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'FOREIGN INFILTRATION' VS 'IMMIGRATION COUNTRY'

The asylum debate in Germany

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The capacity of how many people our country can take in is limited … The burden refugees put on the FRG [Federal Republic of Germany] is too heavy. How should this cramped, overpopulated country be able to take in tens of thousands of people? How should the already strained nature cope with the inevitable consequences of settling more and more asylum seekers? … There is indeed still physical space in this country (maybe it is possible to accumulate the entire world population on the territory of the FRG), but this cannot be the standard. Nature's reserves will not withstand further mass immigration, especially not if from different cultural hearths. And the psychological willingness to accept more refugees of the people, who do not want to lose their homes, is waning too.[1]

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1   Original: *Aber die Aufnahmefähigkeit unseres Landes ist begrenzt … Die Flüchtlingslast wird zu schwer für die Bundesrepublik. Wie soll dieses enge, übervölkerte Land immer neue Zehntausende aufnehmen können? Wie soll die jetzt schon überstrapazierte Natur fertig werden mit den unvermeidlichen Folgen der Ansiedlung von immer mehr Asylbewerbern? … Platz im rein physischen Sinne ist in der Tat noch (vielleicht kann man die ganze Menschheit auf dem Territorium der Bundesrepublik versammeln); aber das kann doch wohl nicht der Maßstab sein. Für weitere Massenzuwanderung, vor allem aus anderen Kulturkreisen, reichen die Reserven der Natur und der Ökonomie nicht, reicht auch nicht die psychische Hinnahmebereitschaft der Bevölkerung, die ihre Heimat nicht verlieren will.* Johann G Reißmüller, 'Diese Last wird zu schwer', *FAZ*, 5 September 1985, 1.

The above quotation was published in the German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (*FAZ*) in September 1985. Other articles of that time spoke of 'foreign infiltration', 'bogus asylum seekers' or 'legions of displaced persons', and were titled (e.g.) '*Opfer von Schmarotzern*' (*Die Zeit*), '*Die Last wird zu schwer*' (*FAZ*), '*Ohne Grundgesetzänderung geht es nicht. Was tun angesichts der Asylantenflut?*' (*FAZ*).[2] Moderate journalists like Klaus Liedtke, former editor of the weekly magazine *Stern*, held politicians responsible for instilling fear in the population by using terms such as '*Grenzen der Ausländerverträglichkeit*' (limitations to the tolerance of foreigners) and '*Überfremdung des Volkes*' (foreign infiltration). He deemed it careless of them to suggest that Germans had to protect their 'national identity against ever new waves of Asian invaders – disguised as asylum seekers'.[3]

Conditioned by the country's National Socialist past, art 16, §2II GG of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) guaranteed that '[p]ersons persecuted on political grounds shall have the right of asylum'.[4] Growing numbers of asylum seekers coming to the FRG in the 1980s led conservatives to proclaim that they would abuse the laws of asylum and the constitution. At the time, Theo Sommer, former chief editor of *Die Zeit*, argued that the fierce debate around the right of asylum in Western Germany really would revolve more around the question of the German self-conception as a nation than around the number of asylum seekers coming to Germany.[5] Indeed, the 1980s were a period when the very existence of a German national identity was thoroughly questioned. One existential part of this debate was the '*Historikerstreit*' (Historians' Quarrel) that emerged in 1986 after the *FAZ*-publication of Ernst Nolte's essay *Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will*. In his essay, he questioned the singularity of the Holocaust and attempted to newly evaluate its importance for German historiography. The German sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas accused him of writing revisionist history and trying to create an unbroken German national identity based on conservative values. A major controversial discussion of the existence, composition and definition of a German national identity ignited almost

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2   In English: 'Victims of Social Parasites', *Die Zeit*, 26 April 1985; 'This Burden is too Heavy', *FAZ* 5 September 1985; 'It Cannot be Done Without a Constitutional Change. What is there to be Done Given this Flood of Asylum Seekers?', *FAZ*, 30 October 1986.

3   Klaus Liedtke, 'Die Angst vor den "Kanakern"', *Stern*, 4 September 1986, 3.

4   *Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland* [Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany], available at: www.documentarchiv.de/brd/1949/grundgesetz.html.

5   See Theo Sommer, 'Wegen Überfüllung geschlossen?', *Die Zeit*, 29 August 1986, 1.

at the same time that the asylum debate was gaining momentum, which leads to the question of whether the debates emerged isolated or related to one another.

I argue that it is possible to gain insight into the concept of a German national identity by analysing statements about asylum seekers in newspaper articles, as they can be read as a dialogue about the 'other' amid the German people. The focus of this chapter is on the representation and linking of these debates in newspapers and magazines from February 1985 to January 1987. During these years, the numbers of people seeking asylum in the FRG rose to over 100,000 per annum – to 103,076 in 1988.[6] Against the backdrop of an emerging economic crisis and high rates of unemployment, a heated debate around the intake of asylum seekers and its implications for the German public emerged and peaked shortly before the general election in January 1987. Articles for the analysis stem from the following nationwide West German broadsheet newspapers:

- *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (*FAZ*), centre-right, liberal conservative
- *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (*SZ*), centre-left, progressive liberalism
- *Bildzeitung*, centre-right, conservative populist tabloid
- *Frankfurter Rundschau* (*FR*), left-liberal
- *Die Tageszeitung* (*taz*), centre-left/left
- *Die Zeit*, centre-left, liberal.

