2017 | *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7 (3): 105–135


# The concept of *Stimmung*

## From indifference to xenophobia in Germany's refugee crisis

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This article deals with the German concept of *Stimmung,* which does not allow a translation into the English notion of "affective mood," but rather is simultaneously an *internal* and *external* state, *subjective* (involving the "I") and *objective* (involving attunement [*einstimmen*] to others), enveloping both *content* and *form*. To understand the essential imbrication of individual and collective moods summoned by the term, we examine three empirical cases of *Stimmungswechsel*, or "mood shifts"—from indifference to ambivalence, to xenophilia and xenophobia—as they shaped the September 2016 German regional electoral campaigns. Following Sally Falk Moore, we focus on the "diagnostic events" which triggered these shifts, observed in fieldwork encounters with Germans concerning migrants and refugees who entered Germany in 2015. How did the perception and experience of "the refugee" become internal to the "mood shifts"? How is *Stimmung* linked to relations to refugees as psychic attachments that either echo an originary collective experience of losing home or promise submission to an experience of self-transformation?

Keywords: *Stimmung*, mood, attunement, Germany, elections, indifference, ambivalence, xenophilia, xenophobia, incorporation

In the 2016 German regional elections, Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Party (CDU) suffered major losses, while a new rightwing, anti-immigrant party, Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), finished a strong third.[1] One year

1. In the September 4, 2016, elections in Merkel's home state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, her CDU came in third (19 percent, down 4.1 percent) behind the Social Democrats (SPD), at 30.6 percent (down 5.1 percent), and the rightwing populists AfD,


ISSN 2049-1115 (Online). DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.14318/hau7.3.006

earlier, on August 31, 2015, Merkel had exclaimed, "*Wir schaffen das!*" (We can do it!), affirming her decision to welcome what eventually became over a million foreign migrants and refugees who had fled to Germany that year. Following these electoral losses, Peter Tauber, the CDU's general secretary, commented, "We are all responsible for this. It was noticeable that the refugee subject was very present. Of course, many people are looking at Angela Merkel." The CDU's lead candidate Lorenz Caffier declared, "There was only one issue, that issue was called and is called *Flüchtlingspolitik* (refugee policy)."[2]

Many commentators have attributed this electoral loss to a *Stimmungswechsel*, a shift in public mood.[3] *Stimmung* is translated into English as mood, vibe, ambience, atmosphere, or feeling. In the widely read weekly *Der Spiegel*, Klaus Brinkbäumer (2016), for example, contended: "Merkel has become a victim *of Stimmung*." This victimization, he argued, represented a "structural transformation" to a "postfactual time," where "truths have less influence on political reality than *Stimmungen* and feelings. . . . Numbers hardly matter, at least not so much as fears and hate, such as rumors and mutterings of conspiracy." If the 2016 German elections were indeed a vote (*Ab-stimmung*) to reject the refugee policy of the chancellor and affirm an alternative mood, then can we describe more rigorously how this mood shift occurs, and what its exact relation is to electoral politics?

Several academic discourses have found it particularly important to take up mood as a concept to describe certain aspects of reality that escape other analytics. The most powerful is psychiatry, which looks at mood as a subjective emotional state that can be diagnosed on the basis of observable, measurable, repeated symptoms within a general classificatory system of illnesses. In Western countries, the diagnosis and treatment of "mood disorders" (e.g., depression, mania, bipolar

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at 20.8 percent (up from 0 percent). Other regional elections in 2016, along with the Berlin state elections on September 13, 2016, showed similar results (see https://www.wahlen-berlin.de/wahlen/be2016/afspraes/index.html, accessed October 26, 2017; for the English version: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_state_election,_2016). Public opinion also mirrored electoral results, as Merkel's approval rating dropped within one year, from September 2015 to September 2016, from 63 to 45 percent (http://www.infratest-dimap.de/umfragen-analysen/bundesweit/ard-deutschlandtrend/, accessed October 26, 2017). These trends continued in the federal elections, held in September 2017. Compared to the 2013 federal elections, the two largest parties both lost considerable support—CDU/CSU (41.5 to 32.9) and SPD (25.7 to 20.5)—while the smaller parties gained—Greens (8.4 to 9.4), the Left (8.6 to 8.9), the Free Democrats (4.8 to 10.5), with the largest gain going to the the AfD (4.7 to 13.4) (https://bundestagswahl-2017.com/ergebnis/, accessed October 28, 2017).

2. For citations, see http://www.tagesschau.de/inland/ltwmv-101.html, accessed October 26, 2017). All translations from the original German into English are ours.

3. Stimmung is not a technical term in Germany but used in everyday conversation (see the use of "aufgeladene Stimmung" [charged atmosphere] and "gesellschaftliches Klima" [societal climate] in the June 5, 2016, edition of the Anne Will program on ARD (German public service TV station), "Guter Nachbar, schlechter Nachbar—Wie rassistisch ist Deutschland?" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8D8yqKumo0k, accessed October 26, 2017).

disorder) within psychiatry and psychology is a growing field of research, often driven by profit motives, as treatments increasingly rely on the promise of personally modulated and expensive psychotropic drugs. Yet none of the related terms for mood disorders are adequate to describe the essential relation of an individual to a collective mood shift, and how the volatility of affect is tied to collective feeling.[4]

A second powerful academic discourse, focused on politics and society, connects collective mood to "public opinion" or "will." While acknowledging that mood has multiple origins and is the result of individual as well as social factors, this discourse nonetheless restricts itself to the analysis of individual opinions in response to surveys or interviews. Scholars then aggregate opinion statements into an objective statistic that is said to measure public will or a policy preference.[5] Politicians and media spokespeople cite such polling data as evidence of a representative attitude or mood. Yet to infer collective mood from aggregate opinions reduces it to a measurable affect, whereas its volatile unconscious character resists control even when brought into speech and conscious thought.

Anthropological approaches for the most part avoid the political science discourse and critique and modify the psychiatric one. Work in medical and psychological anthropology, in particular, has largely placed internal moods in social contexts. Emily Martin, for example, relates mood to "the cultural contexts that give particular meanings to its oscillations and multiplicities" (2007: 29), and Jarrett Zigon and Jason Throop (2014) link attunement through mood and emotions to "moral experience" in a kind of cross-cultural comparison (see also Zigon 2014; Throop 2015). *Stimmungswechsel*, as we use the term, narrows the focus to the internal psychic resonance of experiences within collective affective states triggered by events that mirror in various ways the changing political field.[6] To our knowledge, among anthropologists only Lotte Buch Segal (2016: 464) has taken up mood

4. Common German terms for mood disorders include affektive Störungen (affective disorders), Stimmungsstörungen (mood disorders), Stimmungsschwankungen (mood fluctuations), Gemütserkrankungen (lit., illnesses of the soul; sickness of emotional states), and Befindlichkeitsstörungen (lit., sensitivity disorders, mood disturbances).

5. Unlike Stimmung, which is largely unconscious, opinions are a conscious verbal response in an ongoing social exchange. It remains unclear what exactly an opinion (determined by an attitude) expresses. Arriving at an opinion is the result of many hidden coercive factors, such as the influence of family and friends or the desire to please the questioner. Studies that use survey data obtained through randomized interviews arrive at public opinion, and then relate mood (equated with public opinion) to various objects: public policy (Stimson 1991); US Supreme Court decisions (Link 1995); social policy on taxation and spending (Ellis and Faricy 2011); the agendas of governors (DiLeo 1997); values (Rahn, Kroeger, and Kite 1996); Congressional approval ratings (Ramirez 2012); and migrants and immigration (McLaren 2003; O'Rourke and Sinnott 2006; Kehrberg 2007; Hopkins 2010). See early critical analyses by Blumer (1948) and Bourdieu (1972).

6. Interlocution-based ethnography in one place cannot do justice to documenting the empirical diversity in mood shifts. Berlin is certainly not typical of Germany, neither in its mix of residents (many new and young) nor in its history; nonetheless, it is the German capital, and thus life there has special national symbolic significance.

shifts, suggesting a shift from "passionate belief in a radical transformation . . . to ambivalence" among Palestinians (within and by themselves), expressed in a melancholic mood (caught between "indeterminate loss and ambivalent attachment").

