

# The politics of identity in Germany: the *Leitkultur* debate

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*Abstract:* 'Germany is not a country of immigration' is a fiction of national homogeneity that came under increased pressure with the advent, in 1998, of a centre-left government. New laws for immigration, integration and citizenship were to be introduced, eradicating the concept of *Volk* tied together by *ius sanguinis*. But the opposition Christian Democratic Union made an electoral issue of '*Ausländerpolitik*', especially integration, accusing the government of jeopardising 'German cultural identity'. What ensued was the *Leitkulturdebatte*, about Germany's predominant culture, characterised by the notion of the 'clash of civilisations' and the incompatibility of 'different' cultures. This not only replaced racial belonging with cultural belonging, transforming the *ius sanguinis* into an equally essentialist *ius cultus*, it also formed part of a conservative attempt to re-establish a 'normal' German national consciousness, cleared of the memory of the Holocaust.

*Keywords:* clash of civilisations, culture of remembrance, identity politics, immigration, integration, multiculturalism, nationalism, normalisation

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'Germany is not a country of immigration' – this widely held but brittle fiction of national homogeneity came under increasing fire when the centre-left government of the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Green Party came to power in 1998. The government planned to introduce new laws for immigration, integration and citizenship that would eradicate the concept of a *Volk* tied together by *ius sanguinis* or blood descent. Hence, in July 2000, the government set up the Süßmuth Commission (named after its chairwoman), which aimed to draw up 'modern' laws for immigration and integration. The commission was expected to shatter the myth of a homogenous Germany and propose an almost radical shift in immigration policies on the grounds that immigrants are no longer simply guest workers, but have become an integral part of German society and so should be allowed to participate more fully in it, both socially and politically. In reaction to the Süßmuth Commission, the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) set up its own immigration commission in an attempt to gain the upper hand in the struggle over the definition of German identity and the discourse on immigration and the assimilation/integration of immigrants.

Then, in October 2000, the chairman of the CDU parliamentary group in the *Bundestag*, Friedrich Merz, announced that '*Ausländerpolitik*' (policy on foreigners), especially in respect of integration, would be a major issue in the forthcoming elections. Given that the 1999 regional elections in Hesse had been won by the conservatives, thanks to their campaign against federal government attempts to introduce dual citizenship, this seemed to be a winning formula for mobilising voters in the CDU's favour – at a time, too, when it was struggling with financial scandals. Playing the nationalist card, the CDU and its Bavarian sibling CSU (Christian Social Union) openly questioned whether the ruling SPD was fit to run the country, accusing it of jeopardising 'German cultural identity' by defining the requirements for immigration too loosely.

What followed became known as the *Leitkulturdebatte* – a debate about Germany's predominant or guiding culture. On the surface, this was just a debate about *Kultur*, but it had a number of deeper aspects:

- The *Leitkultur*'s concept of culture was forged on the belief that different, sequestered cultures should remain separate in order to retain their identities and avoid otherwise inevitable cultural conflicts. The notion of 'race' was replaced by that of culture, as cultural belonging was essentialised. Culture, as a vague and broadly interpretable changing cluster of meanings, was able to perform the same exclusionary function as race. This ideology was central to the agenda of the New Right and its neo-racist discourse, a

discourse that also contains elements of, and works similarly to, anti-Semitism.<sup>1</sup>