And additionally, from the weekly news magazines:

- *Der Spiegel*, centre-left
- *Stern*, centre-left.

Initially, around 500 articles on microfilm were sourced for analysis by scanning them for keywords such as 'asylum', 'asylum seekers', 'bogus asylum seekers', 'refugees', 'refugee shelter', 'wave of asylum seekers', 'economic migrants', 'law of asylum', 'national identity', etc. Thematic topics of the newspaper and magazine articles were (e.g.) the FRG's constitution, xenophobia, ethnicity or the right to asylum. These 500 articles were then sifted through by looking more closely at the types of article (descriptive, factual, opinion) and at the headline and content of the

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6   See 'Table 24: Zahl der Asylbewerber in der Bundesrepublik, 1975 bis 1995', in Ulrich Herbert, *Geschichte der Ausländerpolitik in Deutschland* (Bonn: C.H. Beck, 2003), 263.

articles, the language and tone used in them, and distinguishing between descriptive and opinion pieces. From this, a good understanding of the individual journalist's or writer's political standings could be gathered. It also disclosed how these reflected the specific newspaper's political stance. Around 220 articles were selected for closer analysis.

For the purpose of this paper, the debates around 'asylum' and 'national identity' are regarded as discourse threads. This is based upon the concept of entanglement of discourses according to Siegfried Jäger. He defines discourses as rivers of knowledge through time and acknowledges that they affect individual and collective actions and therewith wield power.[7] Discourses are not an absolute reflection of social realities, but they shape them. Their analysis aims at problematisation, that is, at exposing omissions or contradictions. Furthermore, Jäger assumes that discourses are made up out of different components and layers. Their various threads are formed out of discourse fragments that, in the broadest sense, discuss the same topic. These fragments often refer to several subjects, which results in an entanglement of discourses. Consequently, discourses are not isolated from each other and their intertwining creates a highly branched net of discourse threads.[8]

At the end of this paper, the German debate of the 1980s will be compared to the Australian debate about the arrival of Vietnamese boat people in the 1970s and early 1990s. Conclusions will be drawn about the similarities and dissimilarities of the two debates and the motifs emerging in them. This is of interest, for multiple reasons. First, Germany and Australia have a very different history when it comes to taking in foreigners. Germany has, apart from the guest worker system of the 1950s, '60s and early '70s, never had a proactive immigration system. It does not have a control system or a quota for taking in migrants or asylum seekers. Additionally, Germany has always struggled with the question of what it means to be German. Friedrich Nietzsche proclaimed in 1886 that the question 'What is German?' would never die off.[9] Australia, on the other hand, has been an immigration country from the arrival of the First

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7   Siegfried Jäger, *Kritische Diskursanalyse: Eine Einführung* (Münster: Unrast, 2004), 132.
8   Jäger, *Kritische Diskursanalyse*, 132; Siegfried Jäger, 'Diskursive Vergegenkunft: Rassismus und Antisemitismus als Effekte von aktuellen und historischen Diskursverschränkungen', in *Historische Diskursanalyse*, ed. Franz X Eder (Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2006), 239–52, doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-90113-8_13.
9   Friedrich Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse: Zur Genealogie der Moral. Eine Streitschrift* (Berlin: Holzinger Verlag, 2013), §244.

Fleet in 1788. It has a well-established immigration system, including a humanitarian system of refugee resettlement that is split into offshore, onshore and special humanitarian programs. The countries had a different comprehension of their 'national identities' – Germany believing in *jus sanguinis*, citizenship through German descent, compared to *jus soli*, birthright citizenship, in Australia (this was abolished in 1986).

Defining 'national identity'

Looking at the political, cultural and technological conditions that gave rise to nationalism in eighteenth-century Europe, the author of *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson, points to the importance the development of newspapers and novels played in forming homogenous groups. Their emergence, combined with the rise of capitalism, he argues, is the point of origin of national consciousness. He refers to nations as '[imagined communities] because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship'.[10] Even though the single members within a community do not know each other, they share a conception of a superior community to which they belong. 'National identity' is a feeling of belonging that is shared by a group of humans and that produces an idea of a collective as a 'nation' according to Eunike Piwonie, who analysed changes to the concept of 'national identity' in Germany. 'National identity' has an inclusive and an exclusive effect, as it can create or show up differences of the outsiders to a specific community.[11] Part of this 'feeling of togetherness' of a group of people, the creation of a 'we-feeling', is a result of features such as historical territory, language, shared memories, traditions or rights and obligations. The national narrative, built through history and literature, plays a particularly important role as it is internalised and understood as the public's shared history. Considering Germany's National Socialist past, it becomes clear why especially the question about the creation of an identity on the grounds of the nation's past was discussed controversially. According to Claudia Tazreiter, 'ethnic nationalism was a fertile environment for the growth of exclusionary politics in preserving unity against external threats and internal regional,

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10   Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), 7.
11   Eunike Piwoni, *Nationale Identität im Wandel: Deutscher Intellektuellendiskurs zwischen Tradition und Weltkultur* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2012), 46, doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-18740-2.

religious and social forces'.[12] A clear differentiation from 'Others' plays an important part for the concept of 'national identity', seeing that Germany is generally considered to be an 'ethnic nation'. It builds its concept of identity on the grounds of its cultural and ethnic heritage and the concept of *jus sanguinis* that makes German citizenship an exclusive one.

