

CERS Working Paper

Neo Nazism in Germany

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Introduction

This critical analysis will focus on Germany and the extent to which processes of racialisation are still active throughout the country. One of the key associations of Germany and racism is that of Nazism, which is why this analysis will focus on the period of late modernity and post World War 2. With the collapse of the Third Reich, many measures were taken by the Allies to ensure such atrocities such as genocide and ethnic cleansing would not take place in Germany again. Despite this, the rise of neo-Nazism has been an issue at the forefront of post World War 2 scrutiny of racism in Germany. A United Nations report in 2009 claims, “There are 30,000 right-wing extremist in Germany, 4,800 are believed to be neo-Nazis [and] some 9,500 persons are believed to engage in racist violence” (United Nations 2009:9). The focus of this essay will be on a number of themes that will best aid our theorising of racism in Germany. These include, an analysis of institutionalised racism, and a look at neo-Nazism and its subsequent ties with right-wing extremism through various alleged neo-Nazi parties. This involves a particular focus on the National Democratic Party. Wagner (2014) states that one can identify similarities between Hitler’s Nazi Party and the neo-Nazis of today with ease. One obvious common denominator between these two movements is the discrimination of the Jewish community. This is due to a number of reasons, one being the belief that they are a national threat, as Law puts it;

“The contemporary vilification, discrimination and hostility faced by the...Jews in the Nazi Holocaust, arise from their position as a racial threat to national stability” (Law 2010:7).

Other themes to be covered include the issue that neo-Nazism is not just a historical issue but also a contemporary one. Thus, being something that has the alarming potential to gain support in the future. Neo-Nazism is increasingly manifesting itself in far-right politics in Germany and so in order to gain a thorough understanding of these processes or racialisation, one must look at the definition of right-wing extremism, which can be defined as;

“Entailing an anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian concept of political regime, which denies the universal right of freedom and equality of people... [It also includes] the idea of a natural order of things, [that] implies an ethnological or racial concept that is not only linked with ethnocentrism, but is also combined with an exaggerated nationalism, often followed by hostile attitudes towards members of other nations as well as other nations and states themselves” (Westle and Niedermayar 1992: p87-88)

One of the main parties associated with the extreme-right in Germany is the National Democratic Party (NPD). There have been various attempts to outlaw extreme right-wing parties in the post-World War 2 era, which includes the NPD. “All 16 German states filled a motion in the federal constitutional court to ban the NPD” (Overdorf 2014). Note that this quote was taken from an article written in early 2014, highlighting the extent to which this is a contemporary problem as well as an historical one. The states that signed this motion argue that the NPD has policies and beliefs that are in line and similar with Hitler’s Nazi Party and therefore espouses a racist and violent ideology (Crossland 2013). The way in which far right

politics and the NPD in particular, contribute to racism in Germany is seen through various branches of racial hatred. Thus, the ideology of the NPD has been labelled “xenophobic, inhuman, anti-Semitic and anti-democratic” (Interior Minister cited in Crossland 2013). It is not hard to see why extreme right parties such as the NPD have been associated with neo-Nazi ideals. Overdorf (2014) states that by providing the NPD with the mandatory state funding, as allowed with all German political parties, means that the German taxpayers are essentially funding neo-Nazi groups’ propaganda. This is done by the fact that neo-Nazi action groups are believed to try and use the NPD structure to advance their own goals. Even the language used by the NPD is eerily reminiscent to that of the Nazi propaganda (BBC News 2012). This process is similar and can be compared with what the Irish Republican Army (IRA) did with Sinn Fein. During the IRA’s most active and mobile years, they used Sinn Fein as a political wing of a more militant and extreme political movement. One could make the case that if this was possible in Northern Ireland, then the belief that more militant neo-Nazi pressure groups are behind the NPD could very well be a reality. Particularly when considering the fact that this type of ideology has had a lot of support in the country’s recent history.

