

29th Transatlantic Doctoral Seminar in German History: Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century German History

Seminar held at Harnack Haus, Berlin, Germany, June 23–25, 2024. Co-organized by the GHI Washington and the BMW Center for German and European Studies, Georgetown University, in cooperation with the Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung der Technischen Universität Berlin and the Selma Stern Zentrum für Jüdische Studien Berlin-Brandenburg. Conveners: Anna von der Goltz (Georgetown University), Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (Technische Universität Berlin), and Richard F. Wetzell (GHI Washington). Faculty Mentors: Astrid M. Eckert (Emory University), Eric Kurlander (Stetson University), and Daniel Morat (Freie Universität Berlin). Participants: Jordyn Bailey (University of New Brunswick), Johannes Bosch (Heidelberg University), Alexander Compton (Emory University), Laura Cremer (University of Chicago), Vincent Dold (Humboldt University of Berlin), Rhiannon Hein (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign), Elizabeth Howell (Northwestern University), Anne-Maika Krüger (Technische Universität Berlin), Srijita Pal (University of Southern California), Andreas Markus Schurr (European University Institute), AJ Solovy (University of California, Berkeley), Emma Teworte (University of Oxford), Lilia Tomchuk (University of Frankfurt), János Varga (University of Jena).

The 29th Transatlantic Doctoral Seminar, held at the Harnack Haus in Berlin, included fourteen doctoral students from universities in the United States, Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Italy. Following the seminar's established format, the program included seven panels in which two of the participants presented their pre-circulated

papers and two of the other participants gave comments on each.

The seminar began with a welcome reception followed by the opening panel featuring papers written by Andreas Markus Schurr and Laura Cremer dealing with German history in the nineteenth century. The panel was chaired by Anna von der Goltz and featured comments by Jordyn Bailey and Elizabeth Howell. Schurr's dissertation examines German immigrants in Mexico in the mid-1800s. His paper focused on the liberal activist Carl Christian Wilhelm Sartorius as a mediator between Mexican immigration policy and German emigration activism in the late 1840s. He argued that the revolutions of 1848 in Europe provided a window of opportunity for German colonization, as Mexican elites saw white European settlement as a means to "save" Mexico from political chaos. Cremer's research is concerned with "natural healing" practices that emerged in Central Europe in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Bringing bodies "back to nature" was intended to promote individual and social transformation in an era of industrialization and urbanization. Focusing on two prominent sites – Bad Wörishofen and Monte Verità – Cremer showed how notions of "self-care" first emerged in this context. She also traced how "natural healing" practices were quickly commodified, eventually leading to the rise of a transnational "wellness" culture. The discussion focused on non-state actors and their role in shaping German colonialism, on colonial racial hierarchies and their relationship to liberalism, and on the multiple connections between alternative medicine, consumer culture, and capitalism.

The second day's first panel, which was chaired by Richard Wetzell and whose papers were introduced by Lilia Tomchuk and János Varga, focused on histories of public health and the body in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Johannes Bosch's paper is part of a social history of

Lebensreform, a reform movement that originated in the final decades of the nineteenth century in Central Europe. The paper focused on the movement's relationship to classic bourgeois values, such as moderation, rationality, self-control, and autonomy. He argued that, although self-consciously critical of certain aspects of life in the modern age, the *Lebensreform* movement, with its emphasis on shaping "natural bodies," was an attempt to save the bourgeois subject from the perceived ills of mass society. Srijita Pal shared a chapter from her larger dissertation on the first wave of the 1918 influenza pandemic during the final stages of the First World War. While her dissertation as a whole compares the first wave's impact on morale and military effectiveness in the French, British, and German armies, the paper homed in on the German Sixth *Armeeoberkommando* between June and July 1918. It showed that, for various reasons (among them disease management and the malnourishment of soldiers), the lesser known first wave hit German troops particularly hard, ultimately contributing to the failure of the German spring offensive. The discussion focused on the larger historiographical implications of each work, on writing cultural histories of disease and the self, and on the relationship between sources, theoretical concepts, and arguments, and how to strike the right balance between them in a dissertation.

The papers of the third panel, which was chaired by Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, were introduced by AJ Solovy and Andreas Markus Schurr. Rhiannon Hein and Anne-Maika Krüger took participants back in time to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Hein's paper, an extract from her broader dissertation on the city of Göttingen as a micro-study of how processes of globalization shaped the local in the German-speaking lands, analyzed the *Göttinger Taschen Calender*. This popular pocket calendar visualized notions of human progress for Göttingen residents, prompting them to situate themselves on an imagined continuum

of human development, she argued. Anne-Maika Krüger's paper offered insights into her larger project on German nationalist historian Ernst Moritz Arndt and the reception of his work after German unification in 1990. Playing with Klaus Theweleit's notion of "male fantasies," Krüger teased out the gendered nature of Arndt's conception of history and suggested that his emphasis on heroic masculinity made him particularly attractive to present-day far right and *völkisch* thinkers. The discussion revolved around conceptions of time and temporal regimes, both in terms of how historical subjects conceived of their particular "place in time" and how historians can play with notions of time to chart the relationship between past, present, and future in their writing.

