Seventh West Coast Germanists' Workshop: Migration, Mobility, and Exchange

Workshop at the University of Nevada, Reno, March 7-8, 2025. Co-sponsored by the Pacific Office of the German Historical Institute Washington and the Department of History, University of Nevada, Reno. Conveners: Viola Alianov-Rautenberg (GHI Washington Pacific Office) and James McSpadden (University of Nevada, Reno). With support from the Fritz Thyssen Foundation, the Gerda Henkel Foundation, and the University of Nevada, Reno. Participants: Elena Amaya (University of California, Berkeley), Lane Baker (Stanford University), Volker Benkert (Arizona State University), Frank Biess (University of Southern California), David Ciarlo (University of Colorado, Boulder), Sara Friedman (University of California, Berkeley), Heike Friedman (GHI Washington), Mathew Greenlee (University of Colorado, Boulder), Jan Hansen (University of California, San Diego), Mo Healy (Lewis & Clark College), Rhiannon Hein (GHI Washington), Zach Henson (University of Colorado, Colorado Springs), Deborah Hertz (University of California, San Diego), Anna Holian (Arizona State University), Paul Lerner (University of Southern California), Alexander Luckmann (University of California, Santa Barbara), Jennifer Lynn (Montana State University Billings), Simone Lässig (GHI Washington), Caitlin Murdock (California State University, Long Beach), Alexia Orengo-Green (University of Southern California), Thomas Pegelow Kaplan (University of Colorado, Boulder), H. Glenn Penny (University of California, Los Angeles), Sara Pugach (California State University, Los Angeles), Isabel Richter (GHI Washington), Alexandria Ruble (University of Idaho), Erika Schumacher (University of California, Davis), Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger (Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin), Brett

M. Van Hoesen (University of Nevada, Reno), Kurt Woolford (University of Southern California).

The GHI's Seventh West Coast Germanists' Workshop was hosted by the University of Nevada, Reno, and was dedicated to the topic of migration, mobility, and exchange in central European history. As Viola Alianov-Rautenberg noted, the issues of migration, mobility, and exchange are not only of special urgency today but have also characterized much of central Europe's past. Panelists and participants introduced a variety of methodological styles and source materials to explore these themes, often to examine the migration of individuals, families, and communities from central Europe and the global networks that they established. Investigating the past through networks proved to be particularly relevant to the workshop itself; the program included a noteworthy forty-six scholars from across the North American west.

Simone Lässig chaired the first panel, "The Global German World." H. Glenn Penny presented first, on the German-speaking community of Valdivia, Chile. By examining "quotidian" life in Valdivia through letters, business and school records, Penny identified "thick social networks" among German-speakers. Social networks extended from familial businesses to transatlantic communication with family members in Europe, to associations that helped establish the foundations of Chilean civil society. Therefore, Penny argued, "shared mental spaces" that emerged at quotidian levels demonstrate how globalization followed in large part from communal networks outside the auspices of the state. Next, Zach Henson presented on the Volga German community in Northern Colorado. The Volga Germans migrated to the United States from Russia, where their autonomous status was threatened by reforms after Russian defeat in the 1904-5 Russo-Japanese war. In Colorado, Henson argued, they struggled between maintaining their traditions and pressure

to assimilate, particularly during periods of anti-German animus. Third, Jennifer Lynn presented on the life of Agnes Smedley, a radical writer, feminist, socialist, and anti-colonial activist. Smedley's time in Weimar Germany, Lynn argued, reflected Weimar's status as a place of "mobility" and "transition" where Smedley could further develop her ideas about sexuality, women's rights, and revolution while forging connections with other writers and thinkers across the globe.

