

German National Identity and the 2006 World Cup
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Germany's past has often been the source of discussions on national identity, immigration and intercultural relations. Currently, "The Federal Republic of Germany does not officially recognize itself as a country of immigration" (Harris, Paul A.), regardless of the fact that millions of immigrants and immigrant families have spent years and generations growing up in Germany. During the events leading up to the 2006 World Cup, hosted in Germany, many believed racial and xenophobic tensions would not only reflect poorly on Germany's image, but be an indication of the views of a larger majority and perhaps be a catalyst for greater acts of violence. As we look into these issues and concerns raised regarding German national identity before and after the World Cup, we will see that a larger discussion begins to unfold, one that relates to the past, and questions and concerns about the future.

Some of the concerns that have emerged regarding xenophobia and racism in Germany were ignited due to violent attacks during the weeks leading up to the World Cup. An article posted by *The Boston Globe* detailed one such attack, "the savage beating of an Ethiopian man in this historic city [Potsdam] and another attack in Berlin have rattled Germany [. . .] The Easter morning assault here, in which the 37-year-old irrigation engineer was harangued with racial epithets then bludgeoned and kicked, [put the man] into a coma" (Nickerson). Although the blame has been placed on Neo-Nazi thugs, the fear at that time was that such violence would expand and increase as the World Cup progressed, when thousands of foreigners would be visiting. In response to this "a former government spokesman floated the idea of 'no-go zones' in the most notorious epicenters of racist attacks [. . .] Uwe-Karsten Heye warned anyone with dark skin against setting foot in small and middle-sized towns in Brandenburg, the region around

Berlin that has been a hotbed of hate crimes,” saying, “[one] might not leave alive” (AP, www.iransportspress.com).

Although those people who raised concerns felt they were left unanswered leading up to the World Cup, the suggestion of having “no-go zones” seemed to many to be an exaggerated reaction. However, it demonstrated the need to address very real issues. Eritrean-born Jonas Endrias and vice president of the International League of Human Rights explains that, “We have seen on radical right and neo-Nazi Web sites they plan to target black people,” and that, “for a long time the politicians wouldn’t listen to us; now they are listening.” This increase in attention was also fueled by the attack on politician Giyasettin Sayan, “a member of Berlin’s regional assembly who is of Turkish origin,” and was placed in a hospital after, “being attacked by two men who called him a ‘dirty foreigner’[. . .] [And] suffered head injuries and bruising [. . .] after his attackers struck him with a bottle in a street in his Lichtenberg ward in the east of the Berlin” (Deutsche Welle).

Some see this trend of violence as a result of “the high rate of unemployment in the former East Germany.” However, “Marlene Mortler, who chairs the tourism committee of the German parliament,” stated, “Germany is far from being a country where foreign visitors should fear attacks from the far-right.” This sentiment is also expressed by the Celal Altun, “secretary general of the Turkish Council, which represents Germany’s 3 million Turks” saying, “the problem is real, but exaggerated,” and that, “I would not write off Germany as a racist country, and I would stop short of saying there is any place you can’t go to” (AP, www.iransportspress.com). The general understanding leading up to the World Cup seemed to be that these attacks, although troubling and worth consideration, did not indicate the opinions of

the entire country or represent the model of things to come, and so demanded a more isolated response.

Taking a more positive response, most of the tangible steps toward a more peaceful World Cup were made in the form of predetermined attempts to improve the image of modern-day Germany, and display Germany's past in an informative way as opposed to denying it. An article by David Crossland describes this preemptive attempt at a peaceful World Cup, "Everything was planned down to the smallest detail [. . .] [after a game,] rubbish disposal men stood around patiently waiting to polish the streets, [. . .] When one exuberant fan lit a flare in the street, firemen who had been lurking in the shadows jogged onto the scene, put it out, tut-tutted mildly and walked away" (www.spiegel.de). The article continues saying, "Police had trained for months how to handle disorderly fans. They adopted a non-intrusive, tolerant approach and their cooperation with foreign police worked." Those most concerned about the possibility of violence seemed to be the German government and those in charge of organizing the events surrounding the World Cup.

These preemptive measures were meant to ensure a welcoming environment that kept the vast number of fans from different countries, and the local fans as well, from being provoked to violence. This careful planning regarding the image of Germans carried over into museums and famous national sites and monuments. The tour of the Nuremberg exhibit near the World Cup tournaments covered topics related to "German thinkers and poets, the German forest, German Gemütlichkeit (coziness), German efficiency," and the Holocaust (www.spiegel.de, "Trying..."). The Holocaust, being perhaps the most controversial of topics in recent German history is, however, a reality, an article continues, "building an identity on the Holocaust is impossible—building an identity without it, equally so. The exhibit in Nuremberg encourages a very German,

mercurial search for self.” These characteristics of Germany seemed to provide a safety net that ensured a more positive, honest, and respectful representation of Germany as a whole. However, the aspects that seemed to gain the least attention from organizers and visitors also seemed to inadvertently trigger the most genuine sentiments from the German public.