Where we find most affinity to anthropological approaches is in an insistence that precision about mood is not primarily a matter of measurement but more of finding the approximate words and concepts for describing the experience of mood in its temporal specificity and volatility. In this sense, our project builds on Val Daniel's (2000: 335) insistence, drawing from work in Sri Lanka, that to represent a mood is always also about language and writing, about "how to and not to tell a story." Our focus is distinctive in two respects: First, we seek to preserve the specificity of the German concept *Stimmung* and to distinguish it from the English "mood" and related concepts central to anthropology such as context and *Gestalt*. *Stimmung* is closely related to *Stimme* (voice) and *stimmen* (to tune), hence not only an internal state aroused by affect but simultaneously internal and external, subjective (involving the "I") and objective (involving attunement [*einstimmen*] to others), enveloping both content and form. Second, in asking how Germans relate to refugees or to the idea of refugee, we affirm the phenomenological insistence on *perception* while foregrounding psychoanalytic insights into how mood expresses a *relation to the experience of others* as "transformational" or "conservative" objects (Bollas 1987a; on shared agenda, see Csordas 2012). Forms of attachment (Bowlby 1973; Holmes 2005) to objects and attunement or misattunement to moods (Winnicott 1945, 1967; Stern 1985; Ahmed 2014) critically inform the process of the incorporation of the foreign into, or its exclusion from, the social—the very event that is said to have stimulated recent national mood shifts.

Mood changes involve larger social orders, including national moods and democratic legitimation rituals such as elections. We explore the link—attunement—between individual and collective mood shifts not primarily through language but through events. Changes in mood rely fundamentally on the paradoxical quality of perception. Since the perceived thing exists only insofar as someone perceives it, the price for its "realness" is a distortion caused by the limiting concreteness of perspective and location (Merleau-Ponty [1946] 1964: 16). Perceptual experiences are a matter not of truth but of appearances, of the play of presence and absence. An act of perception cannot be decomposed into sensations or ideas because the whole (the experience of the world) is prior to its parts (individual perception). "'Matter,'" writes Merleau-Ponty (ibid.: 15), "is pregnant with its form."

For a more trenchant description of *Stimmung*, we will remain with the German term and engage in a running critical dialogue with its most influential philosopher, Martin Heidegger.[7] His interpretation of German terms offers structural insight into the linguistic unconscious that, as Lévi-Strauss (1978: 4) would put it,

7. For different disciplinary departures from Heidegger, see: in literature, Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht's (2012) focus on the experience of reading literature as one of making present through a mood (as opposed to description and representation); in sociology, Heinz Bude's (2016) development of Stimmung as a sociological fact, a "feeling of world" that inaugurates political conflict; in philosophy, Otto Friedrich Bollnow's ([1955] 2009) hermeneutical reflections on elevated or positive moods, attempting to limit (but not overcome) Heidegger's insistence on the foundational mood of *Angst*.

offers "a new outlook on mankind." Much as the richness of the Polynesian concept "*hau*" opened for Marcel Mauss a wide range of comparative insights, so might the term "*Stimmung*" be generative. Yet we depart from Heidegger in that we are less concerned with his explication of *Angst* as a *Grundstimmung* (basic mood), which speaks to the epic scale of the human species, than with, paraphrasing Bakhtin (1981: 3–40), the novelization of national mood shifts. The German nation itself is an epic register of momentous collective historical events, such as the Holocaust, two world wars, the political division of the Cold War, and unification. More recent events, such as the entrance of migrants and refugees into Germany in 2015, trigger mood shifts that novelize this register: intersubjective, indeterminate in meaning, self-critical in time, and part of ever-developing stories. As anthropologists, we access these shifts from within our own moods as we interact with individuals in an(other) national mood.

## Method

Encounter-based fieldwork provides unique access to mood, as we experience emotional transference with our interlocutors, both learning of and forced to engage the moods they are experiencing. We understand fieldwork encounters as "modes of ethical engagement wherein the ethnographer is arrested in the act of perception, . . . an engagement with persons, groups, and scenes that takes into account the dynamics of our interactions as well as the differences between our locations and those of our interlocutors" (Borneman and Hammoudi 2009: 19).

Our understanding of events draws from the concept "diagnostic event" developed by Sally Falk Moore (1987). In retrospect, the analyst construes as a diagnostic event some happening witnessed during fieldwork.[8] These happenings are singular, often accidental, and do not follow a script yet are occasions for symbolization. Through critical reflection, experiences coalesce into events. Events can turn *Stimmung*; they can trigger a collective feeling and create the need for a collective reattunement. Politics, political talk shows, and social media—primarily Facebook, Google, and Twitter—orient, express, and manipulate moods, but their manipulations work only as they build on extant phantasies. Winners in democratic elections address and often legitimate dominant moods.

Over the course of six months, three events in Germany went viral and triggered changes in public mood: The first, on July 16, 2015, was a chance emotional encounter between Chancellor Angela Merkel and a teenage Palestinian refugee, Reem Sahwil, who feared deportation. It contributed to turning indifference into

8. Our turn to events that are specifically "diagnostic" is intended to make the concept of *Stimmung* useful for ethnographic research, as it seeks to learn from the transference of emotion and mood in the experience of encounters in which the anthropologist also participates. Work on historical events begins from a distance, in which anthropologists cannot learn from the interface of the moods of the anthropologist and interlocutor as they were not present for the unconscious registration of the event (cf. Das 1997; Sahlins 1985; Robbins 2007).

an ambivalent public mood.[9] A second, on September 2, 2015, the dissemination of photos of the three-year-old Syrian Aylan Kurdi's drowned, face-down body on a Turkish beach, galvanized an empathic identification with the plight of refugees, turning ambivalence toward a xenophilic mood as talk spread of a new *Willkommenskultur* (welcoming culture). A third, the New Year's Eve 2015 sexual assaults on German women in Cologne, activated latent fears and mobilized a xenophobic mood—primarily fear of the Muslim male's sexualized aggression.[10] These events represent in condensed form three *Stimmungswechsel*, shifts in the dominant mood: from indifference to ambivalence, and from ambivalence to either xenophilia or xenophobia. Such mood shifts do not cause such shifts, nor are they the product of intentionally willed operations. They are manifestations of a collective feeling that compels an attunement to a new situation, which does not eliminate prior moods but repositions the new mood in relation to previous ones, leading back to the foundational mood of *Angst*.

The volatility of public mood is especially important for electoral campaigns within the democratic political form, when politicians mobilize public opinion through various media outlets to obtain votes. Politicians in democracies often fail in this endeavor because moods exceed and are rarely congruent with public opinion. When politicians are not attuned to mood, they often lose elections. Ritual elections perform the function of retroactively legitimating mood shifts. That is why authoritarian leaders refuse to even acknowledge the possibility of mood shifts to which they might not already be attuned. They may ignore public opinion but nonetheless find it essential to play with the affective power of mood. Germans have a specific term for the activity that makes moods, *Stimmungsmache*, which can be positive or negative, except in politics, where it implies deception and today might be the production of "fake news." In revolutionary contexts, the ability to foresee mood shifts is key to success. Demagogues and prophets, in particular, claim to possess this ability.

The September 2016 German elections legitimized a latent xenophobic mood that stands in stark opposition to the xenophilic *Willkommenskultur* that had emerged the year before. All political parties were subsequently repositioned with respect to this new xenophobic mood. To depict the change from the welcoming culture in mid-2015 to the heightened focus on security measures (*Sicherheitspolitik*) in 2016, we track the mood shifts in particular German individuals as they encounter refugees or the idea of them.[11] Their experiences are indexical of the quality of intersubjectivity, or interpersonal relations in a Germany that faces the challenges

9. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8L2J47dFbc (accessed October 26, 2017).

10. These three events are part of a series of events of unmeasurable but accumulative emotional effects that contributed to emerging moods. One such event of note, for example, the November 13, 2015, attacks by the Islamic State in Paris, activated latent fears and also led to an anxious questioning of the feel-good welcoming mood in Germany. Yet, we were not present for these attacks as a *diagnostic event.* In any case, the New Year's Eve sexual assaults six weeks later, by contrast, turned this anxiety into a social phobia.

11. The "*Blut und Boden*" theory is no longer the only theory of who counts as German; a sizable number of permanent residents identify themselves as European, or with a city or region, rather than as German.

of incorporating large number of refugees and migrants, mostly from the Middle East.

## Mood shift 1. From indifference to ambivalence: Reem Sahwil cries

On July 15, 2015, at a televised forum for young people in Rostock, a coastal city on the Baltic Sea in the former East Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel engaged in a question-and-answer session with students.[12] A fourteen-year-old Palestinian girl, Reem Sahwil, who had fled Lebanon with her parents and brother four years earlier, expressed to Merkel her fears of being deported. The (abridged) dialogue went:

> *Reem* [speaking in fluent German, which Merkel had earlier made a point of praising]: I want to study. It's really a wish, and a goal that I want to reach. Yes, it is really very unpleasant to look on at how others can really enjoy life while you can't enjoy life with them.
> *Merkel*: I understand that and nonetheless, I have to also . . . politics is sometimes hard. When you stand in front of me . . . and you are a very congenial person, but you know also that in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon there are thousands and thousands [of people]. And if we now say, "you can all come here and you from Africa can all come here, you can all come," we, too, could not manage that (*das können wir auch nicht schaffen*). And so we are here in a conflict . . .

