SEMINARS

YOUNG SCHOLARS FORUM 2001: GENDER, POWER, RELIGION—FORCES IN CULTURAL HISTORY

Seminar at the GHI, March 29–April 1, 2001. Convener: Vera Lind (GHI). Moderators: Deborah Cohen (American University), Dagmar Herzog (Michigan State University), Hartmut Lehmann (Max Planck Institute for History), Jerry Z. Muller (Catholic University), Lyndal Roper (University of London), David Sabean (UCLA), and Richard F. Wetzell (GHI).

The Young Scholars Forum is a new annual program designed to support American Ph.D. candidates and recent Ph.D. recipients working in the fields of German, German–American, and European history. It is intended as a meeting place for young scholars from throughout the United States where they can present their work, meet colleagues working in similar areas as well as senior scholars from Germany and the United States, and engage in a weekend of fruitful intellectual exchange and networking.

Each annual meeting will focus on specific topics and/or methodological approaches, rather than a specific time period. The inaugural topic of the forum was chosen because a large number of younger scholars are currently working on topics that employ concepts of gender, power, and religion, and consider their work to fall within the framework of cultural history. This approach allowed for an in-depth discussion of specific topics over the course of five centuries because the different topics were held together by the same methodological concepts. It also allowed participants to re-evaluate important concepts that for the past twenty years have been continuously explored and established, and the broad chronological sweep allowed those who might otherwise never meet to discuss these issues.

Twenty-one young scholars attended, as did seven senior scholars from Germany, Great Britain, and the United States.

On the evening before the first session Lyndal Roper gave the keynote lecture, titled “The Figure of the Witch: Religion, Gender, and Sexuality in Early Modern European History.” She interpreted some early modern texts on witchcraft as contemporary expressions of humor and provided many points to ponder in the following days.
The format of the sessions was intended to promote informal participation and collegiality. In order to have ample time for in-depth discussions the papers were circulated to participants in advance. In addition to writing a paper, the participants were also asked to deliver a ten-minute comment on one other paper, which served as the introduction to the discussions of papers in the different sessions. (The authors themselves provided no additional introduction.) There were nine thematically and chronologically organized sessions chaired by the senior scholars, who helped direct discussion but provided no formal comment.

Session one focused on early modern issues of social control, the church, and sexuality. Katherine Crowther-Heyck investigated the sixteenth-century German discourse on reproduction in religious and medical texts, and the way these texts, which were written for a lay audience, interpreted the corporeal and social events surrounding conception, pregnancy, and childbirth. She stressed that human procreation was connected to the biblical story of creation, thus interweaving the spiritual and the eternal with the physical and the temporal. She concluded that “ideas about the body were changed by the religious controversies of the period.” In the second paper Ulrike Strasser contextualized shifting attitudes toward sexuality in Bavaria from the late-sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century, during a period of Catholic confessionalization. She argued that state authorities purposefully implemented new marriage doctrines in order to prevent sexual unions of the lower classes in ways that affected men and women differently. Whereas the male honor code did not restrict sexual behavior outside of marriage, women of the lower orders were obligated to accept the boundaries of the new social order by avoiding sexual relations. Jason Coy completed the session with an analysis of the prosecution of adultery in sixteenth-century Ulm. He argued that a complex set of factors were at work in these cases, in which the offender’s place in local society, not gender, was the most decisive determination of punishment. Whereas adulterous servants were expelled from the territory, justices tried to reintegrate females and males from enfranchised or artisan households in order to maintain the social and economic order.

The papers of the second session centered on religion as a social and economic force from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Emily Fisher Gray explored conflicts over the use of shared religious spaces in two parishes in Augsburg between 1525 and 1648, one Catholic and one Protestant. She showed that throughout this period the city council, which controlled both parishes, attempted to balance interests and submerge distinctions in the name of “neighborliness” but actually reinforced and promoted the distinctions between the parishes and did not succeed in enforcing a communal identity. Katherine Carté analyzed how the economic structure of the
town of Bethlehem served the goals of the German religious community in Pennsylvania, known as the Moravians. The religious values of the Moravians shaped their economic system, which was communal, directed by the church, and devoted to supporting a large number of missionaries operating in the region. This meant that they suffered ongoing labor shortages and financial problems because economic interest was not the first priority when church leaders developed economic policy.

