsten, wenn sie ihnen fern bleiben.”¹⁹ [Germans like strangers best when they are far away.] Distance may be spatial but it is also socially-class based which leads to emotional divisions bracketing foreigners as fruit salesman and cleaning women with whom many Germans have limited social contact on their own soil. *Blut und Boden* ideology reemerges here in nefarious though less obvious and programmatic ways. A notion of German *Heimat* reinvigorated with neo-conservative national good feelings conflates categories of belonging, as a social, psychological or cultural issue with legal and political dimensions represented in the focus on citizenship.

The confusion of these two modes of affiliation leads to false assumptions and misperceptions about foreigners in Germany. Many Jews are now citizens of Germany, because of German origins, new citizenship after the war (former DPs), immigration, and more Turks are applying for citizenship. However, both groups are ambivalent about making a home in Germany, even after five years of relative peace, at least the kind that does not make headlines anymore. These groups also continue to unsettle static notions of space and place. Just as “culture” itself, according to Daniel and Knudsen, is not “essential,” or “fixed,” but “a creative activity of symbol making and symbol sharing,...fundamentally dialogic,”²⁰ the relationship of Jews and Turks to their fellow Germans is also always in motion, always reconstituting new forms and meanings that to their German fellow citizens may seem to undermine the status quo of a permanent identity. Jews insist on remembering the Holocaust and Turks insist on maintaining their customs. The former continues to call attention to a past tragedy and a present responsibility some would like to put behind them. The latter foregrounds their blatant otherness simply by the way they look. In both cases, these groups are ciphers of difference and dislocation: they mark the

relationship of history (the past and the present), ethnicity (Germans and *Ausländer*), religion (Christian and non-Christian), and place (here and there). As one study termed such a configuration where time and space coincide, *The Past is a Foreign Country*.²¹ Thus Jews and Turks are constant reminders of history and present day responsibility that are intertwined and constantly shifting. Their mere presence redefines what it means to be German. Generated from such mutual interactions, new identities that contradict stereotypes continue to reform and assert themselves.

Many Jews and Turks identify themselves as a collective for other than religious reasons. Jews are not only non-Christian, but the distinction between ethnicity and religion is ambiguous and casts doubts on their ability to be really German, in other words, to have a coherent identity. Here is another version of that tenuous permanence, exemplified by the Gypsies as well. The Turks ambivalence of making Germany a real home may seem contradictory, precisely because the group most rejected appears to be disdained for rejecting the very status that would make it belong. This contradiction also exists for the Jews who are seen to have allegiance elsewhere: interpreted conservatively as a fundamental solidarity to Israel or world Jewry, or more liberally as their identification with a notion of world citizenship [*Weltbürgertum*] carried on from their emancipation in the Enlightenment. Jews, even German Jews, are suspect because they represent these dual allegiances quite literally. And for Turks who have lived in Germany for two or three generations, their desire to belong is also questioned since many want to have a dual identity that would allow them to be simultaneously Turkish and German. The notion of multiple identities occupying the same subject position remains ironically “foreign,” as one Turkish German feared, using the Jews as his reference point, “Kann ich noch in die Türkei zurück, oder bin ich ein Mensch, wie die Juden früher, ohne Heimat?”²² [Can I still return to Turkey, or am I a person, like the Jews before me, without a homeland?]

The elision of Turk and Jew is only possible, in fact, by setting up false dichotomies that continue to further separate Germans from all other *Ausländer*, who were carefully differentiated from *Aussiedler* and *Übersiedler* by German blood laws, and then further categorized by economic and political status such as *Gastarbeiter*, *Asylant* and *Flüchtling*. The word *Ausländer* elides people from over twenty countries into a dark faceless mass and is so broad and undifferentiated as to include an American tourist, a Tamil asylum seeker, or an African diplomat. After Hoyerswerda, protesters marched down German streets disassociating themselves from their German identity and by identifying instead with the victims, proclaiming “Ich bin Ausländer” [I am a foreigner] or “Liebe Ausländer, bitte lasst uns mit diesen Deutschen nicht alleine.” [Dear

foreigners, don't leave us alone with these Germans] During one Berlin demonstration against xenophobia, Rita Süßmuth called upon Germans "den Tag der deutschen Einheit zu einer eindrucksvollen Demonstration gegen Ausländerhaß, gegen Rassismus und gegen den perfiden Ungeist des Antisemitismus zu machen."²³ [to make the day of German unity into a symbolic demonstration against xenophobia, racism, and the perfidious spirit of antisemitism] Again the Jew is invoked through an analogy to the foreigner, immigrant, asylum seeker and while the comparison does indeed appear to work, it also reflects the tendency in Germany to operate in *Denkblockaden*²⁴ [thought blocks]. Kowalsky means the inclination in Germany to reify and absolutize categories, to set up false binary oppositions such as German and *Ausländer*. Kowalsky notes in his book, in fact, how the current situation can no longer be explained by comparisons to the Third Reich and programs of anti-Fascism. He declares, "Viele Strategien antworten auf Fragen von gestern und bewegen sich im Grunde immer noch im Rahmen eines Antifaschismus der dreissiger Jahre."²⁵ [Many strategies respond to questions of the past and still operate in the context of the anti-Fascism of the Thirties].

