Gender, Intersections, and Institutions

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“Goetsch in die Primatenschule!” (Send Goetsch to primate school!)”¹ So read the sign held by a boy at a demonstration in Hamburg, Germany, on 19 April 2009. Some five thousand people had gathered to protest a series of proposed education reform measures (Krupa 2009), known collectively as the Education Offensive (Bildungsoffensive). Although these reforms were comprehensive, the sign in this boy’s hands reflected a central point of dissent. Christa Goetsch was a Green Party politician serving as Hamburg’s education minister and thus overseeing the reform effort; Primatenschule was a play on Primarschule, the name of a new primary school form introduced by these reforms. While Hamburg’s elementary schools (Grundschulen) ended with grade 4, the Primatenschulen would end with grade 6. Proponents argued that the restructuring would enable students to spend more time in an integrated learning environment before separating into various secondary school tracks. That is, learners from different linguistic and ethnic backgrounds as well as students considered high or low performing would attend common primary schools for an additional two years.

The sign and its wordplay were not the only curious aspects of this demonstration. An overwhelming majority of the protesters came from Hamburg’s wealthy and elite, leading the liberal Die Zeit to dub the rally the Gucci-Protest (Krupa 2009). Protesters hailed from areas where the dropout rate was especially low and the university attendance rate especially
high and were particularly well-dressed. The main organizer of the rally, lawyer Walter Scheuerl, was described as wearing a blue sweater tossed over his shoulders as he chanted, “We’re here, we’re loud, because they’re stealing our education! [Wir sind hier, wir sind laut, weil man uns die Bildung klaut!” (Krupa 2009). In addition, the demonstration took place in one of the city’s premier shopping districts: “The route that demonstrators chose reflects the city of Hamburg the way it would like to be seen: prosperous, clean, self-confident. Most of the demonstrators know this route because they’re often here on Saturdays—but to shop, not to demonstrate” (Krupa 2009). The demonstration ultimately helped block the new primary school. Indeed, the controversy over the education offensive led to Goetsch’s resignation as education minister and to the November 2010 collapse of the coalition governing Hamburg.

This chapter examines the case of school reform in Hamburg through an intersectional lens, asking how it came to be that a policy, whose advocates suggested, at least symbolically, would provide better educational outcomes for migrant girls took center stage in Land-level politics in Germany. The intersection studied is that of migrant status and gender (see box 5). The Hamburg government’s school reform appears to have been designed on behalf of migrant children, symbolized in policy documents by a girl, rather than in collaboration with the migrant community. In other words, this is a case of convergence with policymaker interests rather than one of an intersectional group working through an international venue (from the “top down”) or gaining domestic interest group allies to pressure the government from below. Both formal policy texts and pro-reform advocates in Hamburg invoked the interests of girls from minority groups in contradictory ways that ultimately undermined the policy initiative itself.

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**BOX 5. Migrant Girls and Boys**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERSECTION STUDIED</th>
<th>Gender + Immigration Status (Migrant Girls and Boys)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TIME PERIOD STUDIED</td>
<td>2008–11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLICY ISSUE STUDIED</td>
<td>School reform in Hamburg (Bildungsoffensive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GERMAN POLICYMAKERS AS ALLIES</td>
<td>Green Party (especially prior to coalition with the CDU)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hamburg’s Education Ministry (Behörde für Schule und Berufsbildung [BSB])</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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2 The intersection studied is that of migrant status and gender (see box 5).
The chapter first provides background on the German school system and the specific educational and policy contexts in which these reforms were proposed and debated. The chapter then describes the study’s research design and presents the findings, including a brief narrative overview of the rise and fall of the reform measure.

Theoretical Perspectives and the Context for Reform

The Educational Context in Hamburg

Hamburg and its schools present the characteristics, challenges, and potential common to urban educational contexts elsewhere in Western Europe and in the United States. Hamburg is a port city located in northern Germany. It is the country’s second-largest city and one of its three city-states, with some 1,700,000 residents and 165,000 students in the grade-school system (Arlt et al. 2009b). It is also one of Germany’s most ethnically and linguistically diverse urban centers. In the 2007–8 school year, roughly one-quarter of all Hamburg fifth-graders were identified as having a “migration background” (Arlt et al. 2009a, 120). The Hamburg government defines students as having a “migration background” if they (1) do not hold a German passport; (2) are ethnic German immigrants, typically from the former Soviet Union; and/or (3) are from a home in which a non-German language is spoken predominantly (Arlt et al. 2009b, 9). More than one-third of preschool-aged children were bilingual, and roughly 20 percent of them spoke the non-German language predominantly (Arlt et al. 2009a, 161). In 2008, the most common non-German languages spoken in Hamburg were Turkish, Russian, Farsi/Persian, English, and Polish (Arlt et al. 2009a, 161).

Hamburg is also a city of significant contrasts, educational and otherwise. On the one hand, it has the highest rate of students taking the university entrance exam among Germany’s sixteen states. In addition, the dropout rate fell almost 4 percent between the late 1990s and 2008, when around 8.2 percent of students left school with no qualifications (Arlt et al. 2009b, 67). On the other hand, these positive aspects do not apply to all of Hamburg’s students equally. For example, students with a migration background were more than twice as likely as their nonmigrant peers to quit school (Beauftragte 2010, 96). Further, students with a migration background repeat grades at disproportionately high rates and are significantly overrepresented in special education and vocational secondary schools and underrepresented in the academic-track Gymnasien (Arlt et al. 2009b).
The Hamburg government’s education reports (Bildungsberichte) (e.g., Arlt et al. 2009a, 2009b), issued biannually, disaggregate a number of educational domains by gender and by migration status but not both. That is, the data documenting migration and multilingualism in Hamburg’s schools are not further disaggregated by gender. Likewise, the Bildungsberichte report a number of statistics specific to the educational experiences of girls and the employment of women educators but do not further disaggregate these data according to nationality or migration status. The absence of clear data with which to assess an intersectional group’s objective needs (in this case, migrant girls’ and boys’) is a problem confronting many intersectional groups and those who study them or seek to speak on their behalf (see Pfahl and Köbsell, this vol.; Xydias, this vol.).

