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ARTICLE

Rethinking Central Europe as a Migration Space: From the Ottoman Empire through the Cold War and the Refugee Crisis

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What is central Europe? As I write this article in 2021, three decades after the fall of communism, this question seems as salient as ever. I am not the only *Central European History* reader to think about this topic in recent years. In a 2018 *CEH* article, provocatively titled "Habsburg History, Eastern European History … Central European History?," Chad Bryant argued that scholarship on these three nominally distinct fields had become blurred in the wake of the post-communist opening of archives and the transnational turn.[1] It was time, Bryant insisted, not only for *CEH* readers to reconsider the category of "central Europe" itself, but also to engage with a new set of questions, ones that would move beyond the predominant emphasis on "how and why regimes collapsed." Compellingly, he advocated for studies that would help us understand the post-1989 era, such as the long-term legacies of communism, the integration of individual countries into the European Union, and present-day migration to the region.

As several other *CEH* contributors in the last several years have done, Bryant cited Michael Geyer's pathbreaking keynote lecture at the 2006 German Studies Association annual conference, titled "Where Germans Dwell."[2] Contemplating the implications of the transnational turn, Geyer advocated for extending the spatial realm of German history to, essentially, anywhere one can find a German: to paraphrase, if Austrian émigré, bodybuilder, and then governor Arnold Schwarzenegger was living in California, then California was part of German history. Given the historical prominence of the German-speaking lands in *CEH*, we can extend this question to central Europe as well. Does central Europe exist everywhere there is a central European?

In this reflective piece, I revisit this question in the context of the burgeoning field of German migration history. Even before Geyer's lecture, thinking about "where Germans dwell" had begun to yield an impressive corpus of work on the migration of Germans to other parts of the world. Much of this scholarship has involved imperialism, investigating the lives of and discourses surrounding German colonizers and settlers abroad.[3] Yet recent

[1] Chad Bryant, "Habsburg History, Eastern European History … Central European History?" *Central European History* 51, no. 1 (2018): 56–65.

[2] Michael Geyer, "Where Germans Dwell: Transnationalism in Theory and Practice," *German Studies Association Newsletter* 31, no. 2 (2006): 29–37.

[3] See, among others, in order of publication: Susanne Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family, and National in Precolonial Germany, 1770–1870* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Lora Wildenthal, *German Women for Empire, 1884–1945* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Adam A. Blackler, "Heathens, 'Hottentots,' and Heimat: Colonial Encounters and German Identity in Southwest Africa, 1842–1915" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota–Twin Cities, 2017); Steven Press, *Rogue Empires: Contracts and Conmen in Europe's Scramble for Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017); Sean Andrew Wempe, *Revenants of the German Empire: Colonial*

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scholarship, notably Tara Zahra's *The Great Departure* and Benjamin Hein's work on German emigrants in the United States, among others, has increasingly portrayed the subject of Germans traveling abroad explicitly in terms of "migration."[4] This newer development has also been bolstered by the German Historical Institute's rising commitment to migration history under the leadership of Simone Lässig since 2015.[5] In short, by the year 2021, there is no question that the movement of Germans abroad, and the lives that they have constructed beyond German borders, have become part and parcel of German, and therefore of central European, history.

The flipside to the study of Germans emigrating abroad, of course, is the study of non-Germans immigrating to Germany. This is the field that has occupied most of my attention, as my current book project examines the history of Germany's largest ethnic minority—Turkish immigrants—whom the West German government recruited as "guest workers" (*Gastarbeiter*) from 1961 to 1973. By the mid-1970s, and intensifying during the 1980s, Turkish guest workers and their families in West Germany became the primary targets of xenophobia since the Holocaust. Fueled by widespread condemnation of their primarily Muslim faith, rural origins, and perceived patriarchal gender relations, among other stereotypes, West Germans on all sides of the political spectrum came to view Turks as inassimilable into German society.[6] The notion of an unbridgeable cultural chasm between the two groups, despite Turks' ability to gain German citizenship since the 1990s, continues to fuel Islamophobia within far-right circles today. Taken to the extreme, according to this exclusionary line of thinking: Turks can never be considered Germans, Turkey can never be considered part of Europe (let alone the European Union) and, though less outwardly expressed, Turkey can never be considered part of European history.

The latter assumption, against which I strongly argue, is evident in the multiple ways that we, as scholars, have sought to define the borders of an elusive "central Europe." The current description of this very journal, *Central European History*, states that it publishes work "related to German-speaking and German-identified peoples, as well as work on non-German speakers in the historic states and regions of central Europe, including the Habsburg lands, Austria, and Switzerland" but welcomes submissions that "expand and de-territorialize the region's historic frames of reference" and "perennially engages anew the old question, 'what and where is central Europe?'" Alongside the German- and Habsburg-centric focus is the persistence of a Cold War mentality in the scholarship, whereby "central Europe" constitutes the westernmost part of the Eastern bloc, encompassing the former East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary; the latter three were, of course, the countries about which Czech dissident Milan Kundera warned in his renowned 1984 essay "The Tragedy of Central Europe."[7]

Post–Cold War developments have further complicated the definition. The 1991 self-establishment of the Visegrád Group, which includes the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, pushed the idea of central Europe farther eastward even as those same countries jockeyed for acceptance into the western-dominated European Union. Simultaneously, West Germany's absorption of the former German Democratic Republic in 1990, followed by the unified country's rising prominence in the European Union, pushed Germany westward.

Germans, Imperialism, and the League of Nations (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Jeremy Best, *Heavenly Fatherland: German Missionary Culture and Globalization in the Age of Empire* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021).

[4] Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration and the Making of the Free World* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2016); Benjamin Peter Hein, "Emigration and the Industrial Revolution in German Europe, 1820–1900" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2018).

[5] Alongside fellowships and workshops, one new initiative of the German Historical Institute is the network and blog *Migrant Knowledge*, established in 2019 (https://migrantknowledge.org/).

[6] On perceived patriarchal gender relations, see Rita Chin, "Turkish Women, West German Feminists, and the Gendered Discourse on Muslim Cultural Difference," *Public Culture* 22, no. 3 (2010): 557–81.

[7] Milan Kundera, "The Tragedy of Central Europe," trans. Edmund White, *The New York Review*, April 26, 1984, 33–38.

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Nor can one forget the perennial Balkan question: Can Yugoslavia and its successor states, typically considered "southeastern Europe," count as part of central Europe, given their Habsburg history, predominantly Christian faith, and socialist yet nonaligned status during the Cold War?

Messy, fluid, and of questionable value as it is, the category of "central Europe" shares one distinct facet in the scholarly literature: it typically includes neither Turkey nor its predecessor, the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, as Mark Mazower has powerfully noted, "The basic historiographical question is how to fit the centuries of Ottoman rule into the story of the [European] continent as a whole."[8] This question reflects the persistence of a version of European identity that has long been constructed along a cultural and religious binary. The early-modern Habsburg-Ottoman conflicts, rooted not only in imperial geopolitics but also in religious strife, solidified the idea of Europe (and accordingly the idea of central Europe) in decidedly Christian terms. As Suzanne Marchand has shown, the nineteenth-century age of imperialism and the rise of the German academic discipline of *Orientalistik* (Oriental studies) widened the imagined chasm between Europe and the Ottoman Empire despite diplomatic and intellectual exchange.[9] Still today, in the words of Edin Hajdarpašić, "The legacy of the Ottoman Empire in Europe has become part of the pervasive 'Muslim question' that continues to dominate discourses about values like tolerance, diversity, and freedom of speech across the continent."[10]

To our detriment, historians of Europe—and particularly western Europe—have largely trodden the same imagined divide as centuries past, neglecting the important role of the Ottoman Empire, the post-1923 Republic of Turkey, and Muslims as a whole in European history. One notable exception are Europeanists who work on the Balkans, such as Emily Greble, who in her important new book on Ottoman Muslims who became citizens of new European nation-states argues that Islam was "indigenous" to Europe and that Muslims were crucial to "the making of modern Europe."[11] Yet, overwhelmingly, until relatively recently it has not been Europeanists but rather Ottomanists who have been at the forefront of bridging this gap. Bolstered by the rise of global history, they have contributed substantially to the revision of Eurocentrism by portraying the Ottoman Empire as entangled with, shaping, and, in some cases, an integral part of Europe.[12] Indeed, it is in this field of scholarship that Fernand Braudel's renowned 1972 assertion that "the Turkish Mediterranean lived and breathed with the same rhythms as the Christian, that the whole sea shared a common destiny" lives on.[13]

[8] Mark Mazower, *The Balkans: A Short History* (New York: Random House, 2007), xl.

[9] Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Race, Religion, and Scholarship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). The German fascination for Ottoman culture stems further back to the early modern period. See Stefan Hanß, "Ottoman Language Learning in Early Modern Germany," *Central European History* 54, no. 1 (March 2021): 1–33.

