

**Report on the Berlin Program Alumni Panel
at the 36th Annual GSA Conference
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**A NEW ERA OF GERMAN BEVÖLKERUNGSPOLITIK?
Legacies and Myths in German Discourses on Demography
October 7, 2012**

**Moderator: Lisa M. Todd, University of New Brunswick
Commentator: Greg A. Eghigian, Penn State University**

Homogenous Nostalgia: Sarrazin's Demographic Fears and Fantasies
Michael Meng, Clemson University (Berlin Program Fellow 2005-2006)

The Longue Durée of German Population Politics: Ideology and Birth Rates from Grotjahn to Sarrazin
Annette F. Timm, University of Calgary (Berlin Program Fellow 1999-2000)

German Continuities? From Imperial Liberalism before 1914 to Guest Workers, Leitkultur, and Thilo Sarrazin in the 21st Century
Jens-Uwe Guettel, Pennsylvania State University

At the annual German Studies Association Conference in 2012, the Berlin Program for Advanced German and European Studies sponsored a panel on recent discussions about demography in Germany, with a particular focus on the national debate stimulated by Thilo Sarrazin's *Deutschland schafft sich ab: Wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen*. The panel featured papers by Michael Meng (Clemson University), Annette Timm (University of Calgary), and Jens-Uwe Guettel. Lisa Todd (University of New Brunswick) chaired the panel, and Greg A. Eghigian (Penn State University) served as the commentator.

Michael Meng's paper, "Homogeneous Nostalgia: Sarrazin's Fears and Fantasies," pursued connections between emotions, memory, and anxiety in contemporary Germany. It examined expressions of nostalgia — representations of and emotions about the past articulated and designated through language in Thilo Sarrazin's *Germany Does Away With Itself* — to consider broader anxieties and fears about the fragmenting unity of the nation-state. After a brief overview of Sarrazin's main arguments, his paper specifically disclosed three nostalgic desires: 1) the economic and educational vitality of West Germany in the 1950s; 2) the ethno-cultural homogeneity of the nation-state in an abstract sense but also implicitly in its West German iteration during the 1950s; and 3) the pre-war history of Jewish contributions to German society. His paper took Sarrazin's nostalgia as not some as some simplistic reactionary desire for returning to a Germany in the 1950s, but rather as a symptom of deeper distresses about demography, multiculturalism, and difference in contemporary Germany and Western Europe more broadly.

Guettel's paper, "German Continuities? From Imperial Liberalism before 1914 to "Guest Workers," "Leitkultur," and Thilo Sarrazin in the 21st Century," explored continuities in liberal thought. Before 1914, the writings and political decisions by German liberal imperialists like Wilhelm Solf, Bernhard Dernburg, Paul Rohrbach, Max Weber, Friedrich Naumann and others projected racial and/or cultural hierarchies across the globe. During the era of decolonization after 1945, migrants, often from the former European colonies, came to the formerly colonizing nations of Western Europe in order to take over jobs for which no local workers could be found. Concepts initially developed (among others by Weber) to justify either anti-Polish measures within the German Empire before 1914, or the exploitation of indigenous groups in the colonies proved to be flexible enough to rationalize social control measures against these new internal (and allegedly "incompatible") cultures as well. Focusing on the success of Thilo Sarrazin's book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (2010), Jens-Uwe Guettel's paper traced the Janus-faced legacy of imperial liberalism in Germany throughout the 20th Century, from its heyday before 1914, to its potential resurgence in current debates about the alleged cultural (and biological) backwardness of Muslim immigrants in the united Germany after 1990.

Annette Timm's paper, "The Longue Durée of Population Politics: Ideology, Economics, and Birth Rates from Grotjahn to Sarrazin," situated Sarrazin's book within the development of population political arguments since the Weimar period. Sarrazin's claim to be drawing on a long tradition of social democratic thinking is difficult to refute. His arguments have much in common with those of the Weimar SPD politician and social hygiene professor Alfred Grotjahn. Despite these Social Democratic links, authors like Thomas Etzemüller and Christoph Butterwege have argued that the rhetoric of demographic demise has been directed against marginal groups and is a ploy to retain the social status quo. In contrast, Timm argued that what she called demographobias appear at moments of economic crisis and that over the course of the twentieth century the policies that they have motivated have tended to benefit women and the economically marginalized. Demographobes rely on taken-for-granted ideologies of economic growth to foment panic about birth rates and immigration, while policies motivated by demographobias tend to provide real and symbolic benefits to the economically vulnerable. The primary rhetorical power of population political rhetoric has thus been the promise to overcome economic crisis in a way that strengthens the bonds of citizenship.

Greg A. Eghigian provided engaged comments on each of the papers as well as on the topic as a whole, pushing the panelists to think more deeply about where Sarrazin's ideas might be situated. Following his comments, a few minutes remained for questions from the audience. One audience member asked about Sarrazin's stylization of himself as a putative "taboo-breaker;" another suggested situating his ideas within other traditions than liberalism.

*Report by Michael Meng
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