One such case of neglect on the part of the World Cup organizers that resonated a sense of irony in the German public was described again in the *Spiegel* article, “Trying to Be German as the World Watches.” This article describes the awkward choices made for representing the German nation in the opening ceremonies of the World Cup, including the performance of the regional “Schuhplattler dance,” accompanied with “Lederhosen,” with which, “any German who wasn’t Bavarian, though, felt little connection.” After Germany “fell back on clichés,” the ceremony, “amounted to a sort of international dream-theater, with scraps of this and that, where almost any world citizen could recognize a piece of himself.” What took place irrespective of the ill-contrived opening ceremonies was a sense of pride among Germans that had not been seen since the fall of the Berlin Wall, and quickly led to a division in the understanding of German national identity.

A person with a traditional, conservative German perspective tends to view immigration as a problem and negative effect on the country. Immigration (in the minds of traditional Germans) appeared to make the country crowded. The film *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1974) by Rainer Werner Fassbinder demonstrates the view of conservative Germans towards immigrants and foreigners in the 1970s. Initially, most Germans did not accept the main character, a Moroccan whom others mistook for a Turk, as a part of the community. He was refused service at stores and restaurants and his wife (a German) was made fun of by her co-workers for being with a foreigner. Even his wife’s children refused to accept him as their mother’s husband and

their step-father. Immigrants and foreigners are treated poorly, because in Germany racism still exists as it exists almost everywhere in the world. It was only about 60 years ago that the Holocaust took place. Several German adults today were raised by parents who accepted the segregation of minorities. Their parents' thoughts and beliefs about segregation were likely passed to them. Even though the German public has moved towards tolerance of difference since the Holocaust, some racist beliefs still exist, whether people want to believe it or not. This racism creates hatred towards immigration.

During the 2006 World Cup this hatred of immigration was revealed in a few violent and degrading acts. Hosting the World Cup for the first time, some Germans thought that they would show the world they were not in favor of foreigners and that Germany was not a country of immigration. The right-wing National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) "published and circulated a brochure entitled 'White! Not just the jersey color! For a real national team'" (Glindmeier). This was an act of racism that was directed toward a native German soccer player who was born to Nigerian and German parents. It also demonstrated that some Germans will go as far as degrading the team which represents their country because a player who was born and lived in Germany his entire life is has a Nigerian parent, and might not be considered "fully German" by some conservatives. Some Germans still believe a German is someone whose parents are both ethnically German regardless of where they were born, whether in Germany or somewhere else in the world. It was not until the year 2000 that the citizenship law for Germans included the term, *ius solis* (law of land). This meant that if you were born in Germany, you were a citizen of Germany under certain conditions. There have also been other acts of racism toward players on other teams, including African-American U.S. midfielder DaMarkus Beasley. Many fans were heard chanting vulgar comments towards him before, during, and after the games.

Racism clearly still exists in Germany. During this very competitive World Cup, hatred toward other races came out.

This racism ties back into the negative view of immigration by some conservative Germans. According to the *Seattle Times*, six in ten Germans have said immigrants have been a bad influence. Most concerns about immigration focus on unemployment and acts of terrorism. Germans are worried that eventually immigrants will be promoted to higher paying jobs and compete with Germans for employment resulting in unemployed Germans. Terrorism is also a very high concern, especially after events such as September 11th in the United States. Many Germans are dealing with xenophobia. Until they can overcome this fear of foreigners, immigration will continue to be viewed negatively in Germany.

However, those who hold a much more positive view of German immigration are trying to change negative stereotypes of Germany. They view immigration as something that needs to happen and they try to welcome it in Germany. Especially when one considers the economic challenges that Germany and other countries have faced, it cannot be disputed that immigration is necessary. According to *Germany in Transit*, “[t]he German economy will in the future not have enough qualified personnel” (Rau 309), because Germany’s birth rate is continually decreasing. Immigration might become a necessity for Germany in order to prevent the country from entering an economic depression. The World Cup helped unite many German residents regardless of whether or not they were citizens, foreign guests, or immigrants. This event allowed everyone to come together for one thing and one thing only: cheering on a German soccer team in their quest to win the title. In the bigger picture this showed that there are many Germans who get along with immigrants and are more willing to accept immigration.

Even though there were some racist acts taking place during the World Cup, there was also something great that occurred. Hosting the event in 2006 united most Germans. National pride and patriotism could finally be shown positively in a country that had lacked it in the past. Once again it was a great time to be German. The German flag became increasingly popular among everyone at the World Cup. The flag was displayed everywhere showing that people were proud of their German identity, which was probably the first time they felt that way since the Holocaust. Immigrants and foreigners identified themselves as Germans. One saw for example “Four smiling Muslim women in head scarves draping themselves in German colors” (Bernstein), and children from immigrant backgrounds were seen waving the German flag, cheering the team on. Everyone who had any connection to Germany was cheering for Germany and identified themselves as Germans, which had not seemed likely before.

