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Diaspora Experiences: German Immigrants and Their Descendants

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‘Diaspora Experiences: German Immigrants and Their Descendants’ was the title of a conference organized by the Waterloo Centre for German Studies in 2006. On August 24-27, about two hundred participants—researchers in history, literature and film, and linguistics as well as members of the interested public—discussed characteristics of Austrian, German, and Swiss identity in minority settings, aspects of the migration of German speakers from central Europe to many different countries of the world, and also painful experiences such as the loss of Heimat or one’s native language.

When planning the conference,¹ we knew we wanted to facilitate interdisciplinary discussion of the complex issues, perspectives, and aspects of German minorities worldwide under a broad thematic umbrella. Relatively early on and with some hesitation, we decided on the centrality of the notion of ‘diaspora’ for this conference. The concept of ‘diaspora’, applied to the German context of at least the last two centuries, is, of course, not unproblematic. In parts this is due to problems with applying the distinct concept of diaspora to a variety of contexts in migration studies, but more importantly, problems stemming from the semantic, historical, political, and moral tensions between the adjective ‘German’ and the noun ‘diaspora’. We therefore decided to ‘open up’ the word diaspora and return to its etymological roots—its Old Greek meaning of scattering, first of seeds and later of people—without ignoring its later application in Jewish and postcolonial

¹ For information follow the links on the website of the Waterloo Centre for German Studies <http://www.wcgs.ca/>.

contexts. This led to interesting and stimulating discussions during and after the conference presentations.

Of course, ours was not the first conference which facilitated an academic dialog on German minorities. A number of recent conferences and publications have concentrated on Germans in Canada. For instance, the conference *Assimilation—Integration—Acculturation? The German-Canadian Case* in 2004—organized by the chair in German-Canadian Studies, Alexander Freund, at the University of Winnipeg—brought together scholars from history, linguistics and literature. With a wide understanding of migration and post-migration experiences, the focus of this conference was clearly on German-Canadians. Similarly, in their volume *A Chorus of Different Voices*, editors Angelika E. Sauer and Matthias Zimmer collected the contributions of participants to a 1996 workshop on German-Canadian identity. The volume sought to problematize “the notion of German Canadians” (ix); as they note in their preface, “German Canadians defy definition” (ix). The contributors to the workshop and volume were for the most part historians who attempted to approach the topic of German-Canadian culture from fresh disciplinary perspectives. The volume’s explicit challenge to reflect on and reconsider the practice of studying the German diaspora in Canada—its problematization of German-Canadian studies, in other words—sounded a clear warning to scholars that traditional approaches to the German diaspora in Canada would no longer suffice. *A Chorus of Different Voices* dealt specifically with German-Canadians, and largely from a historiographical perspective, but its quarrel with established modes of understanding German diasporic identity was part of a larger shift in the scholarship of identity and culture. This swing towards a more probing scholarly discourse is seen in the collection of essays *Theorizing Diaspora* edited by Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur in 2003. An anthology of earlier and more contemporary texts, the volume’s interdisciplinary and eclectic range covers a breadth of issues both theoretical and related to specific diasporas. One of the collection’s most useful contributions with respect to this volume on the German diaspora is to enshrine a very liberal view of the term

‘diaspora’ itself with some of the essays discussing diasporas as diverse as Jewish, Asian-American, Afro-Caribbean, and gay Filipino. One of the highlights of the volume, a reprinting of Stuart Hall’s important essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” reminds the reader of the fact that cultural identity undergoes constant negotiation and renegotiation, a finding that can be easily seconded by much of the research in the present volume. Though one might fault *Theorizing Diaspora* for its lack of disciplinary or content focus—issues of language remain largely unexplored, for example—the theoretical impulses contained in the collection will play a large role in future research.

