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Trans-, Bi-, and International Relations

Historians who relish a debate over how best to label scholarly work that exceeds the boundaries of national history know that this is no mere exercise in semantics. Investing a concept such as “global history,” “international history,” “diplomatic history,” “transnational history,” or some other construction with the legitimacy conferred by the status of a recognized subfield can carry far-reaching implications in the promotion of one methodological approach over another. Should we favor, and train our graduate students to favor, an emphasis on state or non-state actors, politics or culture, nations or regions, domestic processes or international interactions? The choices we make determine the kind of history we write, and ultimately, the way we understand the world.

Yet after much productive self-scrutiny and numerous efforts at historiographical taxonomy, this field, whatever we are to call it, is characterized by nothing so much as its methodological diversity. The theoreticians have observed, critiqued, and even inspired new work, and the practitioners in the vineyards have produced monographs of great sophistication and depth, but no one has been able to bring order to the field, to cor-

ral non-national historians into a stable approach. The boundaries of the discipline have become as permeable as those of nations, and that is a fine thing.

This volume of twenty-nine essays in honor of the prolific historian Detlef Junker provides good examples of both constructive theorizing and the broad range of differing practices carried out by historians who do not limit themselves to a single nation and cannot be restricted to a consistent conception of history. It is appropriate that such a collection bear Junker’s name. His own impressive scholarship and determined institution- and network-building efforts in transatlantic studies loom large in the history of German-American scholarly cooperation, and he himself pursued interests as varied as presidents and perceptions, international economics and cultural interactions.[1] His two-volume *Handbook* on German-American relations is the best available overview of the richness and breadth of current research on the topic.[2]

The present collection edited by Manfred Berg and Philipp Gassert begins with a section on theory and methods that starts with an essay by Akira Iriye, “Na-

tionale Geschichte, International Geschichte, Globale Geschichte,” that serves as an excellent argument in favor of the careful consideration of labels because they reflect and can influence practices. As Iriye points out, most diplomatic history is still conceived as national history: it teaches us much about the relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy, but very little about how U.S. relations with foreign countries are influenced by *their* policies, and how these policies are themselves influenced by the internal politics of the other country. The complexity achieved by studies of U.S. diplomatic history is not always matched by a comparable appreciation of the complexity of the other side, of the agency of foreigners. International history should try to achieve this appreciation.

Iriye’s contribution is followed by several useful essays that describe and seek to account for recent trends in the field. Frank Ninkovich in “Das Ende der Paradigmen: Die kulturgeschichtliche Wende und die Globalisierung der amerikanischen Diplomatiegeschichte” argues that the cultural turn is not a fad but the outcome of historians’ engagement with globalization, and that culture is indispensable to understanding even high politics and traditional topics. How can we, asks Ninkovich, understand Hitler without racism, or the Soviet Union without Marxism-Leninism (p. 77)? If some diplomatic historians question the causal power of culture, Ninkovich offers the insight that culture can “naturalize” ideology by sedimenting assumptions to the point where certain actions are practically automatic. If ideology is important, culture must be too, and both need to be investigated to understand power and decision-making.

Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, who has been instrumental in furthering international cultural history in both the United States and Germany, analyzes developments in both countries as well as in France in “*Von fremden Ländern und Menschen* oder wo bleibt der internationale Diskurs in der internationalen Kulturgeschichte?” In contrast to the voluminous transatlantic traffic of scholars pursuing and sharing archival findings, she sees relatively little exchange taking place in the realm of theoretical work. Gienow-Hecht concludes that German historians could learn from the innovative techniques of their American colleagues, while Americans would do well not to permit the job market’s demand for specialization limit them intellectually.

Very much in the spirit of Detlef Junker, a number of the contributions to the volume trace the impact of transatlantic scholarly networks on changing histor-