[10] Edin Hajdarpašić, "Out of the Ruins of the Ottoman Empire: Reflections on the Ottoman Legacy in South-eastern Europe," *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 5 (2008): 716.

[11] Emily Greble, *Muslims and the Making of Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021). Throughout this article, I cite numerous other examples of Europeanists who have engaged these questions.

[12] See, in order of publication, among others: Molly Greene, *A Shared World: Christians and Muslims in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *The Age of Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early Modern Ottoman and European Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Sibel Zandi-Sayek, *Ottoman Izmir: The Rise of a Cosmopolitan Port, 1840–1880* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire and Europe: The Ottoman Empire and Its Place in European History* (Istanbul: Kronik, 2017); Gábor Ágoston, *The Last Muslim Conquest: The Ottoman Empire and Its Wars in Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021).

[13] As Ottomanists have rightly contended, Braudel's influence on the field must be tempered by his Eurocentrism and "relative ignorance of Ottoman history," which imbalances his interpretation. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, vol. 1, trans. Sian Reynolds (London: Collins, 1972), 14; Gabriel Piterberg et al., eds., *Braudel Revisited: The Mediterranean World, 1600–1800* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 5.

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To deepen our study of central Europe, I advocate returning to this idea of a more unifying history that includes the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey—not only throughout the seascapes of the Mediterranean but across the landscapes of "central Europe" as well—and that migration, as the movement of people across real and imagined borders, is a suitable place to start. Providing insight into Geyer's question of "where Germans dwell" and Bryant's call to redefine, or even to do away with, the category of "central Europe," I posit that one way to move beyond the category's messiness is to define "central Europe" thematically: as a migration space. By unearthing the history of migration throughout the region, with particular attention to Ottoman and Turkish connections, I reconceptualize "central Europe" in broad and flexible terms—not only as a collection of nation-states, but rather as a space of transimperial, transnational, intercultural, and interreligious exchanges that defy simple categorization.

Although there are many inroads into investigating central Europe as a migration space, I draw from my own research on the history of Turkish-German migration. In the first section, I describe the development and current state of the field of Turkish-German migration historiography. Focusing specifically on my research on return migration from West Germany to Turkey and the perceived "Germanization" of Turkish-German migrants, I argue that we must consider Turks as German (and central European) actors and Turkey as part of German (and central European) history. In the second section, I delve deeply into the implications of one facet of my work: Turkish guest workers' annual vacations to the "homeland" (*Heimaturlaube*) from the 1960s through 1980s, during which they drove southeast on an international highway that traversed West Germany, Austria, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Turkey. Rethinking this vast physical landscape as a migration space from the early modern period until the present day, I highlight the overlaps among three periods typically viewed as distinct: the Ottoman Empire and its post-Ottoman legacy, the Cold War, and—taking up Bryant's call to examine central European history in light of the present day—the Syrian refugee crisis since 2011.

I. The State of the Field: Turkish-German Migration History

Until the 2000s, the study of postwar German migration history was long deemed, especially by historians trained in Germany, as too recent to fall under the scope of history. Accordingly, it remained the province of political science, sociology, anthropology, and literary studies, where it was often relegated under the umbrella of ethnic minority studies. A major turning point was the publication of Rita Chin's 2007 book, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany.*[14] By invoking the phrase "guest worker question" (*Gastarbeiterfrage*), Chin posited migration not as a separate subtheme in German history, but rather as a crucial, constitutive component of the way Germans have defined themselves—as the most recent iteration of a much longer history of identity-defining moments that extended back to what Holly Case has aptly called the nineteenth-century "Age of Questions."[15]

When I began thinking about this project in 2012, Chin's was the only English-language book on the history of the postwar labor migration to West Germany. Its methodological approach—which, alongside its extensive examination of changing German discourses about guest workers, incorporated the voices of prominent migrant intellectuals—got the wheels turning in my head. Where could the field go next? Always intrigued by *Alltagsgeschichte*, I set off to shift the focus to the migrants themselves. What were their daily lives like in Germany? What were their experiences interacting with Germans? How did they "integrate" into German society on the everyday level?

[14] Rita Chin, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[15] Holly Case, *The Age of Questions: Or, A First Attempt at an Aggregate History of the Eastern, Social, Woman, American, Jewish, Polish, Bullion, Tuberculosis, and Many Other Questions over the Nineteenth Century, and Beyond* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

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To be certain, these questions were a product of their time. Just two years before, in 2010, German chancellor Angela Merkel had notoriously commented that multiculturalism had "utterly failed," and former Finance Minister Thilo Sarrazin's blatantly anti-Muslim tome *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (*Germany Abolishes Itself*) had sent shockwaves throughout the media.[16] Questions of assimilation, integration, and multiculturalism in Germany were thus not only timely but also of the utmost political importance. There was also an ethical imperative. At a time when Muslim migrants were being blatantly discriminated against, and as Germans grappled with whether to finally—after half a century of mass migration—define themselves as a "country of immigration" (*Einwanderungsland*), drawing attention to the bottom-up history of Turkish immigrants' everyday experiences seemed to be a meaningful way to highlight the important and enduring role of immigrants in the fabric of German society.

As it turns out, I was not the only historian with that idea. Through encounters in the archives and at conferences, I soon became part of a warm and growing cohort of US-based scholars grappling with very similar questions, among them Brittany Lehman, Brian J. K. Miller, Jennifer A. Miller, Christopher Molnar, Lauren Stokes, Sarah Thomsen Vierra, and Brian Van Wyck.[17] All of us, it seemed, shared a stake in developing a much-needed field. The awareness that I was only one interlocutor among many—and specifically that several other scholars were working on Turkish migrants' everyday experiences in Germany—encouraged me to shift trajectories. I now had to reconsider what specific angle I could take.

As often happens during the research process, the answer came serendipitously. On the very first day of a Turkish language class, as we went around the room introducing ourselves, the instructor's face lit up as I explained my research interest. Incidentally, she had grown up in a very small beach town in Turkey, and many of her neighbors were former guest workers who had returned from Germany to retire in the 1980s and 1990s. Not only did they still live there, but so did her parents. As the semester progressed and our intellectual relationship deepened, she invited me to visit the beach town that summer while she would be there on vacation. I could stay with her parents, and she would arrange oral history interviews with all of her Turkish-German neighbors. With an average length of approximately two hours, each interview began with a warm welcome, Turkish tea, and plenty of sweets. The linguistic cacophony of Turkish and German was especially chaotic (yet all the more ethnographically illuminating) during the numerous interviews in which multiple family members—a husband, a wife, second-generation children, third-generation grandchildren, and even a nephew—all chatted with me at once.

Only through these interviews with returnees, which fortunately came early on in the research process, did I find my angle. Although most of the other work in the field had portrayed Turkish migration as a German story—as a one-directional migration from Turkey to Germany whose implications played out primarily within German borders—I turned my

[16] Sabine Siebold, "Merkel Says German Multiculturalism Has Failed," *Reuters*, October 16, 2010 (https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-merkel-immigration/merkel-says-german-multiculturalism-has-failed-idUSTRE69F1K320101016); Thilo Sarrazin, *Deutschland schafft sich ab. Wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2010). On Sarrazin, see Michael Meng, "Silences about Sarrazin's Racism in Contemporary Germany," *Journal of Modern History* 87, no. 1 (March 2015): 102–35.

[17] Brittany Lehman, *Teaching Migrant Children in West Germany and Europe, 1949–1992* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Brian Joseph-Keysor Miller, "Reshaping the Turkish Nation-State: The Turkish-German Guest Worker Program and Planned Development, 1961–1985" (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 2015); Jennifer A. Miller, *Turkish Guest Workers in Germany: Hidden Lives and Contested Borders, 1960s–1980s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018); Christopher A. Molnar, *Memory, Politics, and Yugoslav Migrations to Postwar Germany* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2018); Lauren Stokes, *Fear of the Family: Guest Workers and Family Migration in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022); Sarah Thomsen Vierra, *Turkish Germans in the Federal Republic of Germany: Immigration, Space, and Belonging, 1961–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Brian Van Wyck, "Turkish Teachers and Imams and the Making of Turkish German Difference" (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 2019).