Despite these limitations, the Bildungsberichte suggest a pattern of negative educational experiences for students with a migration background and a pattern of positive educational experiences for girls. How these experiences play out for girls with a migration background is not clear. For example, while students with a migration background are overrepresented among students who must repeat grades, girls are slightly underrepresented among students held back (Arlt et al. 2009b, 52). With respect to standardized test data for reading and math, students with one or both parents born abroad scored lower than students with both parents born in Germany. For girls, the data are inconsistent. They scored higher than boys in reading and lower than boys in math (Arlt et al. 2009a, 191). Complicating the picture even further is the complex nature of the German school system, a situation at the heart of education reform politics in Hamburg.

The German School System

The public school system in Germany is organized along state lines, as in North America, meaning that the sixteen Länder are chiefly responsible for their own schools. Generally, though, the German system comprises a primary level, the elementary school (Grundschule), which ends at grade 4. Thereafter, students have traditionally advanced to one of three secondary school tracks: (1) an academic track (the Gymnasium), which historically has ended at grade 13 with the Abitur university entrance exam; (2) an intermediate track (Realschule), which ends after grade 10 and has a white-collar vocational focus; and (3) a basic education track (Hauptschule), which students can leave after grade 9 and whose curriculum traditionally has focused on trades and blue-collar vocational training. Reforms from the
1960s and 1970s introduced the Gesamtschulen, comprehensive secondary schools most similar to North American high schools that can lead to all qualifications featuring a series of mechanisms to allow students to move between secondary school forms after grade 7. Finally, students with disabilities have been educated in separate special education institutions (Sonder- or Förderschulen) (for Hamburg specifically, see Arlt et al. 2009b, 14–29; for a discussion of Germany’s overall disability policies, see Pfahl and Köbsell, this vol.).

While students with a migration background represented slightly more than a quarter of all first-graders in the academic years between 2005 and 2009, they comprised about one-third of students assigned to Sonder-schulen. By contrast, although the first-grade class was split fairly evenly between boys and girls during those years, girls comprised only 30–35 percent of students in Sonder-schulen (Arlt et al. 2009a, 117). Across the secondary school system, girls typically represent a larger proportion of students moving up the tracks from Sonderschulen to Gymnasien. That is, between the 2005–6 and 2008–9 academic years, girls represented an average of around 40 percent of students in Sonderschulen, 46–48 percent of students in Haupt- and Realschulen, 47–49 percent of students in Gesamtschulen, and a slight majority of students in Gymnasien (Arlt et al. 2009a, 122). The distribution of students with a migration background is almost the opposite: moving up the tracks, students with a migration background are increasingly underrepresented.

The transition from elementary to secondary school is one of the most complex aspects of German education. In Hamburg, teachers make a formal recommendation about which secondary school form the child should attend after grade 4. Parents have the right to challenge that recommendation and place their child in the school form of their choice (Elternwahlrecht). No matter who decides, the child’s placement is probationary for two years. After grade 6, the school reserves the right to move the child to a different secondary form. Both stages of the assignment process are ostensibly based on the child’s academic performance. However, the fact that students with a migration background are—and long have been—overrepresented in the Haupt- and Realschule forms suggests that other factors are involved. Kids whose parents (especially their fathers) attended Gymnasium are more likely to be sent to Gymnasien, while kids with a migration background are more likely to follow the vocational track. This sorting mechanism is precisely what animated support for education reform in Hamburg. Pro-reform advocates argued that extending primary school by two years would
allow students at different levels of academic achievement and from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds to spend more time in an integrated learning environment. This would provide as many benefits in terms of social cohesion and integration as it would for increasing educational outcomes. In concrete terms, advocates focused primarily on the intersection between race and class; however, advocates also invoked the interests of girls with a migration background in contradictory ways that hindered the success of the Bildungsoffensive.

The Educational Policy Context in Germany

The Educational Offensive and the surrounding controversy can be viewed in terms of the growing dominance of neoliberal approaches to education policy and reform (Bale 2013). Picower has succinctly defined neoliberalism as “an ideology and set of policies that privilege market strategies over public institutions to redress social issues” (2011, 1106). Neoliberalism envisions a society in which individuals make choices for themselves on the open market, not within the confines of public agencies or government mandates (Lipman and Hursh 2007). This ideological claim drives neoliberal policies’ efforts to deregulate the economy, liberalize trade and labor policy, and privatize social services hitherto provided by the state (Hursch 2007; Butterwegge, Lösch, and Ptak 2008). As Jones et al. have argued, neoliberalism does not operate uniformly in every national context. Rather, the specific combination of “value systems and embedded practices existing within each nation state” and the degree of resistance to neoliberal policies differ from context to context (2008, 19).