Anti-Fascism was largely discredited by its overuse in the GDR, the reification of the term came to overshadow and ultimately collapse important distinctions for understanding the Nazi period and the postwar years. The limited recognition of the Jews' place in the Holocaust is one serious example. Kowalsky is correct in criticizing the West German left who he sees operating with old myths and a too *idealtypisch* approach. By denying their national identity as Germans and making a too simplistic elision between nationalism and fascism, these people can only seek out more authentic exotic cultures to admire and celebrate, thus the attraction of foreign restaurants, cultural festivals, and travels to Third World countries. They, in fact, often overemphasize xenophobia to the exclusion of anti-Semitism because of their ambivalence towards Israel.

On the extreme right and even among respectable conservatives there is a different but also problematic response. Overidentifying with being German and a notion of a homogeneous and homogenized unified German *Kulturnation*, these people can continue to call Germany *kein Einwanderungsland* although approximately fifteen percent of the workforce are migrants. More importantly, it can focus the population's attention on xenophobia rather than racism with the implication that only changes in the law will solve the problem of foreigners in Germany. By announcing themselves as foreigners, the leftists wind up victimizing and patronizing those they want to help. Further, by focusing on the foreigners, even leftists avoid dealing with racism spawning the violence coming from the Germans. By adhering to an unrealistic image of what

essentially is a white, Christian Germany, conservatives divert attention to the foreigners and the laws that will manage them, rather than to more deep-seated racism in the population. One psychologist, Birgit Rommelsbacher, noted that “in spite of the many attacks and in spite of Hoyerswerda, racism is rarely straightforwardly addressed. Instead, the President of the Federal Republic speaks of the ‘crisis of human understanding,’ social psychologists of the ‘natural fear of the foreign’ and ‘normal reactions to stress.’”²⁶ She claims for Germans the notion of racism is itself taboo and therefore ignored, just as the problems of dealing with the Nazi past. However, reference to the Holocaust may be freely made because it has become an acceptable topic in German public discourse. In fact, German-Jewish author Rafael Seligmann keeps reminding his fellow Germans that they are better at commemorating *tote Juden* [dead Jews] than taking care of their living ones.²⁷ Politicians conscientiously atone for their sins by invoking the horrors of the Nazi regime, but then can go on to do little about attacks on foreigners.

Wiedergutmachung has indeed for some been achieved, however, without adequate attention to the racism that allowed the Holocaust to happen, as well as the racism propelling much of the foreigner debate and the attacks on the foreigners themselves. For both sides of the political spectrum, the linkage of xenophobia to Nazism, a specific historical manifestation of Fascism, rather than to fascist ideologies and practices in general overhistoricizes the debate and frees today’s Germans from taking responsibility for their own actions. Clearly other European nations and America are racist, yet these comparisons are defensive postures when they are used to excuse what goes on in Germany. The historical tradition of Germany’s treatment of “foreigners” cannot be ignored and the specificity of the German situation which created a tradition unsympathetic to foreign elements needs to be made explicit: its citizens relationship to the foreign (normative and prescriptive social attitudes), the German difficulty to think of themselves in positive terms (rejecting any forms of national identification or pride), the lack of experience with foreigners (a limited colonial tradition) and the inheritance of Germany’s systematic elimination of foreign or different peoples (Jews, Slavs, Gypsies, Jehovah’s Witnesses, gays). But to acknowledge historical traditions and specificity does not mean to imply the comparisons I question in this paper.

For the former German Democratic Republic, where much of the early violence against foreigners took place, the equation of xenophobia with the fascist Third Reich, only supports those who now would like to characterize the former GDR as a fascist state, as the inheritor of Nazism rather than its alternative. It is clear that the GDR’s program of anti-Fascism and obligatory people’s solidarity failed, as the historian Konrad Jarausch points out, because

for GDR historians it “fixated upon the Nazi menace in the past, and failed to criticize the threat of Erich Honecker’s police state in the present”²⁸ and “did not engage the racial dimension of anti-Semitism and insufficiently inoculated youths against xenophobia”.²⁹ However, today the economic and social inequities of the reunification process in fact sustain these citizens’ hostility towards the foreigners in their midst, in addition to their own resentment as having been constituted as an Other by the West Germans. The sociologist Nora Rätzl points out,

