



Gabriele Rosenthal, Artur Bogner (Eds.) (2009): **Ethnicity, Belonging and Biography. Ethnographical and Biographical Perspectives.** Berlin: LIT / New Brunswick: Transaction

The subjects of ethnicity and collective belonging have enjoyed high priority on the agenda of social science research over the last 20 years. Nevertheless there is need (and considerable scope) for further mutual adjustment and refinement of theoretical concepts, substantive empirical discoveries and research techniques. This volume offers a contribution to such efforts by leading practitioners of qualitative research with backgrounds in diverse disciplines. Their research focuses on the perspectives and

biographical experiences of concrete "historical" actors within the contexts of migration, cultural diversity and social conflicts.

### **Abstracts:**

#### **Part I**

#### **Politics of Belonging & Ethnic Conflicts**

Dan and Tammy Bar-On interviewed  
by Gabriele Rosenthal and Artur Bogner

The first chapter contains an interview with Dan Bar-On (Beer Sheva, Israel) that we conducted in March 2008. As was true of the other contributors, Dan gave a lecture at the conference in Goettingen but we decided to publish his contribution in the form of an interview due to his severe illness. To our deep sorrow, Dan Bar-On passed away on September 4, 2008 after a long period of illness. In our interview he spoke about his years of empirical and — most notably — his practical work in the field of conflict transformation and peacebuilding in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Dan Bar-On was one of our colleagues who tried to combine the methods of biographical research not only with academic teaching, but also with practical work — in this case in the field of peacebuilding or conflict transformation. Among his other activities, he founded PRIME, the Peace Research Institute in the Middle East, together with his Palestinian colleague Sami Adwan. The interview offers an impressive brief overview and résumé of his work during the last years of a life that was to a large extent devoted to promoting dialogue and understanding both between Germans and Jews as well as between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians. During our conversation Dan reflected upon his experiences with small multi-ethnic or multi-national groups in which he facilitated a further mutual understanding among the participants and upon his attempts at creating a shared bridging narrative concerning the genesis of conflict between these groups.

The Peace Process in the Wake of Ghana's Northern Conflict: Its Course and Conditions for Success

Artur Bogner

This essay deals with the empirical analysis of the peace process — on the heels of a short yet intense interethnic civil war — that took place in Ghana's Northern Region in the 1990s. In the first part the focus of the analysis are the preconditions of this armed conflict that can be found in the interethnic relationships as well as their history. Furthermore, this essay examines the role played by the staff members of Ghanaian, foreign, and transnational NGOs in negotiating a successful peace agreement.

Democratization and the Resurgence of Ethnic Politics in Ghana, 1992-2006  
Steve Tonah

This paper analyzes the resurgence of ethnic politics in Ghana since the return to civilian rule in 1992. The paper argues that, since the introduction of multiparty democracy, Ghana's politics has been characterized by a fierce contest for political power and ethnic hegemony. Ghana's two main political parties have often appealed to the electorate to vote along ethnic and regional lines in an attempt to win more votes. As a result, ethnic block voting is very prominent in parts of the country while ethnic prejudices, stereotyping and animosities are prominent amongst many rural and urban residents. Furthermore, multi-party politics has polarized the country and exacerbated intra- and inter-ethnic conflicts in the country.

Ethnicity as Participation and Belonging  
Ursula Apitzsch

This essay argues that it is not sufficient to show *that* ethnicity is constructed; it is also necessary to show *how* the mysterious dynamics of ethnicity work and to identify, in particular, their consequences for the possibility of societal participation and exclusion. It gives insights into the history of the concept of ethnicity as ethnic belief according to Max Weber's constructivist sociology. In a historical digression to Kant it demonstrates how enlightenment and the idea of participation by contract can occur simultaneously with a naturalizing use of ascriptive categories of belonging for members of the population who are considered to be excluded by their "nature" from human development. Today, ethnicity may also be consciously appropriated in a positive way in order to pay tribute to the historical positioning and achievement of marginalized groups and individuals who succeeded in reversing ethnicizing processes of identification and stratification, giving them their own meaning, and so reinterpreting them biographically. In conclusion, this paper argues that, instead of speaking about ethnicity without groups (Brubaker), one should speak about ethnic groups without ethnic individuals.

