

Sixth West Coast Germanists' Workshop: Globalizing German History in Research and Teaching

Workshop held at the University of California, Los Angeles, February 23–24, 2024. Co-sponsored by the GHI Washington Pacific Office and the University of California, Los Angeles. Conveners: Anna-Carolin Augustin (GHI Washington), H. Glenn Penny (University of California, Los Angeles), and Isabel Richter (GHI Washington Pacific Office). Participants: Krista Bailie (University of British Columbia), Eva Baudler (Stanford University), Adam Blackler (University of Wyoming), Michael Bunch (University of Colorado, Boulder), Sarah Ernst (University of Southern California), Annika Frieberg (San Diego State University), Moses Headley (University of California, San Diego), Deborah Hertz (UCSD), Carina Johnson (Pitzer College), Dani Kranz (El Colegio de México), Simone Lässig (GHI Washington), Philipp Lenhard (University of California, Berkeley), Caitlin Murdock (California State University, Long Beach), Paul Nolte (Freie Universität Berlin), Alexia Orenco Green (USC), Andrea Orzoff (New Mexico State University), Thomas Pegelow Kaplan (University of Colorado, Boulder), Alexandria Ruble (University of Idaho), AJ Solovy (University of California, Berkeley), David Sabeian (UCLA), Itzel Toledo Garcia (Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo), and Elissa Watters (USC).

The GHI hosted its Sixth West Coast Germanists' Workshop at the University of California, Los Angeles between February 24 and 25, bringing together historians of Central Europe and the German-speaking world from as far east as Colorado and as south as Mexico City to explore what German history means from the perspective of the Pacific and against the backdrop of a rapidly changing historical

profession. The workshop focused on the theme of the “global” in order to address the distinct circumstances Germanists in western North America face, separated from each other and from Europe by great distances.

The first panel, “Transoceanic Histories,” which featured papers from Eva Baudler, Adam Blackler, and Thomas Pegelow Kaplan, centered the workshop’s focus on the Pacific in order to shed light on the way Germans understood their position in the world during the imperial and interwar periods. Baudler presented pre-dissertation research into Chinese diaspora communities within Germany and its colonial holdings, arguing that by following the movement of Chinese laborers and immigrants, a deeper understanding of the way race and place functioned within Germany and the interstices of its empire emerges. For example, though globally the subject of abuse, Chinese laborers in Samoa were protected from corporal punishment because they were non-native. Baudler also detailed the ambiguous positions of Chinese communities in Weimar and Nazi Germany as they stayed abreast of developments in East Asia. Blackler presented on Weimar-era colonial associations and their spectacle-laden jubilees, which provided both ex-colonials and those who had never left Europe a space to develop a sense of victimhood over the “theft of our African homeland” and a collective nostalgia for a form of ethical empire that never existed in practice. He persuasively argued that colonial culture resonated throughout Weimar Germany not in spite of but precisely because of the loss of empire. Pegelow Kaplan rounded out the panel by examining the Philippines as a test case to understand the Third Reich’s global entanglements and Nazism’s effects on overseas German communities. In the 1930s, Philippine leaders, including President Manuel Quezon, drew inspiration from the Nazi regime to challenge American power, privileging Nazis within the local German community. Yet, during the wartime Japanese occupation of the islands,

the collaborationist government embraced Nazi racial categories to defend its semi-autonomous position and justify a pan-Asian ideology that ultimately marginalized Germans.

In a brief roundtable discussion, recent Fritz Thyssen Pre-Dissertation Fellowship grantees AJ Solovy (2019), Sarah Ernst and Alexia Orengo Green (2022), and Moses Headley and Elissa Watters (2023) discussed their experiences conducting research in Germany as graduate students. This was followed after lunch by an extended roundtable, chaired by Deborah Hertz and featuring Caitlin Murdock, Krista Bailie, and Dani Kranz, that reflected on the challenges of teaching Central European history along the Pacific Coast. The panelists emphasized the need to simultaneously globalize German history and adapt its teaching to local conditions, in order to both carve out a space for the field in shrinking departments and make its study feel relevant for students. For example, Murdock explained how in her classes at California State, Long Beach, where many students come from Central American immigrant backgrounds, she emphasizes historical parallels between questions of national belonging in Central Europe and her students' lived experiences at the intersection of multiple identities. German colonialism, both within and beyond Europe, was also put forward as a way to bring Central Europe into timely conversations about empire. Many raised concerns about the preoccupation of students with the Holocaust and Second World War, and the danger of what Moses Headley termed "the specter of pop history." Yet, there was agreement on the value of using these topics to get students through the door, at which point historians can, in Glenn Penny's words, act as "myth-busters," engaging students by breaking down pre-existing notions and narratives of exceptionalism and "making the familiar strange."