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attention to the idea of return migration (*Rückwanderung*), which I define broadly to encompass both temporary and permanent returns to Turkey, as well as circular migration back and forth between Turkey and West Germany. By focusing on the notion of return, and, more broadly, on the migrants' physical and emotional connections to their country of origin, I aimed to complicate dominant scholarly and public narratives that emphasize the migrants' *failure* to return home as a key driver of the tensions that Germany still faces surrounding the integration of Turkish migrants today. Indeed, the title of one of the foremost accounts, Karin Hunn's 2005 book *Nächstes Jahr kehren wir zurück* (*We'll Go Back Next Year*), emphasizes precisely that perception: that the return to Turkey was little more than a long-deferred dream, or even an "illusion," as many contemporary sources put it, that never ended up materializing.[18] Of course, the overwhelming tendency to blame the guest workers for failing to return—which fuels xenophobia by conjuring German resentment for guest workers overstaying their welcome—evades a reckoning with what, in reality, was a German failure: neglecting to take concrete steps to integrate guest workers in the 1960s and, decades later, refusing to accept its status as a country of immigration.

To uncover the reality that remigration was not, in fact, an illusion, I anchored my research in two key terms. The first is the *Rückkehrförderungsgesetz*, the controversial 1983 Law for the Promotion of Voluntary Return of Foreigners passed by West German chancellor Helmut Kohl's conservative coalition amid a climate of rising anti-Turkish, anti-Muslim xenophobia. With this remigration law, policymakers sought to reduce the unwanted immigrant population by offering unemployed former guest workers a so-called *Rückkehrprämie* (remigration premium) to relinquish their residence permits and permanently exit West German borders within just ten months. Though the government officially offered the premium to all guest workers from non-European Economic Community member states, my research reveals that policymakers deliberately targeted Turks in particular; indeed, Kohl secretly told British prime minister Margaret Thatcher the previous year that he wanted to cut the number of Turkish immigrants in half.[19] Although the law fell short of achieving Kohl's 50 percent goal, it did spark one of the largest mass remigrations in modern European history, with 15 percent of the Turkish immigrant population—approximately 250,000 men, women, and children—returning to Turkey within just ten months. As critics in both Germany and Turkey called the law blatantly "racist" and a "voluntary expulsion"—and even compared Helmut Kohl to Adolf Hitler—examining this law helped me heed the call by Rita Chin, Heide Fehrenbach, Geoff Eley, and Atina Grossmann for more studies of the taboo subjects of "race" and "racism" in post-Holocaust Germany.[20]

The second term, which allowed me to emphasize social and cultural history alongside political history, was *Almancı*, a derogatory colloquialism typically used by Turks who had not migrated to describe guest workers and their descendants in Germany (*Almanya*). This term, which I define as "Germanized Turk," implies that the migrants have, to a certain extent, transformed into Germans. Put more bluntly, as a Turkish friend of mine once quipped: "They're like mutants. Turkish-German mutants." At the least, it implies that they have sufficiently adopted German habits, customs, mannerisms, and language during their decades abroad as to be considered no longer "fully Turkish" in the eyes of their countrymen at home. The exclusionary implications of the term *Almancı*, I argue, reveal an important yet underacknowledged point: just as Germans have historically harbored anxieties about migrants' inability to "integrate," so too have societies with high rates of outward migration, like Turkey, developed nationalist discourses in which emigrants betray

[18] Karin Hunn, *"Nächstes Jahr kehren wir zurück…." Die Geschichte der türkischen 'Gastarbeiter' in der Bundesrepublik* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2005).

[19] Claus Hecking, "Secret Thatcher Notes: Kohl Wanted Half of Turks Out of Germany," *Der Spiegel International*, August 1, 2013 (https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/secret-minutes-chancellor-kohl-wanted-half-of-turks-out-of-germany-a-914376.html).

[20] Rita Chin et al., *After the Nazi Racial State: Difference and Democracy in Germany and Europe* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2009).

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some or all of their identity by leaving their country of origin, choosing to remain abroad, and assimilating excessively. Indeed, xenophobic German tropes of cultural clash contrast ironically with Turkish fears of the migrants' Germanization.

The origins of this "Germanized Turk" trope extend to the very beginning of the Turkish-German labor program. When guest workers were first separated from their families during the formal recruitment years (1961–1973), overblown rumors about male guest workers having sex with German women, cheating on their wives, and abandoning their children spread. Estrangement from family thus represented estrangement from the Turkish nation. Simultaneously, as guest workers returned to their home cities and villages with cars and other luxurious Western consumer goods "made in Germany," the stereotype developed that the migrants had transformed into a *nouveau-riche* class of superfluous spenders who had adopted the perceived German habit of conspicuous consumption and neglected the financial needs of Turkey's struggling economy. The final evidence of the migrants' Germanization was the "lost generation" of so-called "*Almancı* children" born and raised in Germany, who were stereotyped as dressing and acting like western Europeans, losing touch with their Muslim faith, and barely speaking the Turkish language. Family politics, financial decisions, and cultural transformation thus all intermingled to create the "Germanized Turk." Though this label was primarily defined externally and used derogatorily, largely based on stereotypes, taking the Turkish discourse of the migrants' Germanization seriously is intellectually productive, for it invites us to consider migrants not as isolated "foreigners" (*Ausländer*), but as fundamentally German actors.

These two intellectual shifts of my work—emphasizing return migration alongside immigration, and considering Turks as German actors—have implications for Geyer's question about "where Germans dwell." If we consider Turkish migrants as German actors (either self-identifying as German or being externally identified as *Almancı*), then we can broaden our scope of German history to include a new geographic space: Turkey. Most intuitively, on the one hand, Turkey was the site of the migrants' lives before they joined the guest worker program, and far from discarding their connections to their country of origin as soon as they set foot on West German soil, the process of "Germanization" they experienced occurred against the backdrop of their Turkish identity. On the other hand, Turkey was the site where the migrants—once they had already begun to "become German"—dwelled after choosing to remigrate with the 1983 *Rückkehrförderungsgesetz*. The notion of Turkish migrants being German actors moving abroad during their vacations and permanent remigration to Turkey is especially apparent in the recollections of the second-generation children of guest workers, many of whom had been born or raised almost entirely in West Germany and for whom the experience of visiting or moving to Turkey, struggling to adapt to Turkish society, and being ostracized as *Almancı* made the German side of their identities all the more salient. To them, as one of my interview partners put it, it was not a *return* to Turkey, but rather a new migration to somewhere "entirely strange."[21]

Of course, by extension, since Germany and Germans are indisputably within the scope of central European history, then—with this shift in thinking—both Turkish migrants and Turkey itself can be considered part of central European history. If we stretch the boundaries of central Europe to include Turkey, then the typical geographic constraints of central Europe, as well as the usefulness of the category of "central Europe" as a whole, start to break down.

II. Three Historical Layers of Migration: Where "Germanized Turks" Traveled

Taking this argument further, I now argue that our idea of German and central European space can span much of the physical landscape *between* Germany and Turkey, specifically including what during my time period of study (1960s–1980s) comprised Austria, the former

[21] Murad B., interview by author, Cologne, Germany, 2017.

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Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria. As a caveat, I do not mean that German historians need to colonize this space as a sort of historiographical *Mitteleuropa* but only that we might benefit by viewing it as a site worthy of study when there are connections to Germany and German actors.[22] There is certainly precedent for this approach, primarily among Holocaust historians, who have examined Nazi atrocities in the killing fields of the East. Yet the role of Germany in central Europe and the Balkans extends far beyond the Holocaust. In a recent edited volume, Mirna Zakić and Christopher Molnar have convincingly argued that German and Balkan histories have been entangled, particularly in the twentieth century.[23] Complicating previous scholarship that has emphasized Orientalist German perceptions of the east as backward, primitive, and uncivilized, the volume emphasizes the mutual influencing of German and Balkan societies, states, regions, and peoples through the topics of war, empire, memory, and migration. The case of Turkish-German migration, though involving two countries on the peripheries of this landscape, offers new opportunities for exploring its interconnectedness.

My thinking on this subject emerged from my oral history interviews with returnees. Of all the questions I asked, one of the most seemingly simple proved the most illuminating: "In what year did you return to Turkey?" One of my first interview partners, a loquacious eighty-year-old woman sitting next to her comparably silent husband, responded pointedly: "Which time? We went back all the time."[24] Immediately, I was taken aback. Although I was already engaging deeply with return migration, it had never crossed my mind that I would uncover anything other than a one-time "permanent return" (in German, *endgültige Rückkehr*, or in Turkish, *kesin dönüş*). When I pressed for details, I learned that the woman, her husband, and their children had in fact traveled back to their Turkish home villages every single summer for more than twenty years. As my other interview partners—and, later, myriad archival sources—corroborated, virtually all guest workers returned to Turkey annually to visit friends and family and, in many cases, to build houses in anticipation of their future permanent return.

On their annual vacations to Turkey and back to West Germany, which one can consider seasonal or temporary remigrations, guest workers and their family members traveled by train, bus, airplane, and, by far most commonly in the 1960s through 1980s, car.[25] Overwhelmingly, they took the same route every single time: a 3,000-kilometer international highway called the Europastraße 5, which extended from West Germany to Turkey by way of Austria, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria.[26] Through this long and arduous journey, plagued by curvy, shoddily maintained, and dangerous roads, the geographic landscape between West Germany and Turkey—the former Habsburg and Ottoman lands—transformed into a unified space where migration *happened*.

