18TH TRANSATLANTIC DOCTORAL SEMINAR
GERMAN HISTORY, 1770-1914

Seminar at the GHI, May 2-5, 2012. Co-sponsored by the GHI 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: James Brophy (University of Delaware), Kenneth Ledford (Case Western Reserve University), Frank Müller (University of St. Andrews), Monika Wienfort (Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies). Participants: Arno Becker (University of Bonn), Jeremy Best (University of Maryland, College Park), Matthew Bunn (University of Texas, Austin), Johannes Gramlich (LMU Munich), Alice Goff (University of California, Berkeley), Barry Haneberg (University of Chicago), Katherine Hubler (Boston College), Inka Le-Huu (University of Hamburg), Jonas Kreienbaum (Humboldt University, Berlin), Megan McCarthy (Columbia University), Janine Murphy (University of Frankfurt/Main), Nina Reusch (University of Freiburg), Anna Ross (University of Cambridge), Felizitas Schaub (Humboldt University, Berlin), April Trask (University of California, Irvine), Albert Wu (University of California, Berkeley).

The 18th Transatlantic Seminar brought together sixteen doctoral students working on dissertations in nineteenth-century German history at universities in the United States, Germany, and Great Britain. The seminar discussed pre-circulated papers in eight panels that featured two comments on the papers from fellow students.

The first panel examined the subject of censorship and press policy. Matthew Bunn’s paper “‘Censorship is Official Critique’: Contesting the Boundaries of Scholarship in the Censorship of the Hallische Jahrbücher” analyzed the censorship of the Hallische Jahrbücher in the late 1830s and early 1840s, focusing on the relationship between their editor, Arnold Ruge, and their censor, Wilhelm Wachsmuth. Bunn argued that the relationship between editor and censor was collaborative as well as confrontational and that the Jahrbücher’s later prohibition reflected higher authorities’ concerns over the censor’s ambiguous association with the journal. Arno Becker’s paper “Das pressepolitische System Otto von Bismarcks 1871–1890” argued that Bismarck did not command a perfect machinery of press manipulation, as older research has sometimes suggested. By analyzing press policy on three levels — Bismarck’s initiatives, the ministerial bureaucracy, and newspaper editors — Becker provided
a nuanced understanding of how the Chancellor managed to influence newspaper coverage. The panel’s discussion focused on the differences between pre-publication censorship during the Vormärz and the state’s increasingly indirect means of influencing the press after 1848 — through defamation lawsuits, economic pressure, and press manipulation.

The second panel was dedicated to the history of museums and popular history. Alice Goff ’s paper “In the Place of the Statue: German Encounters with Art in the Napoleonic Kunstraub (1796–1815)” explored the physical encounters between Germans and art objects in the revolutionary period, especially during the requisitioning of German art collections under the Napoleonic occupations in 1806–1807. Goff argued that even as the Enlightenment and the French Revolution stressed the symbolic meaning of art, the experience of Napoleon’s looting of art drew attention to the fragile material status of art and sensitized contemporaries to the dangers that people and art posed to each other. Nina Reusch’s paper “Zwischen Unterhaltung und Wissenschaft: Geschichtsschreibung in illustrierten Familienzeitschriften, 1890–1913” examined articles on historical topics in five German family journals. Revising the notion that print culture was closely linked to nationalism and nation-building, Reusch argued that most historical articles in these journals did not construct a German national history but located history in a variety of spaces, ranging from local and regional history to European and even global history. The discussion turned on the papers’ historiographical implications: Goff’s shift from examining aesthetic discourses about art to focusing on the materiality of art objects and Reusch’s focus on the tension between region and nation in nineteenth-century historical culture.

