



## Do Germans smell like a rose?

Phagia, philia, phobia

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Before we address the questions our commentators raise, we must state briefly our theoretical ambition. *Stimmungswechsel* are triggered by events (we consider specifically “diagnostic events” where we ourselves were present), which puncture time, provoking echoes from the past and stimulating premonitions of the future. It is as if a community enters into a collective reverie. We seek to understand German reveries which were occasioned by the entrance of more than a million refugees and migrants into Europe in 2015. *Stimmungen* are simultaneously collective and individual affective states, which shift via the mechanism of emotional transference. *Stimmungswechsel* are observable but not measurable, although representative political systems regularly stage elections, in which the heterogeneity of voices engage in an *Ab-stimmung* (vote) that mirrors and takes place within mood shifts. We provide a phenomenological description of the transference in the shift from moods of indifference to ambivalence to xenophilia and xenophobia, and we situate our own moods within specific fieldwork encounters. Phenomenology offers us a way to describe more precisely such mood shifts, but for a deeper understanding we turn to psychoanalysis. Refugees are “objects” that Germans encounter, collectively, and relate to either via distancing or through various forms of attachment. Refugees enable Germans to enter a mood that can be generative (opening) or

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malignant (withdrawing) and hence operate as either conservative or transformative objects.

For Heinz Bude, *Stimmung* is both subjective and intersubjective, and it rules “over me and through me.” I feel ruled, he writes, “only if I am ruling it out” (p. 137). This ruling through *Stimmung* is not via a Foucauldian governmentality or Althusserian interpellation but intimately and temporally linked to the political through voting. Bude also emphasizes the historical importance of *Stimmung* as a “feeling of contemporaneity” (p. 138), as in Durkheim’s collective effervescence. This feeling was also integral to Benedict Anderson’s (1983) theory of how the imagined horizontal kinship of nations was created through the contemporaneity of reading newspapers. The three events we have identified as triggers for identifying mood shifts obtained their significance through this feeling of contemporaneity.

Bude also asks why a particular *Stimmung* becomes dominant, since all experience is marked by ambivalence, and often assumed to be resolved (falsely) by recourse to decision, agency, choice. The question for us is rather about the tensions within *Stimmung*, the experiential indeterminacy and volatility of mood. Tensions exist because of the intrinsic split between the unconscious and conscious, within both the individual and the collective, and not only between those who speak and those who are silent (Noelle-Neumann’s formulation). One may, for example, be consciously xenophilic but unconsciously xenophobic—in our estimation, this is not at all uncommon in Germany. If xenophobia becomes a dominant *Stimmung*, other moods, such as indifference or xenophilia, do not therefore disappear. That is, if xenophobia brings about a unity within a group, its members will still be haunted by prior moods which remain latent. The mood shifts we analyze relate to refugees. German responses to refugees are contingent on their experiences with them in encounters, whether imagined or actual, as they are asked to attune to mood shifts.<sup>1</sup> Refugee incorporation depends on how such experiences unfold and how they become meaningful.

On this point, of incorporation, Heath Cabot and Chris Hann disagree. Hann is altogether skeptical of incorporation, and dismissive of the early *Willkommenskultur* (a product of elites!), a term that, as he writes, came out of nowhere—indeed, precisely because it captured a novel *Stimmung*. Cabot notes that Greek hospitality (*philoxenia*) is not only a frame for reception but also a response to debt, namely of being indebted to Europe. Unlike earlier generations of arrivals, refugees in Germany today are cast not as guests but as strangers. To paraphrase Simmel (1950), they come today and stay tomorrow. The disquiet (*Unruhe*) evoked by the intimate strangers is reinforced by the particular phantasmagoric qualities attributed to them: they are either backward in moral and religious matters (re. Muslim), suggesting a form of cultural inertia or at least inflexibility—a quality generally expected and hence sometimes even “tolerated”; or they exhibit a palpable worldly *savoir vivre*, masters of social media, skilled at everyday forms of politeness and

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1. Owing to lack of space, we unfortunately had to eliminate our discussion of refugee moods, which are a necessary element in encounters. Also, an elaboration of the assaults in Cologne was deleted for this reason, although we do elaborate both issues in a separate essay currently under review in another journal.



civility, and, owing to years of dislocation, situated in envied global horizons, conversant in several languages with relatives in several countries (a sister in Turkey, a brother in the United States, a mother in Jordan, an aunt in Britain). Many Germans find the contradictory interplay of inertia and mobility hard to swallow, for both qualities remind them of what they themselves lack.