Heterostereotypes and autostereotypes

One way of creating an 'Other' is by stereotyping. Stereotypes, which help make sense of the world, are passed on through 'socialisation, education, our families, media, propaganda etc.'[13] (social genesis), and are accepted in society as fixed structures. Stereotypes come into existence and change at certain points in time (historical genesis). They play an important role in our everyday lives, as they are resilient and integrative and form our preconceptions, influence the integration of others into society and are the motivation behind social acts, ideologies, politics etc. The historian Hans Henning Hahn defines a stereotype as:

> a (negative or positive) value judgement, which is generally backed by a strong conviction (or the speaker only pretends to be of this conviction if he uses the stereotype specifically with a manipulative intention, thus not himself convinced that the stereotype is true). It is mostly used on humans, specifically on groups of humans which can be defined in different ways: racial, ethnical, national, social, political, religious or confessional, vocational etc.[14]

A stereotype's research value can be separated into three levels: (a) an asserted claim to truth about a person's nature, (b) alleged objectivity about the stereotype's target (the person that is being discussed) and (c) information about the user of the stereotype. Only the last offers actual insight as it reveals the user's perception of the world and much about the society in which the stereotype exists.[15] Stereotypes have two 'sides':

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12   Claudia Tazreiter, *Asylum Seekers and the State* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2004), 88.

13   Hans Henning Hahn, '12 Thesen zur historischen Stereotypenforschung', in *Nationale Wahrnehmungen und ihre Stereotypisierung: Beiträge zur Historischen Stereotypenforschung*, ed. Hans Henning Hahn and Elena Mannová (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2007), 18.

14   Hans Henning Hahn and Eva Hahn, 'Nationale Stereotypen: Plädoyer für eine historische Stereotypen-forschung' in *Stereotyp, Identität und Geschichte: Die Funktion von Stereotypen in gesellschaftlichen Diskursen*, ed. Hans Henning Hahn (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2002), 20.

15   Hahn, '12 Thesen', 20f.

they show the way others are perceived ('*heterostereotype*') and reveal self-perception ('*autostereotype*'). Conclusions about the worldview of the heterostereotype user can be drawn by analysing both sides.

Heterostereotypical depictions of asylum seekers

It is possible to identify five main heterostereotypes in the newspaper and magazine articles under consideration here:

1. The '*Wirtschaftsflüchtling*' or '*Scheinasylant*' ('economic refugee' or 'bogus asylum seeker') was widely used and assumes that people mainly come to Germany for economic reasons. Attorney Manfred Ritter wrote that, for example, Sri Lankan Tamils would abuse art 16 of the constitution by coming to Germany 'because of the significantly better economic conditions … instead of seeking refuge in neighbouring countries which are linguistically, religious, culturally, climatic and historically more like their own countries'.[16]

2. Criminal offences such as drug trafficking, robbery or prostitution were attributed to asylum seekers. The 'criminal asylum seeker' could not be trusted and certain crimes were attributed to specific nationalities. In an interview with *Der Spiegel* in March 1986, Berlin's Interior Senator Heinrich Lummer said 'but it is the truth'[17] when asked if he really thought Ghanaian women were prostitutes, Sri Lankan Tamils drug traffickers and Lebanese people petty criminals. However, official documents, such as the German Federal Office of Criminal Investigation's paper on crime reduction from 1987,[18] make no reference of a noticeable rise of crimes committed by asylum seekers.

3. People from non-European backgrounds were portrayed as being distinctively 'culturally different'[19] and hence incompatible with German culture. It was implied that asylum seekers from African or

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16   Manfred Ritter, 'Ohne Grundgesetzänderung geht es nicht: Was tun angesichts der Asylantenflut?', *FAZ*, 30 October 1986, 9.

17   Axel Jeschke and Christian Habbe, '"Gucken Sie sich doch die Leute aus Ghana an": Der Berliner Innensenator Heinrich Lummer (CDU) über seine Pläne zur Verschärfung des Asylrechts', *Der Spiegel*, 17 March 1986, 61–64.

18   Bundeskriminalamt Wiesbaden, *Kriminalitätsbekämpfung als gesamtgesellschaftliche Aufgabe: BKA-Vortragsreihe Band 33* (Wiesbaden: BKA, 1988), 36–38.