## Part II

### **The Question of Belonging: Networks & Biographical Work**

Identity, the sense of belonging and biographical closure  
Kaja Kaźmierska

If we are to refer to the history of post-war Poland, massive displacements were experienced by many nations and ethnic groups. The trauma of relocation, whether by choice or by force, affected many lives. In many cases spatial and temporal distance from homeland has lasted for decades. And it is not until recently that we can observe intensive travelling to places of birth. The idea of visiting the homeland is the result of a long process and complicated biographical work undertaken in order to come to terms with one's biography. Biographical work on emotions combines the past and present experiences. These general frames are then shaped by particular and unique individual biographical experiences. At the same time they are also formed by collective identity and memory. I analyze these phenomena relating to collective and biographical experiences of Jews – survivors of the Holocaust. In the paper I present a narrative of Sarah as an interesting example of biographical work on past and present life experiences undertaken in the context of collective memory constraints.

### Immigrants' Memory Work concerning the Shoah and anti-Semitism in Israel and Germany

Edna Lomsky-Feder, Tamar Rapoport, Yvonne Schütze

After the collapse of the Soviet Union “Russian Jews” have immigrated to Germany and Israel in the early 1990s. In both societies the traumatic memory of WWII and the Shoah have constituted both personal and collective memory. Thus, in their process of positioning themselves in the new society - either in Israel or Germany - Jewish immigrants cannot avoid engaging themselves with the memory of the Shoah. The comparative analysis of personal stories narrated to us in the mid-1990s by ninety young Russian-Jewish immigrants (44 residing in Israel and 46 in Germany) explores the manner in which the young immigrants in Germany and Israel manage their membership in the host society by locating themselves within the discourse of recalling the Shoah. More particularly the paper addresses the following questions: Do the immigrants espouse the local discourse in its entirety or only selectively? What do they embrace or reject? Do they put forward a memory version of their own? Putting emphasis on memory work from the agency perspective allows us to understand the meanings that the recollection of the Shoah assumes among various groups, and among immigrant groups, in particular.

### Fragmented collective memory and negative Belarusian identity

Natalia Mamul

Drawing on a case study from the body of empirical research, which includes over 30 narrative interviews collected with male and female residents of Belarus between 1999 and 2008, the author explores the interplay between historical and autobiographical memory, which, according to Maurice Halbwachs (2008), inculcates collective memory and is inextricably connected with collective identity. The interpretive analysis highlights the complex nature of individual and collective identity formation in contemporary Belarus, with its authoritarian regime, its

contested memory field, restrained memory work and conflicting historical and national discourses.

### The Interrelation between Social Mobility and the Sense of Collective Belonging. A Generation of Social Climbers in the Soviet Union goes to Germany

Irina Fefler, Niklas Radenbach

This article takes a look from a biographical approach at ambivalences with respect to an ethnic sense of belonging among migrants from the former Soviet Union with ethnic German family backgrounds. We thereby focus our study on a generation of Germans born in the 1950s and 1960s, whom we refer to as a "generation of social climbers." Characteristic of those persons representing this generation is that as members of a deported group in the 1940s, they received the opportunity to achieve social advancement in the Soviet Union. Under these circumstances, they generally became closely assimilated into the Soviet Russian culture and only began to rethink their collective belonging as Germans during the Perestroika and with the decision to migrate back to the Federal Republic of Germany. Once in Germany, the representatives of this generation of social climbers are characterized by a striking ambivalence with respect to their collective ethnic sense of belonging. In the following article we would like to demonstrate that the interplay of the historical past in the Soviet Union and the ascription of being "Russian" in Germany resulted in a sense of ambivalence.

### Constructing ethnicity: elite biographies and funerals in Ghana

Carola Lentz

In Ghana as in many other societies, funerals constitute crucial moments when social belonging, including loyalties to an ethnic community, must be ultimately validated. In the case of the urbanized elite men and women from Ghana's marginalized rural north discussed in this chapter, funerals constitute an occasion during which the deceased's 'home ties' are re-evaluated and the relations of his (or her) survivors with their rural kin re-negotiated. At the same time, they are an arena in which elite status is performed vis-à-vis both the broader home constituency and Ghanaian fellow elites.

