24TH TRANSATLANTIC DOCTORAL SEMINAR IN GERMAN HISTORY: NINETEENTH- AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY GERMAN HISTORY

Seminar at the GHI West, the Pacific Regional Office of the German Historical Institute Washington, in Berkeley, California, from May 30 to June 2, 2018. Co-organized by the German Historical Institute Washington and the BMW Center for German and European Studies at Georgetown University. Conveners: Anna von der Goltz (Georgetown University) and Richard F. Wetzell (GHI). Faculty mentors: Frank Bösch (Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung, Potsdam), Robert Kunath (Illinois College, Jacksonville, IL), Andrew Port (Wayne State University, Detroit, MI), Isabel Richter (University of California, Berkeley). Participants: Irit Bloch (City University New York, Graduate Center), Logan Clendening (University of California, Davis), Netta Cohen (Oxford University), Linda Conze (Humboldt University, Berlin), Marc-Andre Dufour (University of Toronto), Philipp Ebert (University of Cambridge), Samuel Huneke (Stanford University), Claudia Kreklau (Emory University), Anna Leyrer (Universität Basel), Anne MacKinney (Humboldt University, Berlin), Christina Matzen (University of Toronto), Thomas Rohringer (Internationales Forschungszentrum Kulturwissenschaften, Vienna), Benedikt Sepp (University of Konstanz), David Spreen (University of Michigan), Carolyn Taratko (Vanderbilt University), Karolin Wetjen (University of Göttingen).

The twenty-fourth Transatlantic Doctoral Seminar in German History, co-organized by the German Historical Institute Washington and the BMW Center for German and European Studies at Georgetown University, was dedicated to nineteenth- and twentieth-century German history and was hosted by GHI West, the Pacific Regional Office of the German Historical Institute Washington, on the University of California Berkeley campus. As always, the seminar brought together eight doctoral students from North America and eight from Europe, all of whom are working on dissertations in modern German history. The seminar was organized in eight panels, featuring two papers each, which opened with two comments by fellow students, followed by discussion of the pre-circulated papers.

The seminar started with a panel on the history of science featuring two papers that both addressed the question how the production of knowledge affects identities. Anne MacKinney’s paper “Registering Nature: Lists between Scholarly Work and Administrative
Responsibility in the Berlin Zoological Museum (1810–1840)” examined the documentary practices employed by nineteenth-century naturalists to evaluate specimens and incorporate them into the collections of the Berlin Zoological Museum. This kind of work with paper and specimens, MacKinney argued, helped forge the persona of the scientific administrator, thus elucidating the processes by which divisions of labor and identity were redrawn within Berlin’s diversifying naturalist community. Netta Cohen’s paper “Oriental Air, Occidental Identity: Zionist Transfer of Medical Climatology to Palestine, 1918–1948” studied the development of medical climatology by Jewish physicians in Palestine during the British Mandate. Tracing the origins of medical climatology in the context of western history as well as in the specific Jewish and Zionist contexts, Cohen’s paper investigated the transfer of climatological research to Palestine by central European physicians and its cultural and political implications in its new destination.

The second panel was devoted to Germany history in the post–1945 era. In his paper “‘A Freemasonry of the Perverse’: Gay spies in East Germany” Samuel Huneke examined the existence of gay spy networks in East Germany between 1950 and 1970, a period during which Western services actively recruited gay East Germans, believing them to be desirable collaborators. As the Stasi became aware of these networks, Huneke argued, it came to regard the gay subculture with a suspicion that would shape how it treated gay activism in later decades. Philipp Ebert’s paper “Verjährung als vergangenheitspolitisches Vehikel: Genese und politische Legitimation strafrechtlicher DDR-Aufarbeitung, 1961-1993” contended that the criminal trials dealing with East German state crimes did not result from a political initiative but from legal path-dependencies that arose from the work of West Germany’s Zentrale Erfassungsstelle in Salzgitter and criminal investigations in the GDR that got underway in the transitional period between the fall of the Wall and reunification.

The third panel brought together two different papers on the history of criminal justice and on the history of religion. Christina Matzen’s paper “The Intimacies of Carceral Life: Imprisoned Women in Postwar West Germany” examined the liberation of the Aichach prison in order to analyze how women’s sexuality and criminality became entangled in postwar West Germany. Matzen advanced the thesis that bourgeois notions of gender and sexuality led to the unequal treatment and thus to the imprisonment of women and, more
specifically, that targeting women for venereal disease and using them as scapegoats to evade confronting Nazi crimes was a postwar strategy that is vital for understanding the larger process postwar reconstruction. Karolin Wetjen’s paper “Ein Ritual etablieren: Die Taufpraxis der Leipziger Mission am Kilimandscharo” explored the establishment of the ritual of baptism in the missionary work of the Lutheran Leipziger Missionsgesellschaft in the area around Mount Kilimanjaro in colonial German East Africa in the late nineteenth century. The concrete implementation of the baptismal ritual, she argued, was shaped at least as much by local actors as by mission-related debates about theology and religion that were taking place in Imperial Germany.

