

## NAVIGATING DIVERSITY: NARRATIVES, PRACTICES, AND POLITICS IN GERMAN-SPEAKING EUROPE FROM 1500 TO THE PRESENT

Conference at the Université de Montréal and the Université du Québec à Montréal, April 13-15, 2016. Co-sponsored by the German Historical Institute Washington (GHI), Université de Montréal (Canada Research Chair in German and European Studies, Centre canadien d'études allemandes et européennes, and IRTG "Diversity: Mediating Difference in Transcultural Spaces"), and Université du Québec à Montréal (Vice-Rectorat de la Vie Académique, Faculté des Sciences Humaines, Département d'histoire). Made possible by additional support from the DAAD and the German Consulate in Montreal. Conveners: Till van Rahden (Université de Montréal); Anthony J. Steinhoff (Université du Québec à Montréal), and Richard F. Wetzell (GHI). Participants: Christian Bailey (State University of New York, Purchase College), Rebecca Bennette (Middlebury College), Rita Chin (University of Michigan), Norman Domeier (Universität Stuttgart), Jennifer Evans (Carleton University), Christopher Ewing (City University of New York, Graduate Center), Rebekka Habermas (Universität Göttingen), Jennifer Jenkins (University of Toronto), Kerstin von der Krone (GHI), Simone Lässig (GHI), Mary Lindemann (University of Miami), Matthijs Lok (Universiteit van Amsterdam), Christoph Lorke (Universität Münster), Suzanne Marchand (Louisiana State University), Nicholas B. Miller (Universität Göttingen), Glenn Penny (University of Iowa), Nisrine Rahal (University of Toronto), Julia Roos (Indiana University), Warren Rosenblum (Webster University), Philipp Rousseau (IRTG Diversity, Université de Montréal), Thomas Serrier (Université Paris-8 / European University Viadrina, Frankfurt/Oder), Helmut Walser Smith (Vanderbilt University), Jesse Spohnholz (Washington State University), Fabien Théofilakis (Université de Montréal), Annette Timm (University of Calgary), Sarah Wobick-Segev (University of Western Ontario).

Diversity has been central to political and social life in German-speaking Europe, but also one of its ongoing challenges. For much of the modern era, diversity was viewed as a problem that had to be solved via the marginalization, suppression or even elimination of differences in order to realize visions of unity that lay at the heart of the nation-state, and — even more so — of the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft* and the East German "Peasants' and Workers' State." The debates and conflicts that have ensued from diversity's fate at modernity's hands in the German lands since the Reformation have received

ample attention from scholars working from many perspectives. This conference sought to bring together early modern and modern historians working in many different subfields in order to foster conversations about diversity that connect the perspectives that have emerged in particular disciplines or subfields, from migration, gender, queer, and religious studies to legal, labor and economic history, and political theory. Departing from a recognition that diversity has been an omnipresent force in modern societies, the conference aimed at exploring the benefits (and limitations) of a paradigm that puts diversity at the center of our understanding of the past and the present.

The conference's first panel, chaired by Tony Steinhoff, was dedicated to the theme of "concepts." In the panel's first paper, "Die erste moderne Diversity-Theorie? Magnus Hirschfelds 'Zwischenstufentheorie' und ihre Diskussion im Eulenburg-Skandal (1906-1909)," Norman Domeier explored the paradox that, in his court testimony during the famous Eulenburg affair, the German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld did not draw on his theory of intermediate sexual types, which posited that human sexuality reflected an infinite range of individual sexual varieties, but advanced the notion of a homosexual identity that was independent of sexual acts. Although Hirschfeld's forensic testimony quickly popularized the concept of homosexuality, its effects were not as emancipatory as has sometimes been assumed; as soon as homosexuality became utterable (*sagbar*), homophobia was also born. The question of *Sagbarkeit* — what can be said in a particular time and place — also figured in Rebekka Habermas's paper, "In Search of the Secular: Explorations in Nineteenth-Century Germany." According to Habermas, around 1900 the secular was a category closely connected to race and gender: The secular was closely tied to the "West" and to masculinity. Drawing on the history of emotions, she argued that although the secular was presented as a neutral ground free of emotion, in fact, secular men displayed strong emotions — of disgust, anger, fear — in debates over religion. The intersection of gender and race was also central to the panel's third presentation, on "Navigating Gendered and Sexual Diversity in Late Eighteenth-Century Germany: Meiners, Millar and Bergk on the Global History of Women," by Nicholas Miller. Miller's paper argued that the Enlightenment thinker Christoph Meiners developed a racialized discourse of European exceptionalism with an important gender component. According to Meiners, whereas women were universally oppressed outside of Europe, in Europe women benefited