### Emerging transnational migrant networks in Eastern Europe: The Chinese community in Bucharest post-1989

Rixta Wundrak

Based on a case study on the new Chinese migrant network in Bucharest, this article intends to shed light onto this new migration pattern that has neither been investigated nor considered an important political matter in Europe. On the contrary, the issue of immigration has been consciously ignored by the Romanian public and was considered a 'taboo' for Romanian state agencies during the first half of the 1990s. Combining a variety of ethnographic methods, the following research-questions were addressed: Why and how are those immigrants 'kept secret'? How

are Chinese migrants regarded or represented in Europe and in the society of Bucharest? And what is the story behind these discourses?

In this article, I focus on the historical development of the new Chinese migration wave to Eastern Europe, the immigration process during the early 'wild' years of transition in the 1990s and, finally, the rise and development of Chinese markets in Romania resulting in an urban project called 'Chinatown of Bucharest.' In particular, I intend to highlight with this the complexity of the immigrants' network-building during this process, which implicates both their social embeddedness in the 'transition-society' as well as their transnational links to 'homeland'.

### **Part III**

#### **Transnational Biographies and Intersectionality**

Intersectionality, belonging and translocational positionality: thinking about transnational identities

Floya Anthias

This paper reflects on identity and belonging relating to transnational migration. It critically discusses new forms of identity hailed by the related notions of diaspora, hybridity and cosmopolitanism. The paper provides a critical evaluation of intersectionality frameworks through developing the concept of 'translocational positionality'. This addresses issues of identity in terms of locations which are not fixed but are context, meaning and time related and which therefore involve shifts and contradictions. It also moves away from the idea of given 'groups' or 'categories' of gender, ethnicity and class, which then intersect (a particular concern of some intersectionality frameworks), and instead pays much more attention to *social locations and processes*.

De/Constructing Difference: A Biographical Perspective on Constructions of Ethnicity as Transnational Positionality

Minna-Kristiina Ruokonen-Engler

In this article, I examine how ethnic difference is de/constructed in migrant women's biographies. Based on biographical-narrative interviews that I conducted for my Ph.D. thesis about migration processes and constructions of ethnicity and gender constructions in biographies of migrant women from Finland in Germany. I argue that the concept of ethnic difference is in fact an ambivalent concept that requires an analysis of its intersection with other differences like gender, "race", class and nation. By discussing biographical processes, constructions of agency and gendered experience of migration, I will show how ethnic difference is a relational and contextual notion that is imbued with intimate as well as un/spoken, societal power relations, structural constraints, experiences and discourses. Accordingly, I propose that ethnicity is biographically constructed as transnational positionality, in the sense of transnational belonging and "translocational positionality" (Anthias 2001, 2002). It is a biographical resource as well as a strategy that results from the negotiations of trans/national location and dislocation in relation to the social positioning and

constructions of difference at the intersections of ethnicity, gender, class, nation and racialization.

### Transforming transnational biographical memories: Adult accounts of 'non-normative' serial migrant childhoods

Ann Phoenix

This chapter uses data from a study of adults who, as children, were serial migrants from the Caribbean. Some participants reported clear memories of serial migration, while others used psychoanalytic language of 'repressing' traumatic memories. In both cases, their narratives transformed their experiences in ways that helped them to craft 'livable lives' (Butler 2004). The participants arrived in the UK in the 1960s and 1970s, when overt racism was common. Establishing lives in the UK therefore involved experiences of racism and ethnicisation as well as the negotiation of new relationships with their parents.

### Border Skirmishes and the Question of Belonging. An autoethnographical account of everyday practices of exclusion in the Netherlands

Kathy Davis, Lorraine Nencel

Transnational migration has transformed most European countries, making the problem of how to "integrate" the growing tide of immigrants an increasingly popular topic in public debates and social policy. It is assumed that as long as the newcomer learns the language, adapts to the local customs, and finds work, s/he will be integrated and welcomed with open arms as a full-fledged member of society. Based on an autoethnography of our experiences as US-born, long-term, and fully "integrated" residents of the Netherlands, one of Europe's most multicultural societies, as well as biographical interviews with other so-called "newcomers," we have explored some of the subtle, well-intentioned practices of distancing and exclusion, which are part of the fabric of everyday life. We will show how - contrary to the official discourse of integration - Dutch-ness as a white/ethnic national identity is ongoingly constructed as a "we" which excludes all "others". And, indeed, we have discovered that, paradoxically, the closer the "other" comes to being completely assimilated into Dutch society, the more the symbolic borders of national belonging may need to be policed and tightened.

