

# Between Germanness and Othering – The Process of 'Ossifizierung'

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## Between Germanness and Othering

East German 'Wendekinder' often find themselves in a peculiar social and discursive position: Within Europe and the World they are German and therefore part of the West. The East lies in their past and just behind the border. Within Germany however, they **belong to the nation and simultaneously figure as one of (West) Germany's Eastern Others**.

My poster investigates this ambivalent position of 'Wendekinder' in present-day Germany and proposes the **concept of 'Ossifizierung'** in order to analyze their complex situatedness.

## East Germans in media discourse

It has been argued, that media discourse on the German East-West divide

- marginalizes East German perspectives (cf. 1)
- represents East Germans as an alterity of West German identity (cf. 2)
- marks East Germans as deviation from the Western 'standard zero' (cf. 3)
- frames difference as particularity, related to GDR-origin, weakness and threat and, at times, as vanguard (cf. 4)
- fosters an ethnicized perspective on social conflict (cf. 5)

I adopt a discourse analytical approach in order to analyze material from German media discourse on the role of East Germans in the 'refugee crisis'.

## Welt Online, July 2015

» *Twenty-five years after their incorporation into the new country, the locals of Freital [a town in Saxony, East Germany] fight refugee newcomers with the greeting ›This is no place for refuge«. [...] Every Saxon, who is older than 25 and younger than 66, is an immigrant to this country and will be an immigrant until the end of his life. Just like every native from [the other eastern federal states]. Just like everyone, who was born in the GDR. « (cf. 6)*

## Metaphoric migrants as a threat

The Welt Online article addresses East Germans as (metaphoric) migrants and contrasts their putative migrant status with their racist actions. It underlines alleged similarities and demands solidarity. However, the argument also

- invokes and fortifies the **German 'foreigner discourse'** (cf. 7) and the division between Germans and migrants
- fosters the idea, that migrants need to assimilate and abide by alleged German norms and standards
- threatens those, who do not conform, with exclusion from the nation
- **culturalizes and others racist violence** as an East German phenomenon and forecloses a broader perspective on racism (cf. 8, 9)
- forecloses that, within the German-foreigner dichotomy, **East Germans are Germans, not foreigners**

The material threat of racism is discursively contained in the East. It reminds East Germans of their Otherness and deviation from Western standards. Racism is not seen as part of 'Western culture' but as part of the East. A German news magazine asks accordingly: »Was the re-unification a mistake?« (cf. 10)

## The Process of 'Ossifizierung'

How can the Othering and culturalization of East Germans be theorized adequately?

### 'Ossifizierung'

- analyzes the **Othering of East Germans** as deviation from the (West) German norm
- refers to the ongoing process of producing East (and West) Germanness through discourse
- unlike the post-colonial concept Orientalism, 'Ossifizierung' **does not foreground the racist dimension**, which does not play out in the German East-West divide

It has been suggested to borrow concepts, such as Said's Orientalism and Spivak's Othering, from post-colonial theory (e.g. 11, 12).

However, one needs to keep in mind, that majoritarian East Germans inhabit a very different position from post-colonial Others. For instance are and were they always considered German by racial/racist standards.

East Germans are situated at the **intersection of hegemonic Germanness and Eastern Otherness**. This simultaneous exclusion and inclusion leads to complex and ambivalent subjectivities. So that

- some 'Wendekinder' consequently **identify with Eastern Otherness** and re-interpret what it means to be East German (cf. 13)
- others **adhere to Westernness** by setting out to 'save the Occident' (Pegida) and/or by defending hegemonic Germanness by means of racist violence

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## References

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