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Neo-Nazis Spurn Germany's Diverse New National Team Right Wing Rejection

By Siobhán Dowling

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Mesut Özil celebrates with Cacau, Per Mertesacker and Jerome Boateng.

Most of the country may be in the grip of football fever but one group of Germans are resolutely not supporting the national team. The far-right scene rejects the new

multicultural squad as un-German and says it can't identify. For many, it is consistent with their rejection of the entire democratic state.

"I can no longer identify with the national team," someone calling himself Blaue Narzisse writes, explaining why he isn't supporting Germany in the World Cup. "The colors black, red, gold are being abused for the mega event by this motley Germany team." It is a sentiment repeated widely across the far-right scene these days.

Germany may be awash with black, red and gold, as the national flag adorns cars, balconies and pubs. But while most of the country is urging the team on as it faces Argentina in Saturday's quarter-final, for neo-Nazis it is next to impossible to back a team that includes players with names like Boateng, Özil or Podolski. This German national team is the most ethnically diverse ever, celebrated widely as finally being representative of the wider German society. But to the far right, a squad where 11 of the 23 have migrant backgrounds is no longer really German.

"I hope this team is out as early as possible," writes one commentator on the thiazi.net forum. "Or at least they won't be world champions with team made up of 50 percent foreigners!"

A poster calling himself Nationaler Demokrat writes on another site: "This multicultural troupe with the label 'national team' doesn't interest me any more."

"Özil, Khedira, Cacau, Podolski can go jump in the lake. And we don't need them, the others are good enough," writes NSRealist.

'It Disturbs Their World View'

Some of the extremists are a little torn when it comes to this World Cup, they would like to cheer on the German team but they just don't want someone with a foreign name to score any goals. "I will certainly not cheer at a Cacau goal! But I will never give up for Neuer, Lahm, Schweinsteiger.... Because I love Germany really!"

And while Thomas Müller may currently be Germany's leading goalscorer with three goals, Lukas Podolski and Miroslav Klose, both born in Poland, have two a piece and it was Mesut Özil, a midfielder of Turkish descent, whose goal against Ghana made sure the team got out of the group stage.

Neo-Nazis hate this new team "because it totally disturbs their entire world view," historian Detlev Claussen of the University of Hanover told SPIEGEL ONLINE. They want national teams to be based on ethnic purity. In fact, he argues, Germany has long been a country with much diversity and mass immigration going back over 100 years, it just took the national football team a long time to catch up with this reality.

Jonas Gabler, a researcher into the far-right and football, agrees that the new multicultural national team makes it extremely difficult for the right-wing extremists to

identify with it. "It is an expression of the new understanding of the nation, something the far-right don't accept at all," he told SPIEGEL ONLINE. "Citizenship is not based on ethnic background but on the constitution, it is enough to accept Germany's Basic Law to be German." And that is something that the far-right have a huge difficulty accepting.

This is echoed on the far-right Deutscher Standpunkt website: "The squad is not a German national team and those people with dark complexions are the Federal Republic of Germany, but they are not Germany. Not tall and blond, but black, brown, puny and Muslim. What progress!" the article fumes. "In fact one cannot become German, one is German -- or not. These new Federal Republic citizens are and will remain foreigners."

'Not the Flag of the Nation!'

Claussen points out that hard-core neo Nazis never have in fact supported the German democratic state. By extension, they reject the national team. "Being a Nazi doesn't mean supporting Germany. Nazis want world domination and National Socialism was always supranational," he argues. He says this is what many on the left who feel uncomfortable about the German flag fail to understand -- that the far-right rejects everything that flag stands for.

Gabler agrees: "For true neo-Nazis, who identify with National Socialism, then the black, red and gold is anyway something they cannot identify with. And neither can they identify with the German team."

A posting by one Frei Netz Köln on a far-right website bears this out: "The black-red-gold flag that attaches itself to the Federal Republic of Germany is not the flag of the German nation! Whoever proudly waves that flag is supporting the exact opposite of what is really German and national."

Still, Gabler argues that there are many who consider themselves nationalists or national conservatives, but who identify with the German team nonetheless -- just not with what they see as foreign players.

He says that this is a view shared by a "not insignificant silent minority" in Germany. They think that in a true national team, only people with German roots should be playing.

He points to an article that appeared in mass circulation *Bild* that examined which players sang along to the national anthem and discovered that of those with migration background, only Klose sang along. "There was then quite a lot of commentary on the Internet about how we don't really need people like Özil," he says, adding that this view is not confined to the far-right scene.

Taping into a Huge Pool of Talent

Claussen argues that the German Football Federation (DFB) had been pretty reactionary in the past but after the poor showing of the German team in the 2004 European

Championship it sought to make it easier for migrants to play for the team. "It made a complete about face," he argues, "And put everything into multi-culturalism."

Gabler argues, however, that new legislation in the early 1990s and again at the beginning of the decade making it easier to gain German citizenship also played a big part. "The many players with a migration background simply couldn't play for Germany because they didn't have the right to a passport," he says. The changes to citizenship rules opened the way for the DFB to take advantage of the pool of talent in the country. "It realized that it had let players with huge potential get away."

Claussen sees Özil, born in Germany but with Turkish roots, as an embodiment of the multi-cultural reality in German society. He tells a story to illustrate the change taking place in Germany:

"I was in the local shop the day after the Ghana game and old blue-eyed, gray-haired Teutonic German came in and pointing to the *Bild* newspaper with Mesut Özil on the front, he said 'A Turk had to save us.' The owner looked at him calmly and said: 'That is not a Turk, that is a German.'"