

Berlin Program Alumni Panel
at the 49th Annual GSA Conference in Arlington, Virginia, Sept. 27, 2025

**Holocaust Memory, Multiculturalism, and the Politics of Solidarity in Germany:
1980s to the Present**

June Hwang, University of Rochester

We Are All... Until We Aren't: Solidarity, Identity, and the Fraught Politics of Victimhood

Ludwig Decke, University of Wisconsin-Madison

"There Must Never Be a Second Holocaust!" Jews, *Ausländerfeindlichkeit*, and the Pursuit of Multicultural Germany

Leonie Ettinger, Trinity University

Unkus Heirs: Sinti and Roma of the Third Post-War Generation in the Struggle for Visibility and Remembrance

Lauren Crawford, Yale University

"False Tolerance": German Feminists' Judeo/Islamo-phobia and the Limits of Liberalism

Commentator: **Paul Lerner, University of Southern California**

Moderator: **Jonathan Catlin, University of Rochester**

Organized by **Ludwig Decke** and **Leonie Ettinger**

On the third day of the 49th German Studies Association Annual Conference, Saturday, September 27, 2025, around forty guests gathered in the National Landing III room of the Crystal Gateway Marriott in Arlington, Virginia (USA), to attend this year's Berlin Program for Advanced German and European Studies Alumni Panel. In the small room—described by one colleague with a wink as "the good one," since particularly engaging presentations had taken place there over the past couple of days—hardly a free seat remained when Berlin Program alumnus Jonathan Catlin opened the session as moderator.

The panel featured Berlin Program alumni June Hwang, Ludwig Decke, Leonie Ettinger, and Lauren Crawford, with Crawford unfortunately withdrawing at short notice for personal reasons. Her contribution is included here nonetheless, as it was part of the panel's curation. Paul Lerner, a member of the Berlin Program's Academic Advisory Board, served as commentator.

Bringing together historians (Crawford, Decke) and literary scholars (Ettinger, Hwang), the interdisciplinary panel examined the place of Holocaust memory in German public life. It addressed topics ranging from multiculturalism to Islamophobia, antisemitism, and antiziganism, sparking a rich debate about the extent to which the legacy of the Holocaust has facilitated—or foreclosed—solidarity among minoritized groups in Germany since the 1980s.

Organized chronologically, the panel opened with June Hwang's paper, "We Are All... Until We Aren't: Solidarity, Identity, and the Fraught Politics of Victimhood." Drawing on Alain Finkielkraut's *The Imaginary Jew* (1980), Hwang traced how victimhood became a form of political currency from the 1968 protests through the 1970s and 1980s, later fueling far-right aggression that weaponized the rhetoric of

the “aggrieved victim” against marginalized groups. She also examined victimhood as a performative category that appropriates and instrumentalizes the pain of others to claim power and authority. Overall, Hwang invited the audience to imagine alternative ways of political mobilization that move beyond the category of victimhood.

Next, Ludwig Decke presented “‘There Must Never Be a Second Holocaust!’ Jews, *Ausländerfeindlichkeit*, and the Pursuit of Multicultural Germany.” His paper examined how Jewish activists in 1980s West Germany—who had previously allied with the state against antisemitism—rejected the Kohl administration’s increasing turn toward German nationalism. They feared that this shift would undermine the principle of minority protection that had become a cornerstone of post-Holocaust German Jewish identity. Decke demonstrated convincingly that, in response, West Germany’s Jewish community assumed an active role in supporting immigrant rights and advocating for a multicultural vision of German society that explicitly included non-Jewish minorities.

Although Lauren Crawford’s project, “‘False Tolerance:’ German Feminists’ Judeo/Islamo-phobia and the Limits of Liberalism,” could not be presented due to her absence, it was discussed in Lerner’s comments and the subsequent Q&A. Crawford’s work analyzed the shift from Judeophobia to Islamophobia in German feminist discourse from the 1980s to the 1990s. She demonstrated how feminist critiques that once framed Judaism as patriarchal and incompatible with feminist ideals were redirected toward Islam in the 1990s, exposing the limits of post-Holocaust liberalism in accommodating religious difference. In so doing, Crawford highlighted the contradictions inherent in German liberalism since the end of the Cold War, when Holocaust memory became the moral foundation for reunified Germany’s liberal political ethos.