- The *Leitkultur* debate is part of an international phenomenon, which can broadly be described as the ‘culturalisation of politics’.<sup>2</sup> Since the end of the Cold War, cultural identity/difference have become key terms for explaining and rationalising both international and national conflicts. Samuel P. Huntington’s ‘clash of civilisations’ is supposedly taking place domestically through the ‘importing’ of different cultures via immigration.<sup>3</sup>
- The *Leitkultur* debate was meant to reconstruct the national state’s authority by drawing new boundary lines between nationals and immigrants. No longer was the obsolete *ius sanguinis* – that is, national identity based on German descent – to be used to define who was part of the national body; rather, what I term *ius cultus* was to mark this boundary.
- In my view, the *Leitkultur* debate contributed to the discourse of ‘normalisation’ that began to take root in the early 1980s. Conservative forces, by attacking the ‘culture of remembrance’ (*Erinnerungskultur*), aimed to re-establish a ‘normal’ German national consciousness. They tried to achieve this either by historicising the Holocaust and so treating it as a closed chapter of German history (*Schlußstrichdebatte*) or by challenging the post-war consensus over the uniqueness and unprecedented nature of the Holocaust (*Historikerstreit*). The debate on German *Leitkultur* sought to re-establish national identity and consciousness within a European context – within, that is, the safe realm of a ‘European identity’ formed by enlightenment and modernity.

Following these hypotheses, it is possible to discern several continuities with the past. First, the belief in the essentialist nature of what it means to belong to the German *Volk*, held by the CDU/CSU, remains unchanged. Second, underlying the debate is a neo-racism that is akin to anti-Semitism. Third, there is the concept of ‘normalising’ German history. It was the newly elected Christian Democratic *Bundeskanzler* Helmut Kohl who, in 1982, declared that an ‘intellectual-moral shift in values’ (*geistig-moralische Wende*<sup>4</sup>) was his government’s aim. Since then, the focus on the exceptionalism of Germany’s National Socialist history has given way to a more relativist perspective. In 1985, for example, Kohl and Ronald Reagan together visited the military cemetery at Bitburg, where US soldiers and members of the SS are buried, and laid down a wreath.

### What is *Leitkultur*?

My hypothesis, that the *Leitkultur* debate was, at heart, a neo-racist

debate, makes it necessary to refer briefly to the intellectual genesis of such neo-racism and how it operates. Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a huge upsurge in the resort to notions of culture and identity as a means of conceptualising and explaining social and political phenomena. One of the most prominent examples is Samuel Huntington's 'paradigm' of the 'clash of civilisations'. This theory seeks to explain and rationalise international relations and domestic conflicts no longer in ideological or socio-economic terms, but in terms of cultural incompatibility. The basis for this paradigm can be found in the French *Nouvelle Droite* (New Right) of the late 1960s, which adopted a culturalist racism or neo-racism through, for example, perverting the concept of cultural relativism found in Claude Lévi-Strauss's work. The main proponent of the *Nouvelle Droite* was and is Alain de Benoist, who demands that cultures should be separated in order to allow them to retain their distinct characteristics. This, he writes, is the right and duty of every culture for the sake of the survival of the biological species, mankind.<sup>5</sup>

The *Nouvelle Droite*, which sees itself as a Gramscian movement struggling for ideological hegemony rather than as a party, has attempted to put this concept into practice,<sup>6</sup> with its main political focus on the negative effects that globalisation has on the purity of cultures. Migration is viewed as the most important aspect of globalisation, which is denounced as a US-led phenomenon.<sup>7</sup> By insisting on the right to retain a pure and original identity, de Benoist asserts that the populations of the countries of immigration and the immigrants are both victims of globalisation. Thus, the *Nouvelle Droite* manages to square the circle. Its members represent themselves as 'differentialist' anti-racists through postulating that every culture has an equal right to maintain its purity, but that cultures are incommensurable. The *Nouvelle Droite* demands the expatriation of cultural strangers and hypocritically calls for a fight against the causes of migration.<sup>8</sup> If expatriation is not possible, de Benoist demands thorough cultural segregation,<sup>9</sup> leading, in effect, to the social and political marginalisation of those from 'different' cultures. Neo-racism has thus substituted the biological racism of white superiority with a cultural mechanism of differentiation.