The final panel of the day was chaired by Eric Kurlander and introduced by Alexander Compton and Emma Teworte. The papers by Vincent Dold and Lilia Tomchuk both used approaches from gender history to shed new light on major chapters of German history: the 1848/49 revolutions and the Holocaust. Dold offered a re-reading of the struggles of 1848/49 to show the extent to which practices and spaces understood as female (e.g., drafting letters and pamphlets, aiding prisoners, providing furniture and household objects to build barricades) constituted revolutionary politics. Prominent male revolutionaries also depended strongly on family networks and female support, Dold showed. Tomchuk's paper took participants to early 1940s Transnistria where she examined encounters between Jewish women and Germans. Despite the existential threats that they faced, many Jewish women used these interactions to gain information, help others, and to resist. Their experiences and scope for action, as well as their representation in Jewish testimonies, varied significantly according to the fluctuating presence of occupying Germans and ethnic Germans in different phases of the Holocaust. The discussion focused on the concept of "agency," its potential pitfalls when dealing with the

Holocaust, and how it might help us to write female actors into histories traditionally coded as male.

The first panel of the third day investigated the complex afterlives of National Socialism in West Germany (and Austria) after 1945 in a session which Astrid M. Eckert chaired and for which Laura Cremer and Vincent Dold served as commentators. János Varga's chapter analyzed the use of *The Diary of Anne Frank* in the Federal Republic in the 1950s for educational work against antisemitism. It showed that young people identified with the young Jewish girl without taking the specificity of her experience into account. Educational institutions, Varga contended, succeeded in raising general awareness of the dangers of prejudice but failed to address the specific causes of antisemitism. The extract from AJ Solovy's dissertation on the political identities of former SS members in the FRG and in Austria after 1945 sought to explain why former SS men in West Germany distanced themselves from extreme right politics while Austrian SS veterans adopted a more tolerant attitude towards neo-Nazis. The chapter explained that ex-SS members interpreted certain political movements abroad – especially racist, ethno-nationalist projects such as apartheid South Africa – as the worthiest successors of National-Socialism. The discussion focused on how to use ego documents of Nazi perpetrators without replicating their self-serving narratives, the definitions of antisemitism, antisemitism's relationship to other forms of hate and prejudice, and on how both projects dealt with, as Astrid Eckert put it, the "dark underbelly of liberal democracy."

The seminar's penultimate panel, introduced by Srijita Pal and Anne-Maika Krüger and chaired by Daniel Morat, offered a close reading of histories of gender and sexuality, with a particular focus on East Germany. Emma Teworte's empirically rich paper closely examined a late-stage abortion that resulted in infanticide in late 1940s Rostock. She

suggested a reading of the case that centered on gender-based violence even though the court records she relied on did not interpret it as such. Drawing on historians of early modern and nineteenth-century infanticide to examine the bodily perceptions of the women involved, she highlighted centuries-long continuities in embodied experiences and reproductive practices that transcend conventional periodizations in German history. Jordyn Bailey re-examined the history of the East German Ministry for State Security by focusing on female Stasi informers categorized as “prostitutes” or as “habitually promiscuous.” She accentuated the interconnectedness of the Stasi surveillance network and prostitution control in the GDR, thereby revealing the Stasi as a deeply misogynist institution. The discussion revolved around how specific sources and silences in the archive shape histories of sexuality and gender, writing with empathy about historical subjects with human flaws, and how histories of sexuality and women’s bodies undermine conventional periodizations.

The papers of the seminar’s final panel, with comments by Rhiannon Hein and Johannes Bosch and chaired by Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, highlighted global themes in post-1945 German history, including migration, connections to the postcolonial world, and the growing diversity of the German population. Alexander Compton examined how East and West German social scientists promoted “integration” as a global yet uneven process of individual development. Rather than portraying Afro-Asian dependency as a product of racial inferiority, Compton argued, German experts claimed that the colonial trauma inflicted on African and Asian cultures made students of color dependent on specialized forms of integration support – a claim that allowed German institutions to reframe paternalistic practices of racial othering in ostensibly antiracist terms. Elizabeth Howell looked at West German state engagement with Muslim efforts to build and maintain mosques and prayer spaces

in West Berlin in the 1970s and 1980s. She showed that the state consistently deferred the responsibility for finding suitable spaces to the local level, but that district governments and neighbors resisted and successfully blocked the establishment of prayer spaces. The discussion touched on the most effective ways of foregrounding the voices and experiences of migrants in such histories and on German-German comparisons.

The three-day seminar concluded with a final discussion that revisited some of its recurring themes – particularly histories of health and the body, subjectivity, the Holocaust and its afterlives, gender and sexuality, and the darker aspects of liberalism – and invited participants to reflect on German history writing as a transatlantic enterprise.

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