The fourth panel was dedicated to food history. Claudia Kreklau’s paper “Making Modern Eating: Food ‘Adulteration,’ Legal Responses, and Back to Nature Movements in the German Empire, 1860-1890” investigated the incorporation of industrial food products into the German middle class diet. As the “food police” identified the threat of “food adulteration,” the state reacted with food legislation, while the middle classes turned to vegetarianism. This dual phenomenon, Kreklau argued, constituted the advent of “modern eating.” Carolyn Taratko’s paper “Surrogate Foods in Peace and in War” investigated the status of surrogate foods in Germany during the decades leading up to World War I and during the war itself. After examining notions of habit and hunger, Taratko argued that surrogacy projects were employed as a technology to overcome wartime shortages and resource depletion, representing a technocratic fix to the political problem of hunger in wartime Germany.

The fifth panel combined two microhistories in the cultural history of the 1920s, one exploring a controversial criminal trial, the other the friendship between two prominent women. In her paper “When Silence is Deafening: Covert Anti-Semitism and the Question of Authority” Irit Bloch examined the 1926 “Magdeburg Affair,” a criminal investigation and trial, as a case study to understand how German judges of the Weimar era manipulated procedural law to reach desired outcomes. The complex motivations for the judges’ conduct, she argued, included a strong degree of covert anti-Semitism and sympathy to right-wingers as well as a misguided sense of judicial power being curtailed after 1918. Anna Leyrer’s paper “Die Schwester, der Freundschaftstraum: Lou Andreas-Salomé und Anna Freud” examined the relationship between Anna Freud and Andreas-Salomé.
during the 1920s as part of a history of friendship, especially friendship between women. Even though friendship was seen as competing with familial relationships, Leyrer contended, it was at the same time cast and understood in familial terms.

The sixth panel dealt with the First World War. Marc-Andre Dufour’s paper “That Sinking Feeling: The U-Boat Option and German Conceptions of Victory in the First World War” used the question of unrestricted submarine warfare as a lens to examine how German politicians and military leaders struggled with different conceptions of time and future during World War I. As civilians, generals and admirals approached the submarine question with their specific hopes and fears, U-Boats became the miracle weapon that could win it all for Germany, despite strong objections from the civilian leadership. Turning to the home front, Thomas Rohringer’s paper “Zwischen Bürgerpflicht und Opfergabe: Moralische Ökonomie und Re-Integration Kriegsbeschädigter 1914–1918” analyzed the petitions that injured Habsburg soldiers submitted to the Habsburg imperial family and its ministries during the war. The new motif of the Opfergabe (sacrifice) as the primary strategy of legitimation in these petitions, Rohringer argued, signaled the dis-integration of a moral economy of duty, which had previously regulated the relationship between the monarchy and its soldiers.

The seventh panel was dedicated to the cultural history of Weimar and Nazi Germany. Logan Clendening’s paper “Contested Bodies in Nature: Recreational Bathing in Weimar Germany” investigated the surging popularity of outdoor mixed-sex swimming, sunbathing, and nudism in Weimar Germany, which was widely perceived as evidence of a nation unmoored from conventional gender norms after World War I. The diverse conceptions of gender, the body, and nature that this mass phenomenon generated, Clendening contended, made public bathing sites staging grounds for broader political contestations over the future of the nation. Linda Conze’s paper “Das Fest in der Fotografie: Zur medialen Herstellung von Gemeinschaft zwischen Weimarer Republik und Nationalsozialismus” studied photographs of celebratory crowds to probe the interaction between public festivities and photography in processes of community building on the cusp of the transition from Weimar to Nazi Germany. According to Conze, a comparison between state-commissioned and local photographs of May Day festivities in the early 1930s reveals a multiplicity of photographic representations that goes well beyond the images of the disciplined Volkskörper that is so familiar from Nazi propaganda imagery.
The seminar’s final panel featured two papers on the student movement and leftist politics in the wake of 1968. David Spreen’s paper “Cold War Imaginaries: Mao’s China and the Making of a Postcolonial Left in Divided Germany” situated parliamentary and public debates about legal proceedings against Maoist parties in West Germany in the broader context of SPD Ostpolitik and conservative opposition thereto. Spreen argued that the way intelligence officers and bureaucrats carefully separated Maoism from “foreign extremism” disguised the transnational character of the Maoist Left in 1970s West Germany. Benedikt Sepp’s paper “Bewegtes Denken, harte Körper: Der Zerfall der antiautoritären Bewegung in West-Berlin 1968–1970” examined the late phase of the West Berlin anti-authoritarian movement, which disintegrated into competing splinter groups around 1968. Sepp contended that the splinter groups’ turn toward dogmatic Marxism and rigid organizational structures is best understood as a process of “hardening” (Verhärtung) of body, theory, and practice that represented a reaction against the preceding “movement” phase.

Meeting at UC Berkeley’s Institute of European Studies, where the GHI West offices are located, the seminar was characterized by a marvelous combination of scholarly rigor and congeniality. The final discussion provided an opportunity to reflect on common themes and research trends. Keeping in mind that the dissertation projects presented at the seminar are not a representative sample of ongoing dissertation projects in German history in North America and Germany, it was noted that neither the Sonderweg debate nor National Socialism figured as primary reference points for most of the projects. Likewise, the political caesuras of 1918, 1933, and 1945 were of limited importance, as many papers were concerned with continuities across political regimes. As a sign that gender history and the history of sexuality have had an impact on the mainstream of history, it was also remarked that gender and sexuality figured in many projects whose main themes extended into other areas of history. Although one of the participants rightly observed that every doctoral student should write a dissertation that is meaningful to themselves, it was also clear that all of the papers presented at the seminar had relevance for a better understanding not only of German history but of European history and, last but not least, of our present predicament. The completion and publication of the dissertations presented at the seminar is eagerly awaited.

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