## **Part IV**

### **Intergenerational Transmission**

#### The Effect of the Very Distant Past on Migrants: Armenian Families in Germany Viola Stephan

Based on a family-biographical study using a multi-generational approach, this essay deals with the possible effects of a family history marked by persecution and discrimination on the experiences of belonging on behalf of those Armenians from Turkey who now live in Germany. The Armenian sense of belonging still plays an important role for those subjects I interviewed, and the Armenian Genocide in the

Ottoman Empire is the core issue according to which their Armenian belonging is discussed. Furthermore, the effects of the family past after the genocide become noticeable. Three types of families could be reconstructed based on the familial dialogue as well as the family members' sense of ethnic belonging. The findings suggest that the formation of these family types depends on the phase of the family past that followed the genocide and, more specifically, whether the family members felt surrounded by the perpetrators and their descendants and if the migration to Germany effected a more open familial dialogue or not.

## Processes of intergenerational transmission of citizenship and belonging among immigrant families in Switzerland

Anne Juhasz

This article is based on ongoing research about citizenship and the family in Switzerland. It explores processes of intergenerational transmission of citizenship and belonging among immigrant families from states of former Yugoslavia. Through the analysis of biographical interviews with parents and their children it describes how citizenship and belonging are transferred across the generations. The article addresses the questions: What does citizenship mean to the immigrants from states of former Yugoslavia and to their children? How does a certain type of relationship to a community and (a) state(s) respectively develop and how do processes of intergenerational transmission of citizenship proceed?

## Shifting balances of power and changing constructions of ethnic belonging: Three-generation families in Germany with ethnic German members from the former Soviet Union

Gabriele Rosenthal, Viola Stephan

Based on our study of families of migrants from the former Soviet Union with an ethnic German family background, our article examines how the sense of collective belonging changes within the context of social transformations and shifting social balances of power change. In general, our study has made clear that in terms of the sense of belonging to larger collectivities as well as the we-group of ethnic Germans in the Soviet Union — and, thus, the family as a reference framework — was subject to varying phases of historical relevance or was only significant in particular historical phases. Using the social developments of four different historical phases, we illustrate the generation-specific and family-dynamic processes as they interrelate to changing constructions of belonging as well as the respective reinterpretations of the family's and the individual's own life histories.

## Educational Success and intergenerational Transmission: Educational Advancement among Migrants of Turkish Descent in Germany

Ebru Tepecik

In contrast to the dominant discourse on the low educational participation and consequently the limited educational success of migrant children in Germany, this article deals with the academic success of such children as exemplified by university students of Turkish descent. As part of a doctoral thesis a number of educationally

successful, second generation migrants in Germany were analyzed in a biographical-theoretically oriented qualitative case study. These academically successful migrants and their families are shown to have specific resources and potentials at their disposal, which are beneficial for scholastic achievements. One of the central empirical insights gained from this study is the relevance of the intergenerational transmission of an educational mandate within the family, which is to be analyzed further in the following article.

## Migrant Children in City Space: Assimilation to Multicultural Society

Victoria Semenova

Cross-national migrant discourse is primarily concerned with the problem of adult immigrants not approaching the process of immigration as a collective family project that may include two or more age groups: both adult members as well as their offspring or non-adult members. These children, as a group of young migrants are subsequently described in their host countries as 'second generation' immigrants. The numbers of child migrants are growing very quickly in most countries and this brings a lot of new social problems that are educational, and cultural in nature as well as different forms of social violence. The purpose of this paper is to give an overview of the problem of migration from the following angle of investigation: children as actors in the process of geographic mobility during family-project migration and their adaptation to a new place of residence. I will put particular emphasis on the difficulties of adapting culturally in terms of their self-reflection about a new city space. I am interested in applying new methodologies (the 'space' approach) to child-oriented research in the migration process. In fact, migration is a physical process of geographical mobility. Therefore the 'space' approach to migration as a cultural process could serve as an adequate additional resource for understanding people in a new cultural milieu. How do people react to the changes in their living space and what are the subjective meanings of this change? How do they pass through the boundaries of cultures and respond emotionally in a new alien environment? How do they cope in this new space?