Another way in which the NPD has been linked with neo-Nazi ideals is through various alleged crimes that they’ve been accused of, these include;

“The murders of 9 immigrants between 2000 and 2006, the bombing of an immigrant-owned barbershop in Cologne in 2004 and the murder of a policewoman and attempted murder of her partner in 2007” (Overdorf 2014)

An NPD official called Ralf Wohlleben personifies some of these crimes. Wohlleben was acting as informant for authorities that were part of the movement to ban the NPD from the political scene. At the same time as this he has been accused of supplying the party or associates of it with the gun that was allegedly used in the murder of the 9 immigrants mentioned above between 2000-2006. The suggestion that these murders are clearly racially motivated and can be supported by the National Democratic Party’s own manifesto or brochure;

“An African, Asian or Oriental can never be a German, because handing out printed documents (...) doesn’t change their biological heritage. Members of other races will therefore (...) always remain foreign bodies regardless of how long they live in Germany”. (NPD brochure for party officials cited in Crossland 2013)

This quotation directly highlights the NPD’s intolerance to foreigners in their country. Which in turn, can be used as strong evidence when accusing the NPD of the murder of immigrants. It is clear then that the NPD directly announce their anti-immigration and xenophobic values through the propaganda funded by the party. They have also been accused of doing this indirectly, as seen in 2011, when

NPD politician Udo Voigt, used the slogan “Gas Geben”, when campaigning and promoting his ideals to the electorate. This highly controversial phrase can be translated to mean, “step on the gas”, which has been inevitably criticised because of the clear anti-Semitic connotations, which are indirectly glorifying the Nazi death chambers (Eckardt 2009). What is more, a youth branch of the NPD sparked outrage in 2009, as they were identified as the culprits behind the sending of customised racist condoms to certain politicians. The condom packets had a slogan of “for foreigners and selected Germans”. The condoms were accompanied by a letter which included the text; “protesting the population change” (Eckardt 2009). This was a reference to the increasingly multicultural society that was beginning to take shape in Germany and the subsequent opposition of it by radical right-wing Germans.

This again highlights how neo-Nazism and therefore racist ideals is an issue in Germany. The fact that there is a renowned ‘youth branch’ of the NPD, known as the Youth National

Democrats, puts into perspective how these nationalist values are making their way into mainstream politics. The youth branch is also eerily reminiscent to the Hitler Youth of the Nazi Party. Once more, we are reminded that not only is this a contemporary problem, but also a growing problem. Hence, this is something that needs to be addressed if it is not to have serious repercussions in the future, that could echo the ethnic cleansing seen in Germany prior to and throughout World War 2. This is why there are such widespread calls for extremist parties to be banned, as a repeat of what the Nazi Party did could be emulated through a party such as the NPD.

The Office for the Protection of the Constitution echoes these worries in their annual report for 2011, stating that the NPD “strives to overcome the current political system in Germany” (The Office for the Protection of the Constitution cited in BBC News 2012). As discussed, there have been various movements that have attempted to ban these parties, despite this, one could argue that throughout Germany there is still a somewhat apathetic attitude toward this growing problem. See in the reluctance of the incumbent government to sign a petition. As a result, given what has happened in the past when far-right parties win a majority of seats in the German parliament it should be met with a sense of foreboding. Herber (2013) highlights the condemnation of the incumbent government through an interview with political commentator David Crossland. This continues another theme of this research report regarding the part that post-war governments have had to play in the marginalizing of extreme right parties. The condemnation by Crossland included remarks about how Angela Merkel, the current chancellor of Germany, has done next to nothing to address the issue of neo-Nazi violence, particularly that associated with political parties. He goes on to say her apathy is a result of careerism, which;

“From a politicians point of view, is quite understandable. It's not a major electoral issue; it's not a vote winner. And Merkel is known for focusing her policies on vote maximization” (Crossland cited in Herber 2013).

The comments come in the wake of the already briefly discussed petition, which was signed by 16 German states that sought to ban the NPD. The fact that parliament and Merkel's government in Berlin refused to support the petition, coupled with the knowledge that the courts dismissed a similar case in 2003 suggests that the banning of the NPD is not going to be straightforward. In order to ban a party, a motion must prove that it propagates racism and seeks to overthrow the government. This is clearly a difficult process and is made harder by the fact it is not a leading issue on the governments agenda. Thus, the success of the current notion to ban the party is doubtful.

