

26th Transatlantic Doctoral Seminar in German History: Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century German History

Virtual Seminar, June 16-19, 2021. Co-organized by the German Historical Institute Washington and the BMW Center for German and European Studies at Georgetown University, in cooperation with Villa Vigoni – German-Italian Centre for the European Dialogue. Conveners: Anna von der Goltz (Georgetown University) and Richard F. Wetzell (GHI). Faculty Mentors: Monica Black (University of Tennessee, Knoxville), Jürgen Dinkel (University of Leipzig), and Joe Perry (Georgia State University). Participants: Alexandra Fergen (University of Oxford), Sara Friedman (University of California, Berkeley), Katharina Friege (University of Oxford), Eric Grube (Boston College), Matthew Hershey (University of Michigan), Sheragim Jenabzadeh (University of Toronto), Tamar Kojman (Hebrew University), Jonathan Lear (University of California, Berkeley), Aileen Lichtenstein (University of Glasgow), Annalisa Martin (Birkbeck College, University of London), Alexander Petrussek (Rutgers University), Michael Rösser (University of Erfurt), Johnathon Speed (Vanderbilt University), Michael Weaver (University of Toronto).

The twenty-sixth Transatlantic Doctoral Seminar in German History once again brought together doctoral students from North America and Europe, all of whom are working on dissertations in nineteenth- and twentieth-century German history. Since last year's seminar was canceled due to the pandemic, this year's seminar combined two cohorts of participants. Although we had hoped to be able to meet in person in Washington DC in June 2021, the seminar ended up having to take place virtually due to continuing travel

and public health restrictions. Taking place over four days, the seminar was organized in seven panels, featuring two papers each, which opened with two comments by fellow students, followed by discussion of the precirculated papers.

The seminar started with a panel on the nineteenth century with two papers probing questions of national identity. Tamar Kojman's paper "Music as an Analogy for the Apolitical German" examined the unprecedented preoccupation with music's aesthetic properties among the German educated classes beginning in the 1840s. Music's indeterminateness as a medium and its perceived otherworldliness, Kojman argued, served as a compelling analogy for the German "spirit" and came to play a central part in teleological narratives asserting the Germans' role in world history. Michael Weaver's paper "Political Friendship and State Power, 1850-1858" charted the development of a network of "political friends" in the German Confederation between 1851 and 1858, when the failure of the Revolutions of 1848/49 inaugurated a new campaign of government repression against the liberal network. In this context, Weaver explored how these friends expressed emotion in order to build trust, check political non-conformity, and enforce the reciprocation of professional favors.

The second panel tapped into the global turn in German history to examine questions of space, migration, and networks. Aileen Lichtenstein's paper "A Transatlantic Revolutionary Moment? The Dynamics of Cross-Border Activism in Europe and Beyond" examined the transatlantic connections of the German anarchist movement between 1878 and 1914. By tracing anarchist mobility and settlement patterns across borders, with a special focus on the exile communities in London and New York, the paper revealed the ideological, cultural, and financial continuities of the movement and thus showed that German anarchism matured into a serious movement in the relative safety of exile from where

it was able to facilitate a resurgence in Germany after 1890. Michael Rösser's paper "Economies of Skill? Craftsmen and Office Clerks at the Central Railway in German East Africa" focused on Indian (indentured) labor at the central railway in German East Africa from 1905 to 1914. Since the manpower of Indians, who were predominantly employed as skilled workers (craftsmen or office clerks), was in high demand, the paper argues, they held a comparatively privileged position in the colonial labor market, which was revealed in colonial discourses.

The third panel focused on the First World War and its aftermath. Matthew Hershey's paper "Inclination Toward Death: Suicide and Sacrifice in First World War Germany" examined the spectrum of suicidal behaviors in the German Army at the outbreak of World War I. Hershey argued that the soldiers' suicides of August 1914 constituted a largely unrecognized harbinger of the mass shattering of socio-emotional ties and moral certainties that would ultimately destroy the *Kaiserreich*. Those signals, he observed, were obscured by the staggering combat death rates and simultaneous solidification of the "spirit of 1914," which reframed personal self-destruction as national sacrifice. Sara Friedman's paper "'There is no Censorship': Film and the November Revolution" traced the ramifications of Germany's lifting of federal censorship following the armistice that ended World War I. Arguing that censorship's abolition in the case of film was largely symbolic, Friedman contended that the abolition of censorship simultaneously gestured towards a possible future of artistic freedom and re-ignited prewar morality debates.

