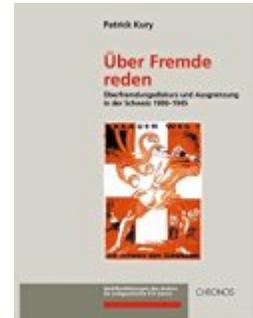


Patrick Kury. *Über Fremde reden: Überfremdungsdiskurs und Ausgrenzung in der Schweiz 1900-1945.* Zürich: Chronos Verlag, 2003. 271 S. EUR 48.00, cloth, ISBN 978-3-0340-0646-0.



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Since its inception as a modern federal state in 1848, Switzerland has gone through three distinct phases of immigration. The first phase, from 1885 to 1914, mostly included migrants from neighboring countries. When immigration was at its highest, foreign nationals represented 15.4 percent of the resident population. After the First World War, the foreign population decreased to a low of 5.2 percent in 1941. The economic boom after the Second World War (1945-73) sparked a second wave of immigration, mostly from countries in southern Europe. Half of all immigrants came from Italy, while most others came from countries like Spain, Portugal and Turkey. The peak was reached in 1974 with 16.7 percent of the resident population. While most immigrants in the first two phases sought employment in Switzerland, a larger percentage of immigrants of the third and current phase--beginning in the late 1980s--were asylum seekers from Sri Lanka, the former Yugoslavia and (more recently) African countries. Today, approximately 21 percent of the individuals who make up the resident population of Switzerland are not Swiss citizens.

It is not surprising, then, that immigration discourses have been dominant in Swiss public life during the twentieth century, and that they continue to be central today. The discourses surrounding immigration from 1900 to 1945 are the focus of Patrick Kury's book, originally a 2002 Basel dissertation. Kury chronicles the surge of anti-immigration rhetoric in the years after World War I. Kury points to the irony that immigration discourses became most virulent during a period when immigration was not a major demographic issue.

The central term in Kury's book is that of *Überfremdung*--a word for which there is no good English-language equivalent. The term used in this review is "overforeignization." Even in German, the term lacks precision, which made it very useful for all political camps in a culturally heterogeneous society like Switzerland. It evokes images of threat to indigenous culture and lifestyle by an overpowering presence of a foreign, alien population segment or by foreign economic interests. It had political, economic, social, cultural and intellectual ramifications. It thus became a

signum of a culturally based national identity that internalized anti-liberal and anti-modernist sentiments. In Kury's view, the term *Überfremdung* served as an imaginary counterpart to a wishful and idealized self-image (p. 79). The term first appeared in Carl Alfred Schmid's essay, "Unsere Fremdenfrage" (1900); it was first used in an official document in 1914 (p. 12-13). It has been useful in invoking a defensive posture against perceived immigration threats ever since.

Kury identifies three distinct phases and patterns of talking about foreigners between 1900 and 1945; each phase saw a discourse that influenced attitudes towards immigrants and shaped policies meant to address the issue. The first phase saw an emphasis on naturalization; the second focused on the cultural, social and racial suitability of foreigners under the rubric of assimilation; the third targeted the economic ramifications of immigration.

Before 1914, few immigration restrictions existed, as borders in Europe generally were open. Both growing European nationalism and increasing immigration posed the question of identity and national unity. Switzerland could not rely on linguistic, cultural or biological uniformity as sources of national cohesion. Rather, national symbols, images, phrases and rituals--such as the national holiday festivities (*Bundesfeier*) in 1891--were invented to create increased bonds. A number of patriotic societies were founded during these years, most with their own publications. Ernst Bovet, professor of Romance literatures in Zurich, founded the journal *Wissen und Leben* in 1907; it remained an influential intellectual forum well into the 1920s. Bovet saw the spirit of the alpine nature as a uniting force, while others even attempted to define the *homo alpinus* as a racial category. The growing immigration issue was clearly embedded in these larger identity discourses. In the absence of a unifying national culture, the pastor Eduard Blocher stressed the importance of the preservation of blood lines. Kury

documents how the desire for a homogeneous Swiss society created anxieties about the rising presence of foreigners after 1908. Much anxiety focused on Jews, even though their numbers were small. The major policy tool under discussion (although never implemented) was facilitated naturalization, which would not only have lowered the number of foreigners, but also facilitated their integration. This discussion seems open-minded by today's standards: Switzerland has by far the most restrictive naturalization policies in Europe, and Swiss voters even rejected the facilitated and automatic naturalization of second and third-generation immigrants, respectively, in 2004.

