

# On Adenauer, Hegel, and ... Migration

(or, How to Interpret Europe's Migrant "Crisis")

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## **Abstract**

Germany expects to receive more than 1 million refugees in 2015. While international commentators have admired Chancellor Merkel's response to this "crisis," the situation is complex and the German government's actions and Merkel's own statements reflect multiple perspectives. In this working paper, I draw on a philosophical tradition dating back to the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel to interpret the political debate of immigration and Germany's response to the recent migrant crisis.

## **Preface and Acknowledgements**

This *RCIS Working Paper* is an edited version of the inaugural Konrad Adenauer Lecture, which I delivered in Ottawa on 25 November, 2015. I thank Ambassador Wnendt, his wife, and his colleagues at the German Embassy for the invitation and their hospitality. The views expressed in this paper are my own. I also thank the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and the Royal Society of Canada for supporting my research with the Konrad Adenauer Research Award, and Ted Killin and Helge Piepenburg for their editorial assistance.

## **Introduction**

Since this lecture is named after the German politician Konrad Adenauer, I will use the case of Adenauer to segue into the main arguments of this lecture. These arguments can be summarized as follows: 1) contradiction is inherent in politics and 2) we do have a framework available to us that can help us explain these contradictions. I want to illustrate this framework using the example of a study on immigration policy and debate in Canada and Germany, as well as Germany's response to the current arrival of refugees.

Adenauer was the first Chancellor of West Germany after WWII. He served in this role between 1949 and 1963. His nickname was *der Alte*, or "the old man," conferred in a respectful way because he was 73 when he assumed office. Prior to the rise of the Nazi regime, he was Mayor of Cologne from 1917 to 1933.

As German Chancellor, Adenauer wrestled with all kinds of contradictions. Let me present three examples: first, Nazi Germany had caused an unimaginable amount of suffering in the world, and Adenauer's task was to rehabilitate Germany as a peaceful nation in the international community. At the same time — and here is the contradiction — Adenauer convinced his fellow West-Germans to rearm, join NATO, and take clear sides in the ideological rivalry between East and West.

A second example: Adenauer made the first steps towards a lasting friendship with arch-enemy France, laying the foundation for European integration. However, with these efforts towards European integration, Adenauer stepped outside the binary, East-against-West geopolitical imagination that had the United States and Russia as the bipolar centre.

Third, after the atrocities of the Holocaust, Adenauer advocated for paying reparations to Israel and Holocaust survivors, and he advanced the reconciliation with Israel. At the same time, however, he denounced the Allies' de-Nazification program and began to rehabilitate former Nazi sympathizers, so that they could regain access to German public and civic life.

To the casual bystander, these policies seem to lack consistency. The more careful observer, however, can see how Adenauer's political work was driven by various material, on-the-ground circumstances and competing political interests. The problem, I think, is that we tend to interpret politics by forcing it into a linear framework that implies that political arguments and action should be consistent. To address this problem, I will present you with a different framework.

For this purpose, I summon another "old man" from German history: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Hegel is a key figure in establishing a philosophical tradition according to which contradiction is at the core of human progress. This tradition is known as dialectics.

### **Dialectics**

My interest in Hegelian dialectics was triggered when I lived in the German city of Stuttgart during a sabbatical a few years ago. Stuttgart is Hegel's city of birth. Figure 1 shows the house where Hegel was born, which has been converted into a museum, called the *Hegel Haus*.



Figure 1: Hegel Haus in Stuttgart, Germany. Photo by Harald Bauder

As I pursued my studies of German immigration policy and debate, it occurred to me that Hegel's framework can provide vital insights into understanding the politics of migration. Using Hegel was especially appealing to me because in Canada — and North America more generally — people rarely use the term dialectics, especially when they discuss migration policy. This seemed to me like a gap that Hegel could fill.

I sometimes use my children as an example to illustrate the dialectical framework. In fact, they asked me once to explain it to them. Initially, I tried to dismiss them by saying something like: "dialectics is about everything and nothing," hoping that this would keep them quiet. But they did not capitulate. Then I explained that it means that things are "reclusively related," which triggered bewildered faces. Finally, I started with a scenario that they could relate to: "If you punch your brother then he gets mad and punches back, then Hegel would call your reaction 'first negation.' Eventually, you may realize that punching each other hurts both of you, and you may decide that you can play a game together other than boxing. Hegel would call this a 'second negation,' or sublation (*Aufhebung*)." The core idea is that contradicting positions are being resolved into a new position. In this way, dialectical relationships are progressing. In fact, one of children could cheat while they are playing their game, causing them to insult each other, in which case the situation once again becomes contradictory and dialectic continues to progress.

