

## Fourth West Coast Germanists' Workshop: Global Germany

Workshop held at the University of California, San Diego, November 4-5, 2022. Co-sponsored by the Pacific Regional Office of the German Historical Institute Washington and the University of California, Davis. Conveners: Frank Biess (University of California, San Diego), Ulrike Strasser (University of California, San Diego), and Sören Urbansky (GHI Washington, Pacific Office). Participants: Volker Benkert (Arizona State University), Anke Biendarra (University of California, Irvine), Sebastian Conrad (Free University of Berlin), Annika Freiberg (San Diego State University), Deborah Hertz (University of California, San Diego), Anna Holian (Arizona State University), Jonathan Lear (University of California, Berkeley), Jörg Neuheiser (University of California, San Diego), Clara Oberle (University of San Diego), Andrea Orzoff (New Mexico State University), Friedemann Pestel (University of Freiburg / University of California, Berkeley), Sandra Rebock (University of California, San Diego), Jennifer Rodgers (California Institute of Technology), AJ Solovy (University of California, Berkeley), Phillip Wagner (Halle-Wittenberg University / University of California, Berkeley).

This year's West Coast Germanists' Workshop, held in person at the University of California, San Diego, afforded a forum for historians from across the West Coast to exchange ideas, present works in progress, and to think through emergent debates and questions in the field of German history together. The timely theme of the workshop — Global Germany — prompted a rich and multifaceted discussion on the ways in which Germany has historically situated itself, both spatially and temporally, vis-à-vis global transformations and conditions; and the ways in which German history

has happened as much beyond its borders as within them. In addition, participants engaged with various questions of methodology, interrogating what it means, in practice, for historians to adopt a “global” approach to a given topic; as well as asking where global history diverges from transnational or comparative history. This discussion of methodology was accompanied by an attempt to work through an understanding of what it means to study German history from the United States and from the West Coast in particular.

Over the course of the two-day conference, participants — professors, GHI visiting scholars, post-doctoral, and doctoral students — discussed ten pre-circulated papers on the theme of “Global Germany.” The papers, along with their accompanying presentations, reflected the field’s increasing turn to the post-1945 era. Indeed, with only a handful of exceptions, participants examined German historical developments after the Nazi regime’s collapse, or else traced continuous historical phenomena across the 1945 threshold. The papers reflected how the post-1945 era in German history demands new sets of questions and frameworks, while emphasizing the continued import and relevance of more well-worn lines of questioning. A lively discussion ensued following each presentation, with not only suggestions for the project, but also open-ended reflection on such broad themes as migration, globalization, national identity, media, democratic citizenship, race, and colonialism.

During the first panel, Friedemann Pestel and Volker Benkert discussed their current work on the global reach of German music and film respectively. Pestel’s paper explored the global mobility of German and Austrian symphony orchestras in the postwar period, moving beyond a simple fetishization of mobility. Instead, Pestel focused on the forces that allowed mobility to develop in the first place, showing how the globalizing postwar musical scene was mutually

shaped by relationships between traveling orchestras and their foreign audiences in East Asia. Knowledgeable Japanese audiences, for instance, compared and critiqued traveling orchestras, leading to high standards and politicized musical rivalries. While the People's Republic of China had originally seen European symphonic music as bourgeois and reactionary, the climate opened up beginning in the 1970s, allowing for the development of a new symphony/audience relationship. In short, non-German and non-Austrian understandings of symphonic music played an equally important role in the history of musical mobility as German and Austrian ideas did. Volker Benkert's presentation discussed the apologetic and redemptive narrative traits in German films that are produced for German markets but also have international audiences. Benkert showed how such narratives function by deploying a critique of the 2013 film *Generation War*, which portrays ordinary Germans as having committed war crimes only due to having been brutalized by the war, while sadistic Nazis (along with antisemitic Poles and Ukrainians) are cast as their unredeemable foils. The idea contained within the film is that German soldiers — who have clearly committed war crimes — are able to redeem themselves through their own suffering and subsequently their active self-liberation from Nazism. Despite the historical dubiousness of this narrative, given that many war crimes were perpetrated almost immediately after the start of the war, this narrative may appeal to German and international audiences, precisely because these audiences seek a narrative of German redemption.

In Friday's second panel, Deborah Hertz and Jennifer Rodgers addressed two different aspects of German women's history. Hertz's presentation focused on the biographies of two radical German-Jewish women during the German Empire: Bertha Pappenheim and Rosa Luxemburg. By examining the pathways in politics that these women rejected, Hertz argued that we can see more of the full texture of political

life for impassioned, intellectual women. Pappenheim, for instance, held a deep passion for marginalized Jewish women while rejecting both Zionism and assimilation. As a German cultural patriot, she had hoped that the Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine would provide an institutional home for Jewish life, but those hopes were dashed in favor of colonial and protestant organizations. Hertz also discussed the complicated romantic life of Luxemburg, whose relationships often brought her a modicum of stability, but not always love. Ultimately, Hertz's presentation was concerned with the question of why these radical women made choices that left them so lonely. These two biographies reveal a story of personal ambition and assimilation within the socialist movement; it was socialism that ultimately provided a space for women who did not have any other pathways. Rodgers's paper analyzed the discourses surrounding childbirth and obstetrics across a divided postwar Germany, centering on the emergence of Native American tropes in West German (and East German) birth stories. After birthing cultures became medicalized in the 1950s, the issue of birth reform eventually emerged and reached a broad swath of German citizens in both countries over the following decades and past German reunification. Rodgers's discussion focused on the fetishization of Native American birth cultures, which—though problematic in its own right—also came at the expense of Turkish and non-white birth stories in both states. As Rodgers argued, white and heteronormative Germans admired “natural childbirth,” but did not extend their admiration to the birthing practices of other racial groups that lived within Germany's borders. When minority communities were featured in this discourse, problematic and racialized language was used to demean these cultures, rather than understand or celebrate them.