In order to gain an accurate perception of far-right political party's agendas, one must take into account the primary sources. The NPD's official website is littered with obvious references to a strong sense of nationalism that has underlying anti-immigration attitudes. For example;

“ “German” social policy in the age of globalization and widespread liberalization is characterized by tight budgets, dwindling services and exploding costs for local control and contributors - while non German immigrants are privileged in the German welfare systems, while billions in German tax money for non-insurance benefits and beyond purposes to be expended, are not in the interest of Germany and its people” (NPD official website)

The editor of the website puts the first word ‘Deutsche’, or in the case of the translation for the quotation ‘German’, in inverted commas. This is done to emphasize the fact that German social policy is no longer for the German people, evoking a sense of bitterness that a significant amount of it is focused on foreigners. The NPD's intolerance of ‘outsiders’ goes as far as not accepting non-white Germans as German nationals. NPD advocates see the tax money spent on non-white Germans and foreigners as ‘wasted’ as it is not in the interest of

'Germany and its people' (NPD official website). In the 'Identity' section of the website, the NPD express various concerns over what they see as the loss of the German identity as a result of immigration; "In many metropolitan centres the proportion of non-Germans approaches the 50% mark" (NPD official website). The website goes on to state how the building of religious institutions such as mosques are "symbols of Islamic conquest" (NPD Official website). This along with the belief that "mass immigration and the doomed 'integration' of millions of foreigners in Germany inevitably lead to crime" (NPD official website) is a clear example of the NPD's xenophobic tendencies and attitudes. It also acts as a stark reminder of the social engineering that could take place if they were to gain power.

Contrary to what some people believe, Nazism is not just a historical problem. This is accentuated by the election results of recent years, which highlight an increasing amount of support for extreme right-wing parties. In Germany, the outcome of elections is done via a proportional representation voting system. This enables us to gain a proper understanding of the amount of political support these far-right groups have. One party in the late 1980's gained an alarming amount of support as Husbands (1992) puts it:

"There was considerable surprise in January 1989 when The Republicans emerged with 7.5% of votes in the election to the West Berlin parliament...The European Parliament election of June 1989 was the high point of the R.E.P.' success...They attracted 7.1% (two million votes) nationwide." (Husbands 1992: 275).

The Republicans are a neo-fascist movement that were founded in 1963. They have often been accused of indirect or direct racism because of their affiliation with the extreme-right. One significant statistic is that they won 15% of the vote in Munich in the 1989 elections. Despite this, and their electoral successes outlined above, Husbands (1992) states that if any extreme-right electoral breakthrough was going to take place it would not be by The Republicans. Instead it would be the NPD, founded in 1964, or the Germans People's Union (DVU) List D, who were officially an established party in 1987, and would go on to merge with the NPD. Only a fraction of the far-right political parties of recent years have been mentioned. Despite this, it is clear to see that while support for these ideals consists of a minority of the population, it is by no means something that should be disregarded because of it. The fact that there is support for these parties shows that there remains a lot of individuals in Germany that are concerned with the influx of foreigners to an extent that it can be considered racist.

Another significant report that will aid our understanding of racial discourse in Germany is that of the ECRI report. As of 2011, the report declares the estimation of the number of extreme right-wing organisations to be 225, whose members' total about 22,150 members as of 2012. The NPD is again identified as the most prominent source of hate speech in Germany (ECRI report 2014). One of the key themes of this report is to highlight the notion that neo-Nazi ideals and subsequent racism is a growing problem.

"The percentage of the population supporting extreme right-wing groups fell from 7.6 % in 2010 to 7.3 % in 2011 in the western part of the country, the figure increased significantly in the East, from 10.5% to 15.8%" (ECRI report 2014:18)

The statistics in the ECRI report shows that there is a net increase in support across Germany for extremism in the past few years. Since the collapse of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), there was a sense of foreboding as the East of the country was and still remains today notorious for being the focus of militant neo-Nazism. Hence, the spread and increase of neo-Nazi activism was of great concern when the unification of the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany transpired. These concerns were not unwarranted as;

“There have been widely publicised attacks on immigrant workers, including an internationally publicised murder in Dresden, there have been attacks on hostels for asylum-seekers...attacks on Poles crossing into Germany after the abolition of visa requirements...confrontations at football matches between rival extreme-right fans...and anti-Semitic desecrations” (Husbands 1992:282).