Session three dealt with early modern religion in the context of male power. Benjamin Marschke focused on the creation of a military church bureaucracy in Prussia that supposedly transformed a disorganized apparatus into a highly regimented state organ, a model example of absolutism and state control. In his attempt to understand how this early modern government really worked, Marschke was able to uncover ample evidence of “bureaucratic in-fighting and a Pietist patronage network and religious faction” that actually manipulated the Prussian government in this area. Rather than serving the state, people controlling the chaplaincy served their own interests and bureaucratization, in fact legitimized an existing Pietist network. In his paper on Marian devotion in the eighteenth century, Duane Corpis showed how dynamic and actively changing local religious traditions clashed with authority when the church tried to reform devotional practices, especially as it attempted to extend its control into the private realm. He argued that the difficulties the church faced in controlling the communities stemmed from the resistance of competing and fractured interests in these communities, which felt that their social hierarchy was being threatened.

The papers in session four dealt with gender and religious identity in the nineteenth century. Maria Baader stated that during this century women in German Judaism moved from a marginal position toward the center of Jewish culture. By adopting German middle-class ideas in their religious practices, women, with their alleged predisposition toward morality and religious sentiment, could make an important contribution to Judaism, which was now practiced more often in the domestic realm. Anthony Steinhoff looked into gender and religious identity at the end of the Kaiserreich in Protestant Strasbourg. Reinforced notions of the church as a private, feminine place, which was part of the general “feminization” of religion at the time, “frustrated efforts to reform local religious life as well as attempts to permit women a larger, official role in the churches as public institutions.” Examples for this can be seen in the debates over women’s right to vote or be elected to parish offices. Whereas Protestant churches in Alsace-Lorraine endorsed both reforms, the political authorities refused them, which shows how gender categories influenced sacred as well as secular power.
The history of fashion was the topic of session five. Katherine Aaslestad analyzed discussions in the local press of Hamburg around 1800 on the political impact of new lifestyles, consumption patterns, and fashion. She found that the criticism of these new styles, in which the question of civic virtue played a major role compared to stereotypes of gender, “represent a republican world view that regarded public and private as fluid and overlapping, and believed both spheres had a profound influence on the public welfare of the community.” A distinct shift becomes visible, one in which individual civil morality replaced the traditional concept of the benefit of the public. Irene Guenther focused on Nazi ambivalence toward the topic of fashion. Besides promoting a “cosmetics-free, smoke-free, dirndl-wearing” female image, the Nazis did not prevent international fashion and beauty trends from being published in German women’s magazines and did not take a stand on the capriciousness of party officials’ wives. She concluded that “women largely decided what they would and would not wear” and were able to do so because “a happy home front” was more important to the Nazi government than insisting on a proper political image for German women.

In session six on culture and religion in Imperial Germany, Eva Bremner evaluated why Wilhelm II’s ambition to establish a cult of his father as a warrior king through countless monuments never caught on in the German public, even though Wilhelm I was extremely popular. She argued that this failure was caused by a completely different popular image of him. Wilhelm I intentionally had himself represented as a proud, gentle Hausvater, and his popularity was based on his “emotional accessibility,” a sentimental image of the monarchy with which the public identified because it reflected middle-class social norms and tastes. Derek Hastings assessed the gendered aspects of the Munich Catholic academic community’s encounter with “modernity.” Changing roles for women and a decline in national strength, among other factors, led to a crisis of masculinity around 1900. Male Catholic intellectuals in Munich thought that the church was becoming increasingly inhospitable to them and tried to prevent what they viewed as the intellectual feminization of Catholicism. Hastings suggested that this might be an effect of a Catholic masculine escapism when confronted with the intellectual challenges of modernity that sought refuge in a vision of the church that proved unrealistic and irrational.

