The 16th Transatlantic Seminar brought together sixteen doctoral students from North America and Germany who are working on dissertations in twentieth-century German history. The students submitted papers on their dissertation projects ahead of time so that the seminar could be fully devoted to discussion. Each panel began with two comments from fellow students.

The seminar’s first panel was devoted to the First World War and featured two papers that presented what one commentator called “revisions of revisionist history.” Larissa Wegner’s paper, “Auf Freiwilligkeit kann nicht gerechnet werden: Zwangsarbeit und Deportationen im besetzten Nordfrankreich, 1914–18,” sought to normalize a war that historians have recently de-normalized by challenging the “total war” thesis. Her close examination of forced labor and deportation during the German occupation of Northern France aimed to demonstrate that these policies did not reflect a process of totalization but significant internal tensions and ruptures. Ryan Zroka’s paper, “The Bitter End: A Social History of the German Army in Defeat, 1918,” was conceived as a contribution to
the debate over the defeat of the German army in 1918. By arguing that the German army remained intact until the end of the war, Zroka challenged a long line of historical interpretations that refuted the stab-in-the-back-legend by demonstrating that the German army had fallen apart. Zroka’s explanation for the army’s cohesion emphasized internal social processes. As social bonds among soldiers broke down, he argued, individual opposition to the war was prevented from turning into collective resistance.

The second panel examined the intersection of economic history and international relations in the interwar period. While most of the historiography on the interwar period has stressed national competition and the breakdown of international cooperation, both papers challenged this picture by arguing for the importance of transnational cooperation. Stephen Gross’s paper, “The Culture of Trade: The Weimar Republic’s Cultural Diplomacy and Area Studies in Southeastern Europe,” argued that, starting in the late 1920s, commercial elites in Berlin and Saxony changed the nature of German cultural diplomacy by using it to promote exports in Central and Southeastern Europe. In 1929, these elites founded the Mitteleuropa-Institut in Dresden, one of a number of private organizations that sought to reorient German trade to Central and Southeastern Europe. Georg von Graevenitz’s paper, “Fluchtpunkt Europa: Die Commission Internationale d’Agriculture und die Planung des globalen Agrarmarktes, 1889–1933,” examined the founding and development of a transnational agrarian organization whose membership consisted exclusively of European agrarian associations. By lobbying the League of Nations for a policy of international market intervention, this organization succeeded in dissolving the League’s dogma of free trade and realigning its policies with European agrarian interests. As a Europeanized international system of market intervention established itself, internationalism and economic nationalism ceased to be conceptual opposites.

The third panel featured two papers on the political meanings of soldiers’ experiences at the front. Anke Hoffstadt’s paper, “Frontgemeinschaft—Gemeinschaft der Front?” analyzed the relationship between the Stahlhelm and the National Socialists, arguing that the growing gap between the two organizations’ respective levels of popularity resulted from a difference in their use of the war experience. Despite great similarities in political ideas and habitus, the Stahlhelm lost out to the rising Nazi party, because the Stahlhelm’s promotion of
an exclusive *Frontgemeinschaft* of World War I veterans prevented the successful integration of a younger generation. Frank Werner’s paper, “*Noch härter, noch kälter, noch mitleidloser: Soldatische Männlichkeit im Vernichtungskrieg, 1941–1944,***” examined military notions of masculinity and their effect on German soldiers’ behavior. On the basis of soldiers’ letters, Werner investigated how masculinity functioned as a motive for taking part in the war and mass crimes. The category of gender, he argued, served not only as a concept of identity, order, and distinction, but also as a conveyor of political meanings that normalized and naturalized the ideologies of war.

The fourth panel was dedicated to sex and crime in the Weimar Republic. Both papers focused on the construction of cultural norms and the contested boundaries between private and public. Matthew Conn’s paper “*Sex on Trial: Epistemologies of Justice and Rethinking Sexuality in 1920s Courtrooms*” argued that, in the early 1920s, German courtrooms witnessed a crucial shift as presiding judges began to consider a greater number of sexual acts illegal under article 175, which targeted homosexual acts. By focusing on the rhetorical strategies employed by attorneys, judges, expert witnesses, and defendants, Conn investigated the often complimentary functions of expert and tacit knowledge in court. Maren Tribukait’s paper “*Die Visualisierung von Verbrechen in den Massenmedien der Weimarer Republik,*” which forms part of a comparative project on visual representations of crime in Germany and the United States, examined how Weimar’s boulevard newspapers and illustrated magazines visualized crime and what kinds of reactions these images provoked. The highly critical reception of crime-related press photographs, she argued, reveals a fear that such images held a nefarious fascination for the masses, an attitude that reflected a more general discomfort with the medium of photography.

