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# Explaining xenophobia and racism: a critical review of current research approaches

Andreas Wimmer

## Abstract

Four explanations of xenophobia and racism will be reviewed by confronting them with the results of empirical studies. I try to show that xenophobic and racist views of the social world are not instrumental to a fight for scarce jobs or housing. Neither is it appropriate to interpret them as a result of a culture clash that is caused by migratory movements across countries and continents. They are not mere radicalizations of the discourse of exclusion and devaluation which political and administrative élites generate and institutionalize, for example, in immigration policies. Starting from the insights of this critical review, I shall develop the hypothesis that xenophobia and racism should be seen as appeals to the pact of solidarity into which state and society have entered in modern nation-states and which in times of intensified social conflicts seems fragile in the eyes of downwardly mobile groups. The xenophobic discourse serves not only to reassure identity when nationalistic self-images run into crisis but is an element of a political struggle about who has the right to be cared for by the state and society: a fight for the collective goods of the modern state.

**Keywords:** Racism; xenophobia; theory; nation-state; state and society; social closure.

In recent years a debate as intensive as it is confused has flared up over the issue whether European societies have already become 'multi-cultural' through the 'new' migration, if in a real sense it should still occur, or whether such a development should be avoided. The public reacts with similar heat and controversy to the rise in racist acts of violence and the success of right-oriented populist parties. How are we to explain these phenomena? How can they be countered effectively? And where in political discourse do the boundaries lie regarding racism and xenophobia? These are a few of the points around which the discussion has recently evolved. Meanwhile, a veritable host of social

scientists have become engaged with these questions. They touch on the basic self-image, on the basic models of Western society, and each of the conflicting answers refers to another political project. Therefore, debates among social scientists are ideologically charged to the utmost.

For example, those who do not accept the premise that racism is built into the fundamental structures of modern society will be reproached for shutting their eyes to reality (see, for example, van Dijk 1992); conversely, those who use an antiracist concept of race in the sense of a subject of emancipation will be accused of essentializing precisely those social categories which also serve racism (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992). Those who dare to stress the diversity of 'cultures' in the tradition of cultural relativism and to demand equal rights and tolerance in a multicultural society (for example, Rex 1985; Leggewie 1993) are already viewed by critical eyes as guilty of 'cultural racism' (Essed 1992) or confronted by the Rushdie scandal and branded as leftist alternative Utopians. On the other hand, those who believe that certain foreign cultures are incompatible with the European and thus warn of ghetto development and social conflicts (Hoffmann-Nowotny 1992) must reckon on being counted as intellectual fellow travellers of nationalistic populists (Castles 1993). But practitioners of multicultural social work also experience something similar (Bukow 1992) – thus all those for whom 'culture' represents a basic dimension of social reality. In the eyes of some of the critics (Demirovic and Paul 1994, pp. 84ff.), even those who interpret xenophobia as an expression of a struggle over distribution issues are viewed as 'new-right ideologists'. The debates are also largely politicized around individual empirical research. For example, a British educational scientist whose studies suggest that teachers in primary schools do not harbour racist prejudices in the anticipated ratios is confronted less with criticism of the methodology and research design than with a suspicion that he or she has acted with malicious intent, causing political damage to the antiracist research community (Hammersley 1993).

Thus, not only in politics and everyday life but also in the social sciences every discourse on the famous stranger, who comes today and remains tomorrow (Simmel 1987), has become problematic. It would be naïve to believe that one could completely remove oneself from this arena of conflicts. Yet even the choice of basic terminology can imply a certain political perspective. The bacteria of ideology take hold precisely in the cracks of the smallest details, to use the epidemiological metaphor of Michael Oppitz (1975, p. 307). Despite this, it is possible to examine social scientific propositions in regard to their empirical plausibility. It is not an *experimentum crucis* which allows a theory to be 'falsified', but statements about the relative validity of an explanation that are to be expected by such a procedure (see Wimmer 1995a, ch. 1).

In this sense four explanations concerning xenophobia and racism are discussed and confronted, as systematically as possible, with the results of empirical research.<sup>1</sup> The four models derive from rational choice theory, functionalism, discourse theory and phenomenology respectively. Building on this, I wish to propose an alternative hypothesis. In the Weberian view that I shall try to develop, xenophobia and racism<sup>2</sup> are interpreted as expressions of ultra-nationalist ideology; downwardly mobile groups appeal to the institutionalized and hegemonial image of a national group of solidarity in order to reassure their place in the core of the social fabric. They thus perceive people outside this imagined community of destiny as competitors for state-organized promises of solidarity and security.

### **Rational choice theory**

According to a first thesis xenophobia and racism stem from an intensive rivalry between migrant and indigenous groups; jobs and cheap housing are especially scarce in times of economic crisis, and from the perspective of established inhabitants the migrants compete for residential space and working opportunities (for Germany, Castles 1987 and von Freyberg 1994; for The Netherlands, van Amersfoort 1982; for the USA, Olzak 1993). The theoretical core of this argument is often a model of rational decision-making (see Banton 1983; Hechter 1986). The thesis thus takes the xenophobic vision of a wave of job-seeking foreigners at par value – which does not mean that it would therefore already be implausible. Several governments of Western Europe argued in this way when in the mid-1970s they turned to limiting labour immigration where possible (for France, see Silverman 1992a, p. 328).

If we regard the problem over the course of time, however, we realize that xenophobic fears of foreign domination are not particularly virulent if wages drop or unemployment rises – both indicators of an intensive competition in the job market. The Swiss case illustrates this point fairly well. For the first time in the last century a 'surplus of foreigners' was diagnosed in the 1880s. The working class complained about the competition of Italian immigrants; the French-Swiss about the political influence of Bismarck's Germany on their Alemannic countrymen; the bourgeois Swiss-Germans about the number of German workmen and journeymen (Imhof 1993). In Zurich at the end of July 1896 there were even riots and pogrom-style evictions of Italians in the Outer Sihl district (Hoffmann-Nowotny 1992, pp. 79ff; compare for similar events in other European countries Lucassen 1995). However, this first wave of fear about foreign domination occurred at a time of modest but steady economic growth, as can be deduced from the recently published *Historische Statistik der Schweiz* (Ritzmann *et al.* 1995).