Session seven centered on political and social debates on morality and prostitution in Imperial and Weimar Germany. Julia Bruggemann investigated the regulation of prostitution in Imperial Hamburg to uncover how gender relations were constructed and contested, owing to the controversy surrounding this issue. She described the strange alliance of feminists and conservatives working to abolish regulated prostitution—the feminists be-
cause they viewed it as social injustice against the right of self-determination, and the conservatives out of fear that the state would become an evil accomplice if it regulated prostitution. Others argued that prostitution needed the protection of the state because it was a trade like any other. However, the power to regulate prostitution allowed city officials to define and control gender roles as well as female sexuality. Julia Roos concentrated on the connection of the prostitution debate and morality in the crisis of Weimar democracy. She explained how the dramatic changes in sexual morality, including efforts to decriminalize prostitution and homosexuality, for example, fueled the religious Right’s opposition to Weimar. She suggested that conservative politics in Weimar have to be explained in the context of shifts in gender relations and sexual attitudes after World War I, rather than as a continuation of pre-1919 political traditions. Conservatives took prostitution reform as a sign of spreading “immorality,” which was not a “psychological illusion” but based in social reality and which ultimately threatened to undermine public support for the Weimar democracy. Julie Stubbs’s paper examined gender and power in the context of the Weimar Law to Combat Venereal Disease of 1927, an attempt to solve the “prostitution problem” with social welfare policies instead of police control. She showed how the law was based on moral assumptions about the role of women in society and how notions of the specific “difference” of women could be used “for both emancipatory and discriminatory purposes.” It offered opportunities for bourgeois conformist women to enter professional work, for example social work, on the grounds of their innate female morality. Women who did not conform, like prostitutes, “face punitive social welfare programs aimed at their rehabilitation.”

Session eight reviewed male identities in postwar Germany, both East and West. Andrew Bickford explored how militarization and family life shaped male identity in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). He argued that militarization served to counter the “demasculinization” that followed the legal goal of establishing equality between women and men because it promoted traditional forms of gender identity, when in fact men played an increasingly marginal role in family life and were more dependent on women for security than vice versa. Furthermore, the insistence that the Nationale Volksarmee (NVA) existed solely for peaceful purposes allowed men to reshape a positive militarized male identity after the crisis of masculinity in the postwar years, when men were blamed for the devastation of war. Clayton Whisnant examined male homosexuality in the 1950s and 1960s in Hamburg, a city that went through a period of severe persecution of gay activity during the Nazi years but became Germany’s center of homosexual activity after 1945 due to the city’s relatively tolerant police force and judicial system. Whisnant identified four major groups of gay men,
each defined by a particular style of dress and behavior, and analyzed how these men constructed their masculinity within the cultural context of the time and in a quite different way from the image of the corrupting homosexual in public discourse.

Definitions of masculinity and femininity in Imperial, Weimar, and Nazi Germany were the topics of session nine. Páll Björnsson focused on how gender images were constructed and used to influence municipal power structures by example of liberal men in Leipzig between 1840 and 1880. He argued that these men regarded themselves as the “midfathers” of an ideal man, a concept that influenced their images of private and public spheres and their vision of the state and nation. Their belief in masculinity was combined with ideals of freedom, independence, and German nationalism. Leipzig liberals believed that only a strong unified Germany would secure these ideals and provide conditions under which “masculine and independent” German men could continue their program. Erik Jensen presented an exploration of women’s boxing in Weimar Germany, until now an overlooked episode in the history of masculinity and femininity that provides insight into the emergence of new gender ideals in the Weimar Republic. Boxing enjoyed enormous popularity at the time, and the culture of female boxing carried specific images and role models. Jensen placed the popularity of female boxing in the context of the emergence of new gender ideals, new slender body images of women, and female physical power, which was nonetheless perceived by many as both aesthetically and biologically threatening. Todd Ettelson analyzed the gendered dimensions of the 1934 “Night of the Long Knives” in which around one-hundred SA men and others were executed by the SS and Gestapo. He described how diverse definitions of masculinity and male sexuality tried to make sense of what happened and concluded that this event played a critical role in determining boundaries between different state organizations and how they were organized and integrated into the state.