The fifth and sixth panels were devoted to *Vergangenheitspolitik*, that is, the relationship among nation, memory, and history. Erin Hochman’s paper, “*Staging the Nation: The Grossdeutsch Idea in the Weimar and First Austrian Republics,*” examined how commemorations for Beethoven, Schubert, and Goethe in the late 1920s and early 1930s became key sites for discussing a *grosseutsch* vision of the German nation and demanding *Anschluss*. Socialists, liberals, and conservatives alike participated in these celebrations, demonstrating that trans-border German nationalism and the project of a Greater Germany were not simply right-wing phenomena in the Weimar era.
Marcel vom Lehn’s paper, “Gelehrte oder Intellektuelle? Deutsche und italienische Historiker zwischen wissenschaftlicher und öffentlicher Praxis, 1943/45–1960,” compared the historical analyses of Nazism and Fascism that West German and Italian historians offered the general public and the resulting tensions between public activities and academic research. Although historians in both countries contributed to a normative distancing from dictatorship in both postwar societies, their desire to shape public opinion affected their choices of research topics and interpretations. Daniel Stahl’s paper, “‘Nazijagd’ in Südamerika: Transatlantische Vergangenheitspolitik und die geflohenen NS-Täter,” examined the efforts undertaken in the 1970s and 1980s to bring to justice Nazi perpetrators who had fled to South America. The modest success of these efforts, Stahl argued, resulted from the convergence of two developments: the democratization of several Latin American states and the internationalization of Holocaust commemoration. Finally, Elizabeth Harrington Lambert’s paper, “Zwischen Goethe und Gedenkstätte: ‘The Best and Worst Place in German History’ as European Culture Capital, Weimar 1999,” explored the construction of German national identity and cultural heritage in the city of Weimar. Through the lens of Weimar’s preparations to assume the mantle of “European City of Culture” in 1999, Lambert traced the transformation of representations of German Classicism and the Nazi past against the backdrop of German unification and European integration, illustrating how national identity and cultural heritage have been politicized, used, and abused in the postwar and post-1989 eras.

The seventh panel was devoted to the economic and social history of the two postwar Germanies. Sarah Thomsen Vierra’s paper, “Settling In: Turkish Guest Workers, West German Businesses, and the Workplace,” examined the role that Turkish guest workers’ workplace experiences played in their settlement in West Germany. The presence of Turkish Gastarbeiter and the resulting negotiations and circumventions, she argued, created spaces within West German businesses that mediated their permanent settlement, even as the companies’ treatment of guest workers also helped set the stage for their status as permanently foreign. Changing the focus from worker to industrial product, Katrin Schreiter’s paper, “Limiting National Aesthetics: The Triangle of Design, Politics, and Production in Cold War East and West Germany,” explored the economic and political structures that constrained the implementation of official design aesthetics in the two German states. Both states
maneuvered within triangles of design, politics, and production that increasingly overlapped, especially under the influence of European market forces. Despite the rhetoric of cultural superiority over the “other” Germany, in which both states engaged, Schreiter argued, the result of this process was a convergence of aesthetics that ultimately forfeited a distinct national design.

The eighth and final panel explored different forms of “alternative” travel in West Germany. Peter Engelke’s paper, “The City, the Car, and the Bicycle in West Germany, 1960–1990,” examined the history of bicycling in West Germany. After long being marginalized by the automobile, during the 1970s urban cycling experienced a resurgence due to the combined effects of the environmental movement, high oil prices, changing cultural norms, and the activism of cycling advocates. Moving from urban cycling to long-distance travel, Anja Bertsch’s paper, “Gegen-Bewegung: Distinktions-Erfahrung und transnationale Vergemeinschaftung im Alternativreisen westdeutscher Jugendlicher, 1960er bis 1980er Jahre,” investigated the history of “alternative” travel among West German youth. Alternative travel, Bertsch argued, allowed travelers not only to develop left-alternative identities but to experience foreign countercultures firsthand and thus contributed to the counterculture’s self-image as a transnational phenomenon.

The final discussion noted that a preponderance of the papers examined the interwar period and West Germany, while relatively few dealt with the Nazi period and East Germany; and that a remarkable proportion of the projects were comparative or transnational. It was also observed that very few papers sought to explain the rise of Nazism. Instead, Nazism figured as one factor among others in papers that were focused on other questions. Clearly, twentieth-century German history is no longer being written as the prehistory and aftermath of Nazism. While this turn away from the established master narrative can be disorienting, most participants seemed to agree that the papers made a strong case for the contingency of German history and demonstrated that this approach can be extremely productive for understanding twentieth-century German history. The seminar’s discussions were characterized by an ideal combination of intellectual rigor and collegiality, which made the seminar an exceptionally rewarding experience.

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