### **Migration Policy and Debate in Canada and Germany**

A similar dialectical progression occurs in migration debate and policy making, which I will demonstrate using examples from my own research.<sup>1</sup> Figure 2 shows schematically a dialectical relationship between the national imagination and immigration. The way in which a national community imagines its identity plays a key role in its immigration policies. Through immigration policy, a nation selects who will be permitted to become a member (who will be "one of us") and who will be excluded (who is not imagined to belong to the nation). At the same time, immigration shapes who we are as a nation.

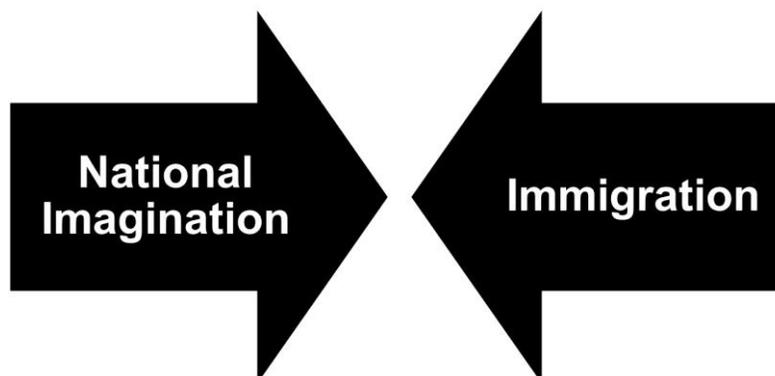


Figure 2: Nation-Immigration Dialectic

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<sup>1</sup> I am drawing on material from my book *Immigration Dialectic: Imagining Community, Economy and Nation*, published by Toronto University Press in 2011.

Canada and Germany make a fascinating comparison in this respect. Canada is a settler nation. Its national identity is closely linked to immigration. In fact, it would be difficult for most Canadians to imagine Canada without immigration. Germany, on the other hand, denied being an immigration country for much of its history, and instead highlighted the ethnic nature of national belonging.

In my research, I compared media debates of immigration policy in Canada and Germany from the late 1990s to the mid-2000s. In the Canadian debate, I was surprised to find that migrants were often depicted as dangerous, which indicates a dialectical practice of negation: “immigrants are not like us.” For example, in 2000, the *Vancouver Sun* reported the following in the context of the proposed Immigration and Refugee Protection Act:

“Our priority is the safety and national security interests of Canada,” [Immigration Minister Caplan] said in introducing the revamped Immigration Act in the Commons. “We are not going to be a place that welcomes serious criminals, terrorists, war criminals or those who committed crimes against humanity.”

This demonstrates that even before the events of 11 September, 2001 — which markedly shifted public opinion against immigration — the media often depicted migrants as violent criminals, agents of organized crime, drug traffickers, and terrorists. Even in Canada, a country firmly committed to immigration, immigrants are depicted as non-belonging “others.”

A similar negation occurs in respect to refugees. They are seen as strangers, coming from countries that represent the opposite conditions that exist in Canada — which is why they want to come to Canada in the first place. These countries are unsafe, violent, undemocratic, and lack freedom and opportunity. However, in Canada, this contradiction between the immigrant or refugee and the Canadian is often resolved. Immigrants and refugees will become Canadian citizens: “they” become part of “us.” In this way, a dialectic progression has occurred to resolve the contradiction between “stranger” and “us.”

My research suggests that in the German debate, this dialectic was truncated — at least during the period I studied. Refugees and asylum seekers were not supposed to stay; rather, they should eventually be repatriated.

In Germany, the dialectic between the national imagination and immigration unfolded in a different way: the “immigration debate” in Germany began in the late 1990s, with a Red-Green government that declared “we are an immigration country.” Based on this premise, the government announced the German GreenCard, which was supposed to enable skilled migration to Germany, and established the Süßmuth Commission, which was given the task to work out the cornerstones of an immigration law. However, the initially proposed law was delayed. Although it passed both houses of parliament, a constitutional challenge to the way the law moved through parliament resulted in a multi-year delay. During this period, circumstances in Germany changed: the economy

declined and unemployment rose. In light of these developments, a dialectical negation occurred: now Germany was increasingly presented again as a non-immigration country. A commentary in the populist German newspapers *Bild* in the year 2002 expresses this position: “The polls agree that citizens of almost all political orientations are of the opinion that we already have not too few but too many foreigners.” Next, the immigration debate shifted towards a third position. This position demanded the *integration* of foreigners who have been in Germany for decades and generations. “Not immigration but more integration is the order of the day,” reported the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in 2003.

