MORE ATLANTIC CROSSINGS? EUROPE’S ROLE IN AN ENTANGLED HISTORY OF THE ATLANTIC WORLD, 1950s-1970s

Workshop at the GHI, June 7-9, 2012. Conveners: Jan Logemann (GHI), Mary Nolan (NYU), Daniel Rodgers (Princeton). Participants: Tal Arbel (Harvard University), Daniel Bessner (Duke University), Alessandra Bitumi (University of Bologna), Jens Elberfeld (Bielefeld University), Udi Greenberg (Dartmouth College), Christian Gütgemann (University of Konstanz), Carola Hein (Bryn Mawr College), Andreas Joch (GHI/University of Giessen), Christopher Klemek (George Washington University), Merel Leeman (University of Amsterdam), Matthieu Leimgruber (University of Geneva), Corinna Ludwig (GHI/University of Göttingen), Andrea Mariuzzo (Cornell University/Luigi Einaudi Foundation), Stephen Milder (University of North Carolina), Ines Prodöhl (GHI), Barbara Reiterer (GHI/University of Minnesota), Elizabeth Tandy Shermer (University of Cambridge), Frank Schipper (GHI/University of Leiden), Quinn Slobodian (Wellesley College), Phillip Wagner (Humboldt University Berlin), Kenneth Weisbrode (Bilkent University), Richard F. Wetzell (GHI), Thomas Wheatland (Assumption College), Anne Zetsche (Northumbria University).

Nearly fifteen years after Daniel Rodgers’ Atlantic Crossings explored transnational and transatlantic influences on progressive era American society, this workshop set out to inquire about the extent to which reciprocal transatlantic exchanges extended into the post-World War II decades. To what degree was the much discussed “Americanization” of postwar Western Europe tempered by a continued influence of European ideas and voices on transatlantic relations in a variety of fields?

To assess transatlantic countercurrents and the impact of European voices that offered competing visions of modernity, the workshop brought historians from a number of historical subfields into dialogue. In an attempt to complicate existing narratives of postwar transatlantic interaction, this group of scholars examined the interaction of various overlapping elite and professional networks. Diplomatic historians working on transatlantic relations and those studying transnational institutions and networks encountered the work of intellectual historians working on European émigrés and the transfer of ideas. Urban and business historians offered their perspectives on changing transatlantic dynamics, as did historians of
the social sciences. The interplay of institutions and individual actors provided a recurring thread throughout the panels. While a unifying narrative across all dimensions of societal exchange remained elusive, it became clear that the traditional understanding of a coherent postwar Atlantic community dominated by American hard and soft power and of an American model of modernity that pervaded social, scientific, and economic discourses is in need of revision. Despite the shift in transatlantic power relations following World War II, European voices continued to play a vibrant role in constructing the concept of the transatlantic West and in the increasingly mobile professional and expert networks that dominated postwar era discussions of social modernization.

The first panel focused on the role of European voices in transatlantic elite networks and in shaping various aspects of a Cold War Atlantic community. Challenging narratives of the postwar global economic order, Quinn Slobodian analyzed the Swiss-German economist Wilhelm Röpke’s position as a linking figure between American conservatives dissatisfied with the New Deal economic order and German ordoliberalism in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Other European voices, by contrast, bolstered a Cold War consensus. Focusing on German émigré and political scientist Carl Joachim Friedrich, Udi Greenberg traced the evolution of the term “Judeo-Christianity” from its origins among Weimar-era intellectuals in Europe to its popularization in the United States during World War II and the Cold War. Weimar intellectual traditions also influenced U.S. security policy as Daniel Bessner showed, presenting the German exile Hans Speier as representative of the transatlantic influences that helped shape the American security state in the 1950s. Kenneth Weisbrode, finally, framed the Atlantic transfers and networks discussed in this panel within a broader look at the mid-twentieth century redefinition of the Atlantic Community as the core of the West, as well as this concept’s roots in the Wilsonian tradition of international and transatlantic relations. By looking at the European voices present in Cold War America and, more broadly, in the Atlantic Community, the papers of this panel opened a discussion about the need to qualify perceived American hegemony and U.S. efforts to build a cultural consensus in the postwar Atlantic world.