from maximal gender freedom. Till van Rahden's comment and the ensuing discussion focused on several points: although the concept of diversity did not appear until the twentieth century, historians have examined the issue of alterity and diversity for a long time; the absence of the concept of diversity until the twentieth century can be explained by the fact that diversity — of wealth, status, power — was simply considered a given in earlier centuries; by contrast, in the nineteenth century it was the notion of "equality" that presented the greatest challenge to the status quo.

The second panel, chaired by Richard Wetzell, was devoted to "Belonging." The panel's first paper, by Suzanne Marchand, presented a study of the modernization of the porcelain industry in nineteenth-century central Europe which suggested that there were, as the paper's title put it, "Many Roads out of Mercantilism." At least in German-speaking Central Europe, Marchand argued, large-scale, mass producing enterprises were not the natural outcome of economic modernization. Instead, German porcelain manufacturers' roads out of mercantilism were diverse. Although many adopted British models of mechanization and labor organization, some manufacturers never gave up handwork. Instead of being doomed to failure, mercantilism may have been one important way of allowing certain manufacturing industries to get off the ground. Moving from economic to social history, and from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, Sarah Wobick-Segev's paper examined the role of diversity in the "Individualized Jewish Community" of Berlin, 1890-1930. This community, she argued, resists easy narratives of either secularization or assimilation and, instead, reflects a diverse picture of Jewish belonging. By examining how Berlin Jews brought Jewish practice into sites of leisure and consumption — dances and balls, hiking and sports, as well as holiday celebrations — Wobick-Segev demonstrated that they had considerable room for maneuver in determining the meaning and practice of their Jewishness. Tony Steinhoff's comment and the ensuing discussion reflected on: the transformation of the nature of belonging in the transition from princely to modern society; the role of consumption in both papers; situational or performative ethnicity; intersectionality; and the relative merits of the concepts of "belonging" versus "identity."

The third panel, moderated by Simone Lässig on the second day, was devoted to the theme "Histories" and featured papers ranging from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. The panel's first paper, by Matthijs Lok, investigated the "invention" of "European pluralism in

history writing” through a case-study of Leopold von Ranke. The idea of European pluralism, Lok argued, originated in the mid-eighteenth century, when historians came to regard the continent’s pluralism as the key explanation for Europe’s historical development. Using the example of Ranke, he insisted that the idea of European pluralism was perfectly compatible with national thought; Ranke held that precisely because Germany lacked a geographical and political center, it embodied the ideal of European pluralism — against Napoleonic hegemony. Thomas Serrier’s paper, “The ‘German Cultural Work in the Eastern March’: National Legitimation vs. the Local Return of the Repressed in the Prussian East (1848-1914),” examined Imperial Germany’s *Polenbild*. Whereas German views of Poland tended to perpetuate the negative stereotype of the *Polnische Wirtschaft*, in the 1890s an urban reconstruction policy sought to transform Poznan into a typically German town, resulting in a *Posenbild* that reflected the cultural construction of the province of Posen as a German province. The panel’s third paper, “Multiculturalism: The Adventures of a Concept in Germany and Europe,” by Rita Chin, examined post-1945 German immigration policy in light of the concept of multiculturalism. Chancellor Angela Merkel’s 2010 attack on multiculturalism, Chin argued, denied immigrants the status of social and political actors in Germany and foreclosed meaningful debate about diversity. Phillip Rousseau’s comment and the discussion raised several important issues: the competition between universal and national history in the nineteenth century; the role that the political weakness of the German states prior to unification played in narratives of pluralism among eighteenth and nineteenth-century German historians; the relationship of American-style multiculturalism to capitalist society; the extent to which the history of Germany’s immigration policy was particularly German.