Noticing that Reem has begun to cry, Merkel smiles and approaches the girl. She says, "You did a great job." The moderator then steps forward and says indignantly, "I don't think, Frau *Bundeskanzlerin*, that it's about whether or not she did a great job, but it's a very stressful situation."

> *Merkel* [somewhat annoyed]: I know that it's a stressful situation. That's why I would like to comfort her—[She caresses Reem's head]—because we did not want to bring her into such a situation, and [turning again toward Reem] because it is difficult for you, and because you showed very well for many, many others in what kind of situation one can find oneself.

In the following days, this televised encounter circulated internationally across various media landscapes. Merkel obviously did not want to seem heartless (her facial expression suggested she was genuinely touched by the girl's sudden breakdown), but she also did not want to make any promises just because of the awkward situation.

Three days after Merkel's encounter, John had a conversation in a restaurant with Hans, a retired single man.[13] Hans owns a large four-bedroom apartment in Berlin,

12. The televised forum was titled Gut Leben in Deutschland. Was uns wichtig ist ("Good living in Germany: What is important to us") (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NWHgUZXBdU, accessed November 2, 2017).

13. Anonymity for us is a ruse that no longer works. Our work is too singular, too well known in the field. Hence we use our own first names throughout. We do, however, use pseudonyms for all interlocutors.

where he spends half the year, and an apartment on the idyllic island of Tenerife, Spain, where he spends the other half. For two years, John had been frustrated in finding places of refuge for friends from Aleppo with whom he had worked between 2002 and 2008. Nearly all were now escaping the civil war. A very few had already made their way to Europe; most were waiting in limbo in Turkey. John was neither indifferent nor ambivalent but personally engaged in the issue. He asked Hans how he uses his Berlin apartment when he is away. It's empty, he replied.

John said that it was a shame to let the apartment sit empty when there were so many people in Germany, including refugees, who need a place to stay. Hans found this impertinent—"Ich bin im Ruhestand!" (I'm retired!)—and scoffed at John's statement, which he repeated to the restaurant owner with great indignation, "He wants *me* to let refugees live in *my* apartment when I'm not here!" John let the issue rest for a bit before asking Hans about the recent exchange between Chancellor Merkel and Reem. Hans had not seen the video but, like nearly everybody with access to the news, he had read about and already discussed it with others.

Hans commented, "The Germans are angry, very angry, about the refugee situation, that they have to take in all these refugees." John reiterated his earlier position, that there were many empty bedrooms in Berlin, and people like him could obviously offer them to refugees in need. "What am I supposed to do?" Hans asked John, uncomfortably, and added, "I continue to employ my Polish maid to clean my apartment even when I'm not there. It's only fair," implying that he was being generous in paying her even in his absence. After a long silence, he said, "Look, I'm an eighty-year-old man, why now?"

John asked Hans if he also had a refugee history. Hans did, indeed. In 1972, he was head of the East Berlin opera house, a cultural functionary in a communist country who was free to travel in the West. He defected in 1972.

> My apartment, everything, I left behind. They had asked me to join a party, any party. I said I wouldn't join the SED [the Socialist Unity Party, which basically controlled the state]. Klaus Gysi, the culture minister, said I should join the Bauernpartei (Demokratische Bauernpartei Deutschlands—The Farmers' Party). The Farmers' Party? Me? That's absurd. So, since I could travel, I just stayed in Paris rather than return the next trip I took.

With his defection, he automatically became a citizen of West Germany.

John found this response evasive. No longer in a patient mood, he asked if, when Hans arrived in West Germany from the East, there was resistance to taking care of him and other refugees? Hans was silent. John asked if a certain group of people within German society, like people over eighty, were exempt at that time from responsibility for refugees like him. Hans again was silent. Failing to elicit a response, John offered an argument: Wasn't it, he asked, indeed people like Hans, who had already enjoyed a wonderful life and were well-off, who might be best positioned to take responsibility for the refugees?

Hans talked instead about Merkel, whom he liked, especially her position against forgiving Greek debt. "She never shows emotion, just like the Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble. They just wait." John asked if waiting while others suffered was not considered cold, and whether this coldness did not reinforce the old

stereotypes of Germans being an unfeeling people. "No, this was the right thing to do, this is politics, and this is how politicians should behave," Hans replied.

And did he think Merkel showed empathy for the Palestinian girl? John asked. "Yes, absolutely," Hans replied. But was there not a discrepancy between her consoling words and her threat of deportation? John asked. Hans replied, "Merkel has to obey the laws she passes, she cannot make exceptions. Nonetheless, I'm sure that Merkel will find a way that Reem's family will not be deported, but she will tell them quietly"—meaning in private, outside the public eye. As Hans pondered Merkel's encounter with Reem, he seemed, much like Merkel herself, to be turning away from a mood of indifference toward one of ambivalence.

Indifference is a mood or feeling of not caring. It implies no action and therefore cannot be judged by its consequences. It is precisely a *Stimmung*, as Heidegger defines it, a feeling that brings one back to something and discloses a particular mode of attunement with the world ([1927] 1996: 126–31). In contrast to moods, actions have intent and real consequences, positive and negative.[14] For example, actions may result in carelessness, which is a failure of attention, or recklessness, which is a failure to consider the risks and consequences of an action.[15] One might *have* a laugh or *take* a walk, but one is just *in* a mood. It does not arise from the self or the world, but expresses how someone is *in* a world (Bude 2016: 38–39). In July 2016, Hans did not want to act. He was *in* a mood of indifference.

Indifference grows out of a sense of time unpunctuated by events. In its temporal quality, indifference is closely related to boredom, *Langeweile* (lit., a long while). Heidegger points to boredom as a key mood of modernity (the "techno-logical age"), an age he characterized by a kind of spiritual shell-shock that renders the world meaningless. But while indifference is unpunctuated by events, boredom emerges out of and is, as Yasmine Musharbash (2007: 315) argues, drawing from Australian Aboriginal material, a response to "an 'assured' future without anticipation [of events that will change things]." In the initial moments of John's conversation above, Hans' attitude toward the refugees lacked the urgency of having to care for the refugees because, we suspect, he lacked at that time the ability to know what he was perceiving. And Hans sensed that Merkel affirmed that he could remain indifferent. He need not care about Reem because Germany and Germans cannot take them all in. Period. Hans wanted his quiet and calm—"meine Ruhe," he called it, which he felt he had earned with his retirement (*Ruhestand*).

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14. We agree with Throop (2014: 69; 2017) that moods can "reveal moral concerns in flux," but the idea of a "moralische Stimmung" makes no sense in German. *Stimmung* is necessarily distinct from action, similar to Clifford Geertz's (1973) distinction between motivation (intimately connected to morality) and mood (diffuse and objectless), which Throop criticizes. By "moral moods" Throop does not mean "bounded moral transgressions," but instead "a zone of moral evaluation in which the foundation of one's very existence as a moral being amongst other moral beings is at stake" (ibid.: 70). This moral orientation, or what he calls elsewhere "disposition," would seem to refer to what Heidegger calls *Sorge* (care) and not to *Stimmung*.

15. See Alan White (1961) on how indifference, carelessness, and recklessness have different meanings in the legal sphere.

But Hans' reaction to Merkel's encounter with Reem turned quickly from indifference into a defensive posture, likely produced in the encounter with John. Awakened by a moral ambivalence in this discussion, Hans tried initially to reason himself out of this situation. This wave of migrants and refugees threatened to disturb his quiet existence, filled with the regularized pleasures of travel and residence in both Germany and Spain. It confronted him with his own ethical compromises and some of the hidden costs that others bear for his security and pleasure. Eventually he asked the telling question, "What am *I* supposed to do?"—making explicit not only how untenable living in an indifferent mood was now but also his own cluelessness about how to act, and that he perhaps did want to act, to deal with the evolving refugee crisis.