But if Huntington's paradigm of the clash of civilisations is, at bottom, an expression of neo-racism, what does this imply? According to Huntington, while it is civilisations – the West, Islam, and so on – that, at the level of international relations, substitute for the ideologically orientated nation state, at the domestic level, it is the assimilation of immigrants that is the litmus test for the 'cultural health' of Europe and North America. For Huntington, cultural belonging is an essentialist category in which democratic values and human rights

are not universal principles but, rather, specific attributes of western civilisation that cannot be transfused into other cultures.<sup>10</sup>

The clash of civilisations is predominantly part of an anti-immigration discourse. In Huntington's words: 'Are Europe and the USA able to make a stand against the flood of migrants?'<sup>11</sup> Immigration from necessarily hostile civilisations, such as Islam, imports the international clash into the domestic realm. That is why 'we have to contain the flood of immigrants, forget about multiculturalism and fight de-westernisation'.<sup>12</sup> Evidently, the context is not so much one of an inter-civilisational conflict as a reflection of the perceptions and fears of the WASP (White, Anglo-Saxon Protestant) majority within the US itself. It is a discourse that serves to legitimise a restrictive immigration and assimilation policy. This new policy is part of the 'racism of the era of "decolonisation", of the reversal of population movements between the old colonies and the old metropolises'.<sup>13</sup> Huntington's essentialist understandings of the individual and of culture render the concept of the clash of civilisations as 'cultural racism' or neo-racism.

*From ius sanguinis to ius cultus*

It was, in my view, the neo-racist ideology implicit in both the clash of civilisations idea and the Nouvelle Droite that formed the basis of the German debate on immigration, integration and cultural belonging.

Bassam Tibi, professor of political science in Göttingen, proponent of an enlightened 'Euro-Islam' and himself a Muslim, coined the term 'European *Leitkultur*' in 1998 in order to summarise the set of norms and values which, for him, characterised the European cultural community.<sup>14</sup> And the recognition, acceptance and internalisation of this culture of modernity and enlightenment form the yardstick for measuring the successful integration of immigrants.<sup>15</sup> Tibi denounced multiculturalism as merely an expression of bad conscience over what happened in the colonial era. Germans are additionally plagued by the guilt of the Holocaust, which is why they have been disproportionately tolerant towards immigrants.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, multicultural societies necessarily create parallel communities which become embroiled in conflicts due to the lack of a widely accepted predominant culture. The consequence is the creation of a cultural and moral vacuum, characterised by a lack of guidelines, in which terrorism, as exemplified by the 'Hamburg cell' and personified by student Mohammed Atta, is able to thrive.<sup>17</sup>

Tibi's main obsession with European *Leitkultur* is that, if the German nation could re-accommodate itself at the heart of an enlightened European modernity, the country's Europeanised cultural identity, detached from the legacy and the damage of the Holocaust, could become acceptable to immigrants as a worthy guiding culture.<sup>18</sup> However, Tibi's concept of cultural belonging is ultimately static; he

postulates that there can be no mobility between civilisations – yet exceptions are possible, for he is evidently one himself.

### Phases of the debate

But how was the concept of a ‘predominant culture’ used in the 2000 debate? What transformations did it undergo and what implication did these transformations have for the formulation of immigration policy?

The debate went through several phases, during which the notion of German *Leitkultur* underwent a metamorphosis. Initially, the term was taken out of its original Europe-wide context, as outlined by Tibi, and was ‘enhanced’ by the addition to it of the epithet ‘German’. After heavy criticism within the CDU (one senior party member, Heiner Geißler, commented that even a skinhead could refer to German *Leitkultur*<sup>19</sup>) it was transformed into the ‘predominant culture in Germany’ and finally to Europe’s or the West’s predominant culture.

Before examining the course of the debate from October 2000 onwards, it is worth drawing attention to a previous attempt, made by a right-wing senior member of the CDU, to ignite a debate about national consciousness and the integration of immigrants. One of the most outspoken right-wing CDU politicians is Jörg Schönbohm, home secretary for Brandenburg, and it was his statements about German identity that prepared the ground for what was to follow. Schönbohm had incorporated the notion of incompatible parallel societies of immigrants and Germans in his proposals for *Ausländerpolitik*. He expressed his fear of the demographic death of the German nation, arguing that a mere constitutional patriotism, such as that promoted by Jürgen Habermas<sup>20</sup> or, in another variant, by Dolf Sternberger,<sup>21</sup> would not be a sufficient base for granting citizenship.