Issues of language and society have also been discussed elsewhere. German language islands in Europe and North America are examined in *Sprachinselwelten*, edited by Nina Berend and Elisabeth Knipf Komlósi in 2006. The contributions of this book—based on a section meeting of the International Society for German Dialectology—concentrate on linguistic features of selected varieties spoken outside of the German-speaking areas in central Europe. With an exclusively European focus, but a wider consideration of sociolinguistic issues, the volume *National Varieties of German outside Germany: A European Perspective*, edited by Gabriele Hogan-Brun, examines varieties of German after the socio-political transformations in central and eastern Europe. Of course, issues of minority languages, language contact and change, societal and individual bilingualism—to name but a few—have been discussed in relation to the German language and many others. The same could be said about (German) literature in minority settings (see Skidmore, this volume). It has been described, analysed, and interpreted under headings such as migrant literature, expatriate literature, and Exilliteratur. However, hardly ever have essays in linguistics and literature of German minorities appeared together and alongside essays on history, migration, and diaspora studies. The small conference *Assimilation—Integration—Acculturation? The German-Canadian Case* is a notable exception here.

German Diasporic Experiences breaks new ground by presenting in one volume linguistic, historical, literary, and cinematic scholarship on similar, overlapping, complementary, and sometimes contrasting aspects of German minorities worldwide. A representative selection of edited papers from this conference, as well as the keynote addresses, follow in this volume, divided into three main parts: identity, migration, and loss.

Identity

Keynote speaker Janet Fuller begins the first part with her discussion of identity in and through language. Her focus is on German speakers—particularly Pennsylvania German—in the United States. Patrick Stevenson and Jenny Carl continue the discussion of language and the negotiation of identities, but focus on German-speaking communities in central Europe, e.g., Hungary and the Czech Republic. Doris Schüpbach discusses how immigrants to Australia from German-speaking Switzerland relate their migratory experience of building a new life in a different language. Staying with the Australian context, Sandra Kipp gives an overview of German and German speakers in Australia between 1939 and 2001. A similar overview—with a focus on identity and identity construction—is provided by Rolf Annas who discusses the German-speaking people of Paarl in South Africa. In the first essay on Germans in Canada, Grit Liebscher and Jennifer Dailey-O’Cain show how these speakers position themselves in German conversations.

Of course the identity of immigrants and their descendants is not just constructed in language use. Andrea Strutz, for example, explores the memories Austrian-Jewish refugees maintained over several generations in the United States. The identity of well-known German-American journalists and newspaper editors, Pulitzer and Preetorius, is Jason T. Baker’s focus. Anne Löchte looks at the *Berliner Journal* (1859-1918) and asks what this Canadian German-language newspaper can tell us of the identity of its journalists and readership. Similarly

influenced by 'external' political events are the Russian German émigré activists during the interwar period in Germany, whom James Casteel discusses in the next essay. Christiane Harzig, on the other hand, is more interested in transcultural spaces when looking at how German-American women in Chicago between 1889 and 1950 constructed their (cultural) identity. The last chapter of the first part looks at more recent historical events and how they affected the relationship of East German institutions with Canadians and German-Canadians. Here, Manuel Meune investigates the role of the Gesellschaft Neue Heimat (1980-1990) and its representation of official East German identity in Canada.

Migration

Part II—Migration—encompasses a broad spectrum of subthemes, all of which have in common a focus on moving: migration from one country to another, the personal experience of changing places, as well as the metaphor of moving on, making progress in a particular area. It is the latter perspective James M. Skidmore takes when he argues for moving the study of expatriate German literature into the academic mainstream of German Literary Studies. Gisela Holfter takes a very different approach, providing an overview of German migration to Ireland at the time of the Third Reich. Looking back further, Nora Faires analyses evangelicalism among Pittsburgh's German newly arrived immigrants in the nineteenth century. Often German and other immigrants were recruited first in their homeland by so-called immigration agents. Angelika Sauer looks at the attempt by three such agents to create a German diaspora in nineteenth-century Canada. By the twentieth century many countries had developed a set of immigration and recruitment policies. Johannes-Dieter Steinert and Inge Weber-New look at these in the British context and pay particular attention to the reception of German migrants. Another focus on migration is offered by Christin Pschichholz when she discusses the immigration of German-speaking people to the territory of modern-day Turkey (1850-1918). The subsequent two chapters by Patrick Farges and Pascal Maeder both talk about Sudeten-Germans in Canada and their migration and acculturation. Anne Ribbert,