In the course of extended immigration, East Germans seem to have lost their Germanness and become the Other. Now they are not seen as embodying the typical characteristics of the true industrious German, but as possessing a number of negative attributes....All of these negative characteristics, however, have to do not with their being “German by blood” but with their being socialized in the communist system.³⁰

Frustrated at having been rejected by their German brothers and sisters, especially after the warm welcome they were given when the Wall came down, East German citizens may well be longing to belong, to be taken back into the German fold. The presence of *Übersiedler*, foreigners and asylum seekers who are being financially supported by the government with financial subsidies and housing is a slap in the face for these Germans. Their *Sieg Heils* and chants of *Deutschland nur den Deutschen* represented the desires of demoralized youths with no hope and no future to be reintegrated into a secure social fabric. They also set their sights falsely on a utopian ideal of the German nation and a German people expressed in Nazism that will fulfill their misdirected dreams.

Since German unification, the memory of the Third Reich has loomed large again. World Jewry repeatedly warned the leaders of the short-lived East German republic and then the new Germany that after forty-five years fears were reemerging about a militarily and economically dominant unified Germany in the center of Europe. Germany’s European neighbors also initially were reserved about this new German might in their midst. Anxieties were quieted until the resurgence of right-wing attacks on foreigners. Again the specter of Nazism seemed to be rearing its ugly head, especially for Americans who are quick to see Nazis around every corner. While the horrors of the Third Reich need to be remembered, it is an injustice to the victims of both historical periods to be compared to each other. The Jews’ tragedy was not only their persecution and elimination because they were different, religiously, ethnically, and according to the Nazis racially, but also the fact that in Germany

their common ties through citizenship and nationhood meant nothing. In 1938, Germany's democratic tradition had only lasted half as long as it did in 1992, and the country had not yet experienced the war that would bring its total defeat.

The comparisons for today's foreigners are even more unfair. Unlike the Jews they are largely poor, uneducated, disenfranchised by their own country and without the protection of civil rights. They have come from economically disadvantaged countries and nations ravaged by war, some as legitimate political refugees threatened by death, torture, or imprisonment, and others as economic refugees, seeking a better future. To many they were merely taking advantage of Germany's liberal asylum law (until it was changed), itself inspired by the Nazi past and its treatment of Jews and other minorities. However, above all they are not "white," and have less chance of being integrated into society than other minorities, because of the literal marking of their bodies as foreign. These potential new Germans, based not on legal citizenship but on acceptance and belonging, are not given a chance to develop a more complicated multiple identity. It must be possible to be a Turkish-Tamil- or Angolan German. Even an uneasy symbiosis like the infamous German-Jewish is not possible for many of the refugees some of whom now legally live in Germany. But as has been proven repeatedly, German citizenship does not guarantee first class treatment. The anthropologist Andrea Klimt showed in her fieldwork with Portuguese guestworkers as early as 1989 that

None of the migrants I knew, regardless of class, generation, or degree of "integration," considered the prospect of "becoming German" to be desirable, realistic, or even imaginable. They, along with most Germans, understand that, "being German" does not rest on such mutable characteristics as legal status, political loyalty, or acquired knowledge. Germanness is not perceived to be an open and permeable category, and Portuguese migrants feel that neither the color of their passports nor the degree of their cultural and linguistic fluency will ensure respect or acceptance.³¹

On a recent *Spiegel* title page, a more frighteningly contemporary commentary pictured quite literally exclusionary categories and stereotypes that are obviously continuing to be reinscribed in public consciousness. The top of the page the words "*Ausländer und Deutsche*" [Foreigners and Germans] are paired with the bright yellow letters "*Gefährlich fremd*" [dangerously different] juxtaposed with incendiary stereotypes of what appears to be a Turkish woman (who looks black) leading a demonstration, Turkish girls studying in headscarves, and four Turkish boys holding weapons. The subtitle reads, "Das

Scheitern der multikulturellen Gesellschaft.” [The failure of a multicultural society].³²

If foreigners and asylum seekers in Germany today are to receive the humane treatment they deserve as Second or Third World immigrants into one of the richest lands in the world, then the so-called “foreigner problem” in Germany must be seen as much imbedded in racism as a economic and social dilemma. Germany hesitates to officially acknowledge that it is a “land of immigration” because once the “problem” is officially “removed” by legal and subsequent social recognition that might develop under more auspicious conditions of immigration, the racism underlying the problem will be all the more evident. It will not have necessarily disappeared with “integration” into German life and it will show that the focus on foreigners and xenophobia diverted attention from racism. Both the left and the right are blinded by their inability to construct a new and more heterogeneous identity, one that acknowledges the benefits of immigration and the racial prejudices that have to be overcome. Neither foreigners, Germans, or Jews can be categorized under monolithic or universal categories; differentiation and specificity rather than uniformity and abstraction will contribute to a more nuanced and historically sensitive analysis. The comparison to Jews and the Nazi period may be a logical link. It may as well be a kind of objective correlative for fears that have no analogue except in Nazism. But such historical moves should at least be recognized as a questionable displacement of emotions from the object of hostility today to a past horror that continues to be mystified and exploited. 1989-92 was not 1933-45. Reunification was no more a completely new beginning than 1945 was a “*Stunde Null*.” When comparisons are taken out of context, they threaten to overshadow the injustices of both historical periods. I merely want us to be wary of facile comparisons that become shorthand for complex historical events.