Neo-Nazi activism, as discussed, brings to the forefront the issue of anti-Semitism. The Stephen Roth Institute is one of the leading centers for the study of contemporary anti-Semitism and racism. By studying the reports from 2009-2012, one would be able to form a better understanding of the extent of the problem in Germany.

Firstly, the report of 2009 outlines the comments made by the president of the German Federal Criminal Police Office, which highlight the fact that “almost three acts of racial violence were committed in Germany daily and some three anti-semitically motivated assaults took place per month” (Stephen Roth Institute 2009:12). Anti-Semitism across Germany increased during the period of the Gaza War, when “activists from the extreme-right, extreme-left and Islamic fundamentalists took part in many virulently anti-Israel demonstrations” (Stephen Roth Institute 2009:12). One rally in Mainz that attracted approximately 5,000 people saw banners with references to Auschwitz and other anti-Jewish slurs. At the same protest there was a small group of Israelis bearing a flag that were attacked and insulted. Instead of protecting the few supporters, police accused them of provoking the violence that ensued. This, not only underlines the great extent to which racism was apparent in 2009 but also the institutionalised racism that is still occurring in the police force, through pre-determined fundamentalist ideals. The conclusion of the 2009 report states that there has been a decrease in violent attack on Jews in Germany, 33 in total in the year 2009. Despite this, many Jews report a sense of insecurity, which will be partly a result of the increase of anti-Zionism to the extent that it is becoming ‘gesellschaftsfähig’, or in other words, socially acceptable (Stephen Roth Institute 2009).

The 2009 report that saw the statistics on racially motivated violent attacks decrease, was essentially nullified by the 2010 report. The number of incidents in Germany had increased to 38. One of the most notable recorded cases included a group of Jews being beaten, insulted and struck on the head by bottles, just for affirming they were Jewish (Stephen Roth Institute 2010). What is more, immigrants who are of ethnic minorities in Germany have been carrying out anti-Semitic attacks across the country as well. In this case, a number of youths of Arab descent assaulted a group of Jews from the local Jewish community. This led to Heinz Fromm, the head of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, drawing ideological similarities between the neo-Nazis and Islamic immigrant communities in Germany (Stephen Roth Institute 2010). This suggests that anti-Semitism in Germany is no longer just a prejudice ideal associated with neo-Nazism and white Germans. It is spreading beyond that to other ethnic minorities and extremist groups and arguably making its way into mainstream society. The growth of neo-Nazism has not stopped at internal ethnic minorities though. Countries across the world have recognised the continuation of neo-Nazism after World War 2 and this was seen at the South African World Cup. Lebanese and Syrian youth cheered the German team for their continued indirect identification with Nazi Germany and the associated attitudes towards Jews. One of the most noteworthy conclusions one can draw from the 2010 report is in line with one of the themes in this report. It concerns the potential for the continuation and growth of far-right extremism. This is summed up in the quotation that follows;

“The prospect of a second generation of eastern neo-Nazis has dashed any lingering hopes that the upsurge in far right support following German unification in 1990 might have been a temporary phenomenon caused by the collapse of the East German economy and the resulting social upheaval and mass unemployment”. (Stephen Roth Institute 2010:22).

A prominent issue that arose in the 2011 report was regarding the National Socialist Underground, which is an underground neo-Nazi terrorist group. The group is associated with ten murders. Nine of which, were immigrants and it is clear that these were racially aggravated killings. Anti-Semitism was a significant part of the National Socialist Underground's ideology and in order to fund their activities the organization sold an anti-Semitic version of the game 'Monopoly'. Some graphic examples of the anti-Semitism seen in the game include the replacing of trains stations with concentration camps. In addition, the game was complete with depictions of evil-looking Jews, Hitler, gasworks and burning Israeli flags (Stephen Roth Institute 2011).