19   Ritter, 'Ohne Grundgesetzänderung', 9; or Liedtke, 'Die Angst vor den "Kanakern"', 3.

Asian countries did not want to integrate themselves. Asylum seekers of Muslim belief were defined mainly by their religion and Islam was seen as incomprehensible and threatening. In an *FR* reader's letter, Alfons Winter demanded that 'the entry of Islamists, which come from a completely different culture', should be banned because the FRG would be in danger of 'slowly, but surely turning into an Islamic republic'.[20] Sommer pointed out that Germany had been a country shaped by immigration for centuries and that waves of migrants had shaped its culture over time and eventually always became part of the nation.[21]

4. Asylum seekers were also portrayed as a 'source for social unrest'. According to Reißmüller, the accumulation of more 'economic refugees' could lead to social conflict and result in destabilisation of democracy.[22] Other articles pointed out that the German problems with asylum seekers were home-grown: 'Strict prohibition to work and detention in camps forced foreigners into the role of vexatious outsiders'.[23] Poor hygiene standards and overcrowding in camps resulted in fights and led to growing public resentment.[24]

5. Several articles described the construction of camps and the intake of asylum seekers generally to be the source of 'xenophobia' in Germany. The *Stern* reported that residents of Eggenfelden put up banners that read *'Keine Asylanten nach Eggenfelden! Eltern schützt eure Kinder!'* (No Asylum Seekers in Eggenfelden! Parents, protect your children!)[25] Another article stated how an anonymous caller threatened to send petrol so that the asylum seekers could set themselves on fire[26] and yet another argued that Germans must be stupid allowing asylum seekers in despite high unemployment rates, as this would lead to social conflict.[27]

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20   Alfons Winter, 'Asylsuchende nach Amerika? Leserbrief', *FR*, 11 August 1986, 2.

21   Sommer, 'Wegen Überfüllung geschlossen?', 1.

22   Johann G Reißmüller, 'So geht es nicht weiter', *FAZ,* 15 July 1986, 1.

23   '"Im Lager ist besser als daheim": Asylgrundrecht – Gütezeichen der Verfassung oder Fehlkonstruktion?', *Der Spiegel,* Nr. 31/1986, 28 July 1986, 32.

24   Josef-Otto Freudenreich, 'Kein Platz für Toleranz', *Die Zeit,* 11 October 1985, 14.

25   Christine Claussen, '"Menschen die keiner will …" Im Bezirk Niederbayern wehren sich Einwohner gegen die Aufnahme von Asylsuchenden', *Stern,* 8 August 1985, 60.

26   See Gerhard Tomkowitz, 'Den Druck im Kessel erhöhen', *Stern,* 4 September 1986, 210.

27   Helmut Böpple, 'Die Deutschen sind … Leserbrief', *Stern,* 28 August 1985, 9–10.

In the following section, the heterostereotypes and autostereotypes of the 'bogus asylum seeker'/'economic refugee' and the 'culturally different asylum seeker' will be examined. The development of the term 'Asylant'[28] and the declassification of asylum seekers as 'Scheinasylanten' is the subject of an article in the *taz* from July 1986. According to author Jürgen Link, the term 'Asylant' was not part of the public discourse until the late 1970s as there were only small numbers of people seeking asylum, mainly coming from communist countries and therefore deemed eligible applicants. In the following years, the term developed into a negatively denoted term to describe asylum seekers. It followed the tradition of other negatively connoted words ending with the affix '-ant', which is also used in words such as '*Ignorant*' (ignoramus) or '*Simulant*' (malingerer). According to Link, 'Asylanten' lost their human face as media and politicians no longer saw them as individual human beings, but rather as a threatening flood or avalanche.[29] Ritter accused asylum seekers of falsifying political persecution in their home countries by 'provoking their government or through joining a radical … organisation'.[30] Equally, Reißmüller thought it indisputable that most of the people coming to Germany were doing so for economic benefits and thus, he noted, natural and economic resources, as well as society's willingness to accept more migrants, were dwindling.[31] Migrants of a different cultural, non-European background were perceived as particularly problematic. While asylum seekers from Eastern Europe were likely to be of Christian belief, followed similar traditions and learned the German language quickly, asylum seekers from African or Asian countries were depicted as unable to adapt and impossible to integrate. Muslim asylum seekers were defined solely through their religion, with Islam perceived as incomprehensible and even threatening. In an article in *Die Zeit*, the journalist Roland Kirbach described the prejudices a Lebanese refugee family faced when they moved into an apartment: Since Muslims would only eat after dark during Ramadan, it was feared that 'the four Omayrat-children would, under the stimulus of hunger, roam the streets and steal lollipops from the German children'.[32]

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28   'Asylant' is commonly used as a negative term to describe asylum seekers, whereas 'Asylbewerber' is the official term.

29   Jürgen Link, 'Asylantenflut oder "Flüchtlinge raus"', *taz*, 24 July 1986, 5.

30   Ritter, 'Ohne Grundgesetzänderung', 9.

31   Reißmüller, 'Diese Last wird zu schwer', 1.

32   Roland Kirbach, 'Sie beten zuviel: Wertminderung durch eine Moslem-Familie?', *Die Zeit*, 21 February 1986, 14.

Generally, those who are negatively defined are deemed ineligible to be granted asylum, yet the accusation that people would come to Germany only for economic reasons was hard to verify. None of the articles that support restrictions to the laws of asylum questioned the negative terminology. There are, however, articles that criticised the use of such terminology: '*Deichgrafen-Metaphorik*'[33] (dike-reeve imagery or water metaphors) is what Sommer called the extensive use of sea-related terms such as '*Flüchtlings-Springflut, Asylanten-Schwemme, Ausländer-Strom, Einwanderer-Welle*' (refugee spring tide, glut of bogus asylum seekers, stream of foreigners, wave of immigrants) and Rolf Michaelis was surprised that Germans were not ashamed to insult those seeking protection.[34]

It is important to note that the fear of new arrivals from 'different cultures' was strengthened in these articles by adding the attribute 'foreign'. The historical and social origins of this stereotype therefore went hand in hand, as the process of promoting the idea of immigrants as irredeemably foreign was reinforced on different levels of social life. The image of something being 'foreign' became part of the collective symbolism and served as a reference point of orientation within society and helped justify political and social actions. It appears that the stereotypes built on one another and became interdependent, almost forming an argumentative circle. Their social and historical origin can be traced back to the increased use of the terms by the media and in politics in the 1980s. The more often asylum seekers were portrayed negatively, the more these ideas gained legitimacy and were adopted in other public spheres of society.