Space limitations preclude a full discussion of the specific development of neoliberal education policy in Germany. Briefly, however, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) studies that began in 2000 represent a watershed moment in the neoliberal transformation of German schools. PISA is a project of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. It is a triennial exam given to roughly a half million fifteen-year-olds in more than sixty-five countries. By design, the exams are not tied to any single curriculum; rather, they claim to measure the knowledge students have gained at the end of compulsory schooling in reading, mathematics, and science (see OECD n.d.). The nature of these international comparative exams fits with neoliberal assumptions about society insofar as the exams represent external accountability measures that purport to be objective and accurately describe school quality (Klausenitzer
Germany’s results on the first study were widely perceived as middling and touched off what has since been dubbed the *PISA-Schock*. In large part, public anxiety over the PISA results was rooted in the gap between long-held assumptions about the high quality of German schools and how German fifteen-year-olds scored on the exams (Martens and Niemann 2013). As Jones et al. have argued, “In Germany [PISA] has helped create a general acceptance of the necessity of modernisation” (2008, 140). In almost every instance, “modernisation” has functioned as code to imply neoliberal transformation: (1) imposing an austerity agenda to drive down state expenditures for public education by lowering costs, in particular by privatizing key services (Magotsiu-Schweizerhof 2000; Barth and Schöller 2005); (2) shifting public attitudes away from viewing education as a public good and toward viewing it as “an object of one’s private deliberations over consumption” (Radtke 2000, 20); (3) reorienting the school system away from equity or equal opportunity and toward selectivity (Schöller 2004), despite (or perhaps because of) the negative consequences of this shift for working-class and poor students in general and for students of color in particular; and (4) forging public-private partnerships to introduce business models of management to the school sector, in particular using standardized measures of increasingly homogenized curricula to make public claims about school quality (Klausenitzer 2002; Schöller 2004).

To be clear, the backlash of the PISA studies has opened up all kinds of ideological space to frame reforms to the German school system. For example, the highly stratified structure of German secondary schools had been considered an off-limits topic for some thirty years (Auernheimer 2009) but became hotly contested as a central cause of educational inequity. Perhaps more significantly, the discovery—or reminder—of the close correlation between academic performance and class and linguistic background has reanimated efforts to transform public schools in linguistically and ethnically just ways. Thus, while neoliberal responses to the *PISA-Schock* have dominated, they have not been the only possibilities.

I have already explored the relationship between neoliberal education policy and education reform in Hamburg (see Bale 2013). While no evidence indicates that privatization or austerity measures drove this particular reform measure, they did justify its social justice aims (e.g., improving the educational experiences and outcomes of students with a migration background, strengthening social cohesion and integration) largely in the neoliberal language of human capital development. For example, official documents typically framed the policy in terms of competition with other
European school systems and improving results on standardized exams such as PISA. This attempt to mix social justice with neoliberal rationales for reform ultimately limited the reforms to Hamburg’s very socially stratified school system.

Sources of Evidence

To study the attempts to reform Hamburg schools and the ways in which the parties in power used images of migrant girls, I conducted an interpretive policy analysis as defined by Yanow (2000). This approach to policy analysis begins by identifying various policy-relevant actors: those charged with implementing given policies as well as those affected by such policies. Interpretive policy analysis seeks to identify the meanings these constituencies make of policy, both symbolically in the form of words and objects, and concretely in terms of how that policy is practiced. Interpretive policy analysis employs a number of conventional qualitative research methods, such as document analysis, semistructured interviews, and participant observation, although in this instance, document analysis alone was used.

Designing an interpretive policy analysis requires differentiating between various interpretive communities with distinct and perhaps even competing stakes. For this study, I identified four communities and collected a wide array of documents related to them between 2008 and 2011:

- official policy documents from Hamburg’s education ministry (Behörde für Schule und Berufsbildung [BSB]), including formal policy texts such as the School Development Plan and The Hamburg Education Offensive: A Clever City Needs Everyone’s Talent, as well as official BSB communications such as the “school letters” signed by Christa Goetsch and distributed via the official BSB website;
- documents created by policy actors favoring the reform measure, including those published and/or disseminated by the two pro-reform coalitions as well as online and printed materials from the teachers’ union that endorsed the measure (the Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft Landesverband Hamburg [GEW]);
- documents disseminated by policy actors in opposition to the reform measure, above all those of We Want to Learn (Wir Wollen Lernen), the primary opposition coalition, and the teachers’ union
that opposed the new primary school form (Deutscher Lehrerver-
band Hamburg [DL]); and
• news stories, editorials, and video broadcasts from Hamburg and
national news media sources.

While collecting data, I did not identify any organizations that formally
represented the interests of women or girls in the campaign either for or
against the reform measure. Indeed, the website of the coalition in favor of
the reform compiled lists of supporting petitions as well as lists of individu-
als and organizations that had endorsed or passed resolutions in support of
the reform. None of the more than forty organizations listed had names
that suggested that they worked for or spoke on behalf of women, migrant
or otherwise, indicating the difficulties faced by this intersectional group in
gaining allies within domestic civil society.

I collected 401 documents: 78 official BSB documents; 29 pro-reform
documents; 168 antireform documents; and 126 media reports. The low
number of pro-reform documents results from the fact that most of these
sources came from websites rather than individual brochures or reports,
and I did not count each web page as a separate document. By contrast, the
antireform coalition was more proactive in sending newsletter-style emails
with media and other attachments, and I counted each email and each at-
tachment as separate documents.

I based my initial approach to data analysis on grounded theory
(Charmaz 2004). Several features of the research made this approach ap-
propriate. First, the dataset informing this study is enormous. The docu-
ment data spanned not only four interpretive communities but also several
years. I began systematic collection of documents in late 2008 and contin-
ued until the new state elections in February 2011. Although the conflict
over this reform measure continued after that date, I made a fairly arbitrary
decision to end my analysis at that point to enable me to draw a reasonable
boundary around the dataset. With such rich data reflecting a real-time
political conflict, I felt particularly compelled to allow themes to emerge
rather than applying predetermined categories.