The manifestation of anti-Semitic attitudes is recognised internally in Germany as well as externally. The German 'Expertkreis Antisemitismus' (Group of experts on anti-Semitism), presented a document to the German cabinet in November of 2011 that showed that "20% of Germans manifested latent anti-Semitic attitudes" (Stephen Roth Institute 2011:24). The fact that the word latent is used highlights the potential for the growth and development of these attitudes, which if trends continue, could mean that neo-Nazism will be able to feed of this and therefore lead to even more racial marginalisation of Jews in Germany in the future (refer back to where I spoke about current trends for neo-Nazism rising). Once more, we are faced with the realisation that the current trends suggest there is an alarmingly high potential for neo-Nazi attitudes to grow in the future. The statistic from the German 'Expertkreis Antisemitismus' is unsettling considering it is a country where mass genocide has already taken place in the recent past. These underlying attitudes could become increasingly active, as things such as the population of well-known neo-Nazi villages in Germany grow. As one paper reports;

"The echoes of the Third Reich are quite deliberate, in Jamel, a tiny collection of redbrick farmhouses, fringed by forest, dozens of villagers describe themselves as Nazis and a majority turns out to vote for the far right...Jamel is for some the tip of the iceberg; an indication of how the far-Right in Germany is open and active, especially in areas of former East Germany where jobs are scarce" (The Telegraph 2013).

The reference to 'the tip of the iceberg' in the quote above reinforces the comment in the Stephen Roth report regarding the 'latent' support for anti-Semitism in Germany. This could be a significant problem in the future, as the little town Jamel is growing and will continue to grow, due to the attractiveness of it to neo-Nazis. It gives them a place to congregate and spread their word. The fact that it is situated in the East of Germany, where jobs are scarce due to the economy and influx of foreigners, makes it a lot easier to attract those who support these attitudes to the town.

Another important issue to consider when analysing racialisation in Germany is the fine line between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. The most recent report from the Stephen Roth Institute (2012) considers this and highlights the fiercely debated issue of whether severe criticism of Israel extenuates and conceals the actual nature of the criticism, which is of anti-Semitic nature. While the number of violent attacks on Jews had decreased in Germany to 23 according to the 2012 report, other anti-Semitic incidents became increasingly common in the years leading up to and including 2012. For example, instead of attacks on Jewish individuals, Jewish institutions were often targeted. The Stephen Roth Institute (2010) explains how various synagogues were attacked with Molotov cocktails in Mainz and Worms. The issue is also addressed in the 2012 report;

"Due to numerous threats of terrorist activity against the Jewish community in Berlin, the police declared that security would be tightened at the community office, since they constituted a potentially prime target in the city" (Stephen Roth Institute 2012:6).

While not directly implied in all primary and secondary resources, after studying various reports and literature, one can make a case that there is a certain extent of institutionalised racism in Germany today, especially in the East. These accusations can be built from the fact that local authorities are less able and less willing to control neo-Nazi activism, particularly when compared to the extent of the efforts of West German authorities. One of the most prominent examples of this was the protest in Mainz already mentioned, whereby police denied racially motivated attacks were occurring. What is more, it has been argued that police in Saxony are somewhat sympathetic to neo-Nazi activities. This has led to reports of police being reluctant to interfere, particularly when witnessing first hand attacks by neo-Nazi skinheads on immigrant workers (Husbands 1992). The institutionalised racism in Germany is further exposed by a neo-Nazi investigation associated with the murders committed by the National Socialist Underground. The incompetence of the authorities as a result of discrimination is mentioned;

“The investigation revealed how racist assumptions hindered detective work...For instance the police was so convinced that only the Turkish mafia would murder Turkish Germans” (Knight 2012).

If the same logic is applied by German authorities to the murders of all non-German ethnicities in the country then racially motivated assaults and murders will be met with ignorance as one could argue many already have. As Knight puts it “the existence of the odd racist police officer is hardly news, of course. The real scandal is that racism is allowed to influence police work” (Knight 2012).