The second panel was titled "Mobility, Migration, and Internment During the Nazi Past" and chaired by Viola Alianov-Rautenberg. Alexandria Ruble presented her research in a paper titled "Imprisoned but not Immobile." Ruble investigated the movement of political prisoners under the Nazi regime using questionnaires [*Fragebögen*] filed after the war's end. Imprisonment was anything but static; incarceration involved extensive movement, which prisoners themselves struggled to keep track of. Prisoners were at times disoriented and isolated, kept away from their local connections. Movement could also be an opportunity, though, as prisoners could forge new networks of political resistance. Next, Thomas Pegelow Kaplan presented his paper on German Jewish migration to the Philippines and Dutch East Indies in the 1930s and 1940s. Pegelow Kaplan deployed the concept of imperial performativity to interrogate Jewish experiences in Southeast Asia. Jewish refugees, he argued, operated in an in-between space. On one hand, they faced discrimination as Jews, but nonetheless the "performance of imperial norms" could stabilize a time of acute crisis. Volker Benkert went third, presenting "Jews who saved Jews: The Loewy Family in Frankfurt, Montpellier, and Phoenix." Amidst the historiographical focus on righteous gentiles who saved Jews, Benkert hoped to acknowledge Jews saving Jews as well. The Loewy family, he showed, used networks of contacts to "spring free" around 1500 mostly Jewish prisoners from Vichy prison camps. At times, he observed, "survival depends on who you know."

Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger delivered the keynote Gerda Henkel Lecture, titled "On the Logic of Autocracy and the Plasticity of History: The Case of Frederick William I, King of Prussia." The talk brilliantly outlined Frederick William I's life (1688-1740) and his deviant style of rulership. The king autocratically grasped for greater authority throughout Prussia, reducing bureaucracy, curtailing the autonomy of localities, rearranging the judiciary, breaking cultural norms, and relying ever more on a coterie of advisors. Frederick William's autocracy bred corruption, disaffection, and noncompliance. Therefore, Stollberg-Rilinger observed, the more he concentrated power, the more isolated and powerless he became. The outcome was what Stollberg-Rilinger identified as the "dialectic of omnipotence and impotence." However, fascinatingly, later historians recast Frederick William's reign to retrospectively anchor the successes of his son, Frederick "the Great," in the policies of the deviant king. Frederick William's unconventional reign, self-described as a tyrannical cultural revolution, became for Prussian historians a "great political necessity" for later glory.

Panel three, "Networks and Economics," chaired by Deborah Hertz, capped off the first day, and concerned the significance of familial and professional networks for migrants. Frank Biess began with "The Woytinskys: Transnational Socialism in the Age of Catastrophe." Biess recounted the lives of Emma and Wladimir Woytinsky using thousands of letters between the couple. Wladimir's statistical expertise gave his family financial stability, even as they moved through starkly diverging political circumstances including the Russian Revolution, the waning years of the Weimar Republic, and the New Deal-era United States. Biess argued that following the Woytinksys' lives can unveil crucial details about historical processes and events. The enduring influence of the Russian Revolution on the Woytinksys' lives, for example, helped inform their conceptions of freedom in a way that would be difficult to understand only by reading

Wladimir's economic treatises. Next, Anna Holian presented her paper, "Generational Transmission and the Reconstruction of Jewish Livelihoods in Postwar Germany." Holian argued that, in Germany after 1945, "occupational inheritances constituted a thin but vital line of continuity" between older generations and surviving younger generations. After the war, many Jewish families attempted to reclaim stolen firms, founded new firms using inherited expertise, or began again with skills learned from their parents. Gender and region of origin were also important, as women in German-Jewish families tended not to inherit family trades or skills, while Jewish women from Eastern Europe were more likely to. During the Q&A, Caitlin Murdock, summing up much of the day's content, observed how networks and individuals are symbiotic but distinguishable; "individuals do matter but not in a vacuum." Therefore, studying networks and the ways people move within and between them enhances scholarship on familiar themes.