The third panel dealt with urban politics in the postrevolutionary 1850s. Anna Ross’s paper “Transnational Networks and Exchanges in Municipal Government after 1848” explored the networks established among municipal administrators in the German states, Europe, and the United States after the 1848/49 revolutions. Focusing on Berlin Police Chief Karl von Hinkeldey, Ross argued not only that post-1848 urban planning and administration were closely linked to such transnational exchanges but that municipal authorities consciously used the transnational exchange of information to pressure their own state governments for increased investment in managing urban environments. Janine Murphy’s paper “The Transformation of Urban Politics: Cultural Liberalism in Germany, 1850–1864” presented a
regional case study of the Rhine-Ruhr industrial region that examined how the German Bürgertum used the public sphere to redefine liberalism. Focusing on the development of bourgeois voluntary associations, Murphy argued that in the 1850s the Bürgertum developed a “cultural liberalism” designed to foster the formation of rational, independent, and democratically capable citizens. The panel’s discussion centered on the extent to which both papers challenged the traditional portrayal of the 1850s as a decade of political reaction by showing that both conservatives and liberals adopted new political strategies after 1848.

The fourth panel explored the political, social, and cultural functions of collecting and exhibiting art in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Johannes Gramlich’s paper “Entstehung, Entwicklung und Funktionieren des Kunstmarktes,” which derived from his dissertation project on the art collecting of the Thyssen family, drew on sociological theories to analyze the development of an international art market in the nineteenth century. By examining the manifold meanings and uses of art that motivated collectors and the process by which works of art acquired a specific monetary value, Gramlich showed how art collecting gradually became a major trend in bourgeois culture. Megan McCarthy’s paper “Modern Design for Newark from the Rhine: German Applied Arts and Progressive Museum Practice in America” explored the origins of a landmark exhibition entitled “German Applied Arts,” which opened at the Newark Museum and traveled throughout the United States in 1912-1913. While the show resulted from a distinctly German impulse, McCarthy contended, it transformed the nature of modern American arts institutions by dissolving the boundaries between art, trade, and industry. The discussion centered on the role of transnational art exhibits as a kind of cultural diplomacy as well as the complicated mix of motivations on the part of art collectors — for whom art represented an aesthetic experience, an economic investment as well symbolic capital.

The fifth panel investigated migration and social welfare in late nineteenth-century cities. Felizitas Schaub’s paper “Topographien der Bewegung im urbanen Raum: Berlin um 1900” examined the remarkable fluctuation and mobility of Berlin’s population around 1900 by looking at the city’s taverns and restaurants. The high fluctuation of the wait staff, the practices of job agencies, and the changing composition of the customers all illustrated the functions of taverns and restaurants as spaces that both reflected and influenced intra-urban,
regional, and transnational processes of migration. Barry Haneberg’s paper “Protestant Welfare for Maidservants and Migrant Women: Marthashof and Maid servant Homes” explored the emergence and development of maidservant homes in mid-nineteenth-century Germany. Focusing on Theodor Fliedner’s Marthashof in Berlin as a case study, Haneberg argued that maidservant homes must be understood not only as preventive measures protecting migrant women and unemployed domestics from moral danger, but also as a prophylactic effort seeking to buttress an aging social and moral order. The discussion noted the contrast between the well-known “cosmopolitanism” of turn-of-the-century Berlin and the “silent migration” of waitresses and domestic servants within the city and the region, which was little noted at the time and has also been neglected by historians.

The sixth panel addressed two different inter-cultural encounters and the role of religion in the nineteenth century. Inka Le-Huu’s paper “Jüdisch-christliche Begegnung als kultureller Code: Die Debatte um einen Dienstmädchenverein 1842 in Hamburg” used an 1842 debate over the membership of Jews in a Hamburg civic association as an example to develop her thesis that mid-nineteenth-century Jewish-Christian interactions functioned as a “cultural code.” Those who advocated Jewish participation in associational life identified themselves as part of a secular camp characterized by liberalism and democratic leanings, while those who rejected Jewish membership demonstrated that they belonged to a conservative camp that rejected democracy and assigned the Christian church a central position in state and society. Albert Wu’s paper “Ernst Faber and the Consequences of Failure: A Study in Changes in 19th-century German Missionary Culture” examined the career of a German missionary to China in order to illuminate the central conflicts within German missionary circles and the complicated nature of a cosmopolitan identity in the nineteenth century. In Faber’s case, Wu argued, it was his experience of missionary failure that shaped his unremittingly critical, even hostile but life-long engagement with China and Confucianism. The discussion addressed the transformation of Western attitudes toward Confucianism and the tension between Shulamit Volkov’s concept of a “cultural code” and the more dynamic concept of a “bürgerlicher Wertehimmel” (Hettling/Hoffmann).