The same applies to the second wave, which occurred roughly in 1917 (Romano 1990). Dates on real wage development for this period are also available which show that around 1917 significant wage increases were recorded in the building and industry sector (Ritzmann *et al.* 1995). Moreover, the percentage of foreigners in the residential population reached its peak in 1914, and dropped continuously after that from 15.4 per cent to about 5 per cent at the beginning of World War II. Although direct competition for jobs may also have diminished in this period, the topic of too many foreigners (*Überfremdung*) appeared high on the political agenda until the mid-1930s (Romano 1990). Voices hostile to foreigners were heard again in the mid-sixties, when the growth quotas of the whole economy as well as those of real wages were increasing (until 1970), and full employment prevailed for a further decade.

One could object that such aggregate data do not say much about the actual competitive constellations in specific branches or regions. Unfortunately, studies which include a measurement of *selective* competition are still very rare. Indeed, one of the most comprehensive and methodically most reliable is Olzak's work (1993) in which she tries to show that the ethnic conflicts and protests in the USA between 1876 and 1914 could be explained by a competition model. By evaluating newspaper coverage she gains a sequence showing the intensity of ethnic disputes which she relates to various measurements of competition (occupational segregation, economic depression, status of workforce training, immigration rates, etc.). It shows that the immigration rate, which in this period attained its historic peak, had no influence on the amount of ethnic conflicts and protests. But the proportional *change* in these rates did have an effect (*ibid.*, pp. 78ff).

On closer examination, however, one establishes that Olzak's study refutes rather than verifies the competition thesis: the changes in immigration figures had no significant influence on conflicts with *immigrants* (almost exclusively white at the time) but rather with those categorized as *blacks* and Chinese (*ibid.*, p. 83). Conflicts with blacks account for 55 per cent of the total; those with white immigrants for just 30 per cent (*ibid.*, p. 77), although only about 200,000 blacks moved into the industrializing North between 1890 and 1910 (previous figures were insignificant) and became competitors for the indigenous residents there. Between 1890 and 1914, however, about a million people *a year* immigrated to the US – mainly from Central, Southern, and Eastern Europe. At the same time the occupational segregation of blacks increased and that of immigrants receded.<sup>3</sup> Thus, direct competition between long-time residents and blacks slackened whereas that with immigrants *intensified*.

An analysis of data at the city level also shows that the degree of segregation of foreigners had a greater statistical impact on violence against those regarded as black than on themselves, while the degree of

occupational segregation of black people did not significantly influence the attacks against them (*ibid.*, p. 177). On the other hand, the percentage of blacks within the residential population largely explains the acts of violence against them, whereas the proportion of immigrants and the hostility towards them, again conversely did *not* coincide (*ibid.*).

It follows from this that the intensity of conflict does not depend on real competition in the job market. Rather, it stems from the *perception* of equality and difference, of legitimate and illegitimate competition (Bélanger and Pinard 1991), as Olzak herself seems to admit at one point (Olzak 1993, p. 95). The competition argument as such is not invalidated by this, but rather the thesis of conflict turning on *individual* goods such as jobs or housing. It seems more probable that ethnic conflicts as well as xenophobic movements are waged over *collective* goods (Bélanger and Pinard 1991; Wimmer 1994; 1995b, ch. 3), as will be developed later in this article.

The critic is supported by other studies of social psychology and sociology; in no way do 'negative attitudes' against foreigners prevail among people who are long-term unemployed<sup>4</sup> or who fear the loss of their job (Hoskin 1985: pp. 14f.; Silbermann and Hüsters 1995: pp. 73–76) or who actually work with foreigners (Hoffmann-Nowotny 1973: p. 87; Silbermann and Hüsters 1995: pp. 60–63).<sup>5</sup> It should also be noted that at least since World War II the *real* competition for jobs between native-born and foreigners has been rather limited. Among economists, to be sure, intense discussion persists about whether immigrants replace or supplement the indigenous workforce. However, Rürup and Sesselmeier (1993) conclude in their overview that the complementary thesis must be viewed 'as the more relevant and until now the clearly better corroborated' (*ibid.*, p. 289) (for Switzerland, see Ritschard 1982; for the US, see Borjas 1990). Tapinos and Rugys' (1994) review of various studies comes to the same conclusion).

Incidentally, the simple competition thesis also contradicts the motives of the xenophobes themselves, although an action-theory argument reflects these specifically. Thus, analyses of Swiss voting results show that in acceptance of more restrictive immigration laws or rejection of improved legal status for foreigners, fear of job competition plays a much more minor role than general fears of loss of social status and identity (Linder 1993, p. 157). Similar motives also stir up racist football fans, such as those in London's East End (Cohen 1991, pp. 323ff.).

With these objections only the simplest variants but not the competition argument as such should be defused, because the idea expressed by xenophobes that 'foreigners take away our jobs' must, nevertheless, be taken into consideration (see, for example, Windisch 1978). Thus, it must be explained under which conditions this *perception* arises if the real competition for individual goods obviously cannot be made responsible for it.

**Functionalism**

According to a thesis equally widespread at present, the cultural differentness of the immigrants is made responsible for conflicts with the native born. In contrast to immigrants from Southern or Eastern Europe, those from the Third World are seen as incapable of assimilation because they come from societies which have a 'mainly agrarian and often semi-feudal or feudal structure . . . which internally is still in part strongly oriented to tribe and clan, perhaps equipped with religions which have not experienced the Reformation and Enlightenment' (Hoffmann-Nowotny 1992, p. 74). Besides this 'cultural incompatibility', the low educational qualifications and professional experience are also blamed for the new immigrants' inability to integrate into the class structure of the host society and therefore finally finding themselves in a ghettoized and marginalized subproletariat (ibid, pp. 22f., 25). Those culturally or even racially different are also favourite targets of public sentiments hostile to foreigners which spread in times of social crises (ibid, p. 24). Thus, according to this functionalist view, the inability of certain minorities to integrate into the structure and culture of the host society leads the majority population to xenophobic rejection.