Data collection and analysis proceeded in an iterative fashion. Typi-
cal of constant comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz
2004), I mined the document data for initial themes and compared them
across different interpretive communities to verify, refine, or refute those
emerging themes. In addition, I used early themes to identify additional
document sources and to develop mid-range theoretical categories. Here, I use the data to address two specific research questions: (1) to what extent did the perspectives of an intersectional group—in this case, migrant girls—come to be represented and/or included in the controversy over the Bildungsoffensive; and (2) who, if anyone, spoke on their behalf?6

Tracing the Education Offensive

Overview of the Reform Measure

The Education Offensive reform measure was comprehensive. At its heart were two structural changes: creation of the primary school, thereby lengthening elementary education to grade 6; and replacing the complex secondary school structure with a two-track secondary system. One track would be the district school (Stadtteilschule), a merger of the previous basic, intermediate, and comprehensive school forms. In contrast to those forms, district schools are designed to prepare all students for the university entrance exam in grade 13. The second track is the academic Gymnasium, which leads to the university exam in grade 12.

Beyond these structural reforms, the measure called for a number of “internal” (schulintern) reforms as well: individualized student learning plans, standards-based7 instruction, expanded compensatory services for German-language learners, and smaller class sizes across the system. Furthermore, accompanying the school-based reforms has been an ongoing professional development “offensive” for teachers (for an overview in English, see Behörde n.d.).

The roots of the education offensive stretch back before the 2008 Hamburg election. The Greens had campaigned on a platform of merging all secondary school forms, using the slogan “One School for All” (Eine Schule für Alle). During the campaign, the Greens produced posters in support of this policy that included images of boys with a migration background. One showed a boy of African descent, perhaps eight or nine years old, with a confident smile and a caption that referred to a traditional, archetypical boy from the city: “The Hamburger Jung: A Good Education for a Good Future” (Hamburger Jung: Gute Bildung, gute Chancen). This placard played on the age and gender of the person depicted while communicating the education platform’s central claim (and later that of the Bildungsoffensive itself): a good education is a key component of equal opportunities for all Hamburg residents, migrant and otherwise. In contrast, the Christian
Democratic Union (CDU) steadfastly opposed any secondary school reform, let alone merging all three forms into one.

Many people found the 2008 election results surprising (see table 5.1). The CDU’s previous coalition partner, the Free Democrats, fell below the 5 percent threshold and were not returned to the Bürgerschaft, Hamburg’s parliament. A left-wing government that included the Left Party, Greens, and Social Democrats also failed to form, leaving the CDU and the Greens to form the government—a rare coalition in German politics. To govern together, the two parties compromised on education. The Bildungsoffensive reflected this compromise: the Greens’ one-school-for-all demand was jettisoned and replaced by the “two-pillar principle” (Zwei-Säulen-Prinzip) of maintaining the Gymnasium favored by the CDU and merging the other secondary school forms into the Greens’ preferred Stadtteilschule. The Gymnasium would end at grade 12; Real- and Hauptschulen would merge into Stadtteilschulen, which would prepare all students for the Abitur in grade 13. Both parties also agreed to the Primarschulreform, whereby Grundschulen would be extended by two years to end at Grade 6, and be renamed Primarschulen.

Although the Green Party had called for a merger of secondary school forms during the 2008 campaign, it backed off that demand during the negotiations that led to the party’s coalition government with the CDU. The same held true for the primary school restructuring. While antireform advocates saw the extension of Grundschulen to end at grade 6 as radical and as a direct threat to their (children’s) interests, some pro-reform advocates saw it as a “lazy compromise” between the Greens and the CDU (Bethge 2010, 22). Teachers’ union activists and teacher members of the Left Party argued that the final version of the reform measure did not promise the sort of real change that could animate and mobilize the support of precisely those populations it was ostensibly designed to benefit—Hamburg’s working-class and migrant families.

Table 5.1. The Partisan Composition of the Hamburg Bürgerschaft, 2008–11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats in Bürgerschaft</th>
<th>Position on School Reform</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian Democratic Union (CDU)</td>
<td>56 seats (46%)</td>
<td>In favor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Democratic Party (SPD)</td>
<td>45 seats (37%)</td>
<td>In favor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left Party</td>
<td>8 seats (7%)</td>
<td>In favor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greens/ Alternative List</td>
<td>12 seats (10%)</td>
<td>In favor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Democratic Party (FDP)</td>
<td>0 seats</td>
<td>Opposed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Governing party
These structural reforms at the primary and secondary levels were formally defined in the contradictory terms of neoliberal human capital development and social justice concerns for greater educational equity. Policy documents and some pro-reform policy actors symbolically invoked the interests of girls with a migration background to garner support for the reforms.

The education offensive was announced in April 2008 and overseen by Goetsch, a Green Party politician and from 2008 to 2010 Hamburg’s education minister. However tenuous the coalition, the school reform plan gained support in Hamburg’s state parliament, and on 9 October 2009 the reform was codified as law (Bethge 2010). Throughout the 2008–9 school year, the education ministry organized a series of regional conferences across the city, in which more than two thousand school staff, parents, and other community members participated (Behörde 2009a). These conferences led to the July 2009 publication of the School Development Plan with a proposal for implementing the entire reform school-by-school in all twenty-two districts (Behörde 2009d). Public feedback was solicited throughout the fall of that year, and a final plan for implementation was issued in January 2010. Implementation of the new primary (Primarschule) and district school (Stadtteilschule) forms was set for August 2010. At the secondary level, the merger of the previous school forms into the new district school moved forward, while the academic Gymnasium remained unchanged. At the elementary level, twenty-four schools were selected to pilot the new primary school form (Behörde 2009c). Complete implementation of the primary school form was intended for the 2012–13 school year (Behörde 2010).