The World Cup helped Germany escape the past and take a step forward as a country. Before the event came to Germany, the country was still connected with the legacy of the Nazis. Stereotypes persisted of Germans as Nazi supporters or racists. This was definitely a problem for a country that was trying to move forward since the Holocaust and let the world know that Germany has changed. According to Andrew Purvis, “[t]his is a different World Cup. Previous hosts have used the tournament to burnish their country’s reputation as a tourist destination, but Germany wants to use the Cup to ‘transmit a new image’ of the nation itself.” This attempt had been successful for Germans. It gave them a positive global image for the first time in decades. There were many events that the government set up to spread this new image of Germany to outsiders. These events included a celebration of German inventions and “exhibits, such as What is a German?” that “explore the identity of the country” (Purvis). The government also distributed “Hospitality Manuals with information on foreign cultures and national customs, and

invited ‘culture guides’ from other countries to teach locals customs from around the world” (Purvis). Germans were trying to make a change in their country and they were trying to show everyone around the world they live in a different Germany. The modern-day Germans want to get rid of the stereotypes based on their past. Even though there are still Germans who oppose immigration, there are many Germans who are willing to accept immigration. There has been a general shift, in that some Germans are finally ready to share their land with others (Purvis).

This reality has been shaped in part by recent developments in music, and culture. However, the shift toward a more positive, inclusive, and broader understanding of German national identity has also been met with both political and cultural discontent. The cultural impact immigrants and their descendants have had on national German identity is perhaps most evident in the medium of music, where a vibrant, articulate, and popular hip hop scene has been on the rise. German-Turkish rap artists are described in one article as “young artists with a migration background [who] have, in recent years, topped the music charts in Germany” (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, “The Impact...”). These artists are not only reported as being popular among the broader German population, but also as taking a positive, proactive, and political stance on issues of immigration, the consequences of globalization, and issues of national identity in Germany and western Europe. One song titled, “Wenn du schläfst” (when you sleep), by the Söhne Mähneheims, a band that includes famous German-Turkish music artist Xaviar Nadoo, describes universals shared by all people. In this case, the need to sleep soundly, a desire shared by all, is highlighted in their music video, which depicts children and adults in various domestic settings. At times a stark comparison is drawn between the poor people in other countries and the homeless and impoverished immigrant communities within Germany. There is a clear reference to the need to reach out to these groups, as pictures of people sleeping or

yawning draw out sympathies for other overlooked and stigmatized individuals. The lyrics seem to underscore this:

Und nichts braucht soviel Schutz wie du
In der Dunkelheit der Welt
Sogar Söldner hol ich hinzu
Denn ein dunkles Reich hat uns umstellt

And nothing needs as much protection as you
In the darkness of the world
I even bring in mercenaries
Because a dark empire has surrounded us

Unlike the stigma in Germany that sees immigrants as lazy and dangerous, the video and lyrics show them as needing relief from hard work and circumstances, as docile and innocent. One article describes this careful and determined use of German by German-Turkish rap artists, “where young people often from immigrant backgrounds use the language as a ‘literary weapon,’ criticizing their society very effectively” (Bowlby). In this article the writer and critic Karin Yesilada goes on to say that in a sense, “They look for the melody in German,’ she adds, ‘it’s kind of regaining German for art.’” This is only one medium for which German- Turkish artists are known; however, it shows the popularity, depth, and proactive approach that many writers and artists take in attempting to be heard.

Turkish immigrants, the largest minority in Germany, have also showed support for the country. This is in part due to an effort to transform misconceptions about immigration in Germany, and towards developing Germany into a country of immigration. By continuing to show their love for the country, others from outside of Germany have seen the change Germany has made. “We support Germany, of course. We live here, we eat their bread!” says Mr. Yildirim. “Our families are here and our future is here” (Wilson). Germany is indeed evolving into a country of immigration and many Germans are becoming receptive to this.

As we look at the events leading up to the World Cup, we can begin to see a larger series of discussions taking place. Although “The World Cup had a very positive effect on the country’s economy and helped improve its image internationally,” as stated by the Interior Prime Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, he remained skeptical of the long-term effects of the World Cup saying, “You can’t have the World Cup all the year round.” (Deutsche Welle, “Germany’s...”) In the end, the World Cup was little more than a chapter in German history. With only a few opportunities for the positive expression of a more inclusive German national identity and even fewer solutions to issues concerning racism and immigration, it is difficult to see the 2006 World Cup as anything more than a fairy tale moment for Germans. What many involved in the festivities can agree on, is that during the little time spent being overtly proud of their nation, Germans longed for the opportunity to express their feelings toward their country. Although Germany has been slow to recognize the positive impact immigrants and their descendents have had on national identity, at the same time progress is being made.

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