Autostereotypes

Each stereotype allows for conclusions to be drawn about those voicing it, about their emotions and perceptions of the world, and thus provides insight into the society in which they take effect.[35] Assuming that stereotypes are particularly useful tools for creating 'we'-groups, it can be argued that the depictions of asylum seekers in mid-1980s newspaper articles were primarily used to distance asylum seekers from Germans, intending to ensure that readers did not identify with asylum seekers, but instead rallied against them.

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33   Sommer, 'Wegen Überfüllung geschlossen?', 1.
34   See Rolf Michaelis, 'Gesang vor der Tür', *Die Zeit*, 1 August 1986, 29.
35   Hahn, '12 Thesen', 21.

The first assertion about the autostereotype is the 'tolerance limit'. This suggests that the FRG had saddled itself with too great a burden by taking in asylum seekers. It includes the allegation of abuse of the right to asylum by '*Scheinasylanten*' by describing applicants negatively. High unemployment rates, criminality, xenophobia and social conflict served as reasons for claiming that the right to asylum should not be granted to 'bogus asylum seekers'. Stressing that large numbers of asylum seekers arrive in the FRG suggests that parts of the German population were concerned about their own living standards. Having experienced the economic miracle of the 1950s and 60s, the German state had moved into an adverse economic situation after 1973 as the oil crisis affected every sector of the German economy. However, despite unemployment rising faster than ever since World War II,[36] the idea of thousands of asylum seekers burdening the economy was unproven. Emotionally loaded terms like '*psychische Hinnahmebereitschaft*'[37] (psychological readiness of acceptance) or '*Interessen der Deutschen*'[38] (German interests) imply that the 'tolerance limit' is not a measurable but rather a subjective limit, suggesting that the exact moment of its excess cannot be determined.

The 'tolerance limit' is supplemented by the idea of 'foreignness' and both blend together to such an extent that their clear distinction is impossible. The fear of foreign infiltration led to a call for a limitation of migration. Bavarian Prime Minister Franz Josef Strauss warned: 'If the situation in New Caledonia gets any worse, we will soon have wogs in our country'.[39] He criticised the unwillingness of asylum seekers and foreigners to assimilate into German culture. Assimilation seemed to be the only acceptable version of integration.

The depiction of asylum seekers as cultural strangers in many articles leads to the question of from where this German fear originates. One cause appears to be the lack of awareness of differences between Germans and non-Germans. The above cited *Die Zeit* article details how the landlord of a Lebanese refugee family was lectured by anonymous callers about the differences between Germans and Lebanese: as they would normally 'live in caves' it would not be necessary to offer them 'a comfortable

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36   See Table, 'Entwicklung der Arbeitslosigkeit in der Bundesrepublik in den Jahren 1950 bis 1990', *bpb.de*, available at: www.bpb.de/geschichte/deutsche-einheit/lange-wege-der-deutschen-einheit/47242/ arbe itslosigkeit?p=all.
37   Reißmüller, 'Diese Last wird zu schwer', 1.
38   Gerhard Kropf, 'Hochtrabend und wirklichkeitsfremd: Leserbrief', *FAZ*, 22 September 1986, 11.
39   Hans Schueler, 'Kein deutsches Ruhmesblatt', *Die Zeit,* 5 April 1985, 7.

apartment with floor heating, tiles, carpets, precious wooden doors and an open fireplace'.[40] Arrivals from Poland, however, were greeted with less suspicion as 'they have the right skin tone, come from a familiar cultural background and learn German quickly'.[41] Different concepts of hygiene, intimacy or time, and also of the roles of family, gender or religion, can lead to misunderstandings between cultures, but it does not preclude their compatibility. If they are nonetheless seen as hindrances, it can be concluded that either a feeling of superiority of one's own culture or a fear of explicit displays of foreign customs are the reason for this.

No concrete evidence is given as to those components of the German culture supposedly in danger, but it is interesting to look at the Prussian virtues that are nominally said to form the basis of the German value system: honesty, modesty, discipline, sincerity, diligence, a sense of justice, a sense of duty and reliability.[42] Asylum seekers in the articles were described as not possessing such virtues. Instead they were depicted as being the exact opposite, as criminal and immoral.