However, a month after the reform was announced in April 2008, an antireform coalition was founded. Led by Walter Scheuerl, We Want to Learn (WWL) leveraged its considerable social, cultural, and economic resources in opposition to the reform. In following Apple’s (2004) lead of identifying specific social blocs behind policy advocacy, I have established elsewhere that the WWL coalition was dominated by elite professionals, especially lawyers and doctors; individuals whose families had an aristocratic history; and the leading members and supporters of the liberal Free Democratic Party (see Bale 2013). Indeed, that party was the only party to oppose the “education offensive” reform (Bethge 2010).

Ultimately, WWL made use of Hamburg’s “direct democracy” ballot initiative law to hold a referendum on the primary school form on 18 July 2010. The initiative succeeded in blocking implementation of the primary
school. By November, Goetsch had stepped down, and the coalition government collapsed. New elections were held in February 2011, and the Social Democrats took office. WWL continues to operate as a sort of permanent opposition to Hamburg’s education ministry.

In the context of this controversy, the needs of migrant girls came to be included in public deliberations at the state level. Both formal policy texts and pro-reform advocates invoked the interests of migrant girls in a contradictory fashion.

**Symbolic versus Explicit Gendering**

On the one hand, gender did not play an explicit role in advocacy either for or against the reform measure in any of the four interpretive communities involved in the controversy over the *Bildungsoffensive*. None of the measure’s stated goals were framed in terms of the educational experiences of girls, migrant or otherwise. None of the explicit argumentation used by pro-reform advocates invoked gender as a basis for supporting the reform or challenging antireform advocates. None of the explicit argumentation used by the WWL or other antireform advocates invoked gender as a basis for critiquing the reform or challenging pro-reform advocates.

On the other hand, however, the most ubiquitous image used in formal policy texts was that of a young girl, perhaps eight or nine years old, with a broad smile, olive skin, dark brown eyes, and dark brown hair pulled back by a pink scrunchie. At times, other girls appeared in the background, somewhat out of focus, collaborating on an assignment. These girls were fairer skinned and had lighter hair. The juxtaposition suggested that the first girl has a migration background while the other girls did not. The image appeared frequently—on multilingual, trifold brochures the ministry produced about the reform measure, in PowerPoint presentations used at public hearings, on the ministry’s website pages dedicated to the reform measure, and in other places. This suggests that at a symbolic level at least, formal policymakers viewed students with a migration background generally and girls with a migration background specifically as key beneficiaries of the reform measure.

However, as the reform measure came under sustained critique from the WWL and other antireform policy actors, formal policymakers and pro-reform advocates framed their defense of it primarily in terms of race and class, not gender. For example, in 2008 Goetsch participated in an interview with *Der Spiegel*, in which the reporter, Birger Menke, referenced
several critiques of the *Primarschule* proposal. Menke pressed Goetsch to address concerns that the new school form would harm academic-track students: by starting *Gymnasium* in grade 7 rather than in grade 5, students would suffer academically. Goetsch’s response implied that this criticism was based on a desire to segregate children from different backgrounds:

> We know from every study that heterogeneity supports learning—indeed, for stronger students, too. Thus, those who say that higher-performing students would be held back by lower-performing students should honestly ask themselves what they really mean. Whether they don’t mean segregating children from different backgrounds. That is the actual question. (Menke 2008)

Moreover, multiple images found in pro-reform policy texts specifically accused antireform advocates of racism and class bias. The membership magazine of the GEW teachers’ union dedicated two issues to a postmortem analysis of the failed *Primarschule*. Accompanying the articles were various pictures of placards with such ironic slogans as, “The elite demand: our background should be worth something again,” “The elite demand: no mixing of our children,” and “The elite clarify: multiculturalism is asking too much of us!” (Edler 2010). Given the emphasis that pro-reform stakeholders placed on questions of race and class, the intent of formal policy documents in using gender symbolically becomes less clear.

**Marina Mannarini and the Intercultural Parents’ Initiative**

Marina Mannarini’s advocacy on behalf of the *Bildungsoffensive* provides the clearest yet also the most contradictory insights into the controversy over this reform measure. Mannarini moved from Florence, Italy, to Germany at age twenty to study second-language education and romance languages (*BQM-Newsletter* 2010). Herself a mother of school-aged children, she was the spokesperson for the Intercultural Parents’ Initiative (Interkulturelle Elterninitiative Hamburg [IKEH]) during the controversy over the *Bildungsoffensive* and a key supporter. The IKEH was formed in January 2010 as a coalition of twenty-five “migrant parent” organizations throughout the city (Kutter and Krischel 2010). The IKEH played a central role in pro-reform advocacy and seemed to enjoy a close relationship with Goetsch and the education ministry. Indeed, Goetsch was present at the press conference announcing the IKEH’s formation (*UoG-News* 2010).
As Mannarini often stated, the IKEH represented not only diverse parents and parent groups in Hamburg but also a diverse set of ideas and perspectives on the Bildungsoffensive. In a 2010 interview she clarified, “Within our initiative there exist major differences in opinion with respect to the positions that we represent. This shows that there is no such thing as THE migrants” (BQM-Newsletter 2010). In more general terms, she stressed, 

Children with a migration background don’t automatically perform poorly in school. It’s high time that we understand that our children—among them highly gifted children—are needed. Not only are the language abilities of many children growing up bilingually a basic fact. But also the intercultural competencies and open-minded attitudes [they possess] are a must in today’s globalized world. Of course, I don’t deny that many of them face considerable difficulties in German schools. But to paint them all with the same brush doesn’t get us anywhere.