when looking at German speakers in the Netherlands, shows that migration experiences can affect language use and competence. The next two essays both deal with the depiction of emigration in German film. Carsten Würmann looks at the fictional figure of the 'Onkel aus Amerika' and Hanno Sowade describes the depiction of expellees in post-1945 West German film. A number of Christian Lieb's interviewees—German-speaking immigrants who came to British Columbia, Canada after 1945—have a lot in common with some of the fictional characters in these two films.

Numerous chapters concentrate on German-speaking migrants to continents other than North America. Stefan Engelberg discusses German language politics of the colonial powers and attitudes towards German and the other languages spoken in the South Seas in the early twentieth century. Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich focuses on migration experiences of immigrants to New Zealand and highlights gender differences. Similarly, Karin Bauer looks at the role of Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche in building a German colony in South America.

Loss

The third part is introduced by Hans Lemberg. He provides an historical overview of the expulsion of Germans from east and central Europe after World War II. Shifting the focus to the flight and expulsion of Jewish entrepreneurs from Frankfurt during the Third Reich, Benno Nietzel discusses the concept and realities of Wiedergutmachung in the post-war years. Dieter Buse directs the reader's attention to the dissolution of a German minority in Poland. The Russian-German diaspora in Kazakhstan—their forced migration and suffering—is the centre of attention in J. Otto Pohl's essay. Similarly, the fate of a German-speaking minority—the case of Blumenau in South Brazil—at the mercy of national politics is what interests Méri Frotscher Kramer. However, not every loss has primarily a political or ideological cause. Jörg Meindl, for example, ponders the question whether or not the changes in Pennsylvania German in Kansas can be described as language loss. The ostensible loss of 'memory' is what Monique

Laney investigates in her essay on Wernher von Braun and Arthur Rudolph. In her literary analysis and interpretation, Doris Wolf employs a similar approach to memory and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* when she approaches Gertrud Mackprang Baer's personal narrative *In the Shadow of Silence*. Alexander Freund also looks at *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, in his case by German migrants in Canada. The last two chapters of this collection deal with different kinds of loss. Natasha G. Wiebe interprets the loss of 'community' and the changing cultural identity as depicted in the works of the Mennonite writer Di Brandt and Monika S. Schmid analyses aspects of and contributors to the loss of German by speakers in Vancouver.

In its thirty-eight chapters, this book provides a complex album of cultural, historical, and linguistic perspectives on many different aspects of German-speaking minorities on five continents—a collection that highlights the many different facets of current thinking on and knowledge of these minorities all over the globe.

We would like to thank the authors for their insightful contributions to this book and for the very pleasant collaboration over the course of about two years. The editors of this book benefitted greatly from help by Janet Vaughan at the University of Waterloo and from the support of the colleagues at Wilfrid Laurier University Press. Moreover, the conference on which the volume is based would not have been possible without the assistance of graduate students—here we would like to mention Peter Wood, Janice MacGregor, and Agata Monkiewicz in particular—as well as the immense work by staff at both St. Paul's College at the University of Waterloo, especially Jodie Fitzgerald. Finally, all of us involved wish to express our appreciation to the conference's sponsors, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Eddie Koch, the Waterloo Centre for German Studies, the University of Waterloo, the Goethe Institute (Toronto), the German-Canadian Chamber of Industry and Commerce (Toronto), the German-Canadian Congress (Ontario), the Germany Embassy (Ottawa), the Consulate General of Germany (Toronto), the Consulate General of Switzerland (Toronto), the Austrian Embassy (Ottawa), and Marga Weigel. Thank you all.

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