Germany was thus declared an “integration country.” This new position achieved several things: 1) “dangerous” new immigration could be blocked; 2) the presence of millions of foreigners in Germany could be acknowledged; and 3) these “foreigners” should be integrated into the national self. Thus, this third position overcomes and merges the former two contradicting positions: as an integration country, Germany is an immigration country *and* non-immigration country at the same time. This was the status of the debate in Germany about a decade ago.

### **Germany’s Response to the Migration “Crisis”**

Armed with these tools from Hegelian dialectics, I will try to interpret Germany’s reaction to the recent migrant and refugee arrivals. I do this cautiously because we know that Hegel’s famous Owl of Minerva takes flight at dusk, after the events of the day have already happened. In the same way, the events in Germany are still unfolding, making it impossible to reflect on them from a distance. In addition, my aim is not to judge the German governments’ actions but to try to understand them, and the situation is tremendously complex.

Since roughly 2010, an increasing number of refugees have been flocking to Europe, predominantly from Syria and the Middle East; the Africa countries Somalia, Sudan, and Eritrea; Afghanistan and Pakistan; and the Balkan states. While Europe tried to secure its borders, the refugees took ever-greater risks to reach Europe, which had the tragic effect that an increasing number of people lost their lives or went missing trying to reach Europe. According to estimates by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), more than 3,000 people died in 2014 alone. For the year 2015, the number is expected to be significantly higher.

During that time, Germany has received an increasing number of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, especially from the Balkan states and the conflict areas in the Middle East and Africa. These population flows define the material, on-the-ground context in which recent political events unfolded.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> An excellent overview of these events is provided by Frida Frida, Carsten Luther, and Paul Blickle (2015) *Willkommen in Deutschland*, *Die Zeit*. Retrieved from <http://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/fluechtlinge-in-deutschland>. This resource is continuously updated. My interpretation represents the status of events as of 23 November, 2015.

A key event, in my interpretation, was the emergence of anti-migrant “PEGIDA” rallies in Dresden, which began in October 2014 and quickly gained supporters (Figure 3). PEGIDA stands for Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident (*Abendland*). Around that same time, there was an increase in arson attacks on refugee shelters throughout Germany.



Figure 3: PEGIDA Demonstrations, 2014. Photo by [www.blu-news.org](http://www.blu-news.org)

However, the PEGIDA rallies met a dialectical negation in the form of counter demonstrations by citizens who opposed PEGIDA and civic leaders who joined the counter-movement. For example, on the night of 5 January, 2015, the Archbishop of Cologne switched off the exterior lights of the Cologne Cathedral in protest against PEGIDA. In addition, leading politicians strongly spoke out against PEGIDA, and soccer fans displayed “refugees welcome” banners during games in stadiums through Germany.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel also rejected the protests with harsh words. In late August, 2015, she commented on anti-migrant protests in the Saxony city of Heidenau in the following way: “it is shameful how citizens, even families with children, support this turmoil by following along.” In a similar context, she said: “it is revolting, how right-wing extremists and Neonazis try to spread messages of hate,” and “there is no tolerance for people who question the human dignity of others.” With the latter statement, she is making a reference to the first paragraph of the German basic law (*Grundgesetz*), which protects the inviolability of human dignity.

In my eyes, Merkel’s reaction can be interpreted in light of her imagination of Germany as a nation: PEGIDA and the burning refugee shelters do not belong into her Germany. How better to affirm a positive national imagination of Germany than through a

dialectical negation that speaks out against anti-migrant protests while also welcoming and protecting refugees.

These reactions coincided with a new policy directive: roughly around the same time as Merkel made these statements, Germany's Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (*Bundesamts für Migration und Flüchtlinge*) cancelled the Dublin agreement for Syrian refugees. This meant that Syrian refugees would no longer be sent back to the country through which they entered Europe upon arrival in Germany.

An effect of this support for refugees and the new policy directive was that the material, on-the-ground circumstances changed. In early September, 2015, large numbers of migrants and refugees arrived in Germany, particularly over the Austrian-Bavarian border. An estimated 20,000 refugees arrived in the Bavarian capital Munich in one weekend alone. There was a large outpouring of support for the refugees among the German population (Figure 4). People volunteered their time to assist the refugees as they arrived; children donated their toys; and Merkel spread optimism when she repeatedly said: "we can handle this" (*Wir schaffen das*).