The seventh panel was dedicated to the history of gender and sexuality. Katherine Hubler’s paper “‘The Woman Question is also a Men’s Question’: The Promise and Problem of Male Allies of Wilhelmine
Feminism” investigated the support of Wilhelmine feminism by a significant number of men who were drawn to feminists’ veneration of femininity and maternity and the promise of a restorative deployment of these virtues in the public sphere. Hubler argued that the maternalist ideology that attracted men to feminist efforts had contradictory consequences: although feminist maternalism could justify distinctively hyper-manly activities, it was also predicated upon a condemnation of dominant masculinity and male power. April Trask’s paper “Transforming the Sexual Body: Medicine, Glands, and Gonads” explored the relationship between German sexual science and the emerging fields of embryology, endocrinology, and constitutional medicine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Trask argued that these new fields of research offered sexologists a new language for negotiating their position in modern medicine and for exploring the therapeutic possibilities of transforming the sexual body. Among the questions raised during the discussion was whether the feminists were launching a cultural movement in response to a failure of politics and whether the sexologists were trying to solve a social question.

The eighth and final panel examined the history of colonialism. Jonas Kreienbaum’s paper “Koloniale Konzentrationslager um 1900: Wissensverhieltnisse, gemeinsame koloniale Kultur und geteilte strukturelle Probleme” addressed the question of why Britain and Germany set up concentration camps in South Africa and South West Africa. Kreienbaum argued that the existing historiography, which has centered on structural factors and knowledge transfers between colonial powers as explanatory factors, does not do justice to the complexity of the historical reality. Although German colonial officials, for instance, adopted the idea of the concentration camp from the British, their implementation was shaped by local traditions, a different structural context as well as their own conceptions of “colonial culture.” Jeremy Best’s paper “Founding a Heavenly Empire: Raising Missionsgeist and Mission Funds in the Heimat” examined the 1913 Nationalspende, a national fundraising drive led by secular colonialists for German mission, which was a key event in the nationalization of the German Protestant mission movement. Whereas before 1913 most German Protestant missionaries had opposed nationalism and favored an international spiritualism, Best argued, the financial success of the Nationalspende strengthened the position of nationalist missionaries just before the First World War. Much of the discussion focused on the challenges that the papers posed to the recent historiography of
German colonialism, the question of what (if anything) was specifically German about these two case studies, and the effect of colonialism on the metropoles.

The final discussion began with reflections on the historical topics that were represented at the seminar, as well as those that were not. There was general agreement that many papers presented highly differentiated analyses of German society, especially civil associations; many examined the social question, but with a focus on the middle-class (rather than working-class) perspective; and a whole cluster of papers focused on the 1850s as a vitally important decade. By contrast, there was not much classic political history, economic history, or Habsburg history. As the entire Sonderweg debate has receded into the background, there were few references to any kind of national narrative; instead, most papers embedded German history in larger transnational contexts, networks, and narratives. Drawing on a remarkably diverse array of primary sources, most projects used cultural history approaches and were primarily concerned with meaning and representation rather than causation. Many worked with a broad definition of politics and used cultural history to illuminate questions of political and social history from new angles. The seminar was characterized by a perfect combination of intellectual rigor and collegiality. The completion of the doctoral dissertations that were presented is eagerly awaited.

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