This argument has several points in common with the everyday outlook that it is primarily the immigrants' 'foreignness' that causes problems. From which it follows that it is also legitimate for one to prefer to remain among one's own kind and to wish others to remain among theirs. Cultural homogeneity also appears as a central value in the Utopia of a democratic, closely-knit and ecologically sustainable small-scale society, to which some factions of the leftist Green adhere. A similar logic underlies the neoconservative calling for defence of a nation's cultural values or those of occidental civilization. In the political and administrative realms, this thesis corresponds, for example, to the three-circles model which the Swiss Federal Council recently proclaimed as official policy: one prohibiting immigration from non-EEA nations such as former Yugoslavia.

Countering the argument of cultural incompatibility, immigrants of the most varied ancestry have heard it repeatedly during the course of history and have often proved it false. The following passage is taken from a work of no less than Thomas Jefferson. It refers to the immigration of Germans to the USA during the eighteenth century and deserves to be quoted at length:

It is for the happiness of those united in society to harmonise as much as possible in matters which they must of necessity transact together . . . Every species of government has its specific principles. Ours perhaps are more peculiar than those of any other in the universe. It is a composition of the freest principles of the English constitution, with others

derived from natural right and natural reason. To these nothing can be more opposed than the maxims of absolute monarchies. Yet, from such, we are to expect the greatest number of emigrants. They will bring with them the principles of the governments they leave, imbibed in their early youth; or, if able to throw them off, it will be in exchange for an unbounded licentiousness, passing, as is usual, from one extreme to another. It would be a miracle were they to stop precisely at the point of temperate liberty (Jefferson 1972, pp. 84ff).

The Irish and Polish immigrants of the nineteenth century were regarded as being equally incapable of assimilating in the eyes of British officials (Miles 1982). In a report from the 1960s Italian migrants were considered to be a security risk by Swiss officials because they had 'an entirely different attitude towards the state and the community' and because especially the poorer and uneducated among them 'according to tradition' stood 'more or less hostile to state power' (cited in Hoffmann-Nowotny 1992, p. 81). Despite these fears the Germans in the USA as well as the Irish in Great Britain and the Italians in Switzerland (Hoffmann-Nowotny and Hondrich 1982) were able to integrate themselves into the culture and society.

Giving the functionalist argument a socio-biological overtone, one could reply as follows: the fear that cultural incompatibility leads to ghettoization, discrimination against foreigners and anomie has, indeed, been falsely expressed at times; but it applies precisely if the *objective* cultural distance is actually too great or even if 'racial barriers' divide immigrant and native born. Two examples contradict this reformulation. After Indonesia's independence hundreds of thousands of individuals of 'mixed descent' migrated from the former colony to The Netherlands in a short time. Although in public opinion and from the viewpoint of government experts they were regarded as being of a completely different culture, not blessed with the 'Protestant work ethos', they could not be stopped, since they all possessed Dutch citizenship. Thanks to the enormous efforts of the social services, the immigrants became so completely integrated into the Dutch world of employment and the mixed residential areas that by the mid-1970s they had ceased to be regarded as a minority group (van Amersfoort 1982, ch. 7).<sup>6</sup> It remains open to question under what conditions such a development can be expected and how strongly motivated one is to push for a forced assimilation policy and to allocate the necessary financial resources.

What the example clearly shows is that by defining a group of immigrants as 'belonging' to the national 'we' and therefore having a right to be cared for by the state, considerable 'objective cultural distances' and degrees of 'racial distinctiveness' can be overcome. Racism as an extreme form of ethnocentrism is by no means an 'inevitable' outcome of the confrontation of culturally and/or racially clearly discernible



populations, as some socio-biological approaches imply (van den Berghe 1978).

As a second example, let us refer to Brazil (see Banton 1983, ch. 3). Despite the recent criticism of the myth of Brazilian racial democracy (Skidmore 1993), it shows that a 'mixed-race' population does not necessarily segregate or has to organize in a racially-defined hierarchy. The contrast with the USA is impressive enough. There, even with upward social mobility, those classified as 'blacks' find themselves again in *black* ghettos, this time in the suburbs (Alba and Logan 1993). Incidentally, studies on segregation in the USA also make it clear that this is due less to 'cultural distance' than to rejection by the white middle class. After all, in the case of Asian immigrants a spatial desegregation occurs along with upward social mobility – a phenomenon independent of the degree of cultural assimilation (*ibid.*). Again the *perception* of incompatibility and unbridgeable cultural distance must be explained. What leads to segregating behaviour if the 'objective' cultural or 'racial distinctiveness' between native born and immigrants cannot be made responsible for it?

But let us return to a second line of thought in the functionalist approach: that poor school training ('structural distance') of the new immigrants will remain a hindrance to social integration. This argument teeters on a similar uncertain basis. Consider the comparatively poor educational schooling of the emigrants from perhaps rural Sicily, whose children have meanwhile 'integrated' in culture and society despite this handicap.<sup>7</sup> The rule usually applies that the farther away from the place of origin one migrates, the higher one's schooling rank will be (cf. Tribalat 1995, pp. 24ff).

Thus, 'cultural distance' and 'structural distance' do not necessarily covary among immigrants. Most Tamils living in Switzerland, for example, have enjoyed a secondary school or even college education (Meier-Mesquita 1993). Lieberman (1980, chs 6–8) has shown that the average Afro-American at the time of the great immigration had enjoyed a better schooling and could read and write better than the immigrants from Eastern, Central and Southern Europe. Yet, despite this, the immigrants rose relatively quickly in the occupational hierarchy, whereas those classified as 'blacks' remained for decades relegated to the most unskilled work. Hence the dynamics of integration and segregation do not depend on educational status alone.