The workshop's second day began with the fourth panel, "Time and Mobility," chaired by Sara Pugach. This panel considered the role of representation and imaginaries in the conceptual movement through ideas and identities. Rhiannon Hein began the panel with "Timing Space in the *Göttinger Taschen* Calendar, 1775-1815," which examined eighteenth-century time regimes and temporal imaginaries. Hein discussed the *Göttinger Taschen* Calendar's representation of stadial theory, which asserted asynchronous stages of human progress. Pictographically, the Calendar posed orangutans, albinos, and tribal Africans as stages close to the origins of humankind, with domesticated and refined European women marking the harmonious stage of achievement. Representations of stadial theory, Hein argued, subverted the older conception of sacred time, thereby disorienting central European political identities. Brett M. Van Hoesen presented next. Hoesen explored the ways that the artist duo Mwangi Hutter–a conceptual merger of

Ingrid Mwangi and Robert Hutter–criticized Germany's failure to grapple with postcolonial racial issues in the 1990s and early 2000s. To Hoesen, works like "Static Drift" offered valuable critiques of Germany's forgotten colonial legacy. Furthermore, Mwangi Hutter's status as two people acting as one artist allowed them to grapple directly with questions of binaries, nature, individuality, self-knowledge, and interrelationship. Mo Healy presented third on the persistence of "The Turk" in the post-1945 Austrian imaginary. Using contemporary newspaper accounts, Healy showed how Austrians deployed "The Turk" rhetorically and symbolically to separate themselves from the Nazi past, celebrate past Austrian glories, and even migrate prejudiced ideas away from "the Jew" onto more politically acceptable targets.

The fifth panel featured brief presentations by recent Fritz Thyssen fellows on their archival work and nascent research projects. Elena Amaya, Lane Baker, Alexander Luckmann, and Kurt Woolford presented, deploying a variety of methodological styles and source materials, and demonstrating the promising range of new research in the field. Amaya employed sociological big-data methods to document the rates of denunciation in Jewish and non-Jewish neighborhoods under the Nazi regime. Baker explored sites across central Europe where contact was first made and negotiated between Roma travelers and fifteenth-century central European systems of hospitality. Luckmann considered the efforts of Catholic architects and urban designers to shape a Catholic modernity. Woolford interrogated the imprecise concept of "informal imperialism" in German-controlled treaty ports in China. Chaired by Isabel Richter, the panel demonstrated the exciting opportunities made possible by academic networks and institutions, a major theme of the workshop.

The sixth panel, "Discourse and Design," chaired by Paul Lerner, challenged participants to consider the importance

of place and image in the formation of, and challenge to, central European identities. Erika Schumacher presented on the incorporation of English garden architecture into Anhalt-Dessau in the eighteenth century. Palladian garden style, Schumacher observed, was the outgrowth of intellectual exchange between England and smaller German states. In adopting English forms, a ruler like Leopold Friedrich Franz hoped to display his connection to his people through monumentality, while engaging more universal Enlightenment ideals of improvement, order, and reform. Next, David Ciarlo presented on the First World War and what he called the "Propaganda of 'Propaganda.'" Ciarlo challenged the common contemporary claim that Germany lost the First World War because it failed to muster a robust propaganda campaign. Instead, he showed, decentralized German culture makers displayed the propaganda of Allied nations to convey to the German people a vision of their nation's restraint and sobriety, as well as the depths that Allied propagandists seemed willing to stoop to. Third, Alexia Orengo-Green presented "Pineapples for Passover," a multi-layered look at Jewish migrants in Puerto Rico during and after the Holocaust. Jewish migrants, she argued, became "active participants" in Puerto Rico's colonial hierarchy, even as they struggled to adapt their religious and personal identities in an unfamiliar environment they often viewed as transitory.

The workshop's final event was a roundtable titled "Teaching German History Today," chaired by Jan Hansen. Caitlin Murdock, one of the panelists, posed compelling questions about how professors can adapt their courses to changing global circumstances. For instance: how are the events of the 2020s rooted in the circumstances of the Cold War, and how might that encourage teachers to rethink their presentation of late twentieth-century history? More disturbingly: how do the recent triumphs of illiberalism in Europe and the United States challenge how professors might teach fascism?

Deborah Hertz, an audience participant, reflected the tenor of the roundtable conversation: "What does it mean to give a fair education in times of tyranny?" Sara Friedman, a panelist, encouraged participants to consider Black and Queer perspectives in German history as a way to engage students. These perspectives, Friedman indicated, allow professors to discuss topics students in the United States find relevant. Friedman also raised critical questions about the material conditions of teaching – that the increasing reliance on contingent faculty shapes how German history is taught.

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