How Mannarini positioned her organization and the educational experiences of students with a migration background is consistent with the conceptual framework that holds that social categories woman and immigrant are not fixed and static; they are not ascribed to individual women immigrants in the same way; and they do not capture the experiences of all women and immigrants in Germany in the same way. Instead, they are mediated by and intersect with other social categories—such as those of race, ethnicity, class, religion, and language—to create a broad continuum of experiences stretching between the extremes of inclusion and marginalization. For example, it is not immediately obvious what a highly educated, professional Southern European immigrant such as Mannarini shares with a rural Turkish woman whose migration to Germany came by way of an arranged marriage. Mannarini’s comments suggest that she was aware of these important differences; that awareness is important in making sense of her and IKEH’s advocacy on behalf of the Bildungsoffensive. And although Mannarini explicitly declared that there is no such thing as “THE migrants,” she—arguably on the more privileged end of the inclusion/marginalization spectrum—ultimately served as the primary spokesperson for migrant parents.

Mannarini was as concerned with the ideas people used to advocate for the reform as she was with mobilizing that support. For example, several months before the referendum on the Primarschule, during a flurry of
activism against the WWL’s campaigns, she argued, “But beyond actions we need arguments, because the other side, the antireformers, they’re constantly working in theirs” (Mannarini 2010a, 10, emphasis added). Both in this text and in other venues that interviewed her, published her writing, or published transcripts of her speeches, Mannarini laid out a framework of three arguments to support the Bildungsoffensive: (1) the impact of globalization on German society; (2) a critique of the elite selectivity of Germany’s schools; and (3) a critique of the formal exclusion of migrant parents from voting. Examining the degree to which each of these arguments was taken up by other actors in Hamburg politics permits an assessment of the ability of Mannarini and her supporters to influence public discourse.

The Bearers of a Globalized World

The first of Mannarini’s arguments positioned the reform as improving the educational outcomes for students with a migration background and, by extension, being good for Germany. Her argument thus has some overlap with neoliberal assumptions about the role of education in creating human capital. Students with a migration background, Mannarini argued, have precisely the sort of linguistic and intercultural skills that are necessary in today’s globalized world. She articulated this argument in two ways. First, Mannarini invoked important demographic changes within Germany to claim that antireform advocates were shortsighted in opposing the reform measure. Speaking at a City Hall rally on 5 May 2010, she maintained.

[The antireformers] fail to see what demographic projections have made quite clear: in the near future, Germany will have a considerable need for qualified workers, meaning we’ll need to rely on every single well-educated person. So I ask myself whether we can continue to afford to waste the enormous potential—part of which is children with a migration background. Because children with a migration background aren’t a burden but rather the bearers of a globalized world! So if social thinking is foreign to the antireformers, then at least they should do it for Germany! (Mannarini 2010c, 7)

In a 2010 interview with a quasi-public group devoted to improving vocational training for young migrants (the Beratungs- und Koordinierungsstelle zur beruflichen Qualifizierung von jungen Migrantinnen und Migranten), Mannarini addressed this issue from a different angle. When
asked, “How would you explain Hamburg’s school reform measure in a minute?,” she recounted the story of Ekim Cüre, a Turkish-German woman raised and educated in Germany. Cüre had hoped to finish her training as a plastic surgeon in Germany but instead decided to move to Turkey, because in Germany, according to Mannarini, Cüre reported,

I have to prove myself every day because of my background. Recently, a sixty-year-old patient told me that I speak good German. This comment, meant as a compliment, actually annoyed me more than it pleased me. It signaled to me that I don’t belong, even though I grew up here, successfully completed my studies here, and have German citizenship. (cited in BQM-Newsletter 2010)

Mannarini deployed this story to illustrate her claim that Germany is wasting such talent by not allowing youth more time to develop their abilities before separating them into different secondary school tracks. While this specific story did not circulate in broader discussions about the reform measure, the human capital approach lay at the heart of the reform: every formal policy document bore the slogan, “A Clever City Needs Everyone’s Talents!” (Eine kluge Stadt braucht alle Talente!).

Selection

As the reference to Cüre’s experience suggests, Mannarini’s second broad argument in support of the Schulreform was a multifaceted critique of the early selection built into the German school system. Mannarini at times referenced the practices of other European school systems to underscore that Germany fell outside the norm by sorting its children so early (e.g., BQM-Newsletter 2010). Formal policy documents made similar comparisons, arguing that Hamburg’s (and indeed, Germany’s) schools were undermining students’ potential with the practice.

Unlike formal policy documents, which framed this problem of sorting primarily in human capital concerns, Mannarini used this argument to critique the reform measure as not going far enough. At issue was the Greens’ original “One School for All” proposal. Mannarini repeatedly expressed her dissatisfaction with the “two pillar” compromise, including in Goetsch’s presence at the press conference introducing the IGEH. Despite this critique, Mannarini continued to defend the reform measure as better than nothing. In her 5 May 2010 speech, she argued,
Indeed, critics of the primary school aren’t just found among conservatives. There are others for whom—quite rightly—six years of integrated learning isn’t enough. But, dear people: better six years than living another ten, twenty, thirty years with an outdated and obsolete school system based exclusively on the principle of sorting. Just like the German fairy tale, “The good ones go into the pot, the bad ones go into your crop.” Funny that it’s not really “politically correct” anymore to use the word selection, yet we continue to think in that way! (Mannarini 2010c, 7)

Nevertheless, Mannarini reserved her sharpest critique of the selectivity of Germany’s school system for those who she argued benefited from the status quo. She opened this speech by declaring, “I understand: when for decades you’ve enjoyed your privileges, in education, too, it’s difficult to let others have their share. ‘We’re doing well, and it should stay that way.’ In my opinion, such attitudes are antisocial, plain and simple” (Mannarini 2010c, 7). In the March–April issue of the GEW union magazine, she made a similar argument:

Are we doing enough to generate anger at the motives behind the [WWL] initiative? For as long as anyone can remember, they’ve enjoyed their privilege, knowing full well that they represent an elite. And now they’re not willing to give up any of that, along the lines of, “What, they don’t have any bread? Then let them eat cake.” (Mannarini 2010a, 10)

For Mannarini, the root of this elite’s rejection of the school reform was not necessarily selfishness but rather a fear of competition. That is, if schools were to become more just and allow more children to develop their potential, competition for good-paying and prestigious jobs would increase and thus threaten the elites’ privileges.