Indifference relies not on boredom, but on suppression of both the anxiety that boredom generates and the comfortableness that it promises. Hans sought not indifference itself but the calm of an uneventful, undisturbed present. Heidegger (1975: 78) called this kind of calm "anesthesia; more precisely, the narcotization of Angst in the face of thinking." We recognized in Hans' search for calm in the face of anxiety, in his refusal to be touched by and to think through the meaning of the entrance of refugees into his community, a mood shared widely with other generations and with most other members of Hans' class. In the course of fieldwork in the summer of 2015, we often asked Germans to bring this mood of indifference into language. Most often people responded with rationalizations, reasoned opinions, more defensive responses to the questions we posed than expressions of their own mood.

It was a relief for most Germans in the latter twentieth century, after the two world wars and the Nazi period, to feel indifferent rather than having to act. Hans knew of the activism and temporal acceleration demanded by war and fascism that his parents had experienced. He preferred indifference to the ideological mobilization that was demanded of him as a young man in East Germany, during the Cold War, when he was told to join the Socialist Unity Party or one of its puppet allies, the Farmers' Party. At the time, he experienced that demand as threatening; today, it seems absurd. Indifference, for him, grew out of a personally active and eventful life in the arts and traveling, enabled by the lengthy period of *Langeweile*—a time slowed down, stretched out, that he experienced living in West Berlin in the final two decades before the opening of the Wall. That period shared in the mood that Heidegger ([1929/30] 1995: 77) defined as synonymous with emptiness, an "ontological hole," a mood evoked in the search to find meaning.

For Heidegger, moods are "not merely subjectively colored experiences or epiphenomenal manifestations of psychological life but rather fundamental ways of Dasein itself" (ibid.: 283). They do not mediate our relationship to the world or distort reality but rather bring or carry us into the world. To be brought into being-in-the-world both attunes (*ein-stimmen*) and determines (*be-stimmen*) the experience of thinking. In Heidegger's words, "a mood brings *Dasein* face to face with its thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) such that this thrownness is not perceived in itself but is disclosed far more primordially in 'how one is'" (ibid.: 385). While moods do not mediate anything, they are themselves triggered—by politics, by the media circulation of images and stories, and by personal experience. For Hans as well as for Merkel, the encounter with Reem challenged the national *Stimmung*. If mood expresses the way one "is" in the world, the confrontation with Reem's presence

challenged indifference, leaving a residue of ambivalence and opening to care for Reem and the refugees.

One of Heidegger's basic assumptions is that *Angst* defines the fundamental way we are with each other (ibid.: 66, 172–76). In *Angst*, he writes, "nothing and nowhere (*nirgends*) becomes manifest" (ibid.: 174–75). But the encounter with Reem had indeed made something manifest in the national space of Germany, requiring attunement to a new mood.

Although all moods may grow out of *Angst*, anxiety continues to play a role while moods shift. The anxieties of the Cold War were ultimately stabilized in the regularized stalemate between the great powers, the USA and USSR, materially expressed by the division of Germany into two opposed states, and perversely expressed in the felicitous phrase "mutually assured destruction." Any destabilizing action risked the destruction of both parties. The fears of destruction were real scenarios, and the end of the Cold War presented an opening to overcome these fears, but that opening was predicated on eliminating the regularizing, stabilizing, and freezing forces of the postwar order.

For Germany, specifically, having been the symbolic center of this Cold War, the first twenty years after the opening of the Wall between East and West Berlin and East and West Germany were anything but boring. Key East German institutions were *abgewickelt* (unwound and dissolved), collective industries were privatized, and labor was reorganized. Massive financial investments in the East accompanied its depopulation. If East Germany were still a country, it would be the oldest country in the world. At the time of unification, 20 percent of the entire German population lived in the East, by 2006 this declined to 16 percent.[16] After 1993, the movement of the capital and most of its bureaucrats from Bonn to Berlin further displaced residents while also bringing wealth. As East Germans experienced a process of unification with uneven outcomes, all Germans witnessed new conflicts that were not structured by the Cold War: murderous ethnic strife and wars in the Balkans along with worldwide political instability, a euro debt crisis, and resistance to EU governance. Within a decade, they assumed new leadership roles and responsibilities, including the first stationing of German troops abroad since 1945.

Much as the opening of the Wall in 1989 punctured the temporality of the Cold War order, the entrance of more than a million migrants and refugees into Germany in a single year, 2015, punctured the temporality of the post-Cold War European order. Their entrance prompted a regression to a more general anxiety and, for many, the mood of indifference was replaced by an unconscious search for a conservative object, the mood of "a mnemic environment" that took them back to a moment of arrest in an early experience of self (Bollas 1987a: 102). For Hans, as we learned a year after the above discussion, regression and anxiety were related to experiences in his childhood that remained, for him, not fully representable. He had been raised in a village about three hours east of Berlin by simple, loving parents who, he said, didn't know anything about the world of art to which he aspired.

16. See https://www.berlin-institut.org/online-handbuchdemografie/bevoelkerungsdynamik/regionale-dynamik/ostdeutschland.html, and https://www.berlin-institut.org/online-handbuchdemografie/bevoelkerungsdynamik/regionale-dynamik/ostdeutschland.html (accessed October 29, 2017)

They placed him in a boarding school at the age of fifteen, and there he received a letter from them (they didn't trust telling him directly) explaining that they had been a childless couple, so they adopted him at age four.

They wrote that Hans was actually born to Jewish parents. Especially since his adoptive father was an officer in the Reichsarmee, the matter of his origin had to remain secret. Hans later discovered that his Jewish parents and all kin were murdered in Sachsenhausen. At eighteen, he moved to Berlin and by coincidence met a Jewish couple who had heard of his unusual history and embraced him as their own. They were into theater and the arts, and introduced him to the GDR elite. He became their protégé, and was sent to Russia to train in dance. Hans says he looks just like the Jewish man who took him in as a young man, except that—he points to his belly—he wants to remain thin, therefore he eats modestly.

Hans shared this story with others reluctantly, and when we asked him about its significance today, he brushed it aside with a wave of his hand, "Was soll das?" (What's the point?) He made the same gesture when he talked of research into his own Stasi (state security) documents, as if those experiences could also be brushed aside. "Such triviality," he said. As he related these stories, his voice had a softness, though, expressive of a different mood than the matter-of-factness with which he had initially expressed indifference to the refugees' plight. The refugees had apparently taken him back to an experience that functioned as a conservative object. In the ethnographer's presence, a year after the aggressive questioning of his indifference, Hans reestablished contact with this conserved part of the self, "a disowned aspect of the child's true self" that had been preserved in a frozen state (Bollas 1978a: 102). This frozen self was now recalled to attune to the mood of a new world that Hans was confronting.

The refugees brought the memory of this former part of the self to light, to which the initial indifference of Merkel and Hans was misattuned. Being a refugee was something many Germans themselves had also experienced in the massive population movements resulting from war and political persecution in the twentieth century. In fact, both Merkel and Hans took note of Reem's plight—Merkel tried to comfort her without changing her own position on deportation; Hans reassured himself that he need not have a bad conscience because Reem would ultimately, quietly, be allowed to stay in Germany. Reem's chance meeting with Merkel did in fact change her personal fate (she and her family were allowed to stay in Germany), but it also served as a point of reference for a collective *Stimmungswechsel*, where indifference gave way to ambivalence, a mood in which Merkel and Hans now cared about the plight of refugees but were troubled by what this might come to imply.

## Mood shift 2. From ambivalence to xenophilia: Aylan Kurdi drowns

Orienting the mood shift from ambivalence to xenophilia were Chancellor Merkel's reactions in midsummer 2015 to the steady stream of migrants who were arriving in Europe by land and sea. Over 107,000 migrants had reached Europe by July. On August 24, the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) ratified an order suspending the Dublin Protocol, declaring that all Syrian asylum seekers were welcome to remain in Germany, irrespective of which EU country they had

first entered.[17] The increasing chaos made Merkel's usual mode of waiting out any situation impossible.[18] The nearly daily reports of refugees dying (or being rescued) in flight (e.g., by drowning off dinghies and boats, asphyxiation in overcrowded containers, being struck by trains) increased pressure on her to act, including the option of police shooting to kill those trying to cross the land borders—reminders of the East German *Schiessbefehl* (shoot to kill policy) for which former East German border guards had been tried and convicted in the 1990s.

On August 31, the first trains with refugees from Hungary had already arrived in Munich, to the cheers and applause of people lining the tracks. After Hungary halted international train services, and police sealed Budapest's Keleti railway station to prevent the thousands of migrants gathered outside the terminal from traveling to Germany, Merkel made her most audacious decision: less than fifty days after her meeting with Reem Sahwil, she announced that Germany would accept the Budapest refugees. Thousands and hundreds of thousands quickly followed, using cellphone apps to track the best and most direct way to avoid police and arrive at their destination. "The prevailing mood in Germany," *Der Spiegel* reported, "was not one of populist outrage but of enthusiasm. Germany had been overcome by a sense of euphoria the likes of which the country hadn't seen since its fairy tale summer when it hosted the 2006 World Soccer Cup" (*Spiegel Staff* 2016).

