

28th Transatlantic Doctoral Seminar in German History: Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century German History

Seminar held at Villa Vigoni, German-Italian Centre for the European Dialogue, Loveno di Menaggio, Italy, June 29 – July 2, 2023. Co-Organized by the German Historical Institute Washington and the BMW Center for German and European Studies, Georgetown University, in cooperation with Villa Vigoni. Conveners: Anna von der Goltz (Georgetown University) and Richard F. Wetzell (GHI Washington). Faculty Mentors: Samuel Clowes Huneke (George Mason University), Paul Lerner (University of Southern California), Miriam Rürup (Universität Potsdam), Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (Technische Universität Berlin). Participants: Joachim Brenner (Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg), Jonathon Catlin (Princeton University), Émilie Duranceau-Lapointe (University of Michigan), Jack Guenther (Princeton University), Martin Hamre (Freie Universität Berlin), Philipp Henning (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin), Christian Kleindienst (Universität Leipzig), Till Knobloch (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), Kate McGregor (University of New Brunswick Fredericton), Verena Meier (Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg), Robert Mueller-Stahl (Potsdamer Leibniz-Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung), Tabea Nasaroff (Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg), Kay Schmücking (Martin-Luther Universität Halle-Wittenberg), Rachel Weiser (Boston University), Brenna Yellin (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), Francesca Zilio (Villa Vigoni).

The 28th Transatlantic Doctoral Seminar in German History once again brought together doctoral students from North America and Europe working on dissertations in nineteenth- and twentieth-century German history. The seminar took place in the beautiful environment of the Villa Vigoni, the

German-Italian Centre for the European Dialogue, whose general secretary, Christiane Liermann Traniello, and academic advisor, Francesca Zilio, provided an exceptionally welcoming atmosphere, as did the Villa's remarkable staff. Taking place over three full days, the seminar was organized in eight panels, usually featuring two papers each, which opened with two comments by fellow doctoral students, followed by discussion of the precirculated papers.

The seminar started with a panel that brought together papers on the related topics of catastrophe and the atomic age. Jonathon Catlin's paper "Thinking against Catastrophe: A Concept in Twentieth-Century German Thought" presented his conceptual history (*Begriffsgeschichte*) of the concept of "catastrophe" in German thought and politics from the aftermath of World War I to contemporary climate change. Against the prevailing tendency to depict catastrophe as a sudden, discrete, and external event, Catlin critically reconstructed the notion of history itself as a "permanent catastrophe" that was developed by the Frankfurt School critical theorists Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno from the 1930s to 1960s. This notion, he argued, might help us conceptualize the ongoing threats of climate change as a slow (if not permanent) process immanent to late capitalist forms of life. Joachim Brenner's paper "Unser Freund Atom(ino): 'Atomare Kindheit' und die transnationale Popularisierung von Atomenergie in Kindercomic und Fernsehen" analyzed the Walt Disney production "Our Friend the Atom" and the Italian comic strip "Atomino" to examine how children in the United States, Italy, East and West Germany were prepared for the "atomic age." Anthropomorphized atoms and metaphors of friendship were used to win support for civil uses of nuclear power in order to stimulate interest in and a responsible attitude towards nuclear power, the key technology of the Cold War, among the youngest members of society.

The second panel examined the issue of race in the contexts of German colonial history and the Nazi regime. Kate McGregor's paper "'Es gibt nur einen Weg zur Schönheit!' ['There is only one way to be pretty!']: Racialized Beauty Norms in the German South Pacific Colonies 1884–1916," examined how normative conceptions of beauty shaped the lives of white German women and forcibly colonized populations in the South Seas. McGregor demonstrated that in the German Empire beauty was neither a frivolous nor an exclusively female concern. White German women (and men) in German Samoa and German New Guinea applied their definitions of beautiful and ugly to the colonized populations to maintain the racialized colonial hierarchy. Émilie Duranceau-Lapointe's paper "How Racial Categories Become Realities: The Bureaucratic Journeys of 'Jewish' Petitioners to the Standesamt in Nazi Berlin, 1939–1945" provided a close analysis of petitions to Berlin's *Standesämter* (marriage bureaus), filed between 1939 and 1943 by German citizens who were classified as "Jewish" or of "mixed race" by the Nazi regime and challenged their racial classification. In her analysis, Duranceau-Lapointe revealed how the *Personenstandsgesetz* of 1937 – in concert with two decrees from the *Reichsminister des Innern* (1936 and 1941) – sought to permanently record and fix a person's religious affiliation in order to prevent any "erasure" of "Jewishness" and thus to render "Jews" permanently visible and legible.

The third panel explored the role of gender in two very different contexts. Christian Kleindienst's paper "The Politics of Jewish Invisibility: (Un-) Sichtbarkeit jüdischer Feminist:innen und Wahrnehmung von Antisemitismus in feministischen Bewegungskontexten" analyzed antisemitism and Jewish invisibility as intertwined problems that de-normalized socially produced orders of visibility and made them the object of feminist critique. As some Jewish feminists raised the question of their (in-)visibility, they formulated claims for recognition

that connected the fight against antisemitism to the question of Jewish visibility within the feminist movement. Rachel Weiser's paper "Her Place in Production: Gender, Labor, and Socialist Brigades in the German Democratic Republic" considered the gendered nature of industrial work in the German Democratic Republic, specifically through workers' brigades. Women, she argued, carved out space for female community within brigades and developed relationships centered on gender solidarity rather than the intended class comradeship. As a result, the factory served as a space for women to participate in and refashion East German socialism.