A final argument is of a more theoretical nature. A static and essentialist definition of culture, as it was characteristic of social anthropological discourse some decades ago, forms the basis for the theorem of cultural incompatibility (see the critique of Castles 1993); yet in the meantime, it is considered to be outdated in this discipline, since individual and subcultural variability, the processual character and strategic adaptability of cultural practice have become central to the discussion (cf. Wicker 1996; Wimmer 1996a).

These critical remarks should in no way dispute the point that considerable orientation problems arise – especially in the first generation – owing to cultural differences and that the presence of immigrants of foreign cultures can cause confusion, fear and defensive reactions on the part of long-time residents. The issue is only to what extent the degree of cultural differentness is responsible for the intensity of rejection. In view of the evidence of very differing abilities to ‘absorb’ other cultures in various immigration contexts, the counter thesis imposes itself: that discursive constructions of ‘otherness’ and the related *perception* of differentness and menace are linked rather with political vested interest than with objective cultural differences..

### **Discourse theory**

The group of social scientists which dominates the field of discussion at the moment starts from this thesis. According to them, concepts of cultural distinctiveness, inability to assimilate and unbridgeable cultural difference form the basic elements of a concept of ‘otherness’ which helps to exclude immigrants from the core social group and to establish domination over them. Above all, it is the official or semi-official power holders who create this discourse of exclusion and self-empowerment, and institutionalize it in multicultural social work or in immigration policies. In this way the consequences of their own politics are made invisible because the cultural differentness of the immigrants bears the blame for exclusion and impoverishment, while xenophobia can be explained as cultural conflict. At the same time, a definition of the social situation can be imposed which makes the ‘immigration problem’ responsible even for the general crisis in political legitimacy and for economic difficulties. From the population, largely homogenous because integrated within the same consumer-culture (Radtke 1990), ‘ethnics’ are categorized apart and separated administratively. An actual ‘sociogenesis of ethnic minorities’ occurs as the effect of such discursive and administrative practices (Dittrich and Radtke 1990; Bukow 1992).

In the same way, this discourse represents a breeding ground on which normal, everyday racism as well as politically-organized right extremism can thrive, because the definition of the basic problem must only be directed at its final consequence: the multicultural idea that every culture is worth protection and should be allowed to have its place to flourish can be reinterpreted as a right of the indigenous to defend their culture and homeland against the threat of cultural creolization and mixture (for Great Britain, see Solomos 1988; for The Netherlands, van Dijk 1991; for France, Silverman 1992b).

In the aftermath of the British study by Robert Miles (most recently, 1993), ‘racist’ immigration discourses and administrative measures in France (Silverman), in The Netherlands (Schuster), and in Australia

(Castles) have been examined. Critics of the multicultural social policy of Great Britain (Anthias and Yuval-Davis), The Netherlands (Essed), Sweden (Ålund), Germany (Radtke), New Zealand (Wetherell and Potter 1993), and Australia (Castles) orient themselves on this theoretical perspective. Finally, analyses are provided of mass media coverage that held the 'racism of the media' responsible for intensified defensiveness towards ethnic 'others' and increasing attacks on foreigners (Gerhard 1994).

We owe an important insight to such analyses: official or semi-official discourse offers an opportunity structure to which immigrant groups can relate (compare the sample case of Padilla 1986) as can groups hostile to them. To be sure, these opportunities are not always perceived, or, if they are, perhaps with completely different political consequences than the ones intended: individual groups can also adopt their own viewpoint which runs contrary to that of the entire publishing, political, bureaucratic and economic élite of a country. The 'ethnic revival' in the USA, for example, directed itself *against* the 'melting pot' model favoured by the majority population and the state apparatus. The same can be shown to apply to the ethnic movements in Great Britain (Werbner 1995) or Mexico (Wimmer 1993).

In addition, the majority's perception of basic social problems can develop independently of the ones held by the national élites: the outcome of the EEA vote in Switzerland is a recent example. It can also be proven from the Swiss case that the change in course, for example, of immigration policy and the official definition of basic political problems occurred only as *reactions* to nationalist and xenophobic social movements (Romano 1990). The Dutch case illustrates this point even more clearly: Rath (1993) has shown that the official discourse on immigration and the integration of 'ethnic minorities' cannot be interpreted as being of a 'racist' nature, if one takes the idea of a cultural or racial hierarchy and an anti-assimilationist stance as being two elements of a minimal definition of racism. Nevertheless, there have been racist and xenophobic political movements in The Netherlands as there have been in other European countries.

Thus, reality effects are not only to be attributed to the discourses of those groups holding power to define official social policies.<sup>8</sup> Instead, the conditions must be analysed under which these discourses spread within a population and are perceived as plausible. The converse is also to be expected – that official views and policies only react to public sentiments and grass-roots protest movements. If, however, institutionalized discourses are credited *à la* Foucault with quasi-magical powers, and if the concept of society is limited to this field of discourses, the conditions for the formation of such social movements – of majorities and minorities – vanish from sight (see Wimmer 1991). To present such an analysis of discursive shifts, we therefore have to take into consideration the non-discursive conditions which influence the relative acceptance of different points of view, classifications and problem definitions, including the

chances of spreading anti-racist interpretations of the world. Whoever avoids reflecting upon the factors that affect the success of different discursive strategies cannot answer the questions of how xenophobic movements develop and why they are subject to cyclic fluctuations.