Schönbohm argued that ‘we will have a pluralism of cultures in Germany but German culture must be its basis. That is what it is all about.’<sup>22</sup> This notion of *Kulturpluralismus* rejects multiculturalism because only through people’s adherence to a common set of values and norms can conflict be avoided. Thus, a certain level of assimilation is necessary.<sup>23</sup> According to Schönbohm, social and political equality within a state can only be granted to those who are members of the German *Staatsvolk*.<sup>24</sup> To become a member of this *Volk*, ‘immigrants have to aspire to its culture, which has developed since Otto the Great, wholeheartedly, and not just because of the personal benefits [to them] of immigration’.<sup>25</sup>

For Schönbohm, integration is not merely about accepting laws or the Constitution. In his view, the ‘honourable discussion about a western constitutional patriotism’ ignores the fact that the integrative

power of the Constitution ‘must be related to our history and our historic experiences’.<sup>26</sup> Foreigners have to accept a ‘minimum of the basic convictions and habits/customs of the German population . . . there is no space for the political conflicts of foreign countries [to be played out] on German soil’.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the clash of civilisations, carried into the West by immigrants, is evident in Schönbohm’s attack on multiculturalism.

To sum up, belonging to German culture meant, for Schönbohm, being part of Germany’s historical *Volk*. Social and political rights are bound to Germanness.

#### *Autumn 2000*

When Friedrich Merz stated before the 2000 elections that the CDU would use any and every topic that might prove useful, he explicitly included policy on foreigners.<sup>28</sup> Despite some protests from fellow CDU members, the term *Leitkultur* entered the programmatic language of the CDU relatively quickly.

Compared to Schönbohm’s concept of German identity, Merz’s *Leitkultur* was characterised by the notion of Germanness being rooted in Europe, by Germany’s integration within the EU and by its reference to constitutional patriotism. Merz demanded that immigrants be willing to accept the German rules and mores that enabled communities to live side by side, which he termed ‘liberal German *Leitkultur*’. This predominant culture has its ‘foundation in the Constitution as the most important expression of German moral order guaranteeing the coherence of German society . . . Germany, as a country at the centre of Europe, has identified itself with European integration and its peace and liberty.’ Although Merz was heavily criticised from all sides, throughout the subsequent debate none of his fellow party members came as close to calling for conventional constitutional patriotism or allegiance as he had. German predominant culture, for Merz, seemed to be simply another term for constitutional patriotism.<sup>29</sup>

However, it was also Merz who began a debate about the criteria for permanent residence rights for immigrants.<sup>30</sup> And, in the way he initiated this debate, he opened up a thick layer of connotations and associations which included anything from constitutional allegiance to demands for ‘order’ and ‘cleanliness’. This left a space for all kinds of images and stereotypes to flourish and was a deliberate strategy to kick off a debate that political opponents felt compelled to join in. But, of course, it ensured that those who contested Merz’s claims also felt impelled to articulate their loyalty to the German nation. And so it happened that even the then chairwoman of the Socialist Party (PDS), Gabi Zimmer, trumpeted her love for Germany.<sup>31</sup>



### From German culture to European culture

While Friedrich Merz, after the first outrage at his demand that immigrants assimilate to a German *Leitkultur*, responded by constantly invoking the Constitution, others omitted the attribute 'German' and substituted it with European or western. 'German *Leitkultur* means accepting the set of values and norms valid in our country. This predominant German culture has always been seen as part of western/occidental civilisation by other countries', said CDU member of parliament Hannelore Roensch.<sup>32</sup>

It was this conjuring up of the roots of German cultural identity as European that was to prevail in the course of the *Leitkultur* debate. The particularity of Germanness was about to disappear and, with it, its historical connotations. A European sense of crisis and decadence; the fear of cultural clashes resulting from immigration from 'distant' cultures; the Europeanness of Germany; and the Christian West imagined as a unified western European culture, all played an increasingly important role in the making of immigration legislation.