Plebicite?

Mannarini was most consistent and persistent in her critique of the structural exclusion of migrants from voting, although this facet was the least frequently echoed by policymakers (e.g., the Hamburg government) or even by the main pro-reform coalitions. Given the WWL’s success in organizing a special referendum on the Primarschulreform for July 2010, the
inability of migrant parents to vote quickly became a central issue in the controversy over the reform itself. As Mannarini declared in the GEW magazine,

Finally, I feel there’s a need to take a clear stance on this most undemocratic moment that the WWL is bestowing upon us: Parents of children with a migration background are the ones who will be disproportionately affected by the decision standing before us this summer, and yet they’re not allowed to vote! What on earth does that have to do with a plebiscite? (Mannarini 2010a, 10, emphasis in the original)

In this statement, Mannarini in fact makes two arguments. She explicitly refers to the roughly 206,000 migrants who were barred from participating in the ballot initiative because they were legal residents of the city but lacked German passports. This number represented about a quarter of all parents with preschool-aged children (Kutter 2010). Indeed, Mannarini and IKEH attempted to transform this critique into a central plank of the pro-reform camp by organizing a symbolic referendum on 3 July, fifteen days before the official referendum (Mannarini 2010c, 8). Organizers set up voting booths in the city hall plaza, invited all Hamburg residents to participate, and sponsored a cultural festival to complement the symbolic act. At the event itself, Mannarini explained, “The only option left for migrants is spectator democracy, because we’re denied the right to vote. Integration can’t only be a one-way street” (cited in UoG-Nachrichten 2010). One participant, Mülayim Hüseyin, the father of two children, described the problem in particularly sharp terms, “We want to participate in the elections that directly affect us. Otherwise what we have here is an apartheid situation” (cited in Kutter 2010). Among the 395 people who participated in the vote, 350 voted in favor of the Primarschule, and 390 voted to allow migrants to participate in future referenda (UoG-Nachrichten).

Implicitly, however, Mannarini also argued that ostensible allies in the pro-reform camp were at best indifferent to the structural exclusion of migrant parents from this ballot initiative. As she wrote in the GEW magazine,

And now they’re asking us, parents with a migration background, for our support. “We know you don’t have the right to vote, and we’re sorry about that. But, still, you should support us by convinc-
ing your German friends to vote YES on the reform.” I’m sorry, but that’s not good enough for me! We’re happy to commit ourselves to a better future for our children and thus to commit ourselves to Hamburg’s parliament. However, in return, we demand assurances that the same parliament will attend to voting rights for migrants on a legal and political level! (Mannarini 2010a, 10)

In her postmortem analysis of the failed Primarschulreform, the sharpness of Mannarini’s words suggest that the quid pro quo she had demanded never came to pass: “Let’s be honest: many democrats just aren’t interested in the target group ‘migrants.’ It doesn’t take much commitment to fob us off with the ever-so-well-intended advice, ‘Just become a citizen!’” (Mannarini 2010b, 14).

In print, at least, Mannarini did not elaborate on her critique of other pro-reform advocates. We can thus only speculate about whether she viewed them as opportunistic (as the first quote would suggest) in asking migrant parents to actively support the pro-reform campaign while not proactively demanding that migrant parents be allowed to vote as well, or whether she viewed them as at least ethnocentric if not worse (as the second quote would suggest) for not engaging migrant interests at all.

Conclusions

The limitations in the official statistics published by the ministry of education (e.g., the biannual Bildungsberichte) mean that it is difficult to ascertain the educational needs of migrant girls. Are they, like girls in general, doing fairly well? Or are they, like migrant children as a group, struggling? In the absence of data disaggregated by gender and migration status, it is difficult to establish what the objective interests of girls with a migration background might be in transforming the structure and practice of Hamburg’s schools. Instead, without these data, formal policy documents produced by the Green-led education ministry worked at symbolic levels to suggest that migrant girls would be among—if not the primary—beneficiaries of the Bildungsoffensive.

The child with a presumed migration background featured in these formal policy documents was a girl, not a boy. This stands in some contrast to the campaign materials the Greens used during the 2008 election. The fact that the image of the boy used in that context as well as images of migrant boys in general did not appear in subsequent formal policy documents
leads to an important question: Would the broader Hamburg public be inclined to support education reform in the interest of migrant boys? Two contrasting discursive patterns appear here. On the one hand, public discourse regarding boys and men with migration backgrounds is often overdetermined by questions of criminality. On the other, concerns regarding arranged marriages, headscarves and other religious attire, and violence against migrant women are often used in framing public discussions of social integration, particularly to generate sympathy (albeit paternalistic) among ethnic Germans toward migrants. (See Donovan, this volume, for more on this subject.) Intentional or not, the symbolic gendering of the Bildungsoffensive connects to and, indeed, reflects these gendered patterns of public discussions about migration and integration.