To return yet again to Geyer's provocation about "Where Germans Dwelled," I will now consider this transnational migration space as one "Where Germans (or at least 'Germanized Turks') Traveled." To do so, I will consider this journey in view of three overlapping historical moments that historians have understandably treated as distinct: the early modern Habsburg-Ottoman conflicts and post-Ottoman twentieth century, the Cold War

[22] This idea echoes the call to "Europeanize" German history. Ute Frevert, "Europeanizing German History," Eighteenth Annual Lecture of the German Historical Institute, November 18, 2004, reprinted in *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 36 (Spring 2005): 9–24.

[23] Mirna Zakić and Christopher A. Molnar, eds., *German-Balkan Entangled Histories in the Twentieth Century* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020), 8.

[24] Necla Ö., interview by author, Şarköy, Turkey, 2014.

[25] On the related concept of "transit migration," see Aspasia Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, *Transit Migration: The Missing Link Between Emigration and Settlement* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

[26] For previous work on the Europastraße 5, see Ruth Mandel, *Cosmopolitan Anxieties: Turkish Challenges to Citizenship and Belonging in Germany* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 232–47; Manfred Pfaffenthaler, "Die Gastarbeiterroute. Zur Geschichte eines transeuropäischen Migrationswege," in *Mobilitäten. Beiträge der Vortragenden der Montagsakademie*, ed. Ulrike Bechmann and Christian Friedl (Universität Graz, 2012), 154–64.

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(particularly the 1960s through 1980s), and the last ten years since the beginning of the Syrian refugee crisis in 2011.

IIa. Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Migration Space: Revisiting an "Ancient Migration Route"

My analysis in this first historical layer, in which I reconceptualize central Europe as an Ottoman and post-Ottoman migration space, is rooted in the animosity reported by vacationing Turkish travelers as they drove annually along the international highway, Europastraße 5, from West Germany to Turkey. Local populations' antagonism toward the travelers—which ranged from disdainful remarks to vandalism, theft, and unwarranted arrests—began during their time in Austria but intensified substantially as they drove through Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. There are multiple ways to explain these tensions. One reason, on which I elaborate later in this article, are the geopolitical pressures and economic inequalities of the Cold War, whereby local Yugoslav and Bulgarian populations viewed Turkish travelers as representatives of the Cold War "West." For this first layer, however, I reach back several centuries earlier to argue that the animosity toward Turkish travelers is partly rooted in a deep-seated association of Turks with Ottomans, which has still persisted, perhaps subconsciously, from the early modern period through the present day. Reconsidering the landscape of central Europe and the Balkans as a space where "Germanized Turks" traveled reveals the enduring significance of the scars left by the history of Ottoman conquest and the post-Ottoman history of migration throughout the region.

In my research, one of the most intriguing pieces of evidence about the historical memory of migration throughout the former Ottoman lands is a sensationalist 1975 article in the West German newspaper *Der Spiegel* on the subject of Turkish guest worker families' vacations to Turkey. Facetiously, the article quipped: "As an irresistible and uncontrollable force, two million guest workers in fully-packed cars make their way on the road of death to Skopje, Istanbul, and Athens. 'The Turks are coming' has become a cry of distress (*Schreckensruf*) for Alp-dwellers and Serbs—almost as once for their forefathers, when the Janissaries approached on the same ancient migration route."[27] By condemning Turkish travelers as a terrifying invasion of Janissaries, the elite corps of the Ottoman Empire's standing army, *Der Spiegel* alluded to the bloody 1683 Battle of Vienna, which took place after the Ottoman military had occupied the Habsburg capital for two months. And by explicitly using the phrase "ancient migration route," the newspaper characterized the region as not strictly demarcated by the borders of an imagined "central Europe," but rather as a space of deeply rooted travel, mobility, and exchange.

Sensationalism aside, the *Der Spiegel* article illuminated an important point: the very same paths on which vacationing Turkish guest workers traveled during the Cold War were overlaid on a much deeper history of Habsburg-Ottoman warfare, climaxing in the 1683 invasion of Vienna.[28] As Palmira Brummett has explained in her fascinating book on Ottoman-Habsburg cartographies, each expansion and contraction of imperial borders was accompanied by the immigration and emigration of enemy populations—soldiers, administrators, bureaucrats, merchants, and settlers.[29] The extent and variety of interactions between migratory Ottomans and Habsburgs, Muslims and Christians, along this transimperial space belies the overly simplistic notion of two distinct empires and populations with minimal exchange beyond warfare. At the same time, however, one cannot discount the power of historical memory to overshadow coexistence and cooperation. Tense interactions among these migratory populations at the local level, amplified amid the larger geopolitical

[27] "E 5: Terror von Blech und Blut," *Der Spiegel*, August 25, 1975, 92–101.

[28] Elif Batuman, "Ottomania," *The New Yorker*, February 10, 2014 (https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/02/17/ottomania).

[29] Palmira Brummett, *Mapping the Ottomans: Sovereignty, Territory, and Identity in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

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context of war and violence, contributed to the development of enduring tropes about the Ottoman "Other" and "bloodthirsty Turk."

Although recent scholarship has complicated the "bloodthirsty Turk" idea by highlighting the multiplicity of ways that early modern Europeans viewed Ottomans, these "ancient hatreds" remained a powerful nationalist discourse in the Balkans.[30] Although western European disdain for Turks subsided somewhat during Ottoman "westernization" campaigns of the Tanzimat Era (1839–1876), nineteenth-century Balkan nationalist movements sought to radically break with the past through a process of "de-Ottomanization," which, in the words of Maria Todorova, aimed to achieve "the polar opposite of being Ottoman (or Oriental), namely, steady Europeanization, Westernization, or modernization of society."[31] This longstanding "anti-Turkism," as some scholars have called it, intensified somewhat during the Cold War era, as socialism and communism in the Balkans stood in stark opposition to the Republic of Turkey's democratization and NATO membership—thereby, to a certain extent, flipping the "ancient hatreds" East–West binary to position Turkey as "Western" and the Balkans as "Eastern." The bitter memory of Ottoman conquest persists today, negatively shaping European attitudes toward Turkey's EU accession.[32] Of course, the repeated reinforcing of these dichotomies contradicts a crucial reality: post-Ottoman societies are hybrids of local, Ottoman, and "Western" traditions.

Alongside the deep history of Ottoman-Habsburg strife and Ottoman rule, the region also remains marked by the legacy of the late- and post-Ottoman history of migration, which involved top-down resettlement projects, forced expulsions, population exchanges, and wartime displacement. Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky has unearthed a much deeper history of refugee crises in the region, revealing how the Ottoman Empire's large-scale efforts to resettle Muslim refugees (*muhajir*) from Russia and the North Caucasus in the late nineteenth century provoked lasting economic and (to a lesser extent) ethnoreligious animosities throughout the Balkans and the Middle East.[33] Upon the end of World War I and dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, fervor surrounding the creation of ethnically homogenous nation-states further transformed the region into a migration space through unprecedented forced expulsions of minority groups, including the euphemistically termed Greek-Turkish "population exchange" of 1923. During the horrors of World War II, intracommunal violence erupted in multiethnic neighborhoods in the Balkans, resulting in ethnic cleansing, mass expulsions, and forced displacement.[34] Four decades later, in the 1990s, the wars in the former Yugoslavia and the Bosnian Genocide generated nearly 5 million refugees and internally displaced persons.[35] Not to be neglected, moreover, is the longer history of persecution of diasporic and migratory populations, such as Jews and Roma.[36]

[30] Božidar Jezernik, ed., *Imagining "the Turk"* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010).

[31] Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 180.

[32] Deniz Bingöl McDonald, "Imperial Legacies and Neo-Ottomanism: Eastern Europe and Turkey," *Insight Turkey* 14, no. 4 (Fall 2012): 101–20.

[33] Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky, "Imperial Refuge: Resettlement of Muslims from Russia in the Ottoman Empire, 1860–1914" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2018).

[34] Max Bergholz, *Violence as a Generative Force: Identity, Nationalism, and Memory in a Balkan Community* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016); Emily Greble, *Sarajevo, 1941–1945: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Hitler's Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

[35] Norman Naimark and Holly Case, ed., *Yugoslavia and Its Historians: Understanding the Balkan Wars of the 1990s* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); V. P. Gagnon Jr., *The Myth of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).