In early November 2000, the CDU's immigration commission published a working paper, which stated that immigration could only be allowed on the 'basis of our constitutional values and in consciousness of our own identity . . . In this sense, compliance with these values can be called the *Leitkultur* in Germany.'<sup>33</sup>

Then, in December, the CSU proposed guidelines for new immigration policies. In addition to demanding that immigration be in Germany's interest, the CSU stipulated that immigration from non-EU states be limited in order to preserve the 'identity of our country' and to save Germany from cultural conflict. Adoption of the '*Leitkultur* must [involve] more than just acquisition of the language and the recognition of laws', it required 'tolerance and consideration for the norms and customs' of the native population. 'In this sense, the yardstick for integration is the *Leitkultur* which is dominant in each *Kulturstaat*. In Germany, this rests upon the basis of European/western values rooted in Christianity, the enlightenment and humanism.'<sup>34</sup> The protection of German identity and culture within a European cultural space meant that unlimited immigration had to be prevented<sup>35</sup> – as if any political actor had ever demanded an end to all immigration restrictions.

In May 2001, the chairpersons of the CDU and the CSU, Angela Merkel and Edmund Stoiber, put forward a joint paper. In an earlier draft published by the CDU, *Leitkultur* had lost its attribute 'German';<sup>36</sup> now the latest version simply referred to the 'hierarchy of values of western Christian culture' without mentioning *Leitkultur* at all.<sup>37</sup> In June 2001, the CDU immigration commission published its final report, which defined German culture as rooted in Europe



and, again, did not mention *Leitkultur*. What followed the discursive death of *Leitkultur* was an agreeable conglomeration of humanism, Christianity, Judaism, Enlightenment and Roman law.<sup>38</sup> So it would appear that the notion of a predominant German culture, or *Leitkultur*, was increasingly being found wanting, seen as dysfunctional. But this was only partly because of the public criticism of the notion, for it had already fulfilled its role by triggering a debate about identity that totally eclipsed the aims of the Süßmuth Commission.

The bare introduction of the concept of *Leitkultur* into public policy making constituted a shift towards the creation of a culturally focused immigration policy. It put under the spotlight of public debate the need for immigrants to make efforts to integrate. Cultural belonging and the adoption of German customs and mores became a prerequisite for wider social and political participation. Whereas the Süßmuth Commission's intention was to provide practical guidelines for immigration and integration, such as a detailed programme concentrating on language acquisition, the CDU and CSU managed to shift the focus of the debate on to questions of national identity and to query the loyalty of non-European immigrants in particular. All attempts to draw up a new idea of citizenship and a new concept of German society were stalled by the success of this debate. The continuity of *ius sanguinis* in the shape of *ius cultus* was established.

### Stabilisation of identity

The most openly visible aspect of the *Leitkultur* debate's continuity with the past was in the way it redefined German identity. It did this by superseding the obsolete blood-and-soil definition of *völkisches* belonging with a more flexible, yet essentially racist, definition of cultural belonging as distinguishing the German nation.

The exclusionist *Leitkulturdebatte* was intended to optimise and influence immigration policy and has to be understood in the context of a general decline in socio-economic analysis. That decline has resulted in a historical and political vacuum into which notions of top-down community creation, nationalist ideologies and socio-biological arguments and justifications have all been sucked.<sup>39</sup> The debate functioned as an anti-immigration discourse. It worked to construct at the symbolic level a coherent cultural identity in reaction to fundamental social and economic changes that had themselves led to the dismissal of the national state and its old (welfare) functions. Immigrants, who could no longer be ignored as a substantial part of society, could nonetheless be excluded from political participation in it by being firmly labelled as culturally incompatible.

