30th Transatlantic Doctoral Seminar in German History

Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century German History

Seminar held at the GHI in Washington DC and Georgetown University June 3-6, 2025, co-organized by the German Historical Institute Washington and the BMW Center for German and European Studies, Georgetown University. Conveners: Anna von der Goltz (Georgetown University) and Richard F. Wetzell (GHI). Faculty Mentors: Molly Loberg (California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo) and Christina Morina (University of Bielefeld / The New School, New York). Participants: Emilie Aebischer (University of St. Andrews), Madeline Adams (University of Chicago), Leonie Bausch (University of Nottingham), Carmen Behrendt (University of Jena), Hans-Martin Behrisch (University of Leipzig), Lukas Doil (Leibniz-Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung Potsdam), Albert Feierabend (University of Erfurt), Svea Hammerle (Leibniz-Zentrum Für Zeithistorische Forschung Potsdam), Paige Newhouse (University of Michigan), Kathryn Perry (Vanderbilt University), Niels Pohl-Schneeberger (Zentrum für Holocaust Studien, Institut für Zeitgeschichte München), Brian Quinn (Indiana University Bloomington), David Labastida Rodriguez (University of Toronto), Jeffrey Saba (University of Tennessee, Knoxville), Adam Teece (Georgetown University), Jonas Wernz (University of Cologne).

The 30th Transatlantic Doctoral Seminar in German History once again brought together doctoral students from North America and Europe working on dissertations in nineteenth- and twentieth-century German history. Taking place over three days, the seminar was organized in eight 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 that brought history of knowledge approaches to bear on the history of German colonialism. Albert Feierabend's paper "Deutschlands Einigkeit in Afrika: Die Heuglin/Munzinger-Ostafrikaexpedition (1860–64) als nationales Projekt" examined the relationship between the German national movement and the first major all-German expedition to Africa (1861–64). The paper argued that the expedition did not primarily result from a specific interest in Africa but rather served the agitation for national unity and international competition. Brian Quinn's paper "'Museum Grotesque': The Science and Politics of Colonialism at the Hamburg Ethnographic Museum in the 1920s" examined the interwar period as an era in which the future of Germany's ethnographic museums, much like Germany as a whole, seemed to be in doubt. The cultural anthropologists who ran the Hamburg Ethnographic Museum navigated old commitments in a rapidly changing political scene, cultivated close relationships with colonial revanchists, and developed modern exhibition techniques.

The second panel was devoted to nineteenth-century German history. Kathryn Perry's paper "*Bildung* Meets *Gewerbe*: *Musikwinkel* Instrument Makers and British Markets, 1860-1914" examined the connections between instrument makers in the *Musikwinkel* region in Saxony, Germany's largest orchestral instrument-making center, and their British markets between 1860 and 1914. *Musikwinkel* makers aspired to British industrial sophistication by founding applied arts institutions on the British model, but their violins instead flooded the low-end British market, helping to fuel an explosion of school music-playing. This episode complicates narratives of Anglo-German exchange that focus solely on the soft power of German high culture and suggests a way

of writing the history of musical globalization through the circulation of instruments. Jonas Wernz's paper "Offene Zukünfte: Nachkrieg aushandeln von Leipzig bis Karlsbad, 1813-1819" examined how, after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the authors of pamphlets and press articles – acting outside state decision-making circles – opened up discursive space for thought and action through an imaginative readjustment of the public sphere. By arguing that the peace negotiations constituted a legitimate object of public opinion formation, these authors placed themselves in constructive tension with monarchical decision-making power.

The third panel explored the connections between the history of science and political history. David Labastida Rodriguez's paper "German Anti-Malarial Therapy at the Crossroads of Imperial Internationalism, 1925-1937" investigated German-led experiments in Mexico with plasmoquin, a quinine-imitating synthetic drug designed to manage the interaction of human bodies with malaria microorganisms and mosquitoes. Presented as a pharmaceutical technology for sanitizing the environment, German experimentation with plasmoquin offered opportunities to reshape the "tropical" world and to revive German colonial ambitions – among other things, by influencing the Malaria Commission's anti-malarial campaigns during the interwar years. Carmen Behrendt's paper "Die Bütefisch-Affäre oder: Ministeriale Selbstgewissheiten auf dem Prüfstand (Januar 1964 bis April 1964)" explored the interplay of science and politics from a very different vantage point. On February 24, 1964, Federal President Heinrich Lübke awarded the *Großes Verdienstkreuz* (Grand Cross of Merit) to the chemist Heinrich Bütefisch, who had played a leading role in the IG Farben chemical conglomerate during the National Socialist dictatorship and had been convicted as a war criminal in the postwar IG Farben trial in 1948. This award caused a scandal, especially since the Auschwitz trial had just opened in Frankfurt less than two months earlier. The

paper investigated the question whether the ministry officials had deliberately proposed a convicted war criminal for the award to make it clear that they considered the Nazi past to be closed.