These findings also raise a central question about interest convergence between an intersectional group and state policymakers—that is, whether the Bildungsoffensive and advocacy for it were designed on behalf of girls (and their parents) from marginalized groups or designed in collaboration with them. Unfortunately, because no policy actors (whether formal, pro-reform, or antireform) explicitly framed the policy in terms of gender, this question is difficult to address directly. Mannarini’s frustration provides at least some insight into this question insofar as she consistently criticized her pro-reform allies for failing to take seriously migrant parents’ demand for the right to vote, for expecting migrant parents to actively campaign for a reform measure they were legally prohibited from voting on, and for condescending to migrant parents that becoming a German citizen is somehow an easy solution to the voting question or somehow an easy process. This frustration suggests a dynamic in which ethnic German policy actors were in charge, setting the terms of the policy itself and of the advocacy for it on behalf of migrant parents and their children. Although the vast majority of these policy actors (both formal and pro-reform ones) were women, neither the condescension nor the subordination that Mannarini called out was explicitly gendered.

This dynamic can also be observed in the tendency for Mannarini’s social justice/antiracism frame to be overshadowed by another frame rooted in concerns regarding human capital development in an era of globalization. Her reference to Dr. Cüre provides a particularly revealing example. The story describes a young professional’s experience with everyday racism, but Mannarini does not deploy it to argue in an explicit way that the Bildungsoffensive is an effort to redress racist structures or practices in Hamburg’s schools. Rather, Mannarini uses this story to claim that because
of such negative experiences, Hamburg is losing out on young migrants’ talents and potential. That is, the implied antiracist message is subordinated to concerns regarding human capital development.

This ambivalence might result from Mannarini’s position with respect to the controversy over the Bildungsoffensive: simultaneously a primary spokesperson on behalf of all migrant parents and a highly educated European migrant to Germany who is arguably more privileged than many other migrant parents. Rather than pinning this ambivalence entirely on the identity or position of a single individual, I see it within the larger context of how the Bildungsoffensive was framed and how the controversy over it played out. This broader perspective demonstrates that the ambivalence of Mannarini’s specific advocacy for the Bildungsoffensive is consistent with the ideological contradictions within the policy itself and advocacy for it.

Both formal policy documents and pro-reform advocates often mixed rationales for the reform based in social justice concerns with those based in neoliberal concerns about human capital development: the cover page of the official policy text, for example, included both the image of the migrant girl and the tagline, “A smart city needs everyone’s talents,” a clear nod to human capital development concerns. This contradictory framing not only ceded ideological ground to antireform advocates but also failed to mobilize the voter base (parents) that would likely have benefited most from the intended reforms. Mixing social justice and human capital rationales may have been the most expedient choice for moving the reform measure through formal policymaking structures (e.g., the Hamburg Senate). But this ambivalent framing fatally undermined the policy once it came under attack from elite sectors of the city, failing to generate broad public support. Fritz Dittmar, a Gesamtschule teacher and pro-reform advocate who contributed a letter to one of the two postmortem analyses in the GEW union magazine, provides crucial insight into how the Hamburg government’s appropriation of migrants’ concerns contributed to the demise of their own policy:

The primary school reform didn’t generate much interest among those it was meant to benefit. They have more important problems: how to make ends meet with [cuts to unemployment], how to get off unemployment altogether, to keep their job, not to be charmed by any of [anti-immigrant politician Thilo] Sarrazin’s foolishness, to pay the rent, to get the money together for child care, and so on. Whether their kids get labeled as “losers” after four years or six is a
secondary problem. In addition, the fact that, since [former German Prime Minister Gerhard] Schröder, the term reform has meant come to mean “threat” and not “promise” also played a role. (2010, 25–26)

In many ways, as the spokesperson for a coalition of more than twenty-five migrant parent organizations, Mannarini was the best-positioned policy actor to represent the intended beneficiaries (vorgesehenen Nutznießern) of this reform measure, yet she framed her advocacy with an ambivalence similar to the policy itself. This is not to say that Mannarini bears direct responsibility for the policy’s failure but rather to underscore the point she made: the ideas one uses to frame education policy reforms and advocate for them are as important as the legwork required to mobilize the advocacy itself.

The failure of the Hamburg school reform illustrates some of the difficulties faced by intersectional groups in making their voices and preferences heard in public debates. The international PISA study highlighted some of the shortcomings in the German school system but did not constitute a venue through which migrant families could force German policymakers to adopting educational reforms conducive to minority achievement. Rather than obtaining civil society allies who could aid them in pressuring the government from below, migrants in Hamburg found such groups actively working against the school reform. Women’s groups were silent on the issue. And while the Greens initially called for thorough school reforms to benefit (among others) migrant boys, this framing disappeared along with the idea of “one school for all” as well as migrants’ concerns about being excluded from Hamburg’s political decision-making process.

NOTES

1. All translations by author.
2. In the Hamburg case, migrant status cut across race, class, and ethnoreligious lines, meaning that some members of this group were marginalized in ways beyond their gender and national origin.
3. Although this phrase “student with a migration background” is awkward in English, I use it in this chapter. The criteria used to define such students are different from those used by the U.S. government to define membership in racial or ethnic groups or to label English-language learners. Thus, to “translate” the German term into a more familiar one would blur these distinctions too much.
4. The disaggregations by gender do not appear in the shorter executive summary (Zusammenfassung) of each Bildungsbericht; finding the gender-related data requires digging through the full report (usually comprising more than 350 pages).
All documents were written in German, though I use the English translations of all titles in the interest of readability.

Elsewhere (Bale 2013), I have analyzed the Hamburg reform measure in light of neoliberal policymaking. While the research questions discussed here prompted me to view the data again with a specific lens (i.e., not in such an open-ended way as with the grounded theory approach I originally used), the data led me to draw quite similar conclusions.

The actual term used was *Kompetenzen* (competencies). However, I think they equate to U.S. standards and the debates over them and consequently have used this translation. For background on these debates, see Ravitch 2010, chap. 2.

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