The *Leitkultur* debate clearly functioned to differentiate 'us' from 'them'. Faced with a society that clearly does not correspond to the

image of a homogenous *Volk*, the CDU and CSU nevertheless recognised the economic benefits of immigration and the need for it. Hence, both parties welcomed the culturalisation of politics and used culture (this extremely flexible, but also obvious, means of differentiation) to exclude, socially and politically, huge numbers of people living in Germany. The *Leitkultur* debate was about interpreting social facts in the daily lives of majority and minority populations in Germany, so as to make sense of social, political and economic differences in a way that would legitimate the exploitation and exclusion of foreigners. People from different cultural backgrounds could not expect to be treated as Germans because they had yet to become Germans.

### German normalisation

Another continuity – in this case, not to do with immigration laws or integration – can be seen in the attempt to reconstruct German identity within a broader European context, thus allowing German nationalism to be rehabilitated under the rubric of Europeanness, as well as a global assertion of perceived German interests.

Somewhat surprisingly, it was CDU chairperson Angela Merkel who was the prime mover in this conceptual and discursive development. Although she had initially rejected the term *Leitkultur*, she subsequently accepted Tibi's conception of it.<sup>40</sup> However, she soon abandoned the notion of constitutional patriotism and launched a discussion on what 'holds our country together', arguing 'that we should go into the united Europe as a joint and self-confident nation'. In Merkel's opinion, the current SPD-led government was least suited to undertake this, 'as it lacks orientation in this field, a poor emotional world prevails there'. For Merkel, the aim of the *Leitkultur* debate was to promote 'a country that is sure of itself, is open, tolerant and curious while being conscious of its past, and that sallies forth into the future and into competition with our neighbours in Europe and the world'.<sup>41</sup>

Right-winger Roland Koch, prime minister of Hesse and a rising star in the CDU at the time, saw a crisis of sense and meaning over Germany's identity as imminent:

If we in Germany are not able to say that the national identity of our country is an important good and that people in our country can feel well and can be proud of it, then we will have problems in a common Europe, being surrounded by self-confident neighbours. Such a self-confidence would be appropriate for us.<sup>42</sup>

The central point made by Merkel and others in statements such as these was that Germany must once again be allowed to act like any other nation: the past, though it had to be remembered, should no longer affect today's politics. This discourse relies on a simplistic

separation between 'bad' nationalism and 'good' patriotism, despite the fact that, in the context of German history and given the specificity of the German idea of the nation, no reference to these terms can be unproblematic. Though Merkel and Koch were nowhere near as explicit about the Holocaust, 'the past that will not pass',<sup>43</sup> they implied what Tibi had boldly demanded: to think about the cultural and historical heritage of post-war Germany after the destruction of the spiritual/intellectual community through the Holocaust.<sup>44</sup> The answer, after the *Schlußstrichdebatte* (the attempt to treat the Holocaust as a closed chapter of German history) failed, was to create a new home for Germany within the shelter of a European identity of modernity and enlightenment, using the West and its values as a cultural-political 'battle cry' (*Kampfbegriff*). The assumption that Germany has always been part and parcel of European modernity, with all its positive aspects, means that the years of the National Socialist regime appear more and more like an accident of history – an accident that could have happened anywhere. Germany's historical development thus loses its specificity and is decontextualised.

## Conclusion

German *Leitkultur*, then, was transformed into a German culture within a European one. This culture is now the yardstick for measuring the degree of assimilation necessary for non-European immigrants to be integrated. But as these cultures are portrayed as almost totally alien, integration is not deemed possible. And, thus, the neo-racist exclusionary mechanism comes into force.