The panel concluded with Leonie Ettinger’s presentation, “Unkus Heirs: Sinti and Roma of the Third Post-War Generation in the Struggle for Visibility and Remembrance.” Focusing on Janko Lauenberger and Juliane von Wedemeyer’s *Ede und Unku – die wahre Geschichte* (2018), Ettinger examined how the book reveals that Sinti and Roma not only continue to experience systemic racial discrimination in Germany but have also been largely excluded from its dominant memory culture. She argued that by retelling the story of these long-overlooked Holocaust victims from a personal, familial perspective, *Ede und Unku – die wahre Geschichte* functions as a powerful literary intervention into engrained memory discourses that points toward new ways of critically reshaping historical narratives for a more pluralistic German society.

Taken together, these four papers tested the validity of Michael Rothberg’s concept of *multidirectional memory*—the idea that different experiences of discrimination and persecution can be commemorated alongside one another—within the context of Germany’s recent past and present. As Paul Lerner emphasized in his commentary, the dialogue between the presentations highlighted the limits of Germany’s approach to memory culture and exposed the “shallowness” of multicultural liberalism in the Federal Republic. He pointed out that the panel not only asked which memories have entered mainstream discourse and which have not, but also which are compatible with Germany’s political culture. This framing politicized the discussion: by drawing attention to the deep-rooted hierarchies structuring German memory narratives, the panel challenged the self-congratulatory “success story” of Germany’s *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and called for a fuller assumption of political responsibility beyond national interests. Ultimately, the panel posited that acknowledging the power dynamics inherent within Germany’s conception of multiculturalism is essential to developing a genuinely multidirectional historical memory that can sustain political alliances across racial, religious, and gender boundaries.

Report Written by Leonie Ettinger

Jonathon Catlin is a scholar of modern European intellectual history. Following his time in the Berlin Program as a doctoral fellow 2022-2023, he earned his PhD from Princeton and is currently a Postdoctoral Associate in the Humanities Center at the University of Rochester. His research focuses on the history of the concept of *catastrophe* in twentieth-century German and Jewish thought. His work on German Holocaust memory debates has been published in *Radical Philosophy*, *The Journal of the History of Ideas Blog*, and an edited volume on the Frankfurt School and antisemitism. He is also the co-editor of a special issue of *New German Critique* entitled "German Memory Politics at a Crossroads" due out in early 2026.

Lauren Crawford is a 2024-2025 Berlin Program alumna and a sixth-year doctoral candidate in Modern European history at Yale. Her dissertation, "Antisemitism, Islamophobia, and the 'War on Terror' in Germany," concerns the relationship between antisemitism and Islamophobia in postwar Germany. Her research has been generously supported by the Fox Fellowship, the Program for the Study of Antisemitism at Yale, the Berlin Program for Advanced German and European Studies, the German American Fulbright Commission, and Yale's MacMillan Center.

Ludwig Decke is a PhD candidate in modern European and Jewish history at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is working on a transnational history of Jewish antiracism in Western Europe. His research has been supported by the Berlin Program, the Central European History Society, and the American Academy for Jewish Research, among others. Next summer, he will continue his research as a fellow at the Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies in Washington, DC. Ludwig was a BP fellow in 2024-2025.

Leonie Ettinger is a Lecturer in German at Trinity University in San Antonio. After earning her PhD in German from NYU, she was a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Berlin Program from 2024-2025. Her work has appeared in *The Platypus Review*, *Marxism in the Age of Trump*, *Expressionismus*, *The Journal of Literature and Trauma Studies*, *Jüdische Allgemeine Zeitung*, *mosaik blog*, *EDA Magazine*, *Caesura*, and *der Freitag*, with two articles forthcoming in *Concepts of Culture: Experiments in Conceptual History* and *The Oxford University Press Handbook of Jewish Literature*. She received the Alpine Fellowship Prize for her essay on Ruth Klüger's *weiter leben*.

June Hwang is an Associate Professor of German and Film and Media Studies at the University of Rochester. She specializes in contemporary film, literature, and culture, with an emphasis on German-Jewish Studies, Gender Studies, affect theory, and critical race theory. She is currently finishing a collection of essays that examines the relationship between minority identities, power, privilege, and subjectivity in relation to Holocaust Studies. June's work was supported by the Berlin Program in the academic year 2003-2004.

Paul Lerner is a Professor and Chair of the History Department at the University of Southern California, where he also directs the Max Kade Institute for Austrian-German-Swiss Studies. He is a historian of Modern Germany and Central Europe who works on the history of the human sciences, Jewish history, consumer culture, and theories of fascism. And he is the author of two books: *Hysterical Men: War, Psychiatry, and the Politics of Trauma in Germany* and *The Consuming Temple: The Jewish Department Store and the Consumer Revolution in Germany*, both published by Cornell University Press.

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