The fourth panel, chaired by Rebekka Habermas, explored the theme of “Entanglements” by bringing together historical studies of religion, sexuality, and race. The first paper, by Jesse Spohnholz, investigated “French and Dutch Religious Migrants in Early Modern Germany.” The intolerant logic of the confessional age did not in fact, Spohnholz argued, result in the suppression of religious pluralism. In a case-study of sixteenth-century Wesel, Spohnholz showed how Wesel city leaders accommodated Protestant religious minorities despite a legal framework that insisted the city be Catholic through mutually agreed regimes of “dissimulation.” The next paper, by Christian Bailey, examined the history of love relationships between Jewish and

gentile Germans under the title “From Jews and Other Germans to Jews and Other Outsiders? The History of Love in Modern Germany.” Drawing on the history of emotions, Bailey used the concept of “situational emotionality” to probe the relationship between language and experience in the romantic realm. The gap between language and experience, he argued, was especially pronounced in the early twentieth century and after 1945, but in opposite ways. Whereas in the early part of the century many Jewish as well as gentile young people subscribed to the language of free love, in actual practice most German Jews married other Jews; by contrast, after 1945, despite the legacy of the Holocaust and much grimmer language, there was more intermarriage between Jews and gentiles. Moving from the Jewish to the gay community, the panel’s third paper, “Highly Affected Groups: Gay Men and Racial Others in West Germany’s AIDS Epidemic, 1981-1992,” by Christopher Ewing, examined how the gay community’s discourses on race and immigration shifted during the height of the AIDS crisis. Whereas, before the AIDS crisis, gay publications usually depicted Muslim male sexuality as both erotic and threatening, after the advent of the epidemic, anxieties about Islam and Muslim sexuality were quickly overshadowed by fears about AIDS and the stigmatization of gays. Although concerns about Islam never completely disappeared, German gay rights and AIDS activists began to explicitly connect the struggle against homophobia to the fight against xenophobia and racism. Jennifer Jenkins’s comment and the discussion called attention to the role of religion as the hard edge of otherness in all three papers and urged that the construction of the concept of “Muslim sexuality” be subjected to critical historical analysis.

The fifth panel, moderated by Fabien Théofilakis and titled “Spectres,” dealt with the subject of citizenship and national belonging. Christoph Lorke’s paper, “Challenging the Nation-State through Binational Marriages: Navigating Cross-Border Love, 1900-1933,” examined the state’s treatment of binational marriages in Imperial Germany and the Weimar Republic. Paying particular attention to binational marriages among German diplomats and the professionalization of civil registrars, Lorke argued that the greater the cultural difference between prospective marriage partners, the more roadblocks the *Standesbeamte* would throw up. On this logic, major “religious and cultural differences” often led to a rejection of binational marriages, especially in the case of marriage between a German woman and a Muslim man. The following paper, by Julia Roos, examined national

belonging through “An Afro-German Microhistory.” Based on a close reading of a series of letters written between 1946 and 1957, Roos argued that narratives predicated on the “triumph of scientific racism over religious discourses” risk missing key complexities of the relationship between Afro-Germans and white German society. Although German national identity remained racialized during the 1950s, she concluded, religious sensibilities opened the door to “interracial understandings” of family that challenged the “racial Othering” of Afro-Germans. The panel’s third paper, by Warren Rosenblum, pursued the theme of citizenship by examining the state’s treatment of so-called “feeble-minded” citizens in Imperial Germany. Warning against the “teleological fallacy” of interpreting nineteenth-century efforts through the lens of Nazi medicine, Rosenblum urged historians to take seriously nineteenth-century reformers’ belief in the “transformative power” of idiot asylums and to treat *Hilfsschulen* (special schools) not primarily as sites of segregation but also as “bastions of experimentation.” Richard Wetzell’s comment and the ensuing discussion focused on the diverse meanings of citizenship in the three case-studies and several other issues, including: the need to investigate the origins and evolution of the “scale of cultural strangeness” underlying the state’s marriage approval process; to what extent taking into account the marriages of Germans to foreigners that took place abroad might change Lorke’s analysis; whether the relative importance of race and religion differed for Afro-Germans and their German interlocutors; and how to avoid the danger of taking the rhetoric of nineteenth-century psychiatric reformers at face value.