[36] On Jews before the Holocaust, see among others: Israel Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe, 1772–1881*, trans. Chaya Naor (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); Marc David Baer, *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009). On Roma, see Will Guy, ed., *Between Past and Future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001); Carol Silverman, *Romani Routes: Cultural Politics and Balkan Music in Diaspora* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Can Yıldız and Nicholas De Genova, *Roma Migrants in the European Union: Un/Free Mobility* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

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The forced expulsion most applicable to my study of Turkish-German migrants occurred between May and August 1989, when Bulgaria's communist government expelled more than 300,000 of the country's 900,000 ethnic Turks whom it deemed, as Tomasz Kamusella has put it, "un-Bulgarianize-able."[37] Since 1984, ethnic Turks, who accounted for 10 percent of Bulgaria's total population, had been subjected to a violent assimilation campaign in which they were forced, sometimes at gunpoint, to change their names to Bulgarian or Slavic ones.[38] Writing after the expulsion, Vera Mutafchieva reached back to the deeper history of Ottoman rule, putting it frankly: "The epitome of Bulgarian notions of 'the other' is no doubt the Turk."[39] Kamusella, on the other hand, has recently contended that this dominant interpretation reinforces a Bulgarian nationalist narrative that justifies the expulsion as recompense for centuries-long oppression under the "Ottoman yoke." In terms of my own research, Bulgarians' animosity toward their own Muslim Turkish ethnic minority population in the 1980s exposes another undercurrent that influenced local Bulgarians' disdain for the "Germanized Turkish" travelers. The 1989 expulsion also relates to my emphasis on return migration, as it occurred just six years after the controversially termed "voluntary expulsion" of Turks from West Germany following the 1983 remigration law (*Rückkehrförderungsgesetz*). Without conflating the often traumatic experiences of Bulgarian Turkish expellees with the voluntary return of "Germanized Turks," it is striking that two Muslim Turkish minority groups living outside Turkey—each of which endured xenophobia and expulsion predicated on ethnic difference and perceived inability to assimilate—migrated to Turkey within the same decade. As Ayşe Parla's new book reveals, the Bulgarian Turks (*Bulgaristanlı*) who fled to Turkey following the 1989 expulsion, despite expecting similar treatment on the basis of shared "ethnic kinship," have faced difficulties integrating into Turkish society, similar to the "Germanized Turks" whom I study.[40] Both groups simultaneously tested the limits of Turkish identity even though the two cases have been discussed separately.

Understanding this complex Ottoman and post-Ottoman migration history requires acknowledging several caveats. First, these tensions cannot be fully explained by "ancient hatreds" or primordial fears of "bloodthirsty Turks" and "Muslim invaders," but rather must be viewed in light of the specificities of local contexts and local histories. In a vein similar to Jan Gross's 2000 book *Neighbors*, a groundbreaking study of the eruption of antisemitism in Poland during the Holocaust, scholars such as Emily Greble, Max Bergholz, Norman Naimark, and Holly Case have reinterpreted violence in the Balkans as contingent rather than predestined, particular rather than generalizable, and attributable to far more than religious and ethnic tensions.[41] Second, the traumatizing legacies of forced expulsion, ethnic cleansing, and displacement often overshadow histories of voluntary migration, chosen assimilation, and cooperation between minority communities. As Theodora Dragostinova has shown in her study of the Greek minority in early twentieth-century Bulgaria, voluntary migrants navigated their complex identities and "ambiguities of nationhood" on the everyday level and were not demarcated into separate, hostile communities.[42] Milena Methodieva's recent study of reform movements among Bulgaria's Muslim community during a slightly earlier time period likewise restores agency to Muslims and highlights local

[37] Tomasz Kamusella, *Ethnic Cleansing during the Cold War: The Forgotten 1989 Expulsion of Turks from Communist Bulgaria* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

[38] Ayşe Parla, *Precarious Hope: Migration and the Limits of Belonging in Turkey* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019), 47.

[39] Vera Mutafchieva, "The Notion of the 'Other' in Bulgaria: The Turks, A Historical Study," *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 4, no. 2 (1995): 53.

[40] Parla, *Precarious Hope*.

[41] Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (New York: Penguin, 2002); Bergholz, *Violence as a Generative Force*; Greble, *Sarajevo, 1941–1945*; Naimark and Case, *Yugoslavia and Its Historians*.

[42] Theodora Dragostinova, *Between Two Motherlands: Nationality and Emigration Among the Greeks of Bulgaria, 1900-1949* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

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interreligious collaboration.[43] These caveats in mind, both the deep history of Ottoman rule in the region and the local hostilities and ambivalences surrounding post-Ottoman migration and mobility are significant for three main reasons: they support the definition of central Europe as a migration space, encourage us to consider the Ottoman Empire and Turkey as part of European history, and provide insight into why local populations viewed vacationing "Germanized Turks" with hostility during the Cold War decades.

IIb. Cold War Migration Space: Economic Inequalities and Divided Mentalities

Having established the deeper history of migration across the former Ottoman lands, I now transition to the 1960s through 1980s, the time period of my research on "Germanized Turkish" guest workers, in order to consider the significance of this "ancient migration route" during the Cold War. Given that their annual road trips between West Germany and Turkey occurred from the 1960s through the 1980s, the Cold War was a looming, haunting presence. After driving through US-aligned West Germany and neutral Austria on the international highway, they crossed into the imagined Iron Curtain, via Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, until they arrived in Turkey. As many in the "Western" camp during the Cold War, vacationing Turkish guest workers envisioned the geographic space between Austria and Turkey as "the East," a label that flattened the distinctions between eastern Europe, southeastern Europe, the Soviet bloc, and socialist but nonaligned Yugoslavia. Far from a situation in which social history reveals the surprising irrelevance of larger geopolitical issues to everyday life, the migrants palpably felt Cold War divisions and remembered them vividly for years to come. The presence of German (or "Germanized") actors in the Cold War "East" is all the more striking given Germany's diminished role in the Balkans at the time and the Iron Curtain's perceived impermeability. Examining this region as a migration space thus speaks to a growing number of scholars who have exposed the porosity of the Iron Curtain and highlighted local East/West interactions.[44]

When they traveled through socialist Yugoslavia and communist Bulgaria, the migrants assumed a role as representatives of two different "Wests." On the one hand, they represented the West German "West," which was easily identifiable not only from the fact that they were driving eastward from the West, but also from the West German markings on their license plates. On the other hand, they also represented the Turkish "West." Indeed, although Turkey was geographically situated east of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, it squarely identified with—and was certainly embraced into—the political "Western" camp during the Cold War. Strategically located at the crossroads (or, to invoke the problematic metaphor, as a "bridge") between Europe and the oil-rich Middle East, Turkey had been a welcome NATO ally since 1952. And, as was the case with much of western Europe, Turkey had been a key target of post–World War II "Americanization" efforts that, though often contested by the Turkish public as "neo-imperialist," were promoted in the early Cold War decades by Turkish policymakers who sought to continue the Kemalist project of "modernization" and "westernization."[45] Finally, the Cold War was also marked by contentious discussions about Turkey's accession to the European Economic Community.[46]

[43] Milena B. Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation: Muslim Reform in the Balkans* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021).

[44] Theodora K. Dragostinova, *The Cold War from the Margins: A Small Socialist State on the Global Cultural Scene* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021); Astrid M. Eckert, *West Germany and the Iron Curtain: Environment, Economy, and Culture in the Borderlands* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Yuliya Komska, *The Icon Curtain: The Cold War's Quiet Border* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Edith Sheffer, *Burned Bridge: How East and West Germans Made the Iron Curtain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[45] Şaban Halis Çalış, *Turkey's Cold War: Foreign Policy and Western Alignment in the Modern Republic* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016).

[46] Mehmet Döşemeci, *Debating Turkish Modernity: Civilization, Nationalism, and the EEC* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

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In the eyes of the "Eastern" Yugoslav and Bulgarian populations that guest workers encountered along the journey, vacationing Turks' West German identity—and particularly the economic success associated with West Germany—was highly salient. Although their appearance did not bear the racialized "Aryan"-looking traits associated with Germans, and most did not speak fluent German, the association was largely in view of the economic inequalities of the Cold War: local Yugoslavs and Bulgarians came to associate vacationing guest workers with "Western" consumer culture. The cars driven by Turkish guest workers were highly reputed West German and American brands (commonly BMW, Mercedes-Benz, Volkswagen, Audi, Opel, and Ford), and in the instances in which they exchanged money with local populations—for example to purchase gasoline or, in far fewer cases, to eat at a roadside restaurant or sleep overnight at a local hotel—they were identified not only by the materiality of their Deutschmark bills and coins, but also by the purchasing power that they, as holders of high-performing West German currency, possessed. By contrast, Western consumer goods were harder to acquire in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. Access to such products was certainly more widespread for Yugoslavs, who benefited from international trade, the ability to make shopping trips to neighboring Italy, and gifts from Yugoslav guest workers returning from West Germany on their own vacations or remigration; still, however, scarcities and a less valuable currency imbued Western products with a cachet of rarity and luxury.[47] In communist Bulgaria, which was not only more impoverished but also more cut off from the "West," such products were even more unattainable.