World War I brought an abrupt end to open borders and market-driven migration patterns in Europe. In this new phase, the tone of the Swiss debate changed markedly. In the face of steadily declining numbers of foreigners, the issue was framed in qualitative rather than quantitative terms. In a 1915 tract, the Winterthur engineer Max Koller argued that the immigration question should no longer be seen as a naturalization issue, but should be viewed within the context of racial and Social Darwinist ideas. In the vein of Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Koller argued that the mixing of races had to be avoided at all costs, even the mixing of the different Swiss cultures. He demanded that certain groups of immigrants, like Slavs, Turks, Orientals, Jews and non-Europeans generally, should be barred from naturalization entirely as they could not be assimilated. Increasingly, the expression "les indésirables" became synonymous with East European Jews.

The third pattern of overforeignization discourses relates to the economic impact of immigration, which had its origins in World War I. One argument addressed the need to protect domestic workers against "inferior foreign elements." This line was supported even by the Free Democratic Party (FDP), the bastion of free-market liberalism (p. 151). Another argument was that trade and commerce were unproductive and led to fraud

and profiteering. Kury (perhaps a bit hastily) associates this idea with the eighteenth-century physiocrats around François Quesnay, who considered only agriculture productive (p. 155), and does not consider how it might relate to the Calvinist doctrine of labor, which also legitimated the work of artisans and even industrial workers. Not surprisingly, commerce was seen as un-Swiss and was commonly associated with Jewish life. In 1921, Ernst Delaquis, a high official in the Federal Department of Justice and Police (EJPD) at the time, offered a lengthy list of occupations not to be allowed to foreigners. The list was headed by peddlers who were believed to either sell merchandise that was not authentically Swiss or to sell overpriced luxury goods unsuspecting consumers did not need. Other professions Delaquis considered inappropriate for foreigners were those of physician, emigration agent and teacher. Here, too, the rhetoric of overforeignization shaped policy: in 1928, corporate boards were required to have a Swiss majority, and in 1933 a federal office was created to certify the Swiss origin of products. The image of the crossbow, the weapon central to the Swiss founding myth of 1291, from here on graced Swiss products--as it still does today.

While Kury identifies these three major phases and patterns of the discourse of overforeignization, the book is not as neatly organized according to these three patterns as one might expect. It is not clear, for instance, why methodological considerations are not discussed until chapter 5 (out of 11). To be sure, the three phases and types of issues they trigger overlap considerably. The second theme--the foreigner as the cultural, social, and even racial other--is the dominant one dealt with in this book, and in this area Kury's book is particularly enlightening.

The rise of biological concerns became evident in the report of a 1920 conference of immigration experts in Solothurn that adapted an innovative doctrine of strict selection. This doctrine was explicitly patterned after U.S. immigration

law (the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and subsequent immigration acts, culminating in the National Origins Act of 1924, and allowed for the exclusion of immigrants on the basis of moral and physical health, education levels, country of origin and ethnicity. The 1920 report favored the immigration of foreigners who were racially related, capable of assimilation or in possession of economically desirable skills. Immigrants who were politically suspect or thought to endanger public health--both physical and moral--were to be rejected. Paradoxically, Switzerland (as a non-immigrant nation) had maintained few immigration restrictions up to this point, while the United States (as an immigrant nation) had practiced selective principles early on. It is a fine irony that Swiss anti-immigration rhetoric and emerging policy were modeled on U.S. policy rather than Nazi policies (as had been alleged during the hot debates of the late 1990s surrounding the Swiss role in World War II).

Kury also analyzes the biological imagery used to describe aliens, beginning with pan-European anxieties about the poisoning and contaminating of the public body before World War I under the influence of recent bacteriological advances (p. 30). The fear of Eastern Jews "uprooted" during the war led Max Ruth, an influential and high-ranking legal expert in the EJPD, to state that Switzerland was taking in more foreigners than it was able to "digest" (p. 123). Kury documents how many experts, such as the legal scholar Ernst Delaquis, held a particular disdain for foreign deserters of the war, as they supposedly lacked moral strength and had evaded the cleansing power of war (p. 128-129). The Swiss journalist and cultural critic Konrad Falke saw anti-militarism and pacifism as a cancer to be excised by war, the greatest of all surgeons (p. 129).

Kury carefully documents that texts dealing with the foreigner question routinely justified discriminatory action against some groups of immigrants in order to preserve the Helvetic way of

life. The mapping of this discriminatory discourse perhaps is the strongest, most original and valuable part of this book. Kury's analysis culminates in the radical, yet well-documented conclusion that the restrictive and even inhumane Swiss refugee policies before and during World War II--which caused thousands of Jewish refugees to be turned away at the Swiss border--resulted from a homegrown xenophobic attitude and not from an affinity with the National Socialist movement. Antisemitism was perhaps the most visible part of this anti-foreigner attitude, but Kury stresses the fact that it became virulent at the tail end of the First War, at a time when German National Socialism still was in its infancy. Kury argues that an admission of a large number of Jewish refugees would have rendered obsolete the hard-fought battle against overforeignization (p. 214). Kury thus implicitly invalidates the view still widely held in Switzerland that the restrictive Swiss refugee policy during World War II represents an aberration from an otherwise continuous humanitarian tradition.