The sixth panel, chaired by Helmut Walser Smith, was titled “Respectability” and explored the connections between religious, educational, and sexual reform in the nineteenth and twentieth century. The panel’s first paper, by Kerstin von der Krone, examined “The Quest for Emancipation and the Transformation of Nineteenth-Century German-Jewish Education.” Focusing on diversity as “a necessity and a challenge,” Krone investigated the role of diversity in a twofold sense: intra-Jewish processes of diversification as well as diversity as a factor in the emancipation process. Her paper analyzed the opinions on Jewish education prepared by three prominent members of the Berlin Jewish community for the Prussian government in 1812 in order to highlight the significance of education for the emancipation process and to reveal the diversity in conceptions of Judaism among German Jews already at this early point in the emancipation process. Pursuing the themes of emancipation and educational reform,

Nisrine Rahal's paper examined "Entangled Histories of Emancipation" through a study of the Hamburg Kindergarten movement. The kindergarten movement of the 1840s, Rahal argued, was an integral part of three reform efforts: *bürgerlich* reform, Jewish reform, and the women's movement. By introducing ideas developed in the context of Jewish reform to the kindergarten movement, German-Jewish women did not aim at assimilation but sought to strengthen the Jewish community while at the same time building a larger pluralistic society. The panel's final paper changed focus from educational to sexual reform. In her paper, "Is Sex Medical, Political or Personal? The German Approach to Sexual Diversity and its Legacies from Hirschfeld to Kinsey," Annette Timm argued that the medical, political, and personal aspects of sexual diversity have been closely intertwined. While German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld's work on sexual diversity was supremely political, his knowledge of sexual diversity was built through close personal contacts with people living outside society's gender and sexual norms. Thus Hirschfeld did not "discover" sexual diversity, but sexually diverse individuals "discovered" Hirschfeld (and later Harry Benjamin and Alfred Kinsey) and taught them what their experiences might mean for the spectrum of human sexual and gender diversity. Jennifer Evans's comment and the ensuing discussion included a call to "queer" history, beyond the study of the history of homosexuality, in the sense of questioning claims to universal experience and recovering a multiplicity of perspectives; as well as the question to what extent the three papers related specifically German stories versus transnational developments.

The seventh and final panel, moderated by Suzanne Marchand, was devoted to the topic "Middle Grounds," which historian Richard White defined as a cultural space where "diverse peoples adjust their differences through what amounts to a process of creative, and often expedient, misunderstandings, and from these misunderstandings arise new meanings and through these new practices — the shared meanings and practices of the middle ground." (White, *The Middle Ground*, 1991, p. x) The middle grounds explored in the panel's first paper, by Mary Lindemann, were the "early modern merchant republics" of Hamburg, Amsterdam, and Antwerp in the period 1650-1790. These merchant republics, Lindemann argued, provided a "middle ground" in the sense of a social space where economic and commercial experiments were launched. While divergent ideas about business practices produced a good deal of conflict, these conflicts forced people to adjust to a changing economic world that swirled

with countervailing ideas. The next paper moved from the merchant republics to the larger and more diverse realm of eighteenth-century German speaking Europe. By asking “What Travelers Saw in Eighteenth-Century Germany,” Helmut Walser Smith examined how, in the late eighteenth century, a way of seeing Germany that focused on cities, states, and territories, gave way to new ways of seeing that reflected a shift in the conception of nationhood from an exterior object of identification to an interior identity. This new way of seeing involved a more sympathetic attitude toward the countryside, an increased interest in the people as well as nature, and a greater appreciation of diversity. The panel’s third paper extended the historical analysis of “middle grounds” as well as the entanglement of nationhood and diversity into the twentieth century by investigating “Diversity, Inclusivity, and Germanness in Latin America during the Interwar Period.” In this paper, Glenn Penny used the information produced by and about German schools in Guatemala City, Buenos Aires (and Argentina’s LaPlata region), and southern Chile as lenses to study the development of these German communities. Arguing that “German spaces” were not limited to Germany, Penny insisted that the study of these German communities and the associated transnational networks reveals notions of Germanness that were much more fluid, inclusive, and diverse than is often assumed. Rebecca Bennette’s comment and the following discussion examined a number of questions, including: the impact of the commercial transformations in Hamburg, Amsterdam, and Antwerp on the cities’ political systems; how constructions of Germanness in Latin America were related to notions of Germanness in Germany; the extent to which the eighteenth-century shift from external to interiorized notions of nationhood was related to changes in the physical reality of travel.

The conference’s concluding discussion began with a comment from Till van Rahden, who noted that, as the papers at the conference demonstrated, there are diverse strategies for navigating diversity and urged historians to resist the temptation to rank them according to contemporary political beliefs or moral values. The ensuing discussion centered on several issues, including a call to examine the history of diversity in ways that move beyond a focus on exclusion and oppression; a critical debate on the opportunities and perils of interdisciplinary approaches; and a plea to uphold the historical profession’s commitment to deep contextualization.

Richard F. Wetzell (GHI)