

Young Scholars Forum**Beyond the Nation: U. S. History in Transnational Perspective**

Seminar at the University of Texas, Co-sponsored by the GHI,
the University of Texas, Arlington and the Dallas Goethe Center

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For the second time, the German Historical Institute's Young Scholars Forum took place at the University of Texas in Arlington. It brought together 17 advanced doctoral students and recent PhDs for two days of lively discussion in a stimulating atmosphere. This year's topic – transnational aspects of U.S. history – proved to be as challenging as it was fruitful. Instead of looking at the interrelationship between societies and cultures from the viewpoint of the nation-state, transnational analyses place the emphasis upon the myriad of connections, entanglements and transfers that link certain elements of one society and culture to that of others.

Unsurprisingly, a couple of papers dealt with various histories of migration, ethnicity, and identity – a field that already explored transnationalism decades before the term came into existence. *Christine Hartig* looked at the history of German Jewish children who were sent to the United States before and during World War II in order to save them from the persecution and, ultimately, annihilation by National Socialist Germany. These children were torn between the hopes of the families they had to leave behind, the demands of their foster parents and homes, and their own expectations. They had to adjust to a new language and new customs, but also found themselves exposed to different concepts of childhood and parenthood in Germany and the United States. *Nicole M. Phelps*, in her paper on migration and consular officials in the Habsburg Empire and the United States, showed how the process of mass migration transformed the traditional concept of territorial sovereignty. Challenged by multiple new problems, both states reacted by expanding their respective consular services and increasingly claimed jurisdiction over „their“ citizens abroad, thus strengthening a new, body-based concept of sovereignty.

Birte Timm and *Ely Janis* both clarified the importance of transnational connections and entanglements in fostering nationalism and national identities, especially in those cases where a nation-state was supposed to be carved out of the realm of an empire. While Timm looked at the reciprocal influences between the ongoing Black freedom struggle in the United States and the Jamaican movement for independence – with a special focus on the New York based Jamaica Progressive League – Janis highlighted the financial and political support of Irish-America for the fight against British rule in Ireland as it was exemplified in Charles Stewart Parnell's 1880 American tour. On his three-month trip, Parnell tried to mobilize public opinion and raise money for famine relief and in order to change the Irish land system. In Jamaica as well as in Ireland, transnational ties to the respective ethnic groups in the United States were instrumental in shaping anti-imperialist nationalism. Thus, it was not just coincidence, as Birte Timm mentioned during the discussion of her paper, that Eileen Curran had been invited to give a speech at a public meeting of the Jamaica Progressive League in 1937 on „how Irish-Americans fought for Irish Freedom“.

Three papers dealt with transnational aspects in the history of science and education. While *Christie Hanzlik-Green* described the intensified international exchange of educational knowledge, policies and techniques in the mid-nineteenth century, resulting to a large degree from the common challenges of industrialization and urbanization, *Markus Lang* portrayed the life and scientific career of Karl Loewenstein, a Jewish-German legal scholar turned political scientist once he came to the United States. *Katja Naumann* analyzed processes of transnationalization in American higher education from 1918 to 1968. During this period, she argued, history teaching in undergraduate as well as graduate courses underwent profound changes. Paralleling the rise of the United States to world power status and the increasing experience of globalization, the geographical scope of history teaching was broadened, starting with the coverage of new geographical areas after World War I, the increasing importance of „Western Civilization“ as a unit of analysis, and, finally, the introduction of World or Global History courses.

Perceptions, discourses, and representations in their various forms also cross national boundaries easily and have to be seen as an important part of transnational history, as was clearly demonstrated by two papers on rather diverse topics. While *Jeff Stone* investigated how maps by American national news journals such as *Time*, *U.S. News and World Report*, and *Newsweek* shaped and transformed the way Germany was represented during World War II and the early Cold War, *Christina Oppel* looked at texts by African American intellectuals dealing with Nazi Germany. Dwelling on Paul Gilroy's concept of the Black Atlantic, she interpreted these writings, the most famous of which was W. E. B. Du Bois's accounts of his visit to Berlin in 1936, not only as reflections of racist Nazi policy but also as a discourse on racial politics in the US.