ical interpretations. Egbert Klautke’s “Auf den Spuren des Sonderwegs. Zur Westorientierung der deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft in der Bundesrepublik” emphasizes the personal experiences of young German historians in the postwar period marked by their study in the United States or contact with German exiled social scientists. These contacts—and, one could add, strong institutional backing from quasi-governmental bodies in both countries—enabled West German scholars to integrate their academic community firmly into “Western” practice. That this effect is not predetermined is shown by Michael Wala’s essay, “‘Gegen eine Vereinzelung Deutschlands’: deutsche Kulturpolitik und akademischer Austausch mit den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika in der Zwischenkriegszeit.” Wala finds that German students who enjoyed the openness and informality of American universities in the 1920s did not seem to be transformed into convinced democrats, since many of them readily joined the Nazi Party a few years later. Volker Berghahn, in “Zur Soziologie der deutsch-amerikanischen Beziehungen nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg: die Netzwerke von Shepard Stone,” argues that after the long domination of the history of twentieth-century German-American relations by political and security topics, with economics a distant third, the new attention to cultural history nonetheless has emphasized institutional histories of the organizations of the postwar occupation or the cultural Cold War. While praising some of this work, Berghahn hopes to see a greater focus on individual actors in their social contexts, especially through the study of networks to develop what he calls a “sociology of international relations” (p. 422). Anja Schäfer’s account of the achievements and limitations of German and American women’s efforts at international peace congresses during the First World War, “Ein hoffnungsloses Unterfangen? Deutsche und Amerikanerinnen auf den Frauenfriedenskongressen, 1915-1919,” is a good example of such a study.

Very different theoretical approaches produce work of interest, such as Wilfried Mausbach’s critical examination of Christian rhetoric in Western alliance-building, “Erdachte Welten: Deutschland und der Westen in den 1950er Jahren”; Frank Trommler’s contrast of the rival concepts of American time and German space in “Aus der Traum vom deutschen Raum: Amerikanisches Zeitdenken gegen deutsches Raumdenken als historischer Konflikt”; or Andreas W. Daum’s look at the role of charisma in the creation of a sense of community between West Germans and their allies in

“Charisma und Vergemeinschaftung: Zur Westbindung der Deutschen im Kalten Krieg.”[3] Philipp Gassert, in “Keine rein geschäftliche Angelegenheit: Die ‘Feindvermählungsfrage’ und die Auseinandersetzungen um die amerikanischen Investitionen im Dritten Reich,” makes use of public and private archives in both countries to establish the mechanisms by which Nazi controls turned U.S. companies into “prisoners of their investments” in Germany, unable to continue business as usual without either collaborating or cutting their losses.

Several contributions focus especially on contemporary issues, such as Alan E. Steinweis on the place of the Holocaust in American debates over military interventions in the 1990s and Klaus Larres’s identification of the roots of transatlantic conflict in diverging postwar perspectives on nationalism (suspect in West Germany, celebrated in the United States) and pacifism (suspect in the United States, valued in West Germany). Konrad H. Jarausch ends the volume with a clear diagramming of the evolution of German and American university structures, showing not only their interlinked development but pointing out the remaining variances in a fashion that should be required reading for anyone tempted to appeal to the “American system” as a positive or negative argument in Germany’s contentious and unfocused ongoing attempt at higher education reform.

Interestingly, the German Democratic Republic makes its presence felt largely through its absence from the collection, a fact only partly explained by the far greater thickness of West German-United States relations. Ute Poiger, for example, has shown elsewhere how one can engage in fruitful investigation of the American presence and influence in postwar Germany without simply bracketing out the East.[4] While the editors sensibly

reject any claims to comprehensiveness and seek instead to present a broad spectrum of work, the GDR’s absence from the discussion not only in this volume but more generally in the study of German-American relations confirms how few scholars have followed Poiger’s lead.

The usual remark about “unevenness” so often applied to edited collections could be made here too, since some of the contributions were originally given as university hall lectures, others are derived from longer works, a few present archival findings and not all of them engage in comparative or transnational analysis and instead are simply essays in American history. However, in a volume designed to commemorate the achievements of an energetic scholar who himself still demonstrates boundless intellectual curiosity, while simultaneously highlighting the fertile potential of a field in flux, this does not detract from the value of the work. Instead, it reflects the healthy promise of such proliferation.

Notes

[1]. As a starting point see the eight-page, condensed (!) list of Junker’s major publications on pp. 589ff.

[2]. Detlef Junker, ed., *Die USA und Deutschland im Zeitalter des Kalten Krieges, 1945-1990: Ein Handbuch*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: DVA, 2001), English translation published by Cambridge University Press, 2004.

[3]. See also Daum’s excellent and original monograph, *Kennedy in Berlin: Politik, Kultur und Emotionen im Kalten Krieg* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003).

[4]. Ute G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000).

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