The first day of the conference ended with Sebastian Conrad's keynote, entitled “European History After the Global Turn,” which addressed the historiographical transforma-

tion that has occurred in recent decades with respect to “global history,” seeking to grasp Europe’s place within this new paradigm. Although many have viewed global history as a progressive historical methodology — one that has developed out of social and cultural history — Conrad reminds us that global history is not an all-encompassing venture that is capable of objectively grasping the entirety of the globe. Rather, global history is an approach that can be applied to particular nations and in some cases may not be applicable at all. To apply the approach of global history to Europe, historians must look at conjunctures and examine the global conditions that in turn produce conceptions of Europe. For instance, Conrad discussed the late nineteenth-century spread of the naturalist novel as an example of the condition of globality; conditions existed across the globe that allowed for the production, translation, and local reproduction of a cultural form that had its origins in Zola’s *Nana*. Conrad reminds us that “Europe” was in many ways made from without as nations encountered European ideas and cultural forms under the conditions of globality. The global, Conrad argues, is not simply an advanced stage of historical development; on the contrary, it is a condition of the modern world that allows for and develops from such encounters and ultimately makes global history possible. Likewise, movements of knowledge, culture, and technology from European to non-European places can be explored by means other than the model of diffusion. Europe can function as one privileged site among many other sites that all exist, however asymmetrically, under global conditions.

The papers given on the second day of the conference addressed five themes in common: migration, international cooperation, national identity, race and racism, and the extreme right. Clara Oberle opened the morning session with a presentation on urban planning in occupied Berlin and made the surprising observation that when it came to housing policy between 1945 and 1948, the occupying forces

were exceptionally willing to collaborate with one another. This surprising rapprochement emerged from a number of factors, including a scarcity of resources, a deep fear about impending public health crises, the cosmopolitanism of the urban planners themselves, and a mutual desire to manage the stream of refugees pouring into the city.

Building on themes of international collaboration and migration, Andrea Orzoff's paper illuminated the specific challenges and experiences of German Jews living in Latin America. In looking at German-Jewish refugee experiences in Bolivia, Orzoff identified a simultaneous attempt to both integrate and differentiate themselves from the indigenous population. The complexity of European Jewish life within a Latin American context, Orzoff concludes, was apparent in a number of different political, economic, and social arenas, but perhaps most powerfully reflected in the realm of culture. In his work with Bolivia's National Symphony Orchestra, for example, the Austrian composer Erich Eisner adopted certain aspects of indigenous culture for the purposes of creating modern, "European" cultural works.

Jonathan Lear rounded out the morning panel by reflecting on the ways in which German and Japanese nuclear scientists sought to "cure" their respective nation's "backwardness," through the scientific advancement of nuclear energy. Both Japanese and German nuclear scientists, Lear demonstrated, shared a certain notion of historical time: oriented towards a remote future measured in millennia, rather than years or decades. This millennial conception of progress had its origins in prewar anxieties about national survival, and became even more manifest in the wake of Germany and Japan's defeats in the Second World War. Lear's presentation was followed by a lively conversation about what can be gained from comparing Japan and Germany, in particular, with one another.

Phillip Wagner inaugurated the second panel of the afternoon by asking how secondary schools sought to teach students about “democratic citizenship.” Wagner argued that in the late 1960s and 1970s, as the immigrant student population grew, the ways in which education programs in West Berlin and Nordrhein-Westfalen introduced children to democratic citizenship often excluded immigrant students. Wagner went on to show that while West Berlin and Nordrhein-Westfalen both conceptualized democratic citizenship vis-à-vis migration policy, they differed in their respective approaches, with Nordrhein-Westfalen state governments offering a more “paternalistic” approach towards immigrant students, and West Berlin taking steps to separate immigrant students from the non-immigrant student population. Taking up Wagner’s exploration of race and democracy in the Federal Republic, AJ Solovy presented on the relationship between the “old Nazis” and the “new extreme right” in postwar West Germany. She showed how and why former National Socialists — SS members — differentiated themselves from neo-Nazis, and instead embraced racist and ethno-nationalist movements across the world. She argued that the rejection of neo-Nazi movements by former SS members was as much about salvaging certain aspects of their Nazi past as it was about situating themselves politically within West German democracy. Her paper prompted a discussion about the differences between the extreme right in West Germany and Austria, as well as West German attitudes towards democratic citizenship and foreign affairs in the second half of the twentieth century.

Annika Frieberg rounded out the conference, by engaging with what she called “*Ostpolitik* and its Discontents.” *Ostpolitik*, she argued, beginning in the late 1960s, became a kind of spectacle. For example, Willy Brandt’s perceived success in the 1960s and 1970s in terms of *Ostpolitik* was subtended by a relatively constrained societal engagement with Germany’s relationship to Poland. In comparing and connecting

the *Ostpolitik* of the 1960s and the 1980s, it becomes apparent that the policy towards the “East” that was developed in the late 1960s, emerged in the 1980s (at least in social-liberal circles) as a skepticism towards dissident groups, and a reticence to make a foreign policy that might threaten the spectacle of international harmony. Frieberg noted that the consequences of this policy reverberate into the present, making it all the more exigent to understand Germany’s *Ostpolitik*, as it developed over preceding decades.

Between the various panels, participants had ample time to informally converse with one another, making for a packed two days of scholarly exchange. At the end of the conference, participants were thrilled to learn that there would be an opportunity to continue these conversations at the next West Coast Germanists’ Workshop, which will take place on April 28-29, 2023, in Vancouver, B.C.

**AJ Solovy and Jonathan Lear**  
(University of California, Berkeley)