The demand that integration has to be a prerequisite for citizenship rights means that the culturalist understanding of belonging imposes a permanent duty on non-European immigrants to display loyalty and adherence to the perceived ideals of the majority culture.<sup>45</sup> Risking hyperbole, Eike Henning quoted the *Reichsbürgergesetz* of 1935: 'To be a citizen of the Reich, you need to be a citizen of German or allied (*artverwand*) blood, who proves by his conduct, that he is willing and suitable to serve the German Volk and the Reich.'<sup>46</sup> Is it an exaggeration to say that blood has become culture? Of course, citizenship always implies loyalty to the country, but surely loyalty can still be freely given by those from different cultural backgrounds. This continuity in German thought and in German legislation is still very much in evidence today. Bassam Tibi has promoted an essentialist view of culture and, in that, given scientific legitimacy to the neo-racism that underlies conservative policy proposals on immigration. Where once German belonging was innate and not to be acquired, Germanness is now part of a wider, but equally essentialist and exclusionist, cultural realm. It is a realm, moreover, that has to fortify itself so as to

combat the challenges posed by hostile civilisations. Certainly, the exclusionary mechanism of cultural racism is a very flexible one, in that it allows anybody who is perceived to be of use to Germany to acquire full citizenship without having to prove they are of the right descent.

Tibi helped to popularise the paradigm of the clash of civilisations and gave intellectual support to the conservative repudiation of immigration. The CDU's and Tibi's vocabulary and their horror scenarios bear a strong resemblance to those of the New Right, with talk of 'parasitic' refugees, 'bogus' asylum seekers seeking immigration and unlimited 'migrant floods' endangering job security and the welfare state.<sup>47</sup> I believe that the *Leitkultur* debate has shown that there is no clear boundary between the New Right discourse on cultural identity and the discourse of the CDU/CSU. These conservative-centrist parties have problematised immigration and integration policies in a way that is hardly distinguishable from the positions of the extreme right.<sup>48</sup>

The clash of civilisations has, indeed, made an impact on German immigration legislation and policy. Not only is German citizenship law still dominated by the notion of blood and soil – although the compromise reached on the naturalisation of the children of foreign residential nationals is surely some sign of progress – the cultural understanding of belonging, with its demand for absolute loyalty and its suspicion that this loyalty can never be total, can be interpreted as an extension of the logic of anti-Semitism. Loose talk about German traditions and customs suggests an authentic originality, rooted in the past and the outcome of previous cultural struggles, which, because of its very existence, is worth enshrining. The rejection of 'race mixing' resonates with neo-racism's unease about the assimilation of immigrants. In the course of the *Leitkultur* debate, Germans were portrayed as an endangered species, endangered by an influx of immigrants with their self-confident cultures, who were unhampered by cultural decadence or conscience-stricken memories of the Holocaust. The German 'collective' or *Gemeinschaft* is threatened by the enemy within.<sup>49</sup> The *Leitkultur* debate was consciously used as a vehicle for addressing certain policy issues and stimulating nationalist and racist, perhaps even anti-Semitic, tendencies in Germany.

## Epilogue

At the time of writing, after four years of negotiation, a compromise between the government and the opposition saw legislation passed by both chambers of parliament in July 2004, to be enacted as of January 2005. Not surprisingly, this compromise resulted in even more restrictive immigration laws, which are intertwined with 'security laws' and anti-terrorism measures. It did not need a clairvoyant to see that,

after the terrorist attacks of September 11, the general willingness to design and implement a rational immigration law lost momentum, even as immigration from certain countries became equated with importing terrorism. In the event, the immigration law has turned into the 'Law for the control and limitation of immigration'.<sup>50</sup> Any humanitarian improvements to the regulations, such as the provision of refuge to the victims of gender-specific persecution, can be attributed solely to Germany's belated compliance with European law.<sup>51</sup> Measures to enhance integration consist of compulsory classes on language and 'culture'. Non-participation can be punished by deportation,<sup>52</sup> and 'intellectual incendiaries' and those deemed to be potential terrorist threats can be deported.<sup>53</sup>

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