The discourse thread focusing on a tightening of art 16, §2II GG is of significance here. As it guaranteed the right to asylum, the continuous increase in numbers of asylum seekers since the 1970s lead especially conservatives to the perception that the constitution was being abused by asylum seekers. Numerous restrictive measures were taken throughout the 1970s and 1980s to constrain the number of foreigners coming to the FRG: for example, the First and Second Acceleration Laws in 1978 and 1980, which aimed at shortening the procedures for granting the right to asylum or imposing a five-year working ban for asylum seekers in 1982. Interior Senator of Berlin Heinrich Lummer claimed that 'according to the current law of asylum, the entire Red Army and the KGB could march [into Germany] as long as they would only proclaim themselves to be asylum seekers'.[43] Reißmüller and others promoted tightening art 16, §2II GG, a move they deemed long overdue seeing that 'millions, yes dozens of millions' could ask for asylum in the FRG under the current laws, which would lead to a destabilisation of the German democracy.[44]

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40   Kirbach, 'Sie beten zuviel', 14.
41   '"Die Spreu vom Weizen trennen": SPIEGEL-Serie über Asylanten und Scheinasylanten in der Bundesrepublik (IV): Polen', *Der Spiegel*, 15 September 1986, 109.
42   See Herbert Kremp, 'Preußische Tugenden', *Welt*, 2001, available at: www.welt.de/print-welt/article431886/Preussische-Tugenden.html.
43   Schueler, 'Kein deutsches Ruhmesblatt', 7.
44   Ritter, 'Ohne Grundgesetzänderung', 9.

Asylum seekers were portrayed as threatening to Germany's political system and its values. This becomes particularly apparent when insisting that '*Scheinasylanten*' would abuse the right to asylum: the stereotypical user accuses asylum seekers categorically of exploiting the law and implies that they would flout basic values. This contradicts imagined German – or Prussian – virtues like honesty and sincerity.

Opponents to an amendment of the constitution pointed to the experiences of flight and refuge of the founders of the FRG and to the National Socialist post of the country, and proclaimed that a change to the constitution might sound like a popular idea in an election year, but that it would not be a viable solution. Instead, the reasons for flight should be investigated and stopped around the world.[45] After the general election in 1987, an amendment of the constitution was less contested, but the discussion came to life again in the early 1990s and finally resulted in a constitutional change of art 16, §2II and the so-called safe-third-country regulation in 1992–93.

Focusing on the 'tolerance limit' and 'foreignness', it can be concluded that there is a presumed limit to what German values can withstand and exceeding it could result in their loss. It is interesting to note that a national character is created for asylum seekers even though these migrants have diverse national and cultural origins. Their cultural diversity is reduced to a few negative attributes to give this group a uniform face. Their assimilation is named as the only way to prevent the loss of German values, or even the abandonment of the German nation in the Western part of Germany.[46] This implies insecurity about the building blocks of one's own nation. Talking about 'floods' of asylum seekers suggests that the control and defence of the arrival of asylum seekers is far more important than determining why people flee their home countries. The use of water metaphors reinforces this feeling of overstraining. An objective discussion or respectful interactions with refugees are treated as equally irrelevant.

It can be concluded that a heterogenic group of asylum seekers is moulded into a faceless group with its own national character by means of stereotyping. This group is characterised as being different and parasitic; verifying the claims of these statements seems to be unimportant. The ideas of having a 'tolerance limit' and of not being able to accept the 'foreignness'

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45 Christian Schütze, 'Politisch Verfolgte genießen Asylrecht', *SZ,* 169/30, 26/27 July 1986, 4.
46 Reißmüller, 'So geht es nicht weiter', 1.

of asylum seekers build upon one another and are interconnected. They merge into the assumption that a subset of the German population lives in fear of the 'other'.

Furthermore, the creation of a negative concept of the asylum seeker as alien appears to be combined with a stylisation of the self-image of the native German. The acceptance of negative stereotypes into the symbol system of the German language implies that the existent image of the 'foreigner' is no longer enough. Negative connotations of foreigners indeed existed in the FRG before the 1980s, most notably through guest worker programs. From 1954 to 1955, a steadily growing number of guest workers and their families came to Germany from countries such as Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece as well as Turkey, Yugoslavia and Tunisia. After their work contracts expired, many guest workers and their families chose to settle in Germany rather than return to their countries of origin. With the economic recession of the mid-60s and early 70s and rising unemployment, guest worker programs were no longer required and ceased operation in 1973. The permanently settled guest workers started being blamed for problems such as shortages in apartments and jobs, social conflicts and the emergence of a subculture of semi-isolated 'second generation' migrants. The 1980s, however, saw another shift in the discourse and a redefinition of the 'foreigner problem': from guest worker to asylum seeker.

Discourses and stereotyping

Looking at the asylum debate and the national identity debate as discourses, it can be concluded that the two are indeed not occurring separately from one another, but that they are entangled. There is, foremostly, the question of how to handle Germany's nationalist-socialist past and the responsibilities that arise out of it. In his speech commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the end of World War II on 8 May 1985, Federal President von Weizsäcker spoke of learning to accept the nation's past – not in order to overcome it, but to preserve its memory and to learn from it. He ended with the plea:

> Do not let yourselves be forced into enmity and hatred of other people, of Russians or Americans, Jews or Turks, of alternatives or conservatives, blacks or whites. Learn to live together, not in opposition to each other.[47]

These aspects are also mentioned in articles regarding the topic of asylum: for example, when defending and challenging art 16, §2II. While some see Germany's history as a reason to take in asylum seekers, others condemn this as 'mistaken altruism'.