The economic association with Germanness became especially clear in anecdotes relayed to me by my interview partners, whose troublesome experiences along the highway made them buy into Cold War tropes of "Eastern" backwardness and inferiority. To mention just a few examples: the husband of one of my interview partners was arrested for speeding by a Yugoslav police officer, who would not release him until he handed over his watch and 500 Deutschmarks. Several interview partners recalled sleeping in their cars rather than hotels in order to prevent locals from stealing from them in both Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. Another recalled that Bulgarian children would knock on his family's car—begging for chocolate, cigarettes, Coca Cola, and cash—and curse the driver with "I hope your mother will die!" if they did not get what they wanted. Overwhelmingly, those recollecting these troubling experiences attributed them to the deficiencies of socialism and communism, which they assumed to have shaped the local population's mentalities. As one traveler recalled upon crossing the checkpoint from Yugoslavia to Bulgaria, the atmosphere immediately seemed colorless and "gray," and no one smiled.[48]

As a testament to guest workers' internalization of Cold War mentalities, the perception of economic inequality persisted even when the travelers crossed into Turkey. Although Turkey was part of the "West," vacationing "Germanized Turks" drew parallels between the perceived underdevelopment of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria and their rural home villages. Crucial to the perception of Turkish villages as "Eastern" was the social symbolism of the cars and consumer goods that vacationing guest worker families brought with them from West Germany. In 1960s and 1970s Turkey, cars were the privilege of elite city-dwellers, and many Turkish villagers had not seen a car—especially one from a West German or American brand—until a guest worker returned on their vacation. Likewise did the very same "Western" consumer goods that Yugoslav and Bulgarian border guards and locals alike coveted—such as Marlboro cigarettes and Coca Cola—imbue vacationing guest workers with social cachet in Turkey, and relatives and neighbors often expected these items as gifts.[49]

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[47] On Yugoslav guest workers, see Molnar, *Memory, Politics, and Yugoslav Migrations to Postwar Germany*.

[48] "Ayhan (1971), Karlsruhe-Istanbul, 2.250 km, Ford Taunus, Ford Granada," (http://www.yolculuk.de/deutsch/mein-reisebericht/).

[49] Michael Holzach and Tim Rautert, "Ahmets Heimkehr," *Zeit-Magazin* 41, no. 1 (October 1976): 28–45.

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Derision of Turkish villages as "Eastern" and economically underdeveloped was especially true among second-generation children who had been born or raised in West Germany. In Turkish novelist Gülten Dayıoğlu's 1986 book of short stories, *Rückkehr zwischen zwei Grenzen* (*Return Between Two Borders)*, a teenager raised in West Germany complains that Anatolian villages are blighted by "mud, dirt, and crumbling houses" and that the villagers live "primitively" and are "stupid, backwards, conservative, strange people."[50] One woman interviewed for a German archive recalled decades later that the residents of her parents' home village "look stupid" and "speak stupidly" (*blöd*),[51] while another told me that everything in her parents' village—especially the "crumbling buildings"—was "ugly" and "wild," compared to the "properly standardized" and "orderly" infrastructure in West Germany. The second generation's critiques of Turkish rural "backwardness" thus echoed their recollections about the underdevelopment of socialist Yugoslavia and communist Bulgaria and, simultaneously, tied their own identities more closely to what they praised as the urban, industrialized, efficient "West." The Cold War migration space was thus not only a transit route, but also contributed to the shaping of Turkish, German, and European identities.

IIc. Syrian Refugee Migration Space: Islamophobia across the Balkan Route and Schengen Zone

For the third historical layer, I will now jump forward to today's world to explore an interesting parallel: the migration of asylum seekers from Syria to Europe along the so-called "Balkan Route" since 2011, which traverses the very same geographic landscape across central Europe and the Balkans as guest workers were traveling during their annual vacations across Cold War Europe. Although some historians might deem the refugee crisis too recent to constitute "history" (as the migration of Turks to Germany was once considered), scholars cannot ignore contemporary relevance. In a world plagued by the resurgence of the far right, shying away from presentism for the sake of avoiding teleology and preserving the (in reality unattainable) goal of objectivity shirks our ethical responsibility to engage deeply with—and perhaps even provide some answers to—the greatest global issues of our time. In reflecting on central Europe as a Syrian refugee space, I not only heed the call to further the study of central Europe to the present day, but also contend that asylum seeker migration—through the immense challenge it poses to the policing of national, international, and supranational borders—has simultaneously tied the region together and torn it apart. Connecting this section to the previous two, I further contend that responses to Syrian refugees, as well as Syrians' perception of the Balkan Route journey, exhibit a continuation of Ottoman and Cold War legacies.

Since its outbreak in 2011, the Syrian Civil War has created the largest population displacement in modern history. As I write in 2021, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that 6.6 million people are internally displaced inside Syria, and 5.6 million are registered refugees in other countries. Of the registered refugees, fewer than 10 percent live in formal refugee camps. The other 90 percent live in largely "overcrowded informal settlements and dangerous locations" in the urban areas of the neighboring countries of Lebanon, Jordan, and—crucially for the way I think about this issue—Turkey.[52] Indeed, it is Turkey—the country of heritage for Germany's largest ethnic minority population—that has taken in the vast majority (64.5 percent) of registered Syrian refugees.[53] To think about this statistic another way, the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey (3.5 million) is even greater than the number of people in Germany with a Turkish

[50] Gülten Dayıoğlu, *Rückkehr zwischen zwei Grenzen. Gespräche und Erzählungen*, trans. Feridun Altuna (Berlin: ikoo, 1986), 136–47.

[51] Nursemin Ö., interview, 2004, Dokumentationszentrum und Museum über die Migration in Deutschland e.V., Cologne (DOMiD-Archiv), R0015.MS 04 R, 185.

[52] United Nations Refugee Agency, "Syria Refugee Crisis," (https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/syria/).

[53] United Nations Refugee Agency, "Syria Regional Refugee Response" (https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria).

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migration background (2.75 million according to Germany's 2018 microcensus).[54] As an aside, it is intriguing here to recall early modern history once more: Syria, of course, was part of the Ottoman Empire from 1516 through 1918. Although this fact likely has no direct bearing on Turkey's willingness to accept Syrian refugees, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has increasingly invoked a nationalist nostalgia for the Ottoman Empire in order to consolidate authoritarian power at home and to gain outsized influence in the region as a whole. This "neo-Ottomanism" or "Ottomania," as it has been amusingly called, lends credence to the notion that, despite Turkish discrimination against Syrians, the Turkish government "embraces a sense of responsibility" toward Ottoman subjects with shared Muslim heritage.[55]

As I conducted most of my research between 2014 and 2017, controversies surrounding German chancellor Angela Merkel's "welcoming culture" (*Willkommenskultur*) toward Syrian refugees fundamentally shaped my thinking. I soon realized that, despite a half century between them, Turkish guest worker families' annual vacations southeast across this migration space during the Cold War occurred across very similar routes as Syrian asylum seekers predominantly take to travel northwest from Turkey to Germany today. By far the majority use the Balkan Route, which comprises several maritime and land routes from Turkey to the most desired destination country: Germany. Most significantly for my analysis, one of the major routes, often referred to as the Western Balkan Route, passes through the Yugoslav successor states en route to the exterior Schengen countries of Hungary and Austria. To reach the Balkans, the majority of Syrian asylum seekers have opted for the treacherous maritime routes from Turkey to the EU member state of Greece, several of whose islands—including the infamous Lesbos, with its horrifying makeshift transit camps—are just ten miles off the Turkish coast.[56] Although less common, another important land route from Turkey passes through Bulgaria instead of Greece. And though not exactly on the same Europastraße 5 highway on which vacationing guest workers traveled, the general trajectory of the subroute through the Balkans is similar, as both traverse the cities of Edirne, Sofia, Skopje, Belgrade, Zagreb, and Spielfeld.

The route today, of course, has immense differences from the Cold War period. Among the most significant is the critical role of the Schengen Area, established in 1995, which abolished internal border controls and instituted a common visa policy. Today, the Schengen Area comprises twenty-six countries, including many that are crucial to the Balkan Route from Turkey to Germany: Greece, Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary, and Austria. But many of the countries along the subroutes—Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia—are not part of the Schengen Area, making Hungary—as the easternmost Schengen member state besides Greece—an especially crucial entry point for asylum seekers wishing to reach Germany. To further complicate matters, Bulgaria, Romania, and Croatia are all EU member states that are not part of the Schengen Area.