It is clear then from this and the multiple reports from the Stephen Roth institute, that it is not just the indigenous German public whose attitudes are somewhat inline with neo-Nazism, but local and state authorities have also emitted these ideals.

The European Network Against Racism (ENAR) report is a useful document when assessing racism in certain countries, in particularly institutionalised racism. It goes through various aspects of society in a systematic way in order to give an NGO’s perspective on the extent of racism. Regarding employment, it reports; “Persons with a migrant background independent of their qualifications are discriminated against with regard to access to the labour market” (ENAR report 2009/10:4). This has been the case to such an extent that migration to other countries surrounding Germany has increased because it remains such a significant problem.

On to the issue of housing the report states;

“Persons with a migrant background independent of their income, their language knowledge or education are discriminated against on the basis of foreign sounding names...[migrants] pay more rent for low quality houses and flats and have less access to better and more affluent areas” (ENAR report 2009/10:4).

Despite the ENAR report flagging up these issues regarding employment and housing, one of the most notable issues of discrimination in the report is regarding health. While those who are of a migrant background will have health conditions in line with those of non-migrants, the racialisation process actually occurs because;

“They are deprived of access to specific medical services [and] lack information about health entitlements and how to use the health system...[there is also] evidence that some practitioners refuse treatment because of the name of the patient” (ENAR report 2009/10:4)

This is significant due to the fact that those who are of a migrant background, will on average have more serious health issues. Therefore, they will be increasingly in need of emergency care due to discrimination from the health services.

Regarding education, racism is a delicate subject. However, most states in Germany allow children of migrants and asylum seekers whose deportation is not occurring in the immediate future to access full education (ENAR report 2009/10). This is a promising sign for the tolerance of migrants but is undone by the fact that the allocation of resources in the education system is disproportionate meaning that the standard of teaching is somewhat lax compared to all German-national schools. Despite this, the education system seems to have a more or less level playing field when it comes to Germans and non-Germans, meaning the extent of institutionalised racism in this branch of society shows promising signs.

The various themes discussed in this critical analysis of the processes of racialisation in Germany have been explored, discussed and analysed. The quintessential theme that has occurred through the analysis of various primary and secondary texts is that racism is still prominent in Germany today, and if anything is showing signs of growth. Despite the efforts of the Allies and the Soviet Union in post World War 2 Germany to quash any remaining Nazi agendas, there still seems to be the instillation of extreme right views across Germany and in particular in the East. The fact that many parties that have been discussed were all established post-war, suggests that there is a strong foundation of people in Germany whose values are in line with those of neo-Nazism in Germany. When assessing the extent to which racism occurs, through manifesting itself through violence, protests and the sort. One must take into account the 'dark-figure of crime', which is the process of acknowledging that some crime goes unrecorded, thereby the official statistic may not be accurate. There are two main reasons for this, these are because the victim is afraid to report it or is unwilling to. In the case of the latter, this could be because of the incompetence that it will be met with by the authorities for reasons such as institutionalised racism within the police force, which this essay has recognised as a considerable problem. Furthermore, it is clear that it is not just white Germans with racist tendencies throughout Germany. Here, The Stephen Roth Institute is referring to the rise in anti-Semitic incidents during and after the Gaza War;

“The explanation lies in the combining of traditional anti-Semitism centered on negative stereotypes of the Jew, the perception of the State of Israel as a Jewish state bearing negative Jewish character traits; and the adoption of such stereotypes not only by neo-Nazis and extremist right-wingers but also by radical Muslim youth” (Stephen Roth Institute 2010:4).

It is therefore evident that the extent of racism in Germany does not stop at white Germans with neo-Nazi ideals showing intolerance to not just Jews, but all ethnic minorities. Rather, minorities such as Muslims have been known to engage in racist behaviour themselves, particularly towards the Jewish community. Despite the fact they could be victimised themselves, by individuals or movements such as the National Democratic Party on a purely xenophobic basis. It would seem that the Jewish community remains one of the most marginalised groups in Germany.

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