The fourth panel examined trends regional and transnational aspects of German history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Johnathon Speed's paper "A 'Child Export': the Swabian Children at the Austro-German Border, 1897–1914" studied the labor migration of Austrian children to

Swabia. Inspired by a long-brewing moral panic, from the first decade of the twentieth century provincial state actors in the Alps began to subject the so-called “Swabian Children” to enhanced oversight via state surveys and forced extraditions. These interventions, Speed argued, marked the moment at which the national categories of German and Austrian finally supplanted regional ones of Tyrol, Vorarlberg, the Oberinntal, the Vintschgau. Eric Grube’s paper “Two *Brudervölker*, Two *Bruderreiche*, Two *Führer*” analyzed the Austrofascist engagement with Nazism. From 1936 to 1938 Nazis and Austrofascists engaged with each other as friends worthy of fraternal participation in fascist visions of *großdeutsch/völkisch* projects and, at the very same time, as adversaries in the midst of a fratricidal war of assassinations and street brawls. Austrofascist vacillation between “appeasement” and punishment of their Nazi rivals, Grube concluded, stemmed from the outgrowth of a constitutive contradiction between regionalism and nationalism.

The fifth panel explored postwar West German social and cultural history. Jonathan Lear’s paper “Struggling for Survival during and after Nazism: The Case of Anton Zischka” analyzed the writings of Anton Zischka, a prolific Austrian-born journalist and science writer, who first achieved fame during the Third Reich and later became one of West Germany’s most influential nuclear advocates. The concept of energy, Lear argued, helped Zischka erase the Nazi past, while also reflecting modes of thought that had previously serviced Nazi Germany’s wartime goals. Annalisa Martin’s paper “Commercial Sex and Crime in West Germany, 1960-1980” examined the association of commercial sex with crime by probing the relationship between morals police officers and women who sold sex in the 1960s and 1970s in Hamburg, Cologne and West Berlin. Criminal law and morals policing, Martin argued, combined to code women who sold sex as both victims and perpetrators. These overlapping interpretations restricted institutional help for women

who sold sex and often pushed them to find other sources of safety and protection.

The sixth panel studied the interwar period from two different transnational perspectives. Sheragim Jenabzadeh's paper "A Revolution of Youth: 'The Hope of Iran' Student Association and the Journal *Farangistan*" examined a group of Iranian students who studied in interwar Berlin and formed the Hope of Iran Association. The Weimar Republic, Jenabzadeh argued, provided these Iranians with a working model of the successes and failures of a nascent republican system. Based on their observation of the Weimar Republic and life in Berlin, these students came to view themselves as a collective youth tasked with inciting a "moral revolution" among the youth of Iran and paving the way for a progressive Iranian future through the organ of their association, *Nameh-e Farangistan* (Letters from Europe). In her paper "Fernweh and the 'Neue Frau' Abroad: German Female Journalists in Pursuit of Adventure, c. 1930-1940" Katharina Friege studied a small number of German female journalists and photographers who sought adventure abroad during the 1930s and 1940s. Arguing that their pursuit of adventure was predicated on an effort to wield autonomy over their lives, Friege explored how these women rendered otherwise abstract concepts, such as technology, gender, or nationhood, concrete through their subjective travel experiences.

The seventh and final panel returned to postwar German history. Alexandra Fergen's paper "Liberty on Trial: Stern, Sexism, and the Dignity of Women" focused on a 1978 lawsuit filed by ten West German women against *stern* magazine for sexist cover images. Examining how the court case unfolded, how it was received by the public, and which implications it had, Fergen argued that the court case played a key role in driving public discourse on gender equality and testing the meaning of West German liberalism. Alexan-

der Petrussek's paper "Limits of the Socialist Metasystem: Growth, Pollution, and Ideal Authority in the GDR, 1961-1982" examined the development of East German reform economic programs of the 1960s as the GDR's last utopian project. Focusing on how ideals were drawn from a social imaginary and practiced as policy and activism, Petrussek argued that this last utopian project simultaneously signaled the party-state's abdication of its ideal authority as the GDR's environmental crisis worsened in the 1970s.

As many noted during the final discussion, even though the seminar was not able to convene in person, the group generated an atmosphere of collegiality, constructive critique, and engaging debate that made these four days a truly remarkable experience. Several participants mentioned that even though preparation for the seminar had been quite demanding (precirculated paper plus preparation of a comment), it had been the most inspiring conference they had attended. The wide-ranging final discussion touched on the situation of doctoral students and junior scholars during the pandemic, including the impact of archive closures, the isolation from regular contact with peers, and the difficult funding situation. On several of the meeting days, informal virtual socializing continued after the panels; the group also held a follow-up meeting a month after the seminar to discuss a wide range of issues of concern to doctoral students and early-career scholars. The completion and publication of the excellent dissertation projects presented at the seminar is eagerly awaited.

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