



ICH BIN KEIN BERLINER
JIE-HYUN LIM

Jie-Hyun Lim is Professor of Comparative History and founding Director of the Research Institute of Comparative History and Culture (RICH) at Hanyang University in Seoul. He has served international academic societies, including the Executive Board of the CISH and the International Committee of the ITH, and held visiting appointments at various institutes such as Cracow Pedagogical University (Poland), Warsaw University (Poland), Nichibunken (Kyoto), EHESS (Paris), and Harvard University. He is the author of numerous books and articles on comparative histories of nationalist movements, the socio-cultural history of Marxism in East Asia and Eastern Europe, and issues of memory, colonialism and dictatorship in East Asia in multiple languages. He is now editing the Palgrave series *Mass Dictatorship in the 20th Century* (5 volumes) as the series editor. His research topic at Wiko has been a transnational history of “victimhood nationalism” covering post-WW II Korea, Japan, Poland, Israel, and Germany. – Address: Director, Research Institute of Comparative History and Culture, Hanyang University, 133–791 Seoul, South Korea. E-mail: jiehyun@hanyang.ac.kr

January 1991. It was smoky and cold. I encountered Berlin for the first time. Seen through the window in the “wagon sypialny” (sleeping car) of the Polish night express train from Warsaw, Berlin was gray and scratched by the dictatorship and Cold War. Smoke with the toxic smell from burning wet brown coal was crawling low from cabin to cabin when the express train “Chopin” approached Berlin on that gloomy winter morning. Passengers were coughing and trembling. When I came out of my cabin and stood in the narrow corridor of the sleeping wagon, I found the noxious smoke was not caused by the polluted

air in East Berlin. A Polish conductor apologized for the failure of the brown coal boiler to heat the wagon. The train did not have a central heating system. Each conductor in charge of management and security of a single wagon had to take care of individual heating. Perhaps he tried to inflame the coal boiler several times, which brought poisonous smoke instead of warmth to our wagon.

The toxic brown smoke and the wintery cold was not the right combination to bring me a pleasant memory of Berlin on that first encounter. When I entered my colleague's apartment in Kreuzberg, I could smell this noxious smoke again. There stood a museum-piece-like brown coal stove decorated with ceramic tiles in a corner of the living room, which smelled the same as the Polish night express. Sometimes memory becomes animated with the smell inscribed on our bodies. Berlin was remembered with that toxic smell for a while. I cannot remember if I preferred that toxic smell to the *nasskalt* outside. The monotonous gray color of the former East Berlin, the toxic smell, and *nasskalt* winter were overlapping in my nascent memory of Berlin.

I came from the "East" in a dual sense: Korea as the West's East and Poland as Germany's East. I travelled from East to West in the imaginary geography. Not to mention Korea as a part of Asia, Poland has been "no man's land" or "a European Third World" in the terms of German *Ostforschung*. While *Ostforschung* (Eastern Studies) in Germany meant Polish Studies, *studia zahodnie* (Western Studies) in Poland meant German Studies. If California is to the USA what Bohemia was to Germany in the medieval period, the border between Europe and Asia is not the Ural but the place where the settlements of Germanic people stop and pure Slavdom begins. A German soldier, stationed in Poland, wrote in his war diary in 1939, "The soul of an Eastern man is mysterious." I am very keen to know how this German soldier would have responded to Konrad Adenauer, the postwar German chancellor from the western Rhineland, who muttered "Asia" every time his train crossed the Elbe into Prussia. The strategic position of Berlin in the imaginary geography has been shaky. The fake ancient Roman ruins in Sanssouci Palace in Potsdam indicate that ambivalence of Berlin's position in the world.

January 2001. I was a participating observer of the demonstration march in memory of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. I took advantage of my research stay in Warsaw to come to Berlin, where veteran historians associated with the international Rosa Luxemburg Conference would get together. The famous slogan *Die Freiheit ist immer die Freiheit des Andersdenkenden* was carried by several different political groups. Chewing an

irony of history that East German dissidents favored this slogan against the communist regime, I had been following up the parade by popping in and out at intervals. The marchers looked pleasant as much as serious. There was no more toxic smell, the gray monotone gave way to color in many a street. I found that *Glühwein* is as effective as vodka to fight against the cold. I was thinking of Rosa Luxemburg as a border-crossing socialist activist who had to fight the multiple prejudices against Poles, Jewesses, women, and the disabled in Wilhelmine Germany.

Berlin accommodated a band of South Korean leftist intelligentsia in post-war Europe. Many a South Korean border-crosser remembers Berlin as a border zone of the political schism in the Cold War era. Pondering the historical irony that Rosa Luxemburg was favored not by the Communist Party but by anti-communist dissidents, I had to think of South Korean intellectuals who migrated to Berlin in the Cold War era. To those South Korean migrants involved in the so-called “East Berlin Affair” (1967–70), such as the composer Yun I Sang, West Berlin seemed like a post-Cold War space. Indeed the communication and exchange with North Korea, which was impossible in the Korean peninsula, was feasible in West Berlin, transcending the ideological borders of the Cold War. The good intention of crossing the border of the Cold War regime and seeing the other half of the Korean nation was, in the final analysis, exploited by the state powers in North and South Korea. In fact, their desire to cross borders was caught up in the binary framework of the Cold War world order, as can be seen in the “East Berlin Affair” and its aftermath. To me, Berlin has been an ideological taboo not to be broken as well as an intriguing post-Cold War space to cross the borders before the *Mauerfall*.

September 2011. I arrived in Berlin with the beginning of *Pfifferling* season in 2011 and left Berlin with the end of *Spargel* season in 2012. It was a bright sunny day peculiar to the golden autumn when I came back to Berlin again. The weather forecast congratulated us by saying that there were 50% more hours of sunshine in the autumn of 2011 than in the previous year. I was not alone, but with family. The Villa Walther lay by the lake. Upon our arrival we could toast with wine glasses on the balcony of our apartment, no. 123, looking over Herthasee. Gentle breeze, bright sunshine, the serene Herthasee, nice neighbors, a comfortable residence, and opulent wine at the Thursday dinner table – all these made a modest luxury. This Berlin was quite different from the one I had known.

I expected that I could be a Berliner if I lived in Berlin. As the German language course began in mid-September as a warm-up program, my expectation was soon betrayed.

Whenever I murmured *ich bin ein Berliner*, mimicking John F. Kennedy, I was told that I should say *ich bin Berliner* without the indefinite article *ein*. However, I found it doesn't matter whether I am a donut or a Berliner while I marveled at the reading text titled *ich bin kein Berliner* in the intensive German language course. The essays on the culture and life of Berliners, written by non-Berliners living in Berlin, cast ridicule upon any authenticity of the cultural stereotype of any certain local, national, or regional unit. These essays of sharpened wits, ironies, satires, and guts evidence that Berlin had meanwhile shifted from a border zone to a hybrid space.

Compared to the text of German authenticity through which I learned German in the early 1980's, this is a sea change. In this lively hybrid space, the Döner Kebab becomes the Berliner's most popular lunch menu and stops being a Turkish national menu. The *Ecke* for standing eaters, from Rogacki market to the sixth floor of the KaDeWe, supplies the whole range of world cuisine.

Berlin as a hybrid space was confirmed by the exhibition of "Tür an Tür/drzwi na drzwi/next door" in the autumn of 2011. It was about 1000 years of the *Beziehungsgeschichte* between Poland and Germany. I remember vividly how Polish public opinion was angry at the German estimation of Copernicus as one of the proudest Germans in history. The *Beziehungsgeschichte* of Germany and Poland dotted with the battle of Grunwald/Tannenberg, the Teutonic Knights, German medieval colonization, the partition of Poland, etc. has been a very dense minefield. To my surprise, the national history of the different interpretations was quite deterritorialized and had been replaced by the transnational history. A young Polish artist parodied Jan Matejko's famous painting of "Battle of Grunwald" by inscribing *Scheiße* and *kurwa* in a dialogue balloon. I have no idea how a German curator explained this parody to the Polish visitors, but I am sure it would be no longer be national blasphemy to future generations.

While I am wandering over the Jewish Berlin, Charlottengrad (the Russian Charlottenburg), the Turkish market in Kreuzberg, and living in the Wiko's deterritorialized ghetto, *ich bin kein Berliner*. Perhaps I shall have no chance to be *ein Berliner* because Berlin will remain a hybrid space of transnational culture. *Ich war, ich bin, ich werde kein Berliner*. Any regret at no chance to be *ein Berliner*? Yes, I do have. However, I would be proud of being *kein Berliner* as Berliners are proud of that. Berlin is sexy, the Wiko is sexier, Berliners as *kein Berliner* are the sexiest.