From the start of the refugee wave, Germans felt pressured to seriously consider *Integration*, that the new arrivals would become part of Germany. The Greeks were impressively hospitable hosts, and in many ways continue to be, but they initially waved the refugees through toward northern Europe (where in fact they wanted to go). As Cabot implies, the Greek (and the Italian) showing of hospitality most likely affected the German *Willkommenskultur*. For Germans, the weight of collective historical guilt added to the opening the refugees provided, to transform themselves into what Hann spoofs, citing Cabot: “noble Germans” (p. 148). The Germans in this instance may have come out “smelling like a rose” only because the intransigence of most other Europeans, especially the Hungarians, summoned the trauma of European Jews in the 1930s. At this particular moment, however, it appears to us that a theoretical critique of humanitarianism within anthropology, painted in broad brushstrokes, risks situating the anthropologist as a collaborator with xenophobic interlocutors.

An important point here, for future research, and not merely at the level of media, is to consider how *Stimmungswechsel* is produced through countries influencing one other, and how the refugee crisis, as it is called, is another sign of the emergence of a European public. The German reverie, then, was prefigured by the Greek response of hospitality, and experienced as an infection that demanded healing action. Most other Europeans wanted to quarantine the bodies with the infection. This was not just an event shaped by Merkel, as Hann suggests, but a collective act that produced lively activity, a wave of voluntarism, and a palpable mood change from indifference to xenophilia. Hann gives no indication of his own mood at the time and how he reacted to the prevailing xenophilia, other than to write that he doubts its presence in Halle. Perhaps he is part of a circle of friends excluded from those participating in the *Willkommenskultur*. Our circle of acquaintances includes many such volunteers, and is certainly not limited to elites in Berlin (we do not hang around with experts). It includes people in Munich and Dortmund and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and of course many from the former East we have known since the early 1980s, several of whom live on social welfare.

Where we would disagree with Cabot is in her equation of *phagia* with *philia*. This is a fascinating and totally apt association, as orality is indeed a primary mode of human sensual incorporation. Some Germans feel able and even eager to digest the refugees, while others cannot stomach this. The former might result in *philia*, a mode of positive metaphorical incorporation. By contrast, a phobic reaction is premised not on incorporation but on something like disgust, a visceral rejection that in its extreme creates the refugees as abject: illegal, useless, dirty, indigestible, unintegratable—and, of course, deportable. Our only response to the hierarchy of refugee statuses, of which Syrians benefit most, is, like Cabot, to recognize the injustice of how exclusions are in fact administered, and to wish for more inclusiveness. Nonetheless, we acknowledge one sentiment behind Hann’s comments: the

right of permanent residents to voice dissent and set limits within legal obligations. We would hope these would be based on rational arguments, but at present they are nearly totally phantasmatic.

Hann (p. 149) attaches too much significance to Merkel and her shortcomings (that she opened the borders to “restore the ‘feelgood factor’ ... [and] “lowe[r] German labor costs” is cynical and absurd). He insists on the primacy of economic issues to the German public: for example, the Greek debt crisis, labor market issues, and German fears of displacement by the new arrivals, especially in the former East. When he writes, “the suspicion of foreigners has entirely rational grounds” (p. 149), is he dismissing the irrational? Labor market analyses of which we are aware stress automation is a much greater threat than the new arrivals, some of whom in any case will be needed because of anticipated labor shortages (such as in the care sector).

Finally, Hann chides us for our evidence. If we followed his suppositions about the structural primacy of labor markets, and the methodological importance of a distanced point of view that assumes opinions express what people mean, we would never arrive at the question of *Stimmung*. One cannot arrive at this whole through an external position that merely accumulates the parts. Like “society” for Durkheim, or “trace” for Derrida, *Stimmung* is *sui generis*. The social world is indeed fragmented, as Hann writes, but these fragments are related to each other, in this analysis, as parts of a nation. More or different encounters, more contexts, more citations, would not necessarily lead us to an alternative analysis of the empirical material we have selected to present from our fieldwork: fieldwork that is experiential, perspectival, encounter-based, intersubjective, focused on the perceptions of the actors. What Hann totally ignores is that we make ourselves visible to our readers, and nonetheless several *Stimmungswchsel* come into view. This proves that our method is generative, true to the spirit of *Wissenschaft*, a concept much broader than the English term “science.”

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