The fourth panel featured transnational perspectives on German history. Jack Guenther's paper "The Idea of Hamburg: Interpreting Interdependence from the Wilhelmine Era to West Germany" asked how attempts to rebuild Germany's economic connections with the world coexisted and contended with the early years of Nazi rule. Guenther's analysis of a 1932 campaign against autarky and the Nazis' early overtures to Hamburg's mercantile sector argued that the city's free traders supported Nazism on the basis of global, not domestic, considerations; the same global perspective, however, led other Hamburg merchants to reject Nazi rule, laying the foundation for a contested postwar recovery. In his paper "Orientalism in Deutschland und Italien zur Zeit des Nationalsozialismus und Faschismus: Ideologie, Geopolitik und Propaganda" Philipp Henning showed that both fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany were strongly influenced by Orientalist modes of thought, which found expression both in their ideologies and in their geopolitical aims. But Henning's analysis of Italian and German radio propaganda for the Arab world after 1934 also demonstrated that the ideas that the two countries projected onto the imaginary space of the "Orient" differed substantially.

The fifth panel explored different aspects of the Second World War. Till Knobloch's paper "The Human Element in

Diplomacy and the Outbreak of the Second World War” showed that French Prime Minister Édouard Daladier’s foreign policy was substantially shaped by his experiences during the First World War. Knobloch argued that Daladier’s perception of Adolf Hitler was, from early on, influenced by his pacifist quest for Franco-German reconciliation. Although Daladier recognized Hitler’s aggressive intentions more clearly during his second term in office, his decisions during the 1938 Munich conference were still influenced by his war trauma. Kay Schmücking’s paper “Heroisierungsversuche zwischen Uniformität und Differenz: Die mediale Präsenz des heroischen Opfertodes im Nationalsozialismus” investigated the Nazi cult of heroism from the perspective of media history. The project focused on Nazi attempts to transform the memorialization of the war dead during the Second World War into a cult of heroism through a variety of media strategies, while also revealing the problems and limits of these strategies.

The sixth panel brought together papers on two different types of migration: the emigration of Jews from Nazi Germany and the postwar resettlement of so-called “ethnic Germans” from Eastern Europe in the Soviet occupation zone. Robert Mueller-Stahl’s paper “Die Flucht festhalten: Emigrationsnarrative in der deutsch-jüdischen Privatfotografie” examined a remarkable discrepancy and tension in the photographs that Jewish families took of the Dutch internment and transit camp Westerbork, in which they were interned after 1940. The happy mood that some of these photographs convey seems at odds with their threatening and hopeless environment. Mueller-Stahl argued that by not depicting the structures of confinement the pictures created a “Gegenraum” (“counter-space”). Brenna Yellin’s paper “*Die Neue Heimat*: An Analysis of the Zentralverwaltung für Deutsche Umsiedler’s Illustrated Monthly Magazine, 1947–1949” analyzed discussions in the magazine *Die Neue Heimat* about the relationship between *Umsiedler*, “ethnic

Germans" expelled from parts of Eastern Europe, and local populations in the Soviet Occupation Zone. Arguing that this often-overlooked source provides necessary insights into the triangular relationship between resettlers, locals, and the state, Yellin showed that state officials attempted to rely on *Heimat* and Germanness to unite the two groups and revealed the contradictions this strategy produced.

The seventh panel examined different aspects of how post-war Germany dealt with its Nazi past. Verena Meier's paper "Kriminalpolizei und Völkermord: Die NS-Verfolgung von Sinti*zzze und Rom*nja sowie die Aufarbeitung dessen unter den Alliierten und in der DDR" employed the concept of "transitional justice" to analyze the process by which Nazi perpetrators were prosecuted, convicted, or amnestied in the Soviet Occupation Zone and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the extent to which victims received compensation. Using 585 personal files of the criminal police in Magdeburg to trace individual biographies of perpetrators and victims, Meier reveals important continuities across 1945 in the state's relationship to the Sinti and Roma minority. Tabea Nasaroff's paper "Disziplin als demokratische Tugend: Zu Theodor Eschenburgs Bürgerbildern (1945–1965)" examined the analyses of the political attitudes of the West German population that Tübingen political scientist Theodor Eschenburg provided in West German media. Her analysis focused on the strategies by which Eschenburg established himself as an authoritative spokesperson for the majority of the West German population but also revealed that some members of the public challenged this claim.

The eighth and final panel featured Martin Hamre's paper "Notions and Practices of Fascist Internationalism in the 1930s." In this paper Hamre analyzed the Lausanne-based International Centre of Fascist Studies (CINEF), which functioned as an international propaganda think tank for Fascist Italy from 1927 to 1930. CINEF, he argued, disseminated

not only ideas of fascism as a “universal” phenomenon and a “third way” beyond liberalism and communism but the argument that the adoption of fascism in Europe and the world would enable a “peaceful” and “true” form of (fascist) internationalism.

Organizers and participants expressed their appreciation to the four faculty mentors who offered their comments and questions both in the panel discussions and in many informal conversations during the breaks. In the final discussion, which closed the three-day seminar, participants reflected on the seminar’s collegial atmosphere as well as the great diversity of topics and themes in twentieth-century German history, while noting that the nineteenth century was almost absent among this year’s projects. One commonality among many of the papers were transnational approaches to German history, which clearly have become mainstream. As always, the seminar had an important networking function, connecting participants on both sides of the Atlantic.

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