Despite the variance in each country's supranational memberships, I argue that there remains a lingering Cold War mentality dividing the Balkan Route into "western" and "eastern" zones, making Syrian asylum seekers' experiences traveling across this migration space bear some similarities to that of vacationing Turkish guest workers from the 1960s through the 1980s. Within this framework, the more interior countries of the Schengen Area represent the idealized "West" and the non-Schengen countries represent the undesirable, economically backward, and often dangerous "East." Although explanations of why Germany

[54] Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, "Bevölkerung mit Migrationshintergrund," September 19, 2019 (https://www.bpb.de/nachschlagen/zahlen-und-fakten/soziale-situation-in-deutschland/61646/migrationshintergrund-i).

[55] Öğr Üyesi, "Turkey's Refugee Policy Under the Shadow of Neo-Ottomanism: A Source of Silent Conflict?" *Journal of Academic Inquiries* 14, no. 1 (2019): 189–214; M. Hakan Yavuz, "Erdoğan's Ottomania," *Boston Review*, August 8, 2018 (http://bostonreview.net/politics/m-hakan-yavuz-erdogan-ottomanophilia).

[56] Max Bearak, "The Shifting Sea Routes of Europe's Refugee Crisis, in Charts and Maps," *Washington Post*, May 2, 2016 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/05/02/the-shifting-sea-routes-of-europes-refugee-crisis-in-charts-and-maps/).

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is the preferred destination country often replicate Cold War tropes of "the West" as economically secure, democratic, and free—in the words of one asylum seeker: "Because they 'provide you with a monthly salary, pay for your accommodation and education, and protect your human rights'"—accounts of the eastern portion of the route emphasize abuse, underdevelopment, and poor infrastructure.[57] Bulgaria, for example, is notorious for its xenophobic attitudes toward asylum seekers, as well as for its "horrendous" living conditions, including "bursting sewage pipes and people sleeping on the corridor floors."[58] And even though Serbia has sought to portray itself as "the unexpected friend of Syrian refugees"—with President Aleksandar Vučić even insisting "We are more European than some Europeans when it comes to migrants"—the situation is little better.[59] For the vast majority of Syrian asylum seekers, then, as for vacationing Turkish guest workers before them, Bulgaria and the Yugoslav successor states are not places of origin or destination, but rather a long and arduous buffer zone that they must begrudgingly cross along the way.

Although vacationing guest workers typically did not travel through Hungary, I consider Hungary here because it is an especially pivotal Balkan Route country, which is often the first Schengen country besides Greece that asylum seekers reach. A refugee interviewed in a 2015 *New York Times* article echoed the Cold War perception of eastern underdevelopment, putting Hungary "in much the same category as Macedonia and Serbia," as having only a "thin veneer of prosperity."[60] That same year, Prime Minister Viktor Órban and his right-wing Fidesz Party erected hundreds of miles of fences along the Serbian and Croatian borders, later fortifying them with barbed wire, heat sensors, cameras, and loudspeakers and wiring them to deliver nonfatal electric shocks.[61] Fidesz's obsession with walling itself in may owe to Hungary's position on the margins of the European Union; after the hard-fought battles to join the European Union and Schengen Area, the country has revealed itself as the most invested in erecting a new Iron Curtain around it. A more pressing factor, however, is the EU's Dublin Regulation giving member states the right to transfer migrants back to their first country of entry, which makes Hungary, as a Schengen border country, liable for hosting asylum seekers and adjudicating their cases.

Intermingling these Cold War and Schengen layers with my previous discussion of post-Ottoman space, the ethnoreligious component of Hungary's abuse of asylum seekers is more explicitly pronounced than in other Balkan Route countries. As Órban notoriously retorted in a 2018 interview with the German newspaper *Bild*, "We don't consider these people to be Muslim refugees. We consider them to be Muslim invaders."[62] Two years prior, parliamentary speaker László Kövér had cautioned, "Shall we be slaves or free men, Muslims or Christians?"[63] Likewise striking is a Syrian refugee in Bulgaria, who reported locals shouting, "We resisted the Ottomans, and we will not accept you. We will Christianize you."[64] Although the xenophobic

[57] Zainab Salbi, "Syrian Refugees Explain Why German Is Top Country in Which to Seek a New Life," *Women in the World*, September 9, 2015 (https://womenintheworld.com/2015/09/09/syrian-refugees-explain-why-germany-is-top-country-in-which-to-seek-a-new-life/).

[58] Nevena Nancheva, "The Common European Asylum System and the Failure to Protect: Bulgaria's Syrian Refugee Crisis," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 15, no. 4 (2015): 439–55.

[59] Davide Denti, "Serbia, the Unexpected Friend of Syrian Refugees," *Boulevard Extérieur*, September 3, 2015 (https://www.boulevard-exterieur.com/Serbia-the-unexpected-friend-of-Syrian-refugees.html).

[60] Anemona Hartocollis, "Traveling in Europe's River of Migrants," *New York Times*, September 5, 2015 (https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/cp/reporters-notebook/migrants/hungary-treatment-refugees).

[61] Marton Dunai, "Hungary Builds New High-Tech Border Fence—With Few Migrants in Sight," *Reuters,* March 2, 2017 (https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-hungary-fence/hungary-builds-new-high-tech-border-fence-with-few-migrants-in-sight-idUSKBN1692MH).

[62] Nikolaus Blome et al., "'You Wanted the Migrants—We Didn't!" *Bild*, January 9, 2018 (https://www.bild.de/politik/ausland/viktor-orban/exclusive-interview-with-viktor-orban-54405140.bild.html).

[63] Zoltan Pall and Omar Sayfo, "Why an Anti-Islam Campaign Has Taken Root in Hungary, a Country with Few Muslims," *Visegrád Revue*, September 14, 2016.

[64] "They've Escaped from Aleppo, But the 60,000 Syrian Refugees Living in Bulgaria Still Feel Far from Welcome," *The Journal.ie*, August 27, 2017 (https://www.thejournal.ie/bulgaria-syrian-refugees-3565372-Aug2017/).

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portrayal of Syrian asylum seekers as "Muslim invaders" reinforces the "ancient hatreds" argument and erases the history of Christian-Christian violence, such rhetoric has proven effective at stirring up nativism throughout the region: in recalling the Ottoman-Habsburg strife, it unifies Hungarians, Serbs, Croats, and Bulgarians and makes the positions of Muslim minority groups, such as Bosnian Muslims and Muslim Albanians, especially precarious.

Although Syrian asylum seekers, much like vacationing guest workers of the 1960s through 1980s, report an easing of circumstances once they cross into Austria and Germany—and although the two countries have not perpetrated an iota of the inhumane detention conditions as elsewhere along the Balkan Route—by no means do I intend to portray the crossing into the imagined "West" as a progress narrative. In fact, many Syrians' earlier idealization of Germany has faded, as Islamophobic rhetoric has surged more in the last several years than it did four decades ago, when anti-Turkish xenophobia motivated West German policymakers to pass the 1983 *Rückkehrförderungsgesetz* that paid guest workers to leave. In November 2017, Germany's anti-immigrant party Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD) won 13 percent of the vote, becoming the third largest party in the Bundestag, bolstered by the prominence of the Dresden-based protest organization Patriotic Europeans against the Islamicization of the West (Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlands, PEGIDA). In Austria, popular anti-Muslim sentiment manifested in the selection of the far-right Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) as a governing coalition partner from 2017 until 2019, accompanied by a 74 percent increase in Islamophobic incidents in 2018.[65] Further westward, the situation is similar. Antimigrant nativism counted as one of the primary reasons for Britain's exit from the European Union and propelled the growing strength of the French National Rally, Dutch Party for Freedom, Italian Northern League, and Spanish Vox parties, among others. Emphasizing xenophobia in western Europe is important, for it avoids the trap of reinforcing the Cold War mentality of the East as backward and intolerant rather than part of broader European trends.

Xenophobia toward Syrian asylum seekers, even in desired destination countries like Germany, relates to another crucial facet of my research on "Germanized Turks": return migration. In January 2016, German chancellor Angela Merkel stepped back from her previous "welcoming culture" rhetoric by announcing that asylum seekers should "go back to your home country" once "there is peace in Syria again, once ISIS has been defeated in Iraq."[66] Although human rights organizations have cautioned against asylum seekers' repatriation, Germany, as elsewhere in Europe, has since striven to facilitate Syrians' departure through similar methods as used in the 1980s to send Turks home: financial incentives for "voluntary return."[67] The mechanism for these voluntary return programs for asylum seekers and refugees—the REAG/GARP program implemented by the International Organization for Migration on behalf of the German Interior Ministry, and cofunded by the EU's European Return Fund—was established by the West German government in 1979, precisely at the same time as policymakers were heatedly debating the law that would become the 1983 *Rückkehrförderungsgesetz.*[68] Although very few Syrians have taken up the offer—just under 450 people in 2018, for example—their disenchantment with Germany reflects not only the minimal state support, poor living conditions, and lack of economic opportunities, but also the racist climate and difficulties "integrating."[69]

[65] Narzanin Massoumi, "Why Is Europe So Islamophobic?" *New York Times*, March 6, 2020 (https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/06/opinion/europe-islamophobia-attacks.html).