Figure 4: Pro-refugee protests in Freiburg, 2015, Photo by Harald Bauder

However, the term "crisis" was also becoming increasingly linked to the arrival of migrants, which suggests an out-of-control, unmanageable situation. There was also opposition from influential politicians. Bavarian President Horst Seehofer demanded the rejection of migrants at the border to Austria as "measures of self defense" (*Notwehr*). The way I interpret this rhetoric is that the dialectical pendulum swung in the opposite direction, which had political consequences in Germany.

On 13 September, 2015 — two decades after the Schengen Agreement established free cross-border mobility — Germany re-established controls on its border with Austria. Next, in October, parliament passed a new asylum law, which reduced financial-support payments to refugees to create a disincentive for refugees to come to Germany. This law also accelerated the deportations of failed refugee claimants and declared the West-Balkan states safe countries of origin, rendering asylum claims from these countries effectively invalid. By October, the media and city-mayors had raised the question: can we *really* handle this situation? In particular, city administrations were struggling to find adequate housing for the arriving refugees.

Thus, there appears to be a contradiction between the optimism of the chancellor, who continues to say “we can handle this,” and a more pessimistic outlook among regional, municipal, and some federal policy makers who say: we would like to, but we’re having problems handling this situation. To address this contradiction, the problem was redefined. The solution can be summarized as “we can handle this situation but we need to do this in an orderly fashion.”

Several initiatives have been brought underway to create order. The Dublin agreement was re-instating for Syrians, which means that Syrians can be returned to the countries through which they entered Europe; however, very few Syrian refugees actually registered in another European country, which suggests that this measure could have been mostly of symbolic nature. In addition, Germany is establishing so-called “transit zones,” where refugees will be registered and their claims checked. Furthermore, there are currently attempts underway to restrict family reunification, which may affect Syrian refugees. Moreover, efforts to fight the causes of migration have been stepped up, including the establishment of a trust fund for Africa (funded by the European Union through a 1.9 Billion Euro investment). These new initiatives incorporate both previous positions: “we can handle this” and “we need order.”

The latest episode in this ongoing dialectic are the tragic attacks that occurred in Paris on 13 November, 2015. A prominent Bavarian politician, Markus Söder, tweeted shortly after news of the attacks broke: “#ParisAttacks ändert alles” — “Paris attacks change everything.” With this statement, he tried to link the arrival of refugees with the infiltration of terrorists.

However, there was an immediate response from the media, federal politicians, civic leaders, and many others: that the two issues, refugees and terrorism, should not be conflated. In fact, refugees are themselves fleeing from the Islamic State. At this point, the dialectic continues.

## Conclusions

I would like to close with a few final points: first, my interpretation of the German migration and refugee “crisis” is provisional. The matter is highly complex and continues to unfold. Second — and despite the provisional nature of my observations — the dialectical framework is, to me, the only way I can make sense of the contradictions that

exist in the current debate and politics related to Germany's response to the refugee "crisis." My aim is not to judge the German government's actions, but to offer a model that helps us understand different national perspectives and particular political responses.

We must acknowledge the Herculean task Germany is confronting: It expects more than 1 million refugees and asylum seeker in 2015 alone. This figure represents far above 1% of Germany's total population — although it is unclear at this point how many will be accepted as refugees. For comparison, Canada typically accepts less than 1% of its total population as immigrants, and has now committed to accepting at least 25,000 Syrian refugees.

However, there is another important difference between Canada's and Germany's response to the Syrian refugee crisis. Just yesterday, Prime Minister Trudeau, in an effort to explain the delay of the arrival of the 25,000 Syrian refugees in Canada, said the following on CBC's Metro Morning<sup>3</sup>: "This is not just about welcoming 25,000 Syrian refugees, it's welcoming in 25,000 new Canadians." This statement reflects precisely the difference in national imagination between Canada and Germany that I mentioned earlier. In Canada, refugees are considered future fellow citizens, while in Germany, there is also an expectation that many refugees will return to their countries of origin when the situation permits and help rebuild these countries.

My third and final point is that our national imagination — who we think we are — fundamentally shapes migration and refugee politics and debate. In turn, migration shapes who we will become. And this is why the current events in Germany are so interesting.



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<sup>3</sup> CBC Radio (2013) Justin Trudeau on Metro Morning: Top 7 quotes from the interview, Nov. 24. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/programs/metromorning/justin-trudeau-on-metro-morning-top-7-quotes-from-the-interview-1.3334393>