Paul Nolte capped the workshop's first day by delivering the Gerda Henkel Lecture, titled "Degrees of Order, Measures

of Freedom.” It detailed his current book project, an up-to-date synthesis of modern German history interpreted as a constant struggle between the quest for “freedom” and “order.” Nolte argued that German history continues to flow through traditional narratives of catastrophe and aberration or redemption and progress, even in recent post-modern and post-colonial examinations, which reinforce a modified *Sonderweg* – identifying German colonial violence as a precursor to the Holocaust – and shrink German history to the years between 1871 and 1945. Nolte hopes to depart from such narratives more forcefully than earlier syntheses by following the way elites and ordinary Germans alike strove to order their worlds from the era of the Holy Roman Empire to the present. The keywords “order” and “freedom” reveal how German history is far from linear, and offer a productive lens through which to bring the Anthropocene into the center of German history, since territorial and environmental management have been central to the search for order. He also argued for German history’s enduring relevance as a “paradigmatic history of modernity” that offers a valuable case study to better understand the historical junctures of high-modern societies.

The second day commenced with papers from Annika Frieberg, Alexandria Ruble, and AJ Solovy examining the “post-war challenges” of denazification and grassroots activist movements, with special attention to gender dynamics and the overarching backdrop of the global Cold War. These papers echoed the workshop’s theme of questioning German history’s rigid junctures and dichotomies, such as those between East and West Germany and the pre- and post-1945 periods. Frieberg began by examining the response of Swedish Social Democratic women’s organizations to the Polish Solidarity movement of the 1980s as a case study to understand the way European pacifist movements engaged with questions of human rights in Europe and abroad. While these groups were deeply critical of human rights abuses in

Vietnam or South and Central America, espousing an “international solidarity,” they resisted American calls to vocally support the Solidarity Movement in Poland, fearing the prospect of nuclear war. Instead, Swedish grassroots peace activists were decidedly realist when approaching *détente* and *Ostpolitik*, prioritizing economic and humanitarian support for Solidarity and persecuted groups within the Eastern Bloc. Ruble followed the 1960 trial of five women charged with endangering the state during the West German anti-Communist campaigns of the 1950s to show how West German women – like their East German counterparts – used the Cold War to frame their claims to rights. Those on trial sought to “leverage gender” and portray themselves not as dissidents but as maternal and peaceful. Yet their strategy failed to produce an acquittal, not least because they were seen as spurning traditional gender roles. Finally, Solovy discussed the thousands of post-Holocaust interactions between Jewish survivors and former members of the SS as both groups left Germany for South America, Australia, and the United States. Whether on ships departing Europe, where survivor and perpetrator had to share intimate spaces, or in chance, everyday encounters, “those who imagined a world without Jews now had to live with them.” While the appearances of survivors differed considerably outside of the camps, former SS personnel largely looked the same. The latter fervently worried about being unconsciously identified, helping to create a sense of victimhood among the most virulent Nazi criminals as they fled Germany.

The third panel featured papers from Michael Bunch and Itzel Toledo Garcia that tackled questions of migration and forced mobility. Bunch discussed the housing and stigmatization of *Vertriebene* (German expellees) in Osnabrück after 1945. As German authorities housed many expellees in the remnant camp infrastructure of the Third Reich, which they continued to refer to with the term *Lager* (camp), they physically and rhetorically separated them from the rest of West

German society. Countering triumphalist postwar narratives, Bunch showed how, for the thousands of expellees who lived in these camps in the midst of the Economic Miracle – and the many who remained as late as the mid-1960s – integration was a fraught and lengthy process. Toledo Garcia presented research into the Agencia Duems, an interwar German news agency that published information about Germany and Europe in newspapers throughout Mexico and Central and South America. Agencia Duems worked to combat negative depictions of Germany in the Associated Press by spreading stories that positively positioned it as a global economic and cultural power. Meanwhile, it marshaled artists and ex-colonial officials to create German-language publications that emphasized the successes of the former German colonial empire and the strength of the *Auslandsdeutsche* (overseas Germans), in the process uniting German communities across different continents in their opposition to the Versailles-based international order.

During the workshop's final session, Carina Johnson presented a paper titled "Carthage and the White Moor" that detailed the "darkening phenomenon" in German artists' representations of North Africans between the early sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In depictions of the 1535 Hapsburg conquest of Tunis, North Africans were represented with a variety of light and dark skin tones that emphasized the region's ethnic diversity. But as Germans became increasingly disconnected from the southern Mediterranean after the Ottoman Empire recaptured the city in 1575, there was a "degradation of ethnographic particularity" that led Africans of all backgrounds to be depicted as black.

Altogether, in its formal panels and roundtables, and in generative informal conversations during coffee breaks, lunches, and beyond the bounds of the weekend's events, the workshop provided scholars at many stages of their

careers a wonderful forum for sounding out new teaching and research strategies that take advantage of the possibilities created by approaching Germany and Europe from the West Coast.

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