### **Phenomenology**

A new sociological approach, which has made the discontinuities in social change the central object of inquiry, tries to explain precisely the constant recurrence of xenophobic movements. To this group of authors, hostility to foreigners and racism have less to do with the intentions of the bureaucratic élites or the growth of the foreign population than with an overall crisis of the entire society (Romano 1990; Imhof 1993). Such deep-gripping crises occur again and again after intensive phases of modernization if the promises of a societal model – for instance, that of the social-welfare state – can no longer be kept and therefore ‘anomic tensions’ spread over all social positions. This leads to a crisis of collective identity so that the calm self-certainty which might enable unproblematic relations with the minorities gets lost. Turning one’s mind back to those basic definitions of self and ‘other’ that are constitutive of a society, to the increasingly objectified nation and its historic myths, promises on the one hand to solve the crisis of identity; on the other hand, it also delivers an explanation of the malaise’s cause, namely the presence of the ‘others’ – the foreigners excluded from the national ‘we’ (Imhof 1993). According to this phenomenological approach, xenophobia and racism are interpreted as ways of reassuring the national self and its boundaries, as attempts at making sense of the world in times of crisis.<sup>9</sup>

To be sure, many studies have shown that xenophobia or racist attitudes are distributed very unequally over the population. At the moment this form of coping with crisis seems to make sense especially for people with little formal education (see Hoffmann-Nowotny 1973: pp. 88, 103, 105, 108; Wagner and Schönbach 1984; Mugny *et al.* 1991; Becker 1993; Linder 1993; Wrinkler 1994; Silbermann and Hüsters 1995: pp. 49–51; Willems 1995). The latest research on voters of the National Socialist Workers’ Party of Germany points to the old middle-class Protestants and those members of the rural working class not integrated in the culture of the Socialist Party or in the Catholic milieu as the patrons of National Socialism (Falter 1991).<sup>10</sup> These tendencies also require an explanation, such as that it is on the nationalistic of all forms of stereotyping ‘we’ and ‘them’ that these groups fall back – not on other ways to reduce complexity and anxiety such as are offered by the categories of class, region, profession, sex, age, religion, etc.<sup>11</sup> I am therefore convinced that the approach last introduced should be combined with an analysis of power strategies and interest policy to focus precisely on the interplay of ideas and interests in social action that Max Weber (1920, p. 252) has so lucidly commented upon.

**Struggling over collective goods**

In order to trace the connection between the politics of identity and the politics of interest, one must go back and look at the historical presumptions under which cultural affiliations were politicized into their current form. Still at the beginning of the last century all inhabitants of a state's territory were members of the 'union of citizens' without regard to their linguistic affiliation or cultural origin. The rights of citizenship became extinct after permanent emigration. Beginning in the 1850s citizenship and national membership were fused (for Germany, see Franz 1992; for France, Withol de Wenden 1992; for a comparison of the two countries, Brubaker 1992). Apart from the differences between individual countries (see, for example, Schiffauer 1992), we can discern three main characteristics of the new order. Each stands at the centre of different scholarly approaches discussing the rise of nationalism, the development of modern forms of citizenship and the process of state-building. I hope to show below that by relating them to each other, we gain new insights into the problems of xenophobia and racism.

First, in the late nineteenth century, the now proverbial 'imagined' community (Anderson 1983) came into being, that is, the conception of a political community of destiny, based on common origin and historical experience. In Switzerland, for example, this representation centred on the mythical self-image of a nation composed originally of pastoralists and peasants, united in the struggle for freedom and grouped around a heroic alpine landscape (see Marchal and Mattioli 1992).<sup>12</sup> Eventually, a new relationship towards territoriality evolved. The immediate surroundings of a settlement, bound by relations of friendship, kinship and profession, were no longer the horizon for expectations of solidarity; the quasi-obligatory bonds of mutual assistance were extended to the national group.<sup>13</sup> The limits of state territory now formed the line beyond which the world of insecurities and dangers began.

Secondly, and even more important, the new order not only created an imagined community of the kind just described but also a real community of interests. This was the case in so far as the citizens of a nation-state became the group within which, after a long series of political crises and revolutionary upheavals, freedom of trade throughout the national territory, equality before the law, socio-political participation based on the principles of democracy and, finally, different social rights were granted and the rules of a liberal, constitutional and welfare-state society became institutionalized (see Marshall 1950; Bornschier 1988, ch. 11; de Swan 1993). From then on, the rights of participation and solidarity appear as collective goods of a nation with the state as its guardian. In other words, the institution of citizenship can be interpreted as a form of social closure (Brubaker 1992, ch. 1; Wimmer 1996b).<sup>14</sup>

Thirdly, contrary to multicultural empires such as the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and the Osmanian sultanate, the bureaucracy of modern nation-states and the bureaucratic process became ethnicized: access to state power was restricted to members of the nation and access to services of the new bureaucracy to those who could show themselves to be part of the imagined solidarity community. An administrative or military ruling class of 'ethnic others' like the Mamelukes or the Janissaries, became unthinkable; the rule of French-speaking lords over German-speaking peasants was now seen as a scandal (cf. Kappeler 1992).

Let us now see what emerges from the combination of all three elements: that the nation became an imagined community of solidarity with clear territorial boundaries which held political, social and economic rights as collective goods and finally, that the ethnicization of bureaucracy and bureaucratic practices had the combined effect of state, culture and territory seeming to belong to members of the nation (see Malkki 1990; Handler 1991). The state in this sense is owned by the people who have been united into a nation.

Why have the nationalistic self-image and the political institution of the nation-state been so successful? According to the argument followed here, the nation-state does not develop as a functional necessity of industrialized societies (contrary, for example, to Gellner 1991). Nor does it automatically result from the rise to power of the bourgeoisie, as Marxists would have it. Rather, it is to be interpreted as the outcome of a successful compromise of interests between different social groups: an exchange of the guarantee of political loyalty for the promise of participation and security. In a similar way, the institutional arrangements of the nation-state, a constitution, rules to resolve conflicts, a specific shaping of political and social rights, etc. are negotiated between different interest groups and thus reflect the balance of power between them and their varying capacities to enforce their vision of society.

