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### DAAD Experiences Report

As a first time DAAD RISE scholarship recipient, but with previous exchange experience in Germany and a small circle of friends near Düsseldorf, I initially predicted my ten-week internship at the Universitätsklinikum Aachen to be a relaxing summer in the land of my old high school exchange trip. I had intermediate skills in spoken German, a healthy appetite for German history and film, and a circle of support an hour away by train. And while the experience was definitely one of the most enjoyable in my lifetime, this summer's stay in Germany also made me grow in ways that I never expected, causing some personal transformation as well as fun. Ultimately, I've come to understand- not unlike many travelers before me, I expect- that Germany and the US have much to learn from each other, and that a life shared between them is complicated but also that much more complete.

By the nature of the endeavor, psychology research is maddeningly difficult, mostly a result of trying to apply the regiments of the scientific method to the variability of the human condition. I had no experience in this field before DAAD and Aachen- my undergraduate research at my home university is in behavioral neuroscience and epigenetics- but learning the German psychologist's methods of finding patterns within human variability was fascinating. My supervisor, Dr. Finkelmeyer, took two already abstract psychological concepts- a new direction in research that shows a cerebellar role in the human sense of smell, and the hypothesis that odors have an effect on our ability to learn social information, and combined them into one very interesting study. We tested subjects with past cerebellar and thalamic (for comparison) strokes, in addition to

subjects with deep brain stimulation treatment for essential tremor, all with a name-face pairing recognition task while having the smell of rotten egg delivered to the subjects' noses. The results of our tests were promising when I had to take my leave from Aachen, but even so, getting our investigations to go correctly was often a challenge.

Thus, Andreas and I worked hard to eliminate sources of variation- different levels of patient disabilities, mechanical and programming error within our test apparatus, and scripting our dialogues with subjects during the examinations. I was surprised that Andreas eventually let me lead the majority of our elderly German subjects through our tests, if only because he had worked so hard to eliminate outside influences on our data, such as patterns in our facial stimuli and odor delivery timing. Andreas' individual attention to detail is what now characterizes my picture of where German science is and will go. We worked through difficulties with finicky equipment, a language barrier (myself), and doubt as to the availability of materials and subjects for our study to perform some rather extraordinary experiments. The state of German science resembles our experience, to my eyes- sometimes a lack of funds (compared to the US, at least), or a lack of support for new Ph.D.'s starting anew in their field, cause difficulties and hamper progress, but Germany still has leading international-level laboratories and publications. Aachen's Uniklinik is itself one of the largest and most successful teaching hospitals in Europe. Maybe students in Köln have to wear helmets to protect themselves from falling ceiling lights in lecture halls, but the German system of education is still world-class and turning out tenacious, creative researchers all the same.

If Germany can be proud of its strong scientific research, it can also be proud of its culture. During my stay, I managed to visit some fifteen places in the country- Berlin,

Köln, Insel Rügen, Freiburg, Lübeck, Dresden, and the Harz, just to name a few. Each had its own unique architecture, dialect, and arresting historical significance- whether the deathly silence of the Buchenwald KZ-Gedenkstätte or the graceful beauty and symbolism of the St. Nikolaikirche in Leipzig. And Germany is also as much a crossroads of the world as London or Brussels- especially in cities like Berlin, where I saw a South African pop/rock/Zulu band perform to an ecstatic crowd. Even during the craziness of the Europameisterschaft in June, I was surprised both by the Germans' pride in their country and simultaneous respect for their Turkish neighbors.

What most made me feel at home while abroad, however, were the German people. Of course, I had a distinct advantage over many of my fellow DAAD participants in interacting with native Germans, due to my established friendships there and solid language skills. Regardless of my situation, I found not just my good friends but perfect strangers to be friendly, helpful but shockingly honest. Germans were always quick to point out things they saw at fault in my thinking, sometimes striking at the heart of American society- like our expensive educations, for instance- while admitting Germany's own problems in the same breath. This sort of openness and level-headedness is sadly missing at times in America, in my own opinion. It also made me think more honestly about my own life and career ambitions.

As I watched the German media work itself into a fever over Barack Obama's visit to Berlin in July, I knew that Germans would be listening intently and thinking carefully over what this man's presidency could do for the world. Thus I find it rather tragic that, despite the fact that many Americans have some idea of what the Berlin Wall was, their understanding of Germany's culture stops somewhere at Lederhosen and

Oktoberfest. Americans in general are quite simply too closed to the workings of the wider world, in comparison. And if all Americans could see what an astounding commitment even the average German has made to personal environmentalism, I think my home would be a lot greener. Germany admittedly still has a lot of work to do in combating unemployment in the former DDR and making its German-born Turkish minority feel at home, but as America seeks to gain “independence” from foreign oil with alternative energy sources, I think both Germany and the US could learn from one another.

Alas, like every summer’s new relationship, mine and Germany’s has to be put on hold, at least for now. I will strive mightily to keep in touch with my friends overseas and continue my German studies at home in Philadelphia, but I know I will grow somewhat distant from what has become my second home. Perhaps by sharing the above experiences with my friends back home, I can stay connected to Germany and help Americans to understand why I deeply love and respect the homeland of Joschka Fischer and Haribo as much as my own. Thus, I am extremely grateful to DAAD’s RISE program for the opportunity to experience all of the above and more this summer. I look forward to my eventual return to Deutschland!