Advanced Chemistry, “Foreign in My Own Country” (1992)

Abstract

Advanced Chemistry, founded in 1987, is considered Germany’s first political hip-hop band. They are one of the few German-language groups to become a member of the Universal Zulu Nation, an international hip-hop awareness group founded in New York in the 1970s by Afrika Bambaata. A radio news clip that opens the recording of “Foreign in My Own Country” frames the song as a response to the arson attack of Rostock-Lichtenhagen in August 1992.

Source

I have a green passport with a golden eagle on it
which often leads me to tear at my hair.
But seriously: I get so much grief,
even though I drive slowly and never get drunk.
All that talk of a European federation –
When I go to the border by train or bus,
I ask myself why I’m the only one who has to show ID,
who has to prove his identity!
Is it so unusual that an Afro-German speaks German but
doesn’t have pale skin?
The problem is the ideas in the system:
A real German must also look German –
Blue eyes, blond hair, then you’re okay.
Was there ever a time when it wasn’t like that?!
“Are you going back to your homeland someday?”
“Where?” To Heidelberg? Where my home is?”
“No, you know what I mean… “
Come on, I’ve heard these questions since I was a kid.
I was born in this country twenty years ago,
but I still ask myself sometimes:
what am I doing here?
Ignorant babble with no end;
dumb comments, I already know them all:
“Um, are you an American or are you from Africa?”
Another comment about my hair – what’s so strange about it?
“Oh, you’re German? Come on, don’t try to fool me”:
You want proof? Here is my proof:
If you please, my name is Frederick Hahn.
I was born here, but I probably don’t look like it,
I’m not a foreigner nor a resettler, tourist, or immigrant,
but a German citizen, from this country.
Where’s the problem? Everyone should go wherever they want:

to ski in Switzerland, to be a tourist to Prague,
to study in Vienna, to be an au pair in Paris.
Others don't even want to leave their country, but they have to flee

xenophobia, inferiority complexes.
I want to shock and provoke,
to motivate my brothers and sisters again.
I already have a plan,
And when push comes to shove, it'll be an eye for an eye, tooth for tooth,
I hope the radio stations will play this song,
for I'm not an exception but one of many.
Not recognized, foreign in my own country,
not a foreigner yet still a stranger.

[chorus]
Not a foreigner
Not a foreigner
Not a foreigner in my own country

I have a green passport with a golden eagle on it,
But I grew up here with Italian roots.
Up until now I just put up with the taunts.
Politicians and the media report morning and night
that the "intake capacity" has been "exceeded."
We are given explanations, our collective head is turned,
Prompted to believe that foreigners present a threat.
So the citizen cultivates prejudices and thinks
that there is a grave possibility of losing his all-important
German standard of living.
Unfortunately, no one comes along asking who would do
the low-paying, undesirable work.
Hardly anyone considers or values the knowledge of
why this country is doing so well –
how guest workers have contributed significantly
to the raging economic development since the 1950s
but lives with a weak foothold in society,
plays the role of scapegoat in times of crisis,
and the actual problem being ignored is simply
swept under the rug inconspicuously.
Not recognized, foreign in my own country.
Not a foreigner yet still a stranger.

[chorus]

I have a green passport with a golden eagle on it,

But no one asks about it when I end up in the wrong neighborhood.
“Hey, let’s get him!”
Good thing I was always fast in the hundred-meter sprint.
Violence in the form of a fist,
or a knife flashed or a weapon firing shots.
Many will say we are exaggerating,
but we’ve lived here for twenty years and are
tired of being silent.
Pogroms happen, the police stand by,
a German citizen fears for his life.
The reunification on television:
in the beginning I was excited, but I regretted
that quickly,
for it’s never been so bad as it is now!
Politician types talk a lot but remain cold and calculating –
all this plays right into their plans;
they look concerned and travel to the scene,
hold a child in their lap and show off for the press,
a new seat in the Bundestag with every flash of the camera;
once there they pass a new law.
Of course, asylum seekers must leave,
and no one messes with the fascists!
This is not my world if only skin color and heritage count;
the illusion of foreign infiltration accrues political value.
Every Hans and Franz passes judgment in ignorance, complains
and bellows, considers himself an expert.
I have been raised to see things differently:
to look behind façades, understand contexts,
to face every human being *en direct* with respect,
ethical values that transcend national borders.
I have a green passport with a golden eagle on it,
But I’m still foreign here.

Source of the German original text: Advanced Chemistry, „Fremd im eigenen Land“, MZEE Records, 1992, in Deniz Göktürk, David Gramling, Anton Kaes und Andreas Langenohl, Hrsg., *Transit Deutschland. Debatten zu Nation und Migration*, München: Konstanz University Press, 2011, pp. 160-161.

Source of the English translation: Deniz Göktürk, David Gramling, and Anton Kaes, eds., *Germany in Transit. Nation and Migration 1955-2005.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007, pp. 116-118.

Translation: Tes Howell

Recommended Citation: Advanced Chemistry, “Foreign in My Own Country” (1992), published in: German History Intersections, <https://germanhistory-intersections.org/en/migration/ghis:document-102> [April 27, 2024].