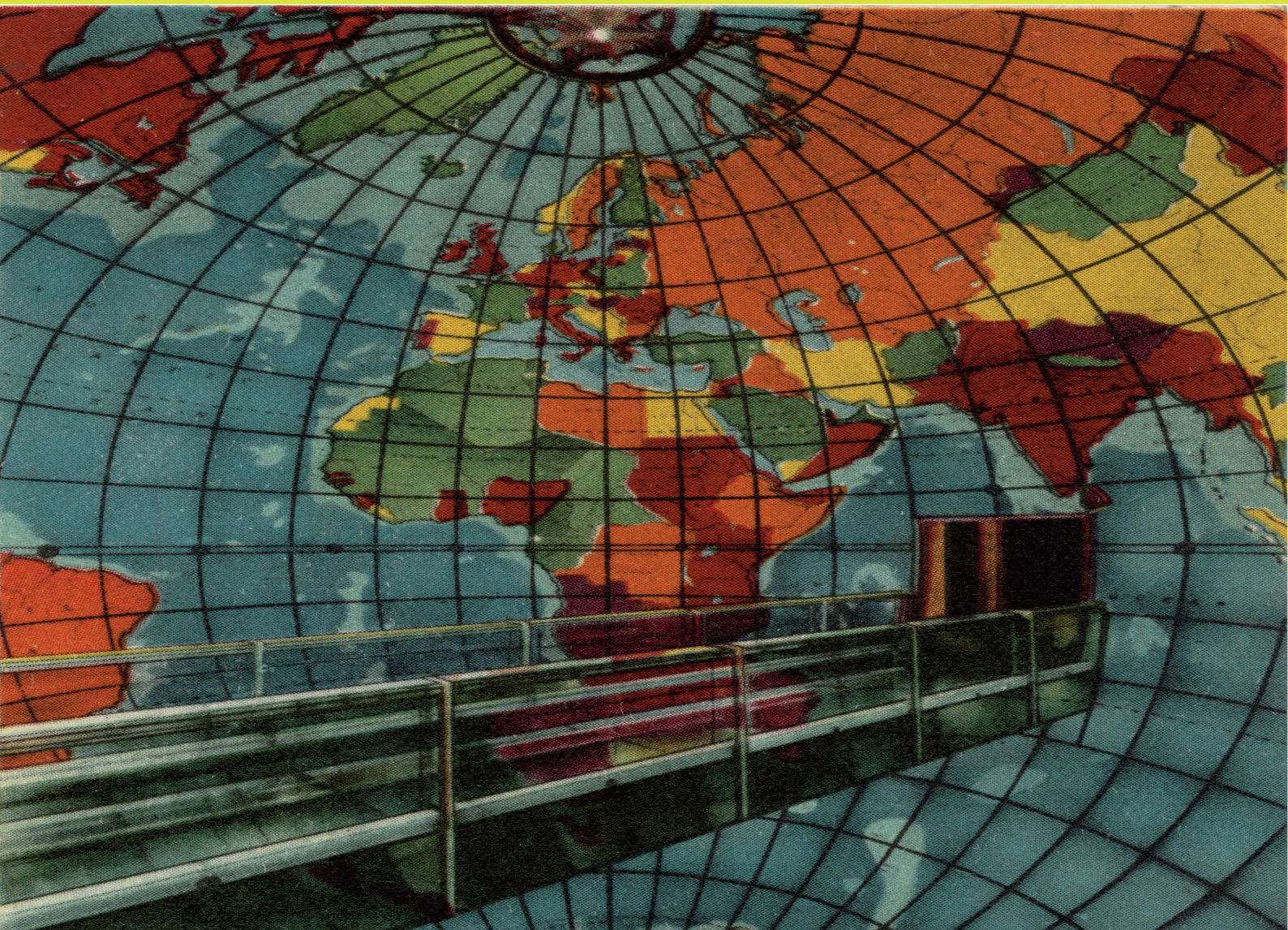


Berlin Program Alumni Roundtable at the
39th Annual GSA Conference in Washington, D.C. October 4, 2015

Writing Histories of Germans Abroad: Approaches and Methodologies to German Sources on Africa and the Middle East

Report



**Berlin Program Alumni Roundtable
at the 39th Annual GSA Conference in Washington D.C.
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**Writing