It became evident during the course of the seminar that non-state actors play an important role in transnational history, whether these are organizations or individuals such as David Abner Morse, a lawyer, New Deal politician and for 22 years Director-General of the International Labour Organization (ILO), whose life and career were described by *Daniel Roger Maul*. Several papers emphasized the importance of transnational networks. *Jonathan Gantt*, for example, pointed out that Irish terrorists were using transatlantic connections to finance their activities, to procure arms and for operational planning. By similar means but with rather different intentions, transnational and transatlantic networks were active in order to promote the rescue and resuscitation of victims of drowning and similar accidents, as *Amanda Moniz* made clear. After the first Society for the Recovery of the Drowned had been founded in Amsterdam in 1767, Humane Societies sprang up in many cities in the North-Atlantic region. Over philanthropic and medical networks, information about innovations in life-saving techniques was shared and knowledge about the rescue and resuscitation of accident victims was exchanged across the ocean. The question was raised in the ensuing debate, however, whether there could have been transnational forces at work before the concept of the nation became so powerful in the nineteenth century.

During the discussion of *Derek Catsam's* paper on bus boycotts in the United States and South Africa, the question evolved whether comparative history was or was not a transnational approach. Does the analysis of symmetrical developments and similar events in different countries constitute a departure from a nation-centered perspective? Or does the fact that the unit of analysis still is the nation-state foster and reify, rather than challenge, the concept of the nation?

Philanthropy is another field of activity that has always had strong transnational elements, as *Katharina Rietzler* made clear in her paper on Rockefeller and Carnegie's support for the study of International Relations in Weimar Germany. She argued, however, that the transnational, national and international should not be regarded as separate spheres and held that nation-states may disrupt, change or encourage transnational relations. German government officials, for instance, tried to manipulate the workings as well as the results of the foundations' work in Germany in order to secure their own policy aims.

The intricate relationship between nationalism and transnationalism was also pointed out by *Joel Lewis* in his paper on the discourse of anti-fascist youth during the 1930s. Focusing on the Spanish Civil War, the Young Communist Leagues (YCL) in the United States and Great Britain shied away from the strict internationalism of communist youth's Leninist generation and adopted a flexible nationalism that allowed them to incorporate national symbols and traditions into their propaganda. Thus, instead of portraying the lives of Liebknecht, Luxemburg and Lenin over and over again and glorifying the Russian Revolution, young communists in the US „Americanized“ Popular Front propaganda and relied increasingly on the legacies of George Washington, Thomas Paine, and, most of all, Abraham Lincoln.

Ralf Richter described another, rather peculiar kind of knowledge transfer, i.e. the widespread imitation and copying of American products by the German machine tool industry. Richter portrayed in detail how German entrepreneurs read American product catalogs and journals – one company subscribed to over 60 international technical and trade journals and went so far as to employ a translator – how they exchanged American patents and drawings with each other and how they regularly visited fairs and exhibitions. Some German companies even hired American experts for their factories and sent employees to the United States to study the American facilities on the spot. Sometimes, even the layout of a whole factory was reproduced in Germany. Richter also expressed the view, however, that copying as a specific kind of transnational technology transfer should not simply be dismissed as dull re-building, since the machines were often changed, suited to specific tasks, and re-engineered during the process.

Economic aspects also loomed large in *Abou Bamba's* paper on the circulation of the TVA model in the United States, France, and the Ivory Coast. Bamba used a triangular approach to explain how and why the TVA model of regional development has become so successful in many parts of the world at a time when its reputation in the United States had long begun to fade. Bamba follows one trajectory from the Tennessee Valley, where the model originated, to the Rhone in Southwest France and, later on, the Ivory Coast, where, ironically, TVA-style regional planning in the Bandama Valley was supported by the French as a means to stem US influence in Francophone Africa. Transnationalism, Bamba concluded, should be seen not only as a historiographical category but also as a truly historical force. Indeed, that conclusion could serve as a summary of the Young Scholars Forum as a whole.

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