The fourth panel explored interwar political and intellectual history. Emilie Aebischer's paper "'Eine Tat der Freiheit': Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945) and the Future of the Enlightenment" analyzed Ernst Cassirer's *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung* (1932) in light of his confrontations with antisemitism and anti-republicanism over the course of his academic career. Cassirer's theory of history, the paper argued, allows one to see his defense of the Enlightenment as a call to action aimed at redirecting Germany's future. Adam Teece's paper "Youth and the Land: Far-right Ruralism and Agricultural Youth Movements in Interwar Germany and Britain" examined the development of far-right youth movements in interwar Germany and Britain, which brought urban youth into the countryside through the experience of agricultural labor. In both cases, he argued, the *bündisch* youth movement provided a crucial model for far-right reformers to create, at a very small scale, the kind of organic, harmonious, and "racially pure" communities that they believed a return to rural society offered.

The fifth panel was devoted to post-1945 regimes of occupation. Leonie Bausch's paper "Dating Across the Divide: Intimate Socializing and Spaces of Encounters in the French Zone of Occupation in Germany (1945-1955)" investigated sexual encounters in French-occupied Germany that were highly politicized and therefore rendered otherwise undocumented everyday experiences of intimate socializing visible. Shaped by young people's limited access to private spaces as well as power dynamics between occupiers and occupied, dating, the paper argued, was an essential part of the occupation and provided an outlet for occupation forces and locals' conflicts and desires. Jeffrey Saba's

paper "Growing up around "the Russians": Between propaganda and lived experience 1957-1979" studies local GDR governments' efforts to instill positive feelings towards the Soviet troop presence while simultaneously grappling with the chaotic nature and negative impacts of Soviet military activity from ca. 1957 to the late 1970s. The paper argued that while ritualistic propaganda events and friendship meets produced mixed results in instilling German-Soviet friendship, informal municipal-Soviet relationships, coupled with the obfuscation of negative Soviet impacts, increased the acceptance of the Soviets among locals in towns near Soviet military bases.

The sixth panel explored two different aspects of East German history. Madeline Adams's paper "Carbon Copy Activism: Queer Information Networks in the German Democratic Republic, 1983-1990" examined how queer activists built and used an information network across East German cities from 1983 to 1990. By tracing print and circulation processes, the papers illustrated how activists worked with and against socialist norms and regulations, co-opting state-owned spaces, surveillance, and socialist rhetoric to insist on a future for queerness in the GDR. Hans-Martin Behrisch's paper "Das Ende der stalinistischen Kirchenpolitik: Die taktische Wende von SED und Walter Feurich" analyzed the political transformation of the parish priest Walter Feurich against the background of changes in SED church policy during the 1950s. At the end of the 1950s, Feurich transformed himself from an oppositional theologian into a theologian loyal to the state. His decision to become an informer for the state security services, the paper argues, was not an exclusively personal decision but was based much more on the exploitation of Feurich's private insecurities and problems by the SED state.

The seventh panel focused on the Nazi era. Svea Hammerle's paper "Raum und Zeit in privaten Fotoalben deutscher

Soldaten vom Überfall auf Polen" argued that private photo albums of German soldiers depicting the invasion of Poland in 1939 are narrative "dispositives" that constructed a specific interpretation of the events of the war through the dimensions of space and time. By historicizing their war experiences and locating them in the conquered space, the soldiers created a memory narrative that legitimized their actions and attributed an ideologically framed meaning to them. Moving from the war to the Holocaust, Niels Pohl-Schneeberger's paper "Transnationale Täterpraxis im Holocaust: Die nationalsozialistische Verfolgung von Juden mit ausländischer Staatsangehörigkeit 1941-1945 am Beispiel der Schweizer Familie Lebedinsky in Riga" reconstructed the "problem management" of the Nazi authorities with regard to foreign Jews based on the case a Swiss-Jewish family in German-occupied Riga. Because the Lebedinsky family witnessed the ongoing mass murders from 1941 onwards, the German authorities decided to block their departure even at the risk of diplomatic conflicts with neutral Switzerland. Faced with a hopeless situation, the family committed suicide in the spring of 1942.

The eighth and final panel dealt with the history of labor in East and West Germany. Paige Newhouse's paper "The *Wende* and the End of Socialist Labor: Vietnamese Workers in East Germany, March-August 1990" examined how, after the Berlin Wall fell, Vietnamese workers had to renegotiate their political and economic status in Central Europe. This paper argued that the collapse of the East German state permitted factory managers to fire workers without substantial reasons, while privatization ended the welfare that they had previously received. It also revealed how workers attempted to hold their German employers accountable. Lukas Doil's paper "Prekäre Arbeit: Leiharbeit und 'Prekarisierung' in der bundesdeutschen Sozialforschung und der autonomen Bewegung der 1980er Jahre" examined the analyses of temp agency work offered by empirical social

research and the left-wing autonomous "jobber movement" in the 1980s. Temp work, the paper argued, was interpreted as an expression of "precarization," i.e. the erosion of the social safety net, demonstrating that the concepts of "precarity" or "precarization" were already being used analytically in West Germany well before the 2000s, when they came to dominate descriptions of the transformation of work.

During the final discussion, which closed the three-day seminar, participants reflected on the combination of microhistorical approaches with an interest in big questions that characterized many of the papers. There also was considerable interest in advice about publishing, which the seminar's mentors gladly offered. Characterized by a collegial atmosphere, the seminar had an important networking function, connecting participants on both sides of the Atlantic.

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