On September 2, two days after Merkel's audacious decision, the Turkish photojournalist Nilüfer Demir posted a shocking photo on Twitter under the hashtag "*KiyiyaVuranInsanlik*" (humanity washed ashore) (fig. 1). It immediately became the top trending topic on Twitter and entered the Facebook pages of many Turkish citizens and of Syrians who had fled the regime. The photo was of the three-year-old Aylan Kurdi from Kobani, Syria, lying face down on the beach, his head turned to the left. European media had already disseminated many such photos and videos of the suffering of refugees in their flight to Europe. Aylan's photo seemed to represent a culmination of earlier images. Some Germans felt confirmed that their indifference contributed to killing this (foreign) child.

17. The Dublin Protocol is an agreement that countries on Europe's periphery ensure that migrants remain and are processed there. As a guarantee necessary for the Schengen Agreement and a core element of Europeanization, it created open movement within Europe for all legally registered residents. In 2014, the flow of undocumented migrants into Europe had already increased to its highest level in twenty years. By May 2015, the flow had become so large that authorities were no longer able to fingerprint all foreigners who entered without visas; by early August, Schengen was no longer enforceable; and by the end of August, Germany explicitly quit enforcing the protocols for Syrian citizens.

18. On September 15, 2015, Merkel in fact offered this justification, "Es gibt Situationen, in denen man nicht zwölf Stunden nachdenken kann" (There are situations in which one cannot reflect for twelve hours) (Spiegel Staff 2016). Given that in April other European countries, particularly the Eastern Europeans, had rejected any attempt to redistribute refugees, and that Western European countries (except for Austria and Sweden) rejected attempts to coordinate distribution, Merkel's alternative was either to erect new border controls (in violation of Schengen) or to acknowledge the emergency and open the border.

**Figure 1:** Aylan Kurdi drowns. (Photo: Nilüfer Demir.)

The photo accompanied a turn away from the dominant *Stimmung* of ambivalence, preparing the German public emotionally for Merkel's decision and a shift in mood. The power of the photo to emit was dependent less on the contextualization of Aylan's death than on the sheer visceral feeling evoked by seeing a drowned child who looked as if he could be a middle-class European. The photo inevitably brought our eyes to its punctum—the small baby shoes staring back at us and his arm lifeless at his side. Its immediate effect was to puncture indifference, collapsing all geographic and temporal distance to suffering, eliminating any innocent position. An exponential increase in international aid for refugees and more sympathetic media coverage followed.

If Reem's breakdown and exchange with Merkel revealed the crude arbitrariness of administrative imperatives, Demir's photograph revealed the inadequacy of words or dialogue to mediate his death to the public. Its address was even more immediate. For nearly a year, people had heard and read much about refugees drowning in the Mediterranean—but these events remained an abstraction. A conversation or dialogue calls on one to take positions, discuss, and argue. As an evocative object that leaves one carrying a burden, the photo of Aylan became the iconic image of the plight of refugees, uploaded millions of times in Facebook pages, frequently shown on television. It confirmed the crisis as having a specifically Syrian face.

If Merkel's hand had been forced by the uncontrollable massing of refugees on the Hungarian border and the breakdown of border controls (i.e., the Schengen Agreement controlling such entry) within Europe, the photo of Aylan prompted many Germans to make good on Merkel's promise of August 31, "We can do it." Many now saw the refugees as a "transformational object," something which promised to change them not through agency but through submission (Bollas 1987b). Refugees offered to Germans an existential experience in which both internal and external environments could be transformed. As transformational objects, refugees

were no longer the cause of a crisis to control but offered an experience that promised to radically alter German collective self-definition. Many German residents began actively inquiring about what they might do to support the new arrivals. Many organizations in charge, like Karitas, had to turn volunteers away.

In early October, Klaus began commuting twice a week to a village about ninety minutes from his home in Berlin where he owned a summer home. His neighbors informed him of thirty asylum seekers staying in a former school building nearby. He volunteered to organize a German-language class for them three hours a week. Afghans comprised the largest number, but there were also Arabs and refugees from Eritrea and Pakistan. Attendance was uneven, and eventually the class was reduced to a fluctuating group of fifteen adult Afghan refugees.

On December 24, Klaus sent an email notice to friends, describing how "dear to my heart" the refugees had become, and what a special joy he had found in teaching them German. He attached two photos of "*my* group of refugees at my Christmas celebration in Berlin." This was Klaus' first such intimate engagement with foreigners (*Ausländer*), and he explicitly insisted on calling them *refugees* and not migrants. He saw this as a chance for him to make a difference. Teaching them added a new depth to his many public activities. He became even more active in civic functions in his residential community. After two months of teaching, Klaus dissolved the account of the *Verein* (society/club) he had helped found to restore a historical church in his village, and convinced its members to agree to use the money left, about 6,000 euros, to finance professional German-language instruction for several of the refugees who were particularly eager and committed to learn.

In instruction, Klaus focused on teaching full sentences, rather than, as his successor did, dry grammar. He lacked a textbook, which might not have been of much use anyway. The initial class included people with four different mother tongues, none of which Klaus could speak, and although about one-third of the refugees spoke some English, there was no single lingua franca for translation. Klaus set as his priority to enable them to speak in German about everyday concerns and situations. He took pictures of foods, initially downloaded from the Internet—primarily vegetables, fish, and meat—and asked them to identify the things they ate. He asked about the names of the shops where they bought everyday items. He asked them to distinguish between supermarket chains, drug stores, and pharmacies. He helped them with the vocabulary necessary to purchase tickets for the trains or buses, to use essential German verbs, to greet others with varying degrees of formality and at different times of the day. Soon, using one student as translator from English to Pashto, he also approached topics important to Germans, such as religion, sex, tolerance, and politics.

Broaching topics such as religion is perhaps one reason that the particular group of Syrian refugees in this shelter ended up dropping Klaus' class. Religion is a topic that good secular Germans like Klaus discuss confidently, unaware that certain formulations might insult many Sunni Muslims, unused to direct challenges to their religiosity by Christians. Klaus made it clear that in Germany no religion and nobody's gods were better than the others, and one could criticize equally Chancellor Merkel, the Christian god, or the Muslim god. He remembered a silence from his students when he said this in class. Klaus thought it likely that his students feared

being disciplined for talking in front of their neighbors, as their opinions would be reported to the more orthodox-inclined in the asylum shelter.

The voluntary and invariably unpaid efforts of private citizens and legal residents have been necessary to supplement, or even substitute for the lack of, government aid (Karakayali and Kleist 2016). These efforts include, for example: voluntary language instruction; collecting and distributing clothes and food; cross-cultural cooking classes; library programs; teaching Muslim girls how to swim; free legal advice; mentors for everyday assistance (a federally organized program of godparents—*Patenschaften*) to facilitate integration, in filling out documents or finding apartments; creating "pro-asyl" websites with useful information translated into Arabic, Dari, Pashto, and Urdu; organizing events in schools to work through prejudices; and teaching children to participate in music, theater, dance, and sporting events. Most of the volunteers are people free to devote their time to causes outside immediate family or work situations, many (mostly female) pensioners, and gay men and women. Many refugees described these volunteers to us as "saints" filled with selfless dedication.

Germans attribute their support for migrants to many sources. One justification is instrumental: that young migrants will fill emerging labor shortages and secure future pensions. Along these lines, it is assumed that young foreigners will have more children and thus relieve the Angst linked to the fear that the Germans are (or that German culture is) dying out. Communities that receive refugees also experience an economic boost, as the support systems developed for migrants bring in federal money. This boost is especially important to rural communities that have been depopulated, given the trend for young people to move to cities. But people in those communities often minimize such benefits, recognizing them only when they are withdrawn (i.e., when the refugees leave or are assigned to other communities).