Based on the idea that nations, as a construct, work not only in an inclusive but also an exclusive way, and that 'national identity' is constructed by differentiating it from the 'other', some aspects of the debate on asylum stand out: insisting on the idea that asylum seekers are culturally foreign to Germans indicates the creation of a 'we'-group through the exclusion of 'others'. The resulting feeling of togetherness is based upon ethnic homogeneity and relies on the principle of assimilation of everything deemed to be foreign. The one common denominator for the 'we'-group is fear – fear of foreigners, and fear of related, social problems. Here, stereotyping's impact on public discourses becomes apparent. A negative reputation is the result of linking Asian or African asylum seekers to criminality, cultural differences, social unrests and xenophobia. 'National identity' and the '*feeling of togetherness*' influence the thoughts and actions of those belonging to the nation and act as strong binding material. This is enhanced specifically by thinking in stereotypes, which has an important and resilient defensive function. Articles promoting immigration do not manage to destroy this negative perception. Instead they label fear of asylum seekers as xenophobia and do not offer an informed elucidation of the pros and cons of immigration. This, however, leads to a growing disparity between supporters and deniers of the right to asylum. Eventually, only two options prevail for a nation: redefining the image of the society by adjusting it to encompass foreigners or attempting to make society fit their idea of it. The actual diversity of the German nation, visible in the presence of former guest workers and their families as well as resettlers, refugees and asylum seekers, clashes with the idea of a national identity based upon ethnic homogeneity. And, ultimately,

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47   Richard von Weizsäcker, 'Speech by President Richard von Weizsäcker during the Ceremony Commemorating the 40th Anniversary of the End of War in Europe and of National-Socialist Tyranny on 8 May 1985 at the Bundestag, Bonn', *Bundespraesident*, available at: www.bundespraesident.de/ SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Reden/2015/02/150202-RvW-Rede-8-Mai-1985-englisch.pdf?_blob= publicationFile.

the German government took the path of attempting to eliminate the facticity of a multicultural society by imposing more restrictive measures, which culminated in the 'Asylkompromiss' of 1992–93. This new regulation means that those travelling to Germany via a safe third country, or a country of the European Union, cannot ask for asylum in Germany, because they have already passed through a safe country in which they could have asked for asylum. It also introduced the principle of safe countries of origin, which deems certain countries to be safe if they do not, or not generally, produce refugees.

(Dis)similarities in German and Australian debates

Australia's immigration policies had for decades been governed by the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901*, which became known as the 'White Australia policy'. It aimed at encouraging Anglo-Celtic migration and keeping out the Asian races.[48] The post–World War II era saw a shift in Australia's attitude towards non-white, non-European migrants and the White Australia policy was abolished in 1973. Shortly after, from 1975 onwards, Australia witnessed for the first time unauthorised arrivals to the country via boat. While Australia had always taken in refugees from around the world via its humanitarian program and under its obligations to the *1951 Refugee Convention*, this was an unexpected challenge.

After the fall of Saigon to the North Vietnamese Army in 1975, large numbers of Vietnamese fled their country, seeking refuge abroad. The majority of the 80,000 Indochinese migrants arrived in Australia by plane and had previously been formally processed by Australian officials at Malaysian and Thai refugee camps. In April 1976, however, a boat with five Vietnamese men landed in Darwin. They were the first of a total of just 2,059 arrivals by boat that came to Australia between 1976 and 1981.[49] Despite the number of boat arrivals being comparatively low, the reaction from politics and society were largely negative. With a federal election due on 10 December 1977, the arrival of six boats carrying 218 asylum seekers on 21 November 1977 was major news. Both parties 'used

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48   Andrew Bennetts, *The Mess We're In. Managing the Refugee Crisis* (Camberwell: Trabagem Publishing, 2017), 185.
49   Nancy Viviani, *The Long Journey: Vietnamese Migration and Settlement in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1984), 85.

the arrival of Vietnamese asylum seekers to demonstrate their resolve to enforce Australia's immigration laws'.[50] Opposition leader Gough Whitlam claimed that Australia's borders needed to be protected against unauthorised immigration, criminal offences and the spread of diseases, thereby negatively associating asylum seekers with these.[51] He also doubted the legitimacy of the arrivals' asylum claims, proclaiming it 'not credible, 2.5 years after the end of the Vietnam war, that these refugees should suddenly be coming to Australia'.[52] On 25 November 1977, Prime Minister Fraser spoke to a woman on talkback radio, who was concerned that Australia would turn into 'another Rhodesia with a white minority'[53] due to the large number of Vietnamese refugees. This shows just how much the arrival of unauthorised asylum seekers stoked fears of an Asian invasion of Australia. Newspaper articles at the time ranged from being critical of the Fraser Government's and the Opposition's stance, to proclaiming that instead of being eligible asylum seekers, 'Vietnamese Communist agents and rich Thai businessmen are reported to be entering Australia posing as Indo-Chinese refugees'.[54] Other articles equally describe boat arrivals as non-genuine asylum seekers. The arriving Vietnamese would lack the 'lean and hungry look' and showed 'evidence of wealth'.[55] 1977 also witnessed the hour of birth of one of the most resistant images in the Australian asylum debate: the queue. Gough Whitlam motioned that 'genuine refugees' should be accepted, but spoke out against putting refugees 'ahead of the queue'.[56]