Cultural diplomacy and efforts by institutions and individuals to keep Western Europe on the agenda for American elites formed the core of the second panel. Anne Zetsche began by presenting a close
look at the Ford Foundation’s role in facilitating networking between German and American elites, its interactions with the Atlantik-Brücke and the American Council on Germany, and its contributions to the creation of an Atlantic Community that was more than just a security network. Andrea Mariuzzo examined Italian-American political scientist Mario Einaudi’s position as a cultural translator, “explaining Europe to Americans and America to Europeans,” and emphasized the importance of biographic studies for the further development of intellectual historiography. Alessandra Bitumi analyzed the European Union Visitors Program’s efforts in the field of transatlantic public diplomacy through fellowships awarded to rising American leaders from different professions and the complexities of the Atlantic alliance in the era of European integration. Overall, the panel revealed the limitations and weaknesses of concerted European efforts in cultural diplomacy, especially when compared, for example, to successful U.S. programs such as Fulbright. Methodologically, the concept of “networks” was central to this panel and, as the discussion following the presentations showed, it is a phenomenon about which historians need to think more critically — to reexamine the many functions of international networks and to separate intention from outcome.

The third panel showcased urban planning as a field with continued, strong European influences on the United States, if primarily as a rhetorical tool with the European city serving as a foil for comparison in the American planning discourse. Phillip Wagner shared his research on American planning experts’ engagement with their European counterparts within the framework of the International Federation for Housing and Town Planning, as well as a look at European urban renewal as perceived by these American planners. Carola Hein traced the international careers of three individual planners — Maurice Rotival, Edmund Bacon, and James Marshall Miller — which prompted a discussion of the ways in which European ideas and planning debates played out or were transformed in American cities. Andreas Joch then provided a broad look at the role of Europe in the postwar American discussion about urban development and the importance of migration and travel in the circulation of planning knowledge. Continuing the discussion about periodization that ran throughout the workshop, these three papers presented urban planning as a field whose transatlantic exchanges were not interrupted significantly during the mid-twentieth century, as was the case in other fields. Instead, the 1970s with the end of New Deal liberalism and the decline of high modernist planning presented the more significant
break in this field. Overall, that decade was repeatedly acknowledged to be a turning point in transatlantic relations, if analyzed differently within different fields.

The panel that followed examined transnational critiques of the Cold War order and highlighted the impact of critical European voices in the United States and the Atlantic Community. Christian Gütgemann traced the early history of the Club of Rome and its efforts to organize an international forum where systems analysis and long-term planning could be used to tackle the present and future problems facing humanity. Stephen Milder presented a study of Petra Kelly’s global approach to activism and politics, and a look at the way her position as a Green Party member of the West German Bundestag allowed her to address the American people, to connect anti-nuclear activists on both sides of the Atlantic, and to challenge the U.S.-West German Cold War relationship. By looking at an epistemic community and an individual activist that both sought to address universal issues, these papers served as a reminder that transatlantic history cannot be written in isolation and must be considered within a global context. A departure from a bloc view of Europe and “the Atlantic West,” many participants agreed, would foster a much more nuanced evaluation of the heterogeneous voices that shaped the postwar era.