Another source is *Wiedergutmachung*, reparations, which for several postwar generations were supposed to undo, or perhaps ameliorate, the historical zenith of destruction achieved in Germany during World War II. The wish to repair in the historical registers of Wiedergutmachung distinguishes the contemporary German response from that of all of its European neighbors.[19] Melanie Klein ([1937] 1975, 1946) argues that reparation does not initially grow out of goodness, guilt, or ambivalence, but out of overcoming a desire to destroy. One of the enduring historical achievements of the German "68" generation has been to directly address and

19. While Greeks and Italians have admirably and disproportionately shared the incredible everyday burdens of caring for the new arrivals on entering Europe, this everyday response is not equally matched by policy initiatives and national narratives of welcome and incorporation. The hospitality offered in those countries is intended as temporary, with the expectation that those arriving will continue north (or agree to go to an EU-administered camp). Only in Germany and Sweden has the public response of generous, enduring hospitality with an intent of social incorporation matched the policy response of Chancellor Merkel. We can imagine an inverse scenario at different times for these four countries. A comparative analysis of national differences in the nature of an imagined relation to "refugees" would fruitfully begin with the question whether they function as transformational or conservative objects.

make conscious the role of the German desire to destroy in both Weimar and Nazi Germany, often linking this desire to masculinity (Theweleit 1987; Jerome 2001) and racial thinking (Mosse 1997). The strength of peace movements in both Germanys of the Cold War is a legacy of this attempt to overcome destructive desire. Overcoming does not do away with guilt, however, but in fact strengthens the superego. Today, when refugees are welcomed by Germans, they encounter people addressing an unanswerable historical, collective guilt. Willkommenskultur is a demonstration of overcoming, or an assurance of having already overcome, a destructive impulse.

Refugees we know who benefited from this xenophilic mood were never able to fully share in it. Not only were they also carrying into these encounters experiences of flight and often near-death, but their experience of incorporation has been halting, at best, slowed above all by language learning and bureaucratic obstacles. Moreover, while being transformational objects for Germans may provide its own satisfactions, refugees are confronted with their own conservative objects that do not promise transformation. They are more likely to experience instead what Kampala Ram (2016: 42) describes in Tamil Nadu as "existential dissolution" (the mood of anxiety produced by displacement). Hans' conservative object, his early experience of abandonment, enabled him access to an alternative mood in the present. But most refugees must struggle with a melancholic attachment to home, reminded that continued destruction in their places of origin means they may be forever homeless. Along these lines, we observed, and psychoanalysts in Berlin have confirmed to us in personal conversations, that refugees often suffer a survivor's guilt, produced by having escaped and not sharing the fate of death of friends and relatives who have been murdered at home.[20]

Germany today is stable, strong, and increasingly self-confident. For those citizens engaged in Willkommenskultur, the experience of refugees as transformational objects contributes to the feeling of Wiedergutmachung, compensation for historical crimes. But for many this feeling is tempered by the fear of loss of contemporary identifications, post-World War II achievements threatened, successively, by unification and European expansion. The new arrivals appear to threaten the benefits of the social welfare state and a sense of oneself as European. In the East European transformations after the fall of the Wall, Slavoj Žižek (1994) made a similar argument for how the threat of theft of enjoyment lurks in national identification generally. On the one hand, the "Thing" of the nation belongs to one particular group or community of people and is not accessible to the Other; but the Thing is under constant threat of being stolen by the Other. To overcome or negate one's unconscious destructive wishes stemming from resentment at what the refugees are alleged to be stealing is one of the sources generating xenophilia: the welcoming spirit and generosity that refugees in Germany initially experienced. On the other hand, Germans who give free rein to those destructive wishes and fears

20. The nearly daily concerts within Germany by the Palestinian-Syrian Aeham Ahmad, known as the "piano man of Yarmouk," express the different emotional registers of survivor guilt and reparation. He plays for what he calls the role of the "good refugee" (see Barnard 2016).

are leaders, accomplices, or sympathizers in the many attacks on refugee homes and persons.[21]

## Mood shift 3. From ambivalence to xenophobia: The New Year's Eve sexual assaults in Cologne

Merely three months after the emergence of a xenophilic mood, another event was crucial in turning back to ambivalence and opening toward a xenophobic mood: the New Year's Eve 2015 sexual assaults on German women in Cologne.[22] At the time of the celebration, roughly a thousand men, largely of Arab or North African origin between the ages of seventeen and thirty, congregated in the main plaza outside the train station. Although incidents of sexual molestation in more or less anonymous crowds in public celebrations is not uncommon in many European cities, in Cologne the attacks were more organized: groups of men spontaneously

21. Criminal statistics reflect the relation of mood shifts to this basic ambivalence. From 2011 to 2014, there were some extreme attacks on refugee homes and against asylum seekers and refugees, but many more on homes than on individuals. This changed as more refugees arrived. In 2014, attacks on buildings sheltering asylum seekers (including arson, property damage, racist propaganda, and incitement to violence) totaled 199, while in 2015, at the height of the welcoming culture, they totaled 1,031, a five-fold increase (including a seven-fold increase in the number of arson attacks). In 2016, they totaled 921. Only in 2016 did the Bundeskriminalamt (BKA—German Federal Bureau of Investigation) begin keeping separate statistics on the number of criminal acts against asylum seekers and refugees (most of which are for insults—Beleidigungen—and incitement to violence—Volksverhetzung). What one might conclude from available categories is that the number of attacks against individuals increased from 1,405 in 2015 to over 1,800 in 2016, despite a three-fold decline from the previous year in the number of asylum seekers entering Germany (890,000 in 2015 vs. 280,000 in 2016), and an increase in the number of migrants who left voluntarily (37,220 in 2015 vs. 55,000 in 2016) or were forcibly deported (20,914 in 2015 vs. 25,000 in 2016). In other words, a decline in asylum seekers does not reduce the number of attacks on shelters (BAMF 2017).

22. A history of turns to xenophobia in Germany goes beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that during the 1990s after the East German state was dissolved and its society was transformed, there was general alarm about such a turn. In 1991, for example, racist riots ("rassistische Auschreitungen") erupted in Hoyerswerda, followed a year later in Rostock-Lichtenhagen. Both events lasted several days, targeting asylum seekers and featuring violent mobs cheered on by crowds of neighbors. There were arson attacks on private homes in 1992 in Mölln, and a year later in Solingen. There were many other, less prominent attacks. While there are indeed similarities with the present, especially in that an imagined unity was suddenly threatened by the opening of a formerly closed border, there was little distinction made in the 1990s between legal and illegal categories of residents, immigrants, foreigners, and asylum seekers, nor between their national, religious, or cultural origins. Islamophobia was not the major motivation for xenophobia. Victims in the 1990s included primarily Turkish families in private homes, Vietnamese street hawkers, gypsies, and Mozambican refugees in asylum shelters.

broke off to corner, sexually assault, and rob German women in the plaza. Despite a strong police presence, officers were understaffed and unprepared to intervene effectively.

These assaults, among several such uncoordinated attacks in German cities on that "celebratory evening," resulted in complaints against 183 men, 108 of whom came from Morocco and Algeria; 120 of the complaints were related to sexual assault, 27 to rape or attempted rape (BKA 2016; Yassin Musharbash 2016). There have been six convictions in Cologne, only two of which have resulted in prison sentences. Although within a week many of the German victims identified themselves, within several months thousands more claimed to have been victimized. The temporal delay in identifying the suspects revealed a public mood of frustration. People suspected that officials, media outlets, and politicians intended to protect the immigrants from German anger rather than the Germans from immigrant attacks. Informing the frustration and suspicion were Merkel's decisive acts, construed retrospectively as an imperative made without prior approval of the other representatives of the people.

The divisive and threatening specter of sexual assault contributed to a re-turn to ambivalence, mobilizing Germans for a *Stimmungswechsel* from a dominant xenophilia to xenophobia (ibid.). This specter has since only grown larger, revived in summer 2016 after the rampages of two youths with migrant backgrounds in Bavaria. Chancellor Merkel's approval rating had already dropped to 54 percent in October 2015 (from an all-time high of 77 percent in February 2012 and again in July 2014); it dropped further after the attacks in August 2016 to 47 per cent. By the time of the September 2017 federal elections, it had risen again, to 60 percent.[23]

While the police repeatedly emphasize that the frequency of sexual attacks by migrants is no greater than that of Germans, the ubiquitous publicizing of such attacks intensifies Germans' fear of being preyed upon by strangers, activating a latent xenophobia.[24] Websites and YouTube videos that document and describe German attacks against foreigners are now counterbalanced with sites that list attacks by foreigners against Germans. Attacks by foreigners on German women are sometimes framed as experiences of German *Wehrlosigkeit* (defenselessness)

23. http://www.infratest-dimap.de/umfragen-analysen/bundesweit/ard-deutschlandtrend/ (accessed October 27, 2017).