[66] Andreas Rinke and Michelle Martin, "Merkel: Refugees Must Return Home Once the War Is Over," *Reuters*, January 30, 2016 (https://www.businessinsider.com/merkel-refugees-must-return-home-once-war-over-2016-1).

[67] Benjamin Bathke, "Very Few Syrians Accept German State Support to Return Home," *InfoMigrants*, April 23, 2019 (https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/16462/very-few-syrians-accept-german-state-support-to-return-home).

[68] "REAG/GARP," International Organization for Migration (http://germany.iom.int/en/reaggarp-en).

[69] Choukri Chebbi, "Syrian Refugees in Germany Contemplate Return Home," *Deutsche Welle*, January 27, 2017 (https://www.dw.com/en/syrian-refugees-in-germany-contemplate-return-home/a-37305045).

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Gauging how Turks in Germany have reacted to the Syrian refugee crisis is difficult. German media outlets have repeatedly reported the widespread opposition to refugees in Turkey, which, while largely accurate, can by no means be conflated with the views of the Turkish diaspora in Germany.[70] Reflecting the diversity of opinions is a 2015 *Die Welt* article quoting two individuals, both the children of Turkish guest workers: although one fully supported Germany's acceptance of Syrians, the other expressed concern that the German government (as it had done in the case of guest workers) would fail to implement legitimate integration efforts and that Turks and Arabs would compete for jobs, social welfare aid, and apartments in migrant neighborhoods.[71] The latter perspective reflects a desire among some immigrants to "pull up the ladder" behind them, expressing a hesitation to support the acceptance of and socioeconomic assistance afforded to new immigrants.[72] Given the timeliness of the issue, scholars have only begun to investigate the interactions between these two migrant groups, largely corroborating the heterogeneous attitudes echoed in German media reports. One recent study, for example, has revealed that some Turks in Berlin, particularly those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, view Syrian refugees as a "threat"; others, primarily those who affiliate with Germany's leftist parties or Muslim religious groups, have created grassroots organizations that provide assistance to Syrians, but these interactions are marred by unequal power relations due to the Turks' "privileged" status as long-term migrants.[73] What emerges is a crucial point often forgotten when discussing the attitudes of a particular group: Turkish migrants are not a homogenous population, and neither are their attitudes toward Syrian refugees.

Considering the current Syrian refugee crisis in view of Turkish-German migration history thus provides another layer with which to view central Europe as a migration space and to transcend the geographic boundaries of "central Europe" as a category. To reach their desired destinations in the "West," Syrian asylum seekers travel along the very same migration space between Germany and Turkey—albeit in the opposite direction—that, from the 1960s through the 1980s, was taken by vacationing Turkish guest workers each year. Like Turkish guest workers before them, Syrian asylum seekers report distinct experiences in each country, suffusing the politics of the European Union and the Schengen Area with the Cold War binary between the economic success and freedoms of the "West" and the scarcity and oppression of the "East." The two migrant groups' predominantly Muslim faith has made each the target of Islamophobia, which although rooted primarily in nativism and the growing twenty-first-century fear of Muslims as "terrorists," is enflamed by tired albeit somewhat effective rhetoric comparing them to the "Ottoman invaders" and "bloodthirsty Turks" who traveled along the same path centuries ago. And the theme of return migration, which should become increasingly important when the Syrian Civil War concludes, underscores the reality that migration is not always a one-directional path, but rather one marked by return, circularity, and all the twists and turns along the way.

[70] Çiğdem Akyol, "Die hungernden Gäste von Istanbul," *Die Zeit*, November 25, 2014 (https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2014-11/fluechtlinge-tuerkei-syrien); "Syrische Flüchtlinge in der Türkei: 'Uns sind alle Türen verschlossen,'" *Der Tagesschau*, August 7, 2020 (https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/situation-syrische-fluechtlinge-tuerkei-101.html).

[71] "'Es dauert Generationen, bis Deutschland Heimat ist,'" *Die Welt*, November 30, 2015 (https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article149406127/Es-dauert-Generationen-bis-Deutschland-Heimat-ist.html).

[72] The phrase "pulling up the ladder," which applies not only to migrants but also to women and racial minorities, appears far more pervasively in English-speaking popular media than it does in scholarly literature. The most commonly cited scholarly essay on the topic is Doug Brugge, "Pulling Up the Ladder: The Anti-Immigrant Backlash," *The Public Eye* 9, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 1–13. Other scholars have engaged with the concept indirectly in describing interactions among old and new immigrant groups. See, among others: Jørgen Carling, "Making and Breaking a Chain: Migrants' Decisions about Helping Others Migrate," in *Beyond Networks: Feedback in International Migration,* ed. Oliver Bakewell et al. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 156–82.

[73] Burcu Togral Koca, "Urban Citizenship and the Spatial Encounter Between Turkish Migrants and Syrian Refugees in Berlin," *Spatial Research and Planning* 77, no. 6 (2019): 567–81.

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Conclusion: Toward the Collapse of Central Europe?

I return now to my opening question: "What is central Europe?" In reflecting on central Europe as a migration space, I have offered several answers. First, central Europe is a region in flux, which cannot be fully understood without attention to neighboring geographic spaces and, especially, to the migration of human beings across those geographic spaces. Second, central Europe ought to extend everywhere a central European dwells or travels. If we consider Turkish-German migrants as fitting into the category of "German"—as I think, to counter xenophobic narratives of non-integration and cultural clash, we have both an epistemological and ethical imperative to do—then not only this vast migration space, but also Turkey, falls under the scope of what we might consider "central European history." Third, the enduring importance of this central European migration space becomes especially clear when examining the overlapping layers of historical moments and seismically shifting borders that occurred on the very same ground: from the Ottoman Empire through the Cold War and the Syrian refugee crisis, though others could be explored. Finally, this conceptual shift reveals Turkey as a surprisingly important regional actor, helping resolve how to integrate the history of the Ottoman Empire, the Republic of Turkey, and Islam as a whole into the historiography of a singular "Christian Europe."

One might very well counter my assessment: if Turkey counts as part of central European history, then can central Europe count as part of Turkish history? And if central Europe can count as Turkish history, and if central Europe is everywhere a central European dwells or travels, then does "central Europe" even matter as a category? Although I do not intend for this article to sink into nihilism (I, for one, continue to believe that labels matter, malleable as they are), I do intend to provoke us to think of "central Europe" in more expansive terms. When shared histories are evident and relevant, central Europe can—and should—be included in the scope of other regions, and self-proclaimed scholars of central Europe do not have a singular claim on central European history. Ultimately, I remain of the firm conviction that tying the world together, in both past and present, is one of the historian's paramount tasks.

On a more foreboding note, I suggest that it may ultimately be migration that brings about the undoing of this current iteration of the geopolitics of this interconnected region. While the British exit from the European Union and the rise of Euroskeptic, anti-immigrant, and Islamophobic parties across Europe provide the clearest indication of this potential trend, the hardening of the European Union's internal and external borders, especially across the central European migration space, cannot be discounted. As early as 2015, several EU countries including Austria and Hungary had already succumbed to populist pressures by reintroducing national border controls, leading the former Austrian interior minister to declare the Schengen Area "on the brink of collapse."[74] Most recently, adding fuel to the fire, the Syrian refugee crisis intermingled with global health concerns as the COVID-19 pandemic compelled all twenty-six Schengen member states to fully or partially close their internal borders by mid-May 2020.[75] As the squalor of overcrowded, underfunded, and often inhumane makeshift transit camps made asylum seekers especially susceptible to the coronavirus, anti-immigrant politicians have seized on the pandemic as another prong in their ethno-nationalist arguments for longer-term border restrictions. If the Euroskeptics and xenophobes get their way, only time will tell what new geopolitical constellation will emerge out of the European Union and Schengen ruins, as out of the early modern imperial and Cold War ruins before it. More certain, however, is that the very

[74] Ian Traynor and Helena Smith, "EU Border Controls: Schengen Scheme on the Brink after Amsterdam Talks," *The Guardian*, January 26, 2016 (https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/schengen/reintroduction-border-control_en).

[75] European Commission Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, "Temporary Reintroduction of Border Control" (https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/schengen/reintroduction-border-control_en).

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same central European migration space, with its myriad regional and global connections, will continue to be host to centuries more of human migrations, and the land on which the migrants travel—forever infused with the memories and histories of all those who traveled along it before—will surely outlive us all.

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