European émigré scholars were among the most influential European voices in postwar America, and their role in American intellectual life formed the focus of the fifth panel. Émigré historians, for example, were instrumental in constructing Cold War notions of the “West.” Merel Leeman shared a look at the German-American historians George Mosse and Peter Gay, reflecting on their cultural approach to historical analysis as a result of their transatlantic migration experiences. In their work, European émigrés at times played the role of transatlantic mediators. In that vein, Thomas Wheatland’s paper argued that Franz Neumann was instrumental in attempts to negotiate between Critical Theory as espoused by the Institute for Social Research and the American brand of empirically-based social science that the Frankfurt School encountered in exile. Both this panel and the previous one raised the idea that generational differences within organizations and groups of migrants can effectively create a natural periodization; while émigré intellectuals often remained rooted in interwar traditions and concepts, many younger scientists and activists began to reach across the iron curtain and worked with “mental maps” of the world that afforded them a more global problem-solving agenda.
The next three papers questioned the hegemonic role of American social science models in the postwar period and explored the negotiations between American and European scientific cultures and traditions. Tal Arbel’s presentation analyzed the knowledge migration of German classical social theory and postwar American empirical social research to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The two met and clashed as part of a historical episode in which an area on the periphery became the venue for a transatlantic debate, serving as a reminder that the reception of transatlantic exchanges often depended greatly on localized political and cultural dynamics. Barbara Reiterer then shifted the focus to the applied social sciences by discussing the biography of Gisela Konopka, a professor of social work at the University of Minnesota. Reiterer traced Konopka’s career from her initially reluctant entrance into the field of social work as a recently arrived German refugee in the United States to her introduction of social group work to postwar West Germany and her efforts to foster intercultural understanding on both sides of the Atlantic. Jens Elberfeld, finally, examined the development of family therapy in the United States and in West Germany, arguing that it was not a clean-cut case of Americanization and unilateral transfer, but rather one of multiple and multidirectional exchanges that had their roots in turn-of-the-century European psychology and psychoanalysis. The panel suggested that within the complexity of transatlantic exchange, a look at the individual setbacks, challenges, and failed transfers is often equally important for the narrative of exchange.

The final panel considered the role of European corporations and corporate models in the United States, qualifying narratives of postwar economic Americanization. Elizabeth Tandy Shermer began by presenting a study of European postwar investment in the American South, connecting it to a longer history of transatlantic economic exchange in the region, and emphasizing the proactive role of Southern businessmen like North Carolinian Luther Hodges in seeking to attract foreign investment. Matthieu Leimgruber analyzed the evolution of cross-border benefits plans for traveling managers and executive expatriates among the growing number of American multinationals operating in Western Europe. Corinna Ludwig, finally, shared a case study of the German chemical company Bayer’s return to the U.S. market in the wake of the Second World War, its marketing strategies and corporate communication practices, and the challenges that European, and particularly German companies faced in postwar America. All three papers complicated the paradigm of American
The concluding discussion underscored the great variety of ways in which European influences and models played a role in the United States during a period typically characterized by exchanges crossing the Atlantic in the other direction. The Americanization paradigm, most participants agreed, was no longer tenable, and transnational approaches to transatlantic history have by now become the accepted norm. Similarly, postwar labels such as modernization, the Cold War dichotomy, and the unified West were called into question and, while none of them were completely dismissed, their reexamination suggested a more complex view of postwar transatlantic exchanges. As much as participants embraced the application of new, transnational geographies, several participants emphasized that nation states also remained a powerful unit of analysis that should not be forgotten. Research that “thinks small” and looks at individual European migrants, transatlantic institutions, and transnational businesses is beginning to reveal a more nuanced and multidimensional view of transatlantic exchange in the rapidly globalizing second half of the twentieth century. At the same time, several common threads emerged over the course of the workshop that allowed connections to be made across disciplines and between different groups of émigré professionals. The labeling of individuals or ideas as “European” could either help or hinder their acceptance in the United States — a distinction that often rested on a number of variables, including what aspect of their Europeanness was being stressed and whether it reflected commonalities or differences with the element of American society to which it was being compared. Many participants called for the reevaluation of conceptual geographies as discussions turned to the inclusion of Japan in a trilateral view of “the West,” postcolonial and peripheral areas as forums for exchange, and the need to explore the voices of Southern and Eastern Europe — or conspicuous lack thereof — in the narrative of postwar transatlantic exchange. While several suggestions were made for alternative periodizations of the “American Century” based on the rise or fall of institutions and ideologies, the emergence and decline of intersecting networks, or on subtle differences in generations of Atlanticists and migrants, no unifying timeline emerged. Rather, it was suggested that a number of
overlapping periodizations might more aptly describe the entangled
nature of the twentieth century.

The workshop was part of the GHI’s *Transatlantic Perspectives* proj-
et, and the project’s new website (www.transatlanticperspectives.
org) was introduced during the workshop. We are grateful for the
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