24. Criminal statistics do not show a direct relation between events and xenophobia. They are also difficult to interpret, as they "underreport" many kinds of harm, and tend to be incomparable over time (new categories frequently replace older classifications that aggregated different motivations and harms). For example, "hate crimes," a relatively new classification, actually declined from 4,583 in 2009 to 3,046 in 2015; but the number of "politically motivated violent acts against asylum seekers and registered refugees" (an even newer and more precise classification) rose 30.7 per cent from June 2015 to June 2016 (DB 2015, cited in Biermann and Geisler 2016). That said, in the year following the Cologne sexual assaults, while the number of attacks against refugee homes decreased slightly, from over 1,031 to 921, and attacks against asylum seekers rose slightly, asylum-related attacks on political officials and aid workers—that is, against the infrastructure of the welcoming culture—dramatically increased (Federal Criminal Police [BKA] statistics cited in ibid.).

in the face of a mainly Muslim onslaught, referencing a disavowed past German identification with violence, aggression, genocide, and biological racism. Private videos have circulated on Facebook of German women explicitly asking German men to reassert their masculinity to protect them. A revanchist reinterpretation of German history has much appeal, especially to youths who feel unfairly victimized by their grandfathers' past, held accountable for Nazi crimes. A dangerous feeling is thereby cultivated, that foreigners are taking advantage of the German historical defeat, and its acknowledgment reexperienced now not as maturity but weakness.

In our research we have met no Germans who consciously think of themselves as xenophobic, and in most parts of Germany less than 30 percent reportedly identify with antiforeigner sentiments.[25] Most do not consciously fear foreigners, nor do they think they hate them. Since the Cologne assaults, however, a renewed anxiety of the foreign (*Fremdenangst*) has emerged. Such anxiety is most active and effectively mobilized through appeals to unconscious affect. And, as many scholars have documented, organizations such as Pegida (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West), invest in turning this anxiety into a specific fear of new migrants (Rehberg, Kunz, and Schlinzig 2016).

Whereas xenophilia is the tendency to solidarize and accommodate the foreign, in xenophobia fear becomes the primary emotion, within which the foreign is perceived as hostile. Both xenophobic and xenophilic moods rely on phantasies of the other with powerful imaginary dimensions, and both coexist in a group and within

25. In a yearly opinion poll, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Mitte Studie assesses changes in hostility to foreigners and the growth of rightwing, antidemocratic sentiment in Germany. In summer 2016, it found that rightwing extremism remained constant if not declining slightly. Only 20 percent agreed with the statement it was "not very" or "absolutely not" good that Germany took in so many refugees. A total of 56 percent found the reception of refugees "good," and another 24 percent found it "partly good" and were optimistic that the situation would be managed. Nonetheless, 40 percent agreed that German society was being infiltrated (unterwandert) by Islam (Zick, Küpper, and Kraus 2016). A much-cited study of extremism in Sachsen by Pickel and Decker (2016) drew a correlation between the increase in actual numbers of foreigners and antiforeigner sentiment: Sachsen-Anhalt, with the fewest numbers of foreigners among provinces, had the most hostility to foreigners (42 percent), and the other East German provinces confirm this correlation. Surprisingly, however, Bavarians ranked second (30 percent) in hostility, although Bavaria (in the west) has one of the largest populations of foreigners. Many analysts assume that either lack of contact or increased labor competition with foreigners leads to xenophobia. This result was affirmed in a 2013 study in France, which concluded that relatively frequent contact is accompanied by increased tolerance, but that xenophobia is likely to increase when natives feel they are in economic competition, sensitive to educational attainment (François, Magni-Berton, and Matthews 2013). We would argue that more important than contact itself is its kind and depth, the available interpretations, and the *Stimmung* which makes the contact resonant with collective experience. Also, in the German context of 2016–17, the positive promise of necessary labor replacement was more significant for framing migration both in the media and in public mood than was the threat of labor competition. It is globalization (and job loss due to mechanization and rising educational standards) that is the actual factor producing resentment toward and fear of migrants for labor competition (which surely exists), not their numerical presence.

the individual. Unconscious German fears of the foreign are often hidden under a veneer of disinterest, and communicated by avoidance and subtle, unspoken expressions of impatience and disdain. These expressions generate a diffuse paranoia among foreigners, which can easily be projected into a xenophobia that they see as signaling hostility toward them. They equally confirm a secret sense of shared moral superiority (also called *Kulturchauvinismus*). While race, too, plays a distinctive role, it is difficult to disentangle appeals to the legacy of images of a Nazi past from what is an affective (dis)identification with racial difference.[26]

## Encounter. A birthday party

In summer 2016, a Berlin friend in her mid-fifties invited two (male) refugees to her birthday party, which included about twenty other guests and extended over a long afternoon, evening, and breakfast the next day. The party had several purposes: to support the *Willkommenskultur*, to celebrate with old friends and acquaintances, and to introduce two refugees who lived isolated in a local shelter to a larger German entourage of more or less well-off sympathizers. The guests included men and women, gay and straight, married and single, from the former East and West, who ranged in age from their early thirties to their seventies. Most were middle- to upper-middle-class professionals (e.g., teachers, bankers, artists, a retired professor of criminology, a butcher, a former state administrator, a translator, and a tourist operator), and belonged to a large network of friends and acquaintances, though not everyone knew each other beforehand. Most were Germans, except for an Italian university student, an American anthropologist (John), and several people with what Germans call a "migration background"—a Jewish-Hungarian-born woman who had married a German (now deceased), a Polish computer expert who settled in Berlin as a child, and a German-Iranian anthropologist who was born and raised in (West) Berlin and now lives and works in the United States (Parvis).

On the first day, the two young refugees arrived a bit late, by bicycle, while the rest of us had come by car or by regional train. The German guests had already begun drinking and snacking. There were no formal introductions. Upon arrival, the two refugees seated themselves at the periphery of the palanquin under which the other party guests had gathered. The refugees spoke no German except for a few studiously learned responses. One of them spoke English well, but not all of the Germans did, which made them hesitate before approaching the refugees. For this

26. Racism is present and active in Germany, but its historical and experiential valences should not be distorted by filtering them through American experience, which runs the risk that the specificity of xenophobia in Germany and its apogee in the Final Solution will be made invisible. Germans have, arguably, distanced themselves radically from pre-World War II racism, yet they continue to struggle with the most adequate term for acts of xenophobia, the three most common being *Rassisimus* (racism), Fremdenfeindlichkeit (hostility to foreigners), and Ausländerhass (hatred of foreigners). Most antiforeign acts today are motivated by Islamophobia (a religious antipathy) and not antisemitism (which has nonetheless increased), and by Middle Eastern rather than African or Asian phobias (which are also strong).

reason alone, we assume, many Germans did not use this opportunity to converse much with them. Those who spoke better English did approach them with curiosity and tried to make them feel welcome. That proved difficult, however, not just because of the linguistic barrier, but also because the one who spoke English well replied in short, noninformative ways, resulting in spiritless and somewhat pointless exchanges, quickly tiring listeners. The few short exchanges that had more depth were outside the larger group. Perhaps the refugees were not forthcoming in their responses because they were afraid that too honest a response or too odd an admission might endanger their asylum cases. Their reticence made the Germans suspicious. It was never clear to us if the refugees understood that the Germans guests were uniformly supportive, even donating anonymously to a collection for them.

Around 6 pm, the main dish arrived: a whole roasted pig on a large skewer. Both the refugees—one of whom was Muslim, the other a Christian converted since coming to Germany—refused to eat the meat, although they had announced to the host beforehand (perhaps out of politeness) that they would consider trying pork. To buy and serve an entire roasted pig is a rare delicacy, not something urban Berliners experience frequently. The two refugees stuck mainly to the potato salad and other vegetables and breads. One of the them stuck to water, the other tasted the wine and said he liked it.

While alcohol quickly loosened the tongues of many of the Germans, it certainly did not make the refugees feel more relaxed. The central theme in the conversation among the Germans present was what to think and do about refugees. Several of the guests were fully engaged with various commitments in their communities. But the refugees were fully excluded from the overall discussion. After a couple of hours, most guests began to talk only among themselves in smaller groups. Once the meal had ended, a local actor arrived to sing old German classics while playing an accordion. Some people appeared sentimental; others tuned out. The time for mutual engagement had passed. Whoever was outside the historical experiences that were now mobilized through music, which included not only the two refugees but also a number of other guests, felt this exclusion and became a mere spectator. As the evening progressed, the heavy pork, beer, and wine did their intended work—as Germans say, *der Wein ist zu Kopf gestiegen* (lit., the wine has climbed to the head). The atmosphere fell into *Gemütlichkeit*, a collective emotional coziness that to outsiders can appear impenetrable, and in which all formality or laborious politeness is considered disruptive. The refugees maintained their brave, brutally constant smiles throughout.