Kury carefully traces the antisemitic exclusionary narratives and discourses of overforeignization that targeted East European Jews in particular--who were often associated with Bolshevism. This is remarkable, as the numbers cannot explain this fixation on Jewish immigrants: numbering 20,000 members in 1920, the Jewish community in Switzerland was small, and of these, only one-quarter to one-third came from the East (p. 136). Kury describes these immigrants as ideal aliens who helped define a national core in spite of confessional, cultural and linguistic heterogeneity (p. 134). They served as easy targets for an exclusionary rhetoric, as they were visibly alien, adhered to a different faith and could be discriminated against without fear of diplomatic retributions.

Kury further demonstrates how the establishment of a modern federal administration with centralizing tendencies in the pre-war years pre-

pared the ground for new institutions that could shape policy based on these immigration discourses. The Federal Immigration Service (*Fremdenpolizei*) was founded in 1917, and both the Federal Border Medical Service (*eidgenössischer Grenzsanitätsdienst*) and the Federal Labor Office (*eidgenössisches Arbeitsamt*)--which became an important collaborator with the immigration service--were created in 1920. The 1920 message of the Swiss executive (the Federal Council) regarding "measures against overforeignization" (*Massnahmen gegen die Überfremdung*) represented *Überfremdung* as a fact without further explanation and predicted that the Swiss would be a minority in their own country by 1997. This deceitful rhetoric found an eerie echo in the anti-naturalization campaign posters of the Swiss People's Party (SVP) in 2004, which claimed that Switzerland would have a Muslim majority by 2035. A 1925 constitutional amendment made legislation on the residency of foreigners a federal matter, and the 1931 federal "law regarding sojourn and residency of foreigners" (*Gesetz über Aufenthalt und Niederlassung von Ausländern*), followed by enforcement instructions to cantons in 1933, severely restricted the activities of foreigners. Federal officials now had the means to regulate naturalization through the new central category of assimilation (p. 185), which was used particularly against Jews, who, as of 1926, had to reside in Switzerland for fifteen years even to be considered for citizenship. This minimum was raised to twenty years during the Second World War, even though non-Jewish foreigners were naturalized in record numbers (pp. 188-189).

Given the growing discourse on overforeignization, it is not surprising that the tools of direct democracy were set in motion to address the perceived problem. The first of many so-called foreigner initiatives (*Ausländerinitiativen*) was submitted in 1920, but rejected in a national vote in 1922. Among other provisions, it would have doubled the federal residency requirement for naturalization to twelve years--a step implement-

ed during World War II by executive order and still in force today.

Immigration, asylum, assimilation, integration and naturalization continue to be hotly debated in contemporary Switzerland. Since 1971, Swiss voters have voted on numerous popular initiatives to limit immigration in one form or another. A brief overview of the immigration-related issues Swiss voters have decided within the past five years proves how alive the issue of overforeignization is in contemporary Swiss political discourse—and how relevant Kury's book is. The SVP initiative to severely restrict asylum was defeated in 2002 with the narrowest of margins, but, as mentioned before, the facilitated naturalization of foreigners born and raised in Switzerland was defeated in a 2004 vote. On the other hand, voters approved Swiss accession to the Schengen agreement and the phased abolition of migration restrictions for citizens of EU countries; this was extended by referendum to the ten new EU members in 2005. Still pending is an SVP initiative, launched in November 2005, to "democratize" naturalization; that is, to allow citizens to vote on the naturalization of individual foreigners who reside in their communes. And the growing debate about Muslim immigration likely will lead to new popular initiatives.

Kury's book enriches our outlook on these contemporary discourses by adding a historical perspective. But beyond that, Kury documents and analyzes an important piece of Swiss history. The only limitations of this work are that discourses of overforeignization are rarely discussed in the context of larger European debates, and that the cultural contexts and historical roots of these discourses are only vaguely explored. But these are minor points in relation to what Kury does accomplish: he traces anti-foreigner discourses back to 1900 and shows how they shaped policy. He further documents how a handful of public officials in the EJPD, most of them also participants in the debates (especially Max Ruth and

Heinrich Rothmund), managed to shape policy and implement such policy administratively. Kury also brings to light a significant body of primary sources that reveal the origins of restrictive Swiss immigration and naturalization policies that are still in place today. The methodologically innovative link between discourse and policy makes this an important book for anyone interested in European debates about immigrants since 1900.

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