

Scott Kloeck-Jenson International Pre-Dissertation Travel Grant Narrative Report for Susan Rottmann

With funding from the Scott Kloeck-Jenson International Pre-Dissertation Travel Grant, I was able to conduct preliminary dissertation research in Istanbul Turkey in the Summer of 2005 for my doctoral degree in Cultural Anthropology. My dissertation will examine how Germany's Turkish Muslim minority is navigating conflicting religious, ethnic and national meanings and identities and although I have lived in Germany it was extremely important to conduct research in Turkey. I was able to begin analyzing the experiences and impressions of Turks who have lived in Germany and returned to Turkey, of friends and relatives of immigrants, as well as Turkish views of Germans and the European Union in general. Not only was this research useful in planning my intended dissertation in Germany, but in fact several new sites and theoretical directions for my future research were suggested.

I began my pre-dissertation research by conducting a series of interviews with professors and academics in Istanbul. Dr. Ayse Parla and Dr. Levent Soysal, professors at Sabanci University and Kadir Has University respectively, were particularly important contacts. Dr. Parla has conducted research with Bulgarian-Turkish return migrants to Istanbul and Dr. Soysal's research has centered on Turkish youth in Germany. Both scholars were able to suggest numerous articles, books and resources for further academic study. This was particularly useful since many of these sources are published in Turkish and may be difficult to access in the United States. They were also able to give me concrete advice about how to approach a project involving Turkish transnationalism and the names of several other scholars who should be contacted. Both were particularly interested in how my understanding of the concept dignity and the role

that dignity plays in the resolution of violent conflicts could be applied to German Turks or to return migrants. Dr. Parla and Dr. Soysal agreed that understanding how Turkish immigrants understand dignity, how this influences individual's decision-making and how state authority defines or calls this into question would be interesting and important questions. They provided numerous suggestions for relevant social groups to examine which I was able to research in part via the internet and they were also able to propose other concepts such as "honor" and "shame" which might be fruitful areas of exploration.

In addition to these meetings and acquiring the materials suggested by them, I was also able to interview and spend time in participant observation with several other contacts gained through my time in my summer language program in Istanbul, through contacts with professors in the United States and my Turkish conversation partners at the University of Wisconsin. Many of my interview questions centered on religion and the concept of dignity, but the most interesting results of my research came spontaneously while spending time with these Turkish contacts. Cooking and shopping together, attending a wedding, listening to what is considered "shameful," talking about relatives and friends who have lived in Germany or their own experiences in Germany and listening to their ideas about Europe and Germany which were brought up spontaneously and naturally was the most important part of my research.

There were many times when I was aware of the ways in which my dissertation might engage issues of social justice. Many Turkish people with whom I spoke who had traveled to Germany had experienced racism but many had also internalized criticism of Turks "lack of ability" to integrate into Germany. Most did not articulate mistreatment by the German state and were not aware that Turks in Germany might be denied many

civil and economic rights accorded to “ethnic” Germans. My Turkish contacts also highlighted the importance of examining the practices of the Turkish state and how this affects migration and return migration and the experience of religious expression and other freedoms in Turkey and Germany.

The research I was able to perform this summer was essential for the preparation of my dissertation. It is clear that my initial questions are important and worthy of exploration: How important are Muslim religious practices such as wearing a headscarf or maintaining dietary restrictions and what new religious practices are emerging in Germany? When and how do immigrants express or experience “Muslim” and “Turkish” identities and dignity, and when do they strive for secular identities, “Germanness” or a transnational cosmopolitanism? How are they confronting racist and anti-Muslim sentiment in a “host” country? However, through the course of my pre-dissertation research it has also become clear that exploring the concepts of honor and shame as well as dignity, the role of the Turkish state and understanding the experience of return migrants and the impressions of Germany that Turks who have not lived there possess are also extremely relevant topics of inquiry.

My dissertation research will have important implications for anthropology and for scholars of globalization and migration, Turkish culture and Islamic religion and I am sincerely grateful for the opportunity granted by the Scott Kbeck-Jenson International Pre-Dissertation Travel Grant to begin the exploration of my project this summer. This research has laid vital groundwork for my dissertation.