The animating force in this group was the celebration of the host's birthday. She had sacrificed a specific German meaning of birthday party, whereby she would be the focus of our attention, by putting the refugees at the center. She knew that they were in need of the means of *Integration*: contacts to everyday Germans and all things local; escape from the stupefying isolation of a shelter run by a private for-profit company. But given the deritualized nature of such gatherings in Germany today, the symbolic means for a specifically German form of incorporation were lacking.

The host had gone out of her way to stage an encounter where the guests might feel comfortable with each another. For the Germans present, this meant a presence

without artifice (*ohne Künstlichkeit*), to be able to present themselves "the way they really are" to the foreign guests. This "authenticity" guarantees a general feeling of *Gemütlichkeit*, but it also masks a serious difficulty. Communicating with outsiders involves coping with how one is *seen by them* and hence disturbs any notion of authenticity. Serving a whole roasted pig made the refugees uncomfortable and might have also disgusted some Germans. But here in its function to preserve authenticity it foreclosed an opening to people raised in societies where pork is taboo.

Contrary to the host's intent, the party was unable to create a space in which to learn something about the unusual cultural historical experiences of the two refugees.[27] One message that most of the guests carried away was that refugees were exasperating to interact with meaningfully in any relaxed manner. This message might not curtail a sociopolitical commitment to the refugee cause, but it does encourage skepticism about the long-term possibility of the incorporation of foreigners. We heard none of the optimistic talk that we had heard in the period before the Cologne attacks; no one said that refugees were needed to supplement an anticipated German labor shortage or that they would bring cultural diversity to Germany. Rather, talk focused on how the traumatic histories of many refugees, their lack of education, and the few skills they brought with them would make *Integration* impossible.

At one point, the question arose of whether the two men might be con artists—a topic from which they were excluded. A German guest confided in us that he thought the investment in refugees was largely wasted (although he himself had volunteered to help six months earlier), because most refugees did not in fact want to learn German. Another said that German bureaucracy created so many obstacles that it was nearly impossible for refugees to integrate. Another confided that she feared women's rights were in peril; another, referring to the recent murder of one gay Syrian by another refugee, said that homosexuals were endangered. These comments by guests initially enthusiastic about, if not themselves active in, the *Willkommenskultur* suggested neither *Fremdenfeindlichkeit* (hostility toward the foreign) nor a fear of the foreign, but an exhaustion of positive identifications. In addition, they indicated an attunement with an increasingly ambivalent mood, which could set the stage for a xenophobic turn.

There were also criticisms of how Merkel had made decisions without consulting other representatives of the people, and of her initial indecisiveness and sudden reversal of her long-held positions. Some said that after the collapse of border controls, and learning that German asylum proceedings were slow and deportations rare, the generous German reception made the country too attractive to outsiders, increasing German vulnerability.

Neither xenophobia nor xenophilia have, to this point, been able to sustain themselves as dominant moods. There seems in fact to be a reprise of the aesthetic

27. We went out of our way to ask questions and engage the two men (and the next day, the wife of one of the men), and we also translated often between English and German, but the other guests quickly lost interest in listening to our conversations. Despite our efforts to see behind their smiles, the refugees remained inscrutable to us; we were also never able to develop a sense of what they thought of us, or of the other guests, until we interacted with them in other settings over time.

experience of indifference, which, after Germans began to grasp how extremely attractive their country has become to others, finds new resonance as a defense against caring. Perhaps the most frequent complaints we have heard, also from Germans who have offered shelter to refugees, have been about refugees spending most of their time maintaining contact with friends and families living elsewhere, in a far-away world of unimaginable troubles, and about their lack of interest in their hosts, in German culture, or in what contributions they might make to Germany's future.

## Conclusion

Consider, by way of conclusion, three posters from the fall 2016 Berlin electoral campaign more than eight months after the Cologne events, one year after Aylan Kurdi's death, and thirteen months after Merkel's meeting with Reem Sahwil.

The first, a Green Party poster from the electoral campaign, which reads "Your God? Your Sex? Your Thing!" (fig. 2), addresses contemporary identity politics in Germany from a liberal perspective. It warns that the other should not be expected to contain your phantasies of God or sex. Religion and sexuality, in other words, are private affairs and not a government's business. The message of the poster was intended to relieve rather than raise anxieties. It apparently had little effect in changing voter preferences, as the Green Party support declined slightly to 15.2 percent from 17.6 percent in the previous election.

The CDU poster in figure 3, which reads "Party safely. Our plans for your safety," is a direct response to the Cologne attacks, yet does not name the event explicitly, which might suggest Merkel's CDU refugee policy was responsible. Three well-to-do, white German-looking women amiably party with one another, without any apparent fear, with several men positioned in the background. The CDU's support declined substantially, from 23.4 to 17.6 percent.

The election poster of the AfD (fig. 4), the anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim party that had not participated in the previous regional election, portrays five different types of pepper spray for personal defense. The poster says: "Since Cologne, Berliners have strengthened their defenses. The smart ones vote for the AFD." The term *Abwehrkräfte* (defenses) is a synonym for the immune system, necessary to fight the flu or a cold. Smart voters should arm themselves against possible refugee attacks in two ways: with pepper spray and by voting for the AfD, whose share of the vote went from zero to an impressive 14.2 percent.

Political parties attempt to influence public opinion through the vote (*Abstimmung*). Regional elections for national politics serve as indices for the direction of national mood. The posters are a response at the affective level not to attitudes or opinions but to the dominant *Stimmung* regarding relations between Germans and the new arrivals. They try to capture in words and images the *Stimmungswechsel* from ambivalence to xenophilia and xenophobia, which required Germans to reattune after prior events. Moods do not yield to emplotment in simple narrative structures of cause and effect, but imply forms of *Welterschließung*, particular ways of opening up to the world that at once entail appropriation of and entrance into that world. Moods do not just bring us into a relationship with a


**Figure 2:** Bündnis 90/Grünen: "Dein Gott? Dein Sex? Dein Ding!"

world as an object but relate us to ourselves *in* that world (Bude 2016: 40). Echoes of affects from past experiences that are not readily symbolized and resist articulation—Heinz Bude (ibid.: 43) calls them *Nachklang von Gefühlen* (echoes of feelings)—are integral elements in a *Stimmung*. These echoes can be subject to a nearly infinite regression of prior experiences of loss. For Germans in a pregnant moment of an ongoing world refugee crisis estimated to involve 65 million individuals, the new migrants and refugees might function as conservative objects who echo an


**Figure 3:** CDU: Sicher feiern.


**Figure 4:** AfD: Abwehrkräfte.

originary collective experience of losing homes and a way of life following World War II, layered more recently by the dissolution of East Germany and displacements resulting from "unification." Or, alternately, they might function as transformational objects and promise an experience of self-transformation. In response to

these new arrivals, affective adumbrations have surged to the fore by compelling various *Stimmungswechsel* that depart from Cold War indifference.

## Acknowledgments

We thank audiences at the Departments of Sociology at the University of Delhi and the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, and at the Indian Institute for Advanced Studies (IIAS), Shimla, for comments on a version of this article. We are also grateful for support in completing research and writing from IIAS and the Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst. The photographs in figures 2–4 were taken by Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi.

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## Le concept de "Stimmung"; De l'indifférence à la xénophobie pendant la crise des réfugiés en Allemagne

Cet article évoque le concept allemand de stimmung, qui ne s'offre pas aisément à la traduction: il ne s'agit pas précisément d'une humeur affective, mais plutôt simultanément d'un état intérieur et extérieur, à la fois subjectif (un état du "je") et objectif (impliquant une mise en accord - einstimmen - avec les autres,) comprenant à la fois le fond et la forme. Afin de comprendre les imbrications de l'individuel et du

collectif invoquées par ce terme, nous examinons trois cas empiriques de stimmungszechsel, ou "changements d'humeur" - de l'indifférence à l'ambivalence, de la xénophilie à la xénophobie - qui ont influencé les élections régionales allemandes de Septembre 2016. En nous inspirant de Sally Falk Moore, nous nous intéressons surtout aux "évènements diagnostiques" qui ont lancés ces changements, observés lors de rencontres de terrain avec des allemands concernant les migrants et les réfugiés qui sont arrivés en Allemagne en 2015. Comment la perception et l'expérience du "réfugié" est-elle devenue partie intégrante du changement d'humeur? Comment le Stimmung est-il lié aux relations avec les réfugiés, à travers des attachements psychiques qui soit relaient une expérience collective originelle de la perte d'un foyer, ou bien promettent la soumission à une expérience d'auto-transformation?

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