Notes

- ¹ Cited from *Der Spiegel* 47.23 (1993): 16.
- ² In a lecture given at the Paul-Loebe-Haus, as quoted in Jeffrey M. Peck, “The ‘Ins’ and ‘Outs’ of the New Germany: Jews, Foreigners, Asylum Seekers,” in *Reemerging Jewish Culture in Germany. Life and Literature since 1989*, eds. Sander L. Gilman and Karen Remmler (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 130.
- ³ Cited from *Der Spiegel* 46.4 (1992): 44.
- ⁴ *Der Spiegel* 46.4 (1992): 41.
- ⁵ E. Valentine Daniel and John Chr. Knudsen, “Introduction,” *Mistrusting Refugees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 2.
- ⁶ *Washington Times*, 4 September, 1992: F1. It is interesting that after making these kinds of comparisons, the article goes on to relativize and even appear to excuse aggressive xenophobia in Germany.
- ⁷ *Washington Post* 14 Dec. 1992: D1.
- ⁸ Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners. Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Knopf, 1996).
- ⁹ See *Washington Post* 14 Dec. 1992: D4.
- ¹⁰ A. M. Rosenthal, “Our German Crisis,” *New York Times* 24 Nov. 1992: A15.
- ¹¹ Alan Dershowitz, “Nazism in Germany is no Surprise,” [Jewish Telegraphic Agency], n.d.
- ¹² Arrigo Levi, “Wir alle sind Deutsche.” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 9 Sept. 1992: 3.
- ¹³ Marc Fisher, “13,000 Germans Demonstrate Against Right-Wing Violence,” *Washington Post* 30 Aug. 1992: A29.
- ¹⁴ Leslie Adelson, “Opposing Oppositions: Turkish-German Questions in Contemporary German Studies,” *German Studies Review* 17. 2 (1994): 305.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Ruth Mandel, Turkish Headscarves and the ‘Foreigner Problem’.Constructing Difference Through Emblems of Identity,” *New German Critique*, 46 (1989): 31.
- ¹⁷ Noted in a discussion with Efron.
- ¹⁸ For more on the relationship of “foreigners” to notions of home [*Heimat*], see Jeffrey M. Peck, “Refugees as Foreigners. The Problem of Becoming German and Finding Home,” in *Mistrusting Refugees*.
- ¹⁹ *Der Spiegel* 46.4 (1992): 41.
- ²⁰ Daniel and Knudsen, 2.
- ²¹ David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (New York: Cambridge University

Press, 1985).

²². *Der Spiegel* 47.23 (1993):21.

²³. Cited from *Die Tageszeitung* 30 Sept. 1992: 1. For more on the relationship of xenophobia and antisemitism in German protest marches and demonstrations, see *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 31 Aug. 1992: 3; *Neues Deutschland* 28 Aug. 1992: 1; *Washington Times* 9 Nov. 1992: A 1; *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 30 Sept. 1992: 2; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 29 Oct. 1992: 33; *Das Parlament* 12. 47- 48 (1992): 1.

²⁴. Wolfgang Kowalsky, *Rechtsaussen... und die verfehlten Strategien der deutschen Linken* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1992).

²⁵. Kowalsky, 10.

²⁶. Birgit Rommelsbacher, "Rassismus Ost und West schaukeln sich hoch," *Die Tageszeitung* 11 Feb. 1992: 11.

²⁷. See Rafael Seligmann, "Die Juden leben," *Der Spiegel* 46.47 (1992): 75.

²⁸. Konrad Jarausch, "The Failure of East German Antifascism: Some Ironies of History as Politics," *German Studies Review* 14. 1 (1991): 86.

²⁹. *Ibid.*, 94.

³⁰. Nora Räthzel, "Germany. One Race, One Nation?" *Race & Class* 32. 3 (1991): 45.

³¹. Andrea Klimt, "Returning 'Home': Portuguese Migrant Notions of Temporariness, Permanence, and Commitment," *New German Critique* 46 (1989): 70.

³². *Der Spiegel*, 16 (1997).