The debate around the Vietnamese boat arrivals had no significant effect on the election outcome;[57] it did, however, have influence on the second wave of boat arrivals from 1989 to 1998. Arrivals were mostly from Cambodia and Southern China. While the Vietnamese boat people of the first wave had been granted refugee status and permanent residence, arrivals of the second wave were held in detention for the duration of their claim assessment – some for over two years. This change was partly brought on by a general surge in applications for permanent residency

50   Rachel Stevens, 'Political Debates on Asylum Seekers during the Fraser Government, 1977–1982', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 58, no. 4 (2012): 529, doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8497.2012.01651.x.
51   John Mayman, 'Lib Policies Blamed for Viet Influx', *Australian*, 26–27 November 1977.
52   Ibid.
53   'Fraser Warns Refugees', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 November 1977, 1–2.
54   *Age*, 25 November 1977, 9. As quoted in Stevens, 'Political Debates', 530–31.
55   *Australian*, 25 November 1977, 6. As quoted in Stevens, 'Political Debates', 531.
56   'Hawke: Return Bogus Refugees', *Australian*, 29 November 1977, 1.
57   Stevens, 'Political Debates', 529.

from applicants who had arrived in Australia legally. Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey referred to this as having 'turned the White Australia Policy inside out'.[58] According to polls quoted by sociologist Katharine Betts, the Australian public's attitude towards boat arrivals toughened from 1977 to 1979 and again in 1993, with larger numbers of people wanting to send boat arrivals back.[59]

At first glance, similarities between the German debate of the 1980s and the Australian debates of the 1970s and 1990s become apparent. The sudden influx in the numbers of asylum seekers led to an intensifying public debate in both countries and eventually to toughened regulations. The 'Asylkompromiss' in Germany in 1992–93 and the introduction of mandatory detention in Australia in 1992 are good examples of this.

It is interesting to note that the arguments brought forward in the public debates are very similar. In both debates the genuineness of asylum seekers is questioned, with the idea of them seeking a better life, rather than fleeing from prosecution, dominating. This can be seen, for example, in the address to the House of Representatives of the Rt Hon. Ian Macphee, member of the Liberal Party, in March 1982,[60] as well as in the remarks from Manfred Ritter in the *FAZ* in 1986.[61] Rachel Stevens distinguishes between three functions of the 'seeking a better way of life' argument:

1. trivialising the conditions from which asylum seekers were fleeing
2. exaggerating the threat posed to the Australian nation by, potentially large numbers of, asylum seekers
3. creating a separation between those fleeing impoverishment and those fleeing political persecution.[62]

Comparing these three lines of arguments with the German debate, it can be stated that especially Stevens' second point ties in with the idea of the 'tolerance limit' – the extent to which a nation can accept asylum seekers

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58   Geoffrey Blainey in Warrnambool in March 1984, quoted in Michael Kirby, 'Australian Population, Multiculturalism and the Road from Warrnambool: The Hon Justice Michael Kirby CMG: The Opening Address delivered at the Second General Conference of the Australian Population Association, Sydney, 8 December 1984', *Journal of the Australian Population Association* 1, no. 2 (1985), 61.
59   Katharine Betts, 'Boat People and Public Opinion in Australia', *People and Place* 9, no. 4 (2001): 40–41.
60   Stevens, 'Political Debates', 538.
61   Ritter, 'Ohne Grundgesetzänderung', 9.
62   Stevens, 'Political Debates', 538.

before it may collapse economically or culturally. This is comparable to the exaggerations used by Reißmüller, who speaks of potentially 'millions, yes dozens of millions' of people that could try to seek asylum in the FRG[63] or Berlin's Senator of the Interior Heinrich Lummer, who claimed that 'according to the current asylum law, the entire Red Army and the KGB could march [into Germany] as long as they would only proclaim themselves to be asylum seekers'.[64]

Insisting that arrivals by boat would 'jump the queue' reveals a level of 'foreignness' of asylum seekers. The creation of an imaginary queue in which those seeking asylum are lining up leads to the suggestion that boat arrivals are disrupting this orderly line by jumping straight to the top. They would therewith cheat those asylum seekers who arrived in Australia by plane, for example, out of their spot in the queue. This is not only used to contrast boat people negatively from other asylum seekers, to show them as undeserving of being granted refugee status, but also as an emotive descriptor in that it is used to make boat arrivals look like criminals. This creates a divide between the 'them' and the 'us' – asylum seekers and Australians.

What is interesting to note in the Australian debate, however, is that insisting on a differentiation between 'genuine asylum seekers' and boat people who 'jump the queue' creates a justification for adopting tougher regulations and the move to mandatory detention for boat arrivals. It serves to legitimise these tougher stances, as it claims that those asylum seekers following the proper channels are more deserving of being granted a place in Australia than others. The idea of a jumpable queue is not something that features in the German debate.

1980s Germany was a country that many felt had an obligation to assist asylum seekers due to the experiences during World War II; it was also struggling to come to terms with its 'national identity' and the significance of an increasingly foreign population. Australia, on the other hand, was and is a country whose 'national identity' is deeply connected with the concept of migration. The arrival of Vietnamese asylum seekers to Australia in the 1970s was only the first test for a country that had only recently abolished its White Australia policy and was presumably still coming to terms with a more multicultural, non-White identity.

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63   Ritter, 'Ohne Grundgesetzänderung', 9.
64   Schueler, 'Kein deutsches Ruhmesblatt', 7.