The sessions ended with a final discussion that served as a summary of previous debates and as an opportunity to explore the concepts and methodologies connected with the study of gender, religion, and power over the five centuries covered by the Young Scholars Forum. The senior scholars gave their impressions of how these categories worked and in which way this new generation of scholars is changing the agenda by asking new questions. It seems as if this new generation is rapidly expanding the range of these cultural concepts as well as the greater context in which they pose their questions. There was a great emphasis on sexuality, homosexuality, and identity, especially masculine identity, but the papers did not stop there; rather, they used these topics in order to understand major social, political, and cultural changes.
All in all, the participants impressed us not only with the high quality of their papers but also with their readiness to engage in debates across thematic and temporal boundaries. In addition, participants commenting on papers that were thematically close to their own work but concerned with a completely different period of time proved to be a successful way to engage everyone in the discussions and gain input from different viewpoints. All panels produced a wealth of insights, questions, and incentives for further research. The forum successfully fulfilled its mission by bringing younger scholars together for an intense weekend of debate, allowing them to reflect on their work, receive criticism, and broaden their horizons beyond their specific chronological or topical fields. It also offered them an opportunity to network among themselves and get to know some of the established scholars in these fields. The Young Scholars Forum would not have been possible without the support of the Friends of the GHI and generous funding from the Max Kade Foundation.

Vera Lind

Participants and Their Topics

Katherine Aaslestad, University of West Virginia, “Reading Fashion, Reading Gender: The Dangers and Enticements of Mode Around 1800.”

Maria Baader, Columbia University, “From a Male Culture of Learning to a Religiosity Centered on Women: Gender and the Transformation of German Judaism, 1800–1870.”

Andrew Bickford, Rutgers University, “Male Identity, the Military, and the Family in the Former German Democratic Republic.”

Páll Björnsson, University of Iceland, “The ‘Midfathers’ of the ‘New Men’: The Case of Nineteenth-Century Liberals in Leipzig.”

Eva Bremer, Princeton University, “From Heldenkaiser to Hausvater: Wilhelm I as the King of Christmas.”

Julia Bruggemann, De Pauw University, “Gender Relations in Imperial Germany: A Case Study. Prostitution in Hamburg, 1870–1914.”

Katherine Carté, University of Wisconsin, “Religion as a Force in Economic Culture: Business Practice Among Bethlehem’s Moravians, 1745–1761.”

Duane Corps, Georgia State University, “Marian Pilgrimage and the Privileges of Male Power in Eighteenth-Century Germany.”

Jason Coy, UCLA, “‘Unchaste Acts’: Adultery, Status, and Social Control in Sixteenth-Century Ulm.”
KATHERINE CROWTHER-HEYCK, Swarthmore College, “Pregnant with Meaning: Sixteenth-Century Discourse on Reproduction.”


EMILY GRAY, University of Pennsylvania, “Good Neighbors: Communal Relations and Contested Religious Space in Augsburg, 1525–1648.”

IRENE GUENTHER, University of Texas/Houston Community College, “Fashioning Women in the Third Reich.”

DEREK HASTINGS, University of Chicago, “Fears of a Feminized Church: The Catholic Academic Community in Munich and the Crisis of Catholic Masculinity, 1890–1914.”

ERIK JENSEN, University of Wisconsin at Madison, “Boxing and the ‘New Women’ in Weimar Germany.”

BENJAMIN MARSCHEK, UCLA, “‘Unsere Parthey’: The Chaplaincy, Pietism, and Factionalism in Absolutist Prussia.”


ANTHONY STEINHOFF, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, “Gendering Religious Identity in Imperial Germany: Evidence from Protestant Strasbourg (1870–1914).”

ULRIKE STRASSER, University of California at Irvine, “State of Virginity: Gender, Religion, and Politics in Early Modern Bavaria.”


CLAYTON WHISNANT, University of Texas, “Styles of Masculinity in the West German Gay Scene During the 1950s and Early 1960s.”

SEVENTH TRANSATLANTIC DOCTORAL SEMINAR IN GERMAN HISTORY: GERMANY IN THE AGE OF TOTAL WAR, 1914–1945

Seminar at the GHI and the BMW Center for German and European Studies at Georgetown University, April 25–28, 2001. Conveners: Roger Chickering (Georgetown University), Andreas W. Daum (GHI), and Richard F. Wetzell