Of course, the social compact between élites and various component elements of society developed only gradually in the course of a long and painful history of struggles over inclusion and exclusion. It is significant that racist constructions were initially used as ideological tools to legitimate the marginalization of peasant and proletarian sections of society, and only later in the process of the institutionalization of the nation-state were directed against non-national 'others', as Robert Miles (1993, ch. 3) has recently shown. This process of gradual inclusion

. . . facilitate[d] the ideological identification of certain social strata within the subordinate classes (which are defined as belonging and therefore as having a natural right of access to scarce rights and resources) with the institutions responsible for the organisation of production and distribution of material resources and political rights (i.e.

with capitalists and the institutions of the local and the national state) (Miles 1993, p. 102).

Periodically this institutional arrangement and the nationalistic self-image associated with it run into a crisis; the social compact breaks up, because the balance of forces between the different groups has changed in the course of economic and political developments. In the short space available I cannot discuss this in more detail, but perhaps we should remember that this does not happen *because* of higher immigration rates. Clearly indications of times of crisis are rising rates of suicide and criminality as well as the appearance of social movements of different political strands which try to enforce their vision of the future.<sup>15</sup>

One of these projects consists of revitalizing the national solidarity community, in insisting on the claim that the 'legitimate owners' of state and territory should have the right to a privileged seat in the theatre of society. During times of intensified social conflicts and general disorientation, the appeal to the national community aims at securing the future by safeguarding the rights and privileges of the indigenous who the state is supposed to protect. Whoever does not belong to the national majority such as an immigrant or a member of a religious or ethnic minority appears as an additional threat to the now precarious social union. In the eyes of the xenophobes there is a zero-sum game to be played over the collective goods gained by joint work, a fight for the institutionalized promises of solidarity.

The 'others' become strangers, intruders in an ideal community of nation or race – even the true causes of the breakup of this communal harmony and therefore responsible for the many insecurities that the future seems to bring. A kind of 'moral panic' spreads, to borrow a term from Pnina Werbner (1996), the fear of a chaotic breakdown of the social world triggered by the released flood of foreigners. When the 'presumption of loyalty' (Max Weber 1920) is abandoned, the cultural distance to the strangers seems to become insurmountable – independently, as we have seen, from objective cultural distances. Their integration into one's own social environment is therefore neither possible nor desirable and a feeling of solidarity cannot be expected of the 'owners' of the state, especially when the 'others' are seen as traitors to one's own political project, as is today the case with Muslim minorities who are stereotyped as fundamentalists.

Immigrant groups with high unemployment rates or asylum seekers also become targets of xenophobic hatred, because they seem to prevent the state from its true task, namely to look after the well-being of its 'owners' (cf. Willems 1995, pp. 517ff). In more general terms, the non-coincidence of social citizenship rights and national, political citizenship rights appears in the eyes of downwardly mobile groups as a scandal (Bommes and Halfmann 1994). Social workers, liberal big business and

advocates of a multicultural society are seen as traitors to the common national cause (see the case-study in Göran 1992).

In the radicalized, racist versions of this vision the 'people' have therefore to take things into their own hands and stop the 'others' from 'invading' one's own territory. A Manichean view of a fight between the morally superior 'nations', 'cultures' or 'races' and the barbarian ones is developed. Since neither accommodation nor assimilation is seen as being desirable or as being a possible solution to this conflict, every measure to hold the groups apart and restore the morally sanctioned hierarchy between them becomes legitimate, including even acts of violence or overt discrimination.

A xenophobic or racist way of interpreting the social crisis does not appeal equally to all members of a society. A change in the social balance of forces threatens the prestige of some groups and their social and economic standing more than others. These downwardly mobile groups fall back on this way of ensuring a future because they seem more dependent on promises of solidarity organized by a nation-state.<sup>16</sup> In our times, which are characterized by an accelerated growth of the tertiary sector and especially the information industry, and a corresponding decline of other economic sectors (see Klauder 1993), this holds true for people with a low educational background. There are many studies on the social distribution of xenophobic attitudes (Hoffmann-Nowotny 1978: pp. 88, 103, 105, 108; Wagner and Schönbach 1984; Mugny *et al.* 1991; Becker 1993; Linder 1993; Winkler 1994; Willems 1995) and of the composition of the electorate of contemporary right-wing parties who disseminate xenophobic discourses (Niedermayer 1990: pp. 572, 576; Betz 1991: pp. 12ff) that have shown this. As already mentioned, recent research on the National Socialist Workers' Party of Germany makes clear that the old Protestant middle classes and the rural proletariat of small-scale enterprises were the focuses of support for the political programme of the Nazis (Falter 1991). Both groups were clearly victims of the industrialization process of the time and threatened by a loss of social standing.

In the eyes of these groups the territorial dimension of the national community has a special importance (Waldmann 1989); it is viewed as solidarity among the familiar ones who live in a borough or village that becomes a mini-model of the nation. The physical presence and visibility of foreigners in these social spaces, and especially their integration in local schools and communal institutions, nurture perceptions of invasion, inundation and existential rivalry at times when the social contract breaks up and promises of a future become rare assets (de Jong 1989; see the case-studies of Cohen 1991).<sup>17</sup>

Xenophobic and racist perceptions of social reality do not therefore become acute because they are strategically instrumental in a fight for scarce jobs or housing. Neither does it make much sense to interpret them as a deplorable result of a culture clash caused by migratory



movements across countries and continents. Nor are they mere radicalizations of the institutionalized discourse of exclusion and devaluation that political and administrative élites generate. According to the hypothesis I have tried to develop, xenophobia and racism should be seen rather as appealing to the pact of solidarity into which the ethnicized bureaucracy and a national community have entered and which at times of intensified social conflict seem fragile, especially from the viewpoint of those threatened by loss of their social standing. In their eyes, the cultural differences become insurmountable and the foreigner appears as an illegitimate competitor for living space and jobs. The xenophobic discourse does not serve to reassure the egos of especially weak personalities, as assumed by some psychologists' studies. But this is an element in a political struggle about who deserves the right to be cared for by state and society: a fight for the collective goods of the state. In the final analysis, xenophobia and racism result in their contemporary appearance from basing collective identities and granting participatory rights on the idea of a national community. In other words, they are an integral part of the institutional order of the nation-state, or, using an expression of Étienne Balibar's, 'an inner completion of nationalism, which is always overshooting it' (Balibar 1988, my translation).

According to this view, xenophobic movements and ethnic conflicts in the former USSR and the South should be treated as phenomena of the same order. In both a fight for the collective goods of the state is at the heart of the political dynamics. In the former USSR and the South, however, the rise of the nation-state has had different implications. The selective and multiple ethnicization of the bureaucracy leads to excluding much larger categories of people from the imagined and real community of solidarity. Therefore, the different subgroups of an ethnic category begin to perceive themselves as members of a political community of destiny and to fight for control of the state and for the title of its nation (Wimmer 1994; 1995c; 1995d; forthcoming).

This is merely an outline of an explanatory approach, and not an elaborated theory already founded on empirical detail. Much further research is needed to make this interpretation of xenophobia and racism as ultra-nationalism plausible and to find more than indirect empirical evidence for the hypotheses put forward in this article. If, for the time being, we consider this approach to be sensible, what could be said about a possible 'solution' of the problems of xenophobia and racism? It would certainly be useful not to dissolve the institution of the state as such but of the *nation*-state as the bone of contention in these conflicts. To attain this end, a transnationalization and at the same time subsidiarization of state functions could be equally useful (see Held 1995) as the redefinition of bonds which hold a political entity together. All those living in a state should then share not a common national heritage but a common political and civil culture (see Habermas 1993). Attempts to change the

course of history in this direction would be confronted with the fierce resistance of those for whom the national community of solidarity continues to make sense. One of the most difficult tasks for the future would be to find a way of taking their interests and perceptions into account. Then, hopefully, they would be equally included in a new social contract as would those men and women who today suffer from xenophobic and racist violence.

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## Notes

1. Three reservations should be stated at the outset: first, for sake of brevity I shall not discuss the historical development of the theoretical positions and the various critiques of these positions but present them in the way they are actually put forward. Second, the various theories on non-European racist social formations such as e.g. plantation societies, on the relation between racism and colonialism, etc. cannot be discussed here (see the overview of Hall 1980). I shall have to confine myself to explanations of contemporary racism and xenophobia in late industrial societies. Third, even this restricted overview can meet no claim for comprehensive treatment. Notably omitted are the ethnopsychological works (e.g., Erdheim), the sociopsychological research on racist prejudice, socio-biological (Eibl-Eibesfeld, van den Berghe), historical (Mosse, Poliakov, and recently Geiss), cultural historical (Dumont; Schiffauer), and world system theory/Marxist explanatory approaches (Balibar and Wallerstein). Dittrich (1991) offers a compilation of sociological research in the USA and in Germany; Werbner (1996) documents the state of British research; a brief overview of various approaches is provided, among others, by Wimmer (1992).

2. It may be useful to define the concepts of xenophobia and racism before starting the discussion (see Taguieff 1988; Miles 1991, pp. 93–103; Miles 1993, ch. 3). Five different constructions of the relation between 'us' and 'them' can be distinguished. Together they form the repertoire of tropes from which modern discourses of exclusion are constructed: firstly, the fear of being 'inundated' by 'others' and becoming estranged from one's own culture (fears of inundation); secondly, the image that mixing different cultural or biological 'entities' is harmful (phobia of interbreeding and creolization); thirdly, the idea that the stamps of certain biological or cultural 'characteristics' are so 'profound', that they cannot be changed during the lifetime of an individual or the history of the whole group (idea of impregnation); fourthly, a hierarchization of the groups according to a value judgement that places one's own group at the top and makes it seem legitimate to marginalize others; and, finally, the perception of a zero-sum game between foreigners and 'ourselves'. In my view, this list allows one to distinguish between xenophobia and racism as two points on a continuum of ever more exclusionist discourses. Fears of inundation, phobia of interbreeding and the perception of a zero-sum game make up for a xenophobic world-view. Biological and 'cultural' racisms are additionally characterized by the hierarchization of the groups and the idea of impregnation.

3. Olzak 1993, p. 94, footnote; ch. 8 for the period between 1870 and 1880; ch. 9 for the entire period under study.

4. Falter (1991, ch. 8.2) reached this conclusion in his analysis of voting behaviour during the rise of the National Socialists in Germany. The lower the unemployment, the more success they had at the polls. In areas with high unemployment, on the other hand, the Communist Party proved popular.

A questionnaire by Sinus (1983, cited in Heitmeyer 1992, p. 45) aimed at the perception of competition among unemployed German youths. Contrary to my thesis, the percentage of youths unemployed or formerly unemployed who believed that foreigners took away jobs lay at 20 per cent, about double the figure of employed youths. But the ratio is reversed for those who consider this belief patently false – among youths who had been without work for more than six months the figure is higher (36 per cent) than among employed youths of similar age (29 per cent) (*ibid.*). Thus, there is no clear connection between unemployment and the perception of illegitimate competition.

Heitmeyer's book also provides a table (Heitmeyer 1992, p. 52, based on Baethge *et al.* 1980 as well as Rosen 1985) which shows that there is no linear connection between youth employment and the number of violent acts committed by right-wing extremists in the Federal Republic of Germany.

5. It is to be inferred from the most comprehensive study on the subject by Hoffmann-Nowotny on Switzerland at the end of the 1960s that, among other things, the degree of competition in the job market does not determine the degree of hostility to foreigners: Although the unskilled and skilled workers between 1950 and 1960 were confronted with the quadrupling of the foreign ratio (to 39 per cent in the total occupational group) (Hoffmann-Nowotny 1973, p. 48), they were in the same range (that is, about 46 per cent) advocating professional discrimination against the foreign workforce as were staff employees and officials (*ibid.*, pp. 118ff) in whose environment the ratio of foreigners during the same period rose only 1.7 per cent to 6.8 per cent (*ibid.*, p. 48). By contrast, only 28 per cent of the skilled workers pleaded for sharp discriminatory measures even though the percentage of foreigners in the category of all workers during the course of the decade doubled to 28 per cent without seasonal workers, 40 per cent when they were included (*ibid.*, pp. 48ff).

6. Van Amersfoort found that the geographical and social structural dispersion of the Dutch Indonesians had the effect of their dissolution as an ethnic group, a view that has recently been criticized by Wim Willems *et al.* (1990) for various reasons.

7. According to Hoffmann-Nowotny (1973, p. 159) 84 per cent of Italian migrant workers in 1969 had less than eight years of schooling; 47.2 per cent even less than five years.

8. Note that this also applies to the producers of public discourse *par excellence*, the journalists. A quantitative content analysis of the Swiss print media which has been published recently (Küpfer 1994) shows that the press can be acquitted of charges of one-sided or even xenophobic coverage. The contributions most hostile to foreigners are found in the 'Letters to the Editor' column. Only the popular newspaper *Der Blick* tends to report comparably often on acts of violence committed by those seeking asylum. Van Dijk's (1991) assertion of a systematic derogation of foreigners in the media is reduced in the case of the Swiss press to one of negative coverage, which is characteristic of the media system in general.

9. Heitmeyer (e.g., 1992) argues similarly in his studies of extreme-right youth orientation, though in connection with Beck's individualization thesis. Comparable arguments were already presented in the late 1950s by William Kornhauser (in '*The Politics of Mass Society*') and also play a role in the French discussion on the *Front National*, though here less will be referred to the American atomization thesis or to Beck than to Durkheim's term 'anomie' (Niedermayer 1990, p. 578).

10. Today, according to election analyses of Niedermayer (1990) and Betz (1991), a marked correlation can no longer be established between the support of rightist radical parties and membership of the 'old' middle class, perhaps with the exception of Denmark

(Niedermayer 1990, p. 572, but see Betz 1991, p. 13; for the entire group of self-employed in Germany, see also Becker 1993, pp. 145ff); analysis of voting behaviour also reveals that objectively deprived persons (e.g., long-term unemployed) do not consider rightist radicals' problem solutions as more plausible than do others (Niedermayer 1990, p. 574). In increasing numbers, on the other hand, skilled blue-collar workers seem to belong to the voter pools of these parties (Betz 1991, pp. 12ff, in reference to the election results in Norway, Denmark, France, Germany and Austria. The Norwegian 'Progress Party', to be sure, finds especially great support from unemployed youths. Regarding Germany, see Winkler 1994, p. 81).

11. Furthermore, Silbermann and Hüters (1995, pp. 84ff) have shown by means of a representative survey that there is no connection between the perception of a general social crisis and the degree of xenophobic attitudes that a person holds.

12. Other metaphors of national communities are discussed in Alonso 1994, pp. 382–4; Kapferer 1989.

13. For homogenization of identitarian space, see Gellner 1991; for France, Weber 1976; for the corresponding efforts in Switzerland, see Bendix 1992.

14. This is also shown by the American discussions over the normative basis of restrictions on immigration (see Carens 1987).

15. See Wimmer 1995b, on this terminology for analysis of social change and a corresponding model of the historical developments in Mexico from the seventeenth century to the present. For a more detailed theory of crisis causation see Bornschier (1988).

16. Corroborating this thesis is the very strong statistical correlation between, on the one hand, the perception of future opportunities of one's own professional category and the mobility aspirations considered within reach by the person and, on the other, the perception of being overrun by foreigners (Hoffmann-Nowotny 1973, p. 89), the stress on national peculiarity (ibid, p. 102), and approval of discrimination against foreigners on the job (ibid, p. 120). The better the future chances of one's own professional group are rated and the higher a person's desire for upward mobility (and his belief in its being attainable), the less he will perceive being overrun by foreigners, the less he will stress the national peculiarity of the Swiss and the less he pleads for discrimination against foreigners. To explain the discrimination attitude, the estimation of future opportunity is even more important than a person's professional position (ibid; however, Silbermann and Hüters [1995, pp. 63–67] found only a weak correlation between the degree of xenophobic attitudes and the estimation of one's own future economic opportunities).

There are also studies showing that 70 per cent of right-wing extremist offenders were clearly downwardly mobile (Kalinowsky *et al.* 1985, cited in Heitmeyer 1992, p. 54) and that it is not the really downgraded (e.g., long-term unemployed) who are attracted by right-wing populism or radical politics. It seems much rather to be those who *fear* economic and social marginalization or actually have good reasons to fear it (Niedermayer 1990, p. 573f). Winkler (1994, p. 83) also cites a German study by Veen, Lepszy, and Mnich which establishes a great uncertainty about the future felt by Republican voters, although the studies of Roth as well as Falter and Schumann do not confirm this finding (ibid).

Yet the correlation between the perception of future opportunity and fear of being overrun by foreigners appears clearly at the aggregate level: studying the period 1966–1967, Liepelt (1967, cited in Heitmeyer 1992, p. 52) has been able to establish a clear inverse correlation between the index of private economic expectations in Germany and the election potential of the right-wing radical NPD.

A further indicator to support this thesis was delivered in a study of the 'winners' of the modernization processes of the 1980s and 1990s including service employees such as higher-level bank employees, advertising agents, computer specialists, etc. (Grimm and Ronneberger 1994, p. 106). The 'cosmopolitan self-image' of this group made it – according to the authors, who originally set out to prove the opposite – 'resistant' against right-wing ideologies (ibid, p. 123). Some 113 of 118 of those questioned even confessed to a consumerist multiculturalism and favoured the slogan 'Foreigners welcome!'

17. However, this territorial aspect should not be overestimated because racism can also exist where foreigners are hardly present (see the Polish 'anti-Semitism without Jews' or the marked xenophobic tendencies in the East German states as opposed to the Western ones [Castner and Castner 1992]) or are hardly identifiable as such (as shown by the Nazi hunt for assimilated Jews who were considered especially dangerous).

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