

Report on the Berlin Program Alumni Roundtable at the  
Thirty-Third Annual GSA Conference  
Oct. 8 - 11, 2009 in Washington D.C. (Arlington, VA)

Being and Becoming a Minority in Germany: Immigrant Integration, Political  
Representation and Minority Rights

Chair: Ruth Mandel, University College, London

Galya Ruffer (Northwestern University), How Naming Laws Define Citizenship and Belonging in Germany

Renee Reichl Luthra (UCLA), The Impact of Class Background and Migration History on Educational  
Attainment: A Study with the 2005 Mikrozensus

Nadine Blumer (University of Toronto), Memorial to the Murdered Sinti and Roma of Europe: Building Blocks  
of Collective Identities

Gokce Yurdakul (Humboldt University), Jews and Turks in Germany: Racism, Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia

This panel, supported by the Berlin Program, explored a number of legal, political and cultural processes that have had clear effects on immigrant and minority communities in Germany. Antonio Gramsci argues that organic crises in society, including Black and immigrant political resistance, erupt not simply in the class struggle but in industrial and economic life and debates on sexual, moral and intellectual issues related to political representation. Drawing on his argument, the panel tackled the social implications of legal and political processes that concern immigrant and minority communities, how immigrant and minority communities react to the legal decisions and social policies that affect them, and the common strategies used by immigrants and minorities when dealing with ethnic, religious and racial discrimination in Germany. Our exploration of these questions pointed to changing political, social and legal discourses of religion, ethnicity and gender in Germany.

Galya Ruffer started the session with a fascinating paper examining the narrative of German citizenship from the perspective of the administrative function of the secular state as it transcribes individual life from the moment of birth by administering birth certificates and recording names to create and constitute a citizenry. Taking the naming laws as a case study, she argued that these laws have been essential to German nation-building as a form of social ordering and identification. However, she noted that as diversity in Germany becomes more pervasive, these state objectives are increasingly challenged. Her paper brought a new perspective to bear on current understandings of what is perceived in European discourse as “failed integration” by looking at how state administration and documentation requirements for immigrants contributes to this failure in its subtle highlighting of “Otherness.”

The second presenter, Renee Reichl discussed another institution affecting immigrant integration, education. She argued that if the educational attainment of second generation immigrants is high, their life chances are much more likely to converge with Germans without a migration background. In other words, the intergenerational assimilation of immigrants may depend on the educational attainment of the second and later generations. In her paper she considered how the educational attainment of immigrant children differs according to the migration background of their parents. Questioning whether the national background and reception of immigrants impact their children’s educational attainment, Renee compared the children of Germans without a migration history to the children of guest workers, *Aussiedler*, refugees and EU migrants of

different national backgrounds. Adding additional controls for compositional and background effects, she tested whether differences in educational achievement observed between these groups could be attributed to the age, sex, region of residence, human capital composition, naturalization rates, and time of arrival of various migration streams. Finally, she examined the significance of interactions between national background and compositional effects in determining whether the effect of class background differs by migration history and naturalization.

Renee used 2005 Mikrozensus, the only nationally representative data source with the sample size and parental information necessary to identify the children of ethnic Germans and naturalized first and second generation immigrants by national origins. Her data analyses reveal much more variation amongst the second generation than has previously been observed; she specifically noted the superior educational attainment of the children of Middle-Eastern and Southeast Asian immigrants and *Aussiedleras* compared to Germans without a migration background. This unexpected and interesting finding stimulated questions from the audience. In response, Renee suggested that class background has a weaker effect on educational attainment for naturalized immigrant children and some national origin groups. Her findings, she argued, point towards the importance of cultural background and context of reception as direct predictors of educational attainment and mediators in the relationship between class background and educational attainment for immigrant children.

After this intriguing quantitative study, we moved to a qualitative work on memory, minorities and German national identity. In her presentation Nadine Blumer explored the notion of place by considering the negotiations, debates and planning of a memorial in Berlin dedicated to the Sinti and Roma murdered in the Holocaust. She began by describing the contentious debate around the construction of a memorial to Sinti/Roma as separate from the Memorial for Jewish victims of the Holocaust; the ongoing conflict, she said, has obstructed construction for almost a decade. In her paper, Nadine discussed the proposed memorial as a site upon which the political mobilization of a minority population is played out and represented – both literally and metaphorically. Her analysis of the Sinti/Roma memorial and the ways it is represented and debated in contemporary German society offered the audience a unique perspective from which to explore specific themes related to the Holocaust's "forgotten victims."

The final paper of the panel by Gokce Yurdakul considered the inter-ethnic relationships between Turks and Jews in Germany. This was a good closing point, as her paper brought together the various panel concepts introduced under the overarching theme of immigrants and minorities seen in a comparative perspective. Gokce argued that in order to establish themselves as a community in Germany, Turkish immigrant leaders attempt to collaborate with the Jewish community; to this end, they draw parallels between their experiences and Jewish experiences. Drawing on interviews with leaders of Turkish and Jewish communities in Germany, participant observation data collected since 2003 and secondary data from national media, Gokce explored how immigrants and minorities relate to each other in Germany. Her construction of this relationship offered some intriguing clues about how immigrants and minorities define a specific German national identity *vis-à-vis* their own diasporic identities. Her paper had interesting conceptual overlaps with Nadine's work on the construction of German national identity through "Otherness" and the German debates on victimhood.

After the presentations, Ruth Mandel moderated the ensuing discussion. The 25-30 audience participants responded very positively to the papers and raised a number of critical questions. Galya's work on naming sparked stimulating questions and received anecdotal information based on the audience's first-hand experience; this latter point showed that the naming regulations are an important part of national identity, not only for immigrants but for Germans who question national identities. Renee's presentation, specifically (but not only) was considered around her concept of "immigrant advantage;" this led to an interesting and stimulating discussion of her data analysis. Renee also explained how children of immigrants have an advantage in educational attainment over their German counterparts from the same class background. The continuing discussion questioned the concepts of minorities and German national identity, specifically

targeting the work of Nadine and Gokce, and asking the following questions. How do Jewish community leaders respond to other minorities? How can the extension of minority rights given to the German Jewish community be justified or not justified for other communities, such as the Turkish community?

The lively discussion showed that the papers sparked the audience's interest. Clearly, the panel reached its aim of critically addressing some controversial issues around immigrant integration, minority-immigrant relationships, German national identity and its related regulations. The audience response shows the importance of including immigration issues in the programme of the German Studies Association's Conference. Simply stated, it is crucial that we explore the new and ever-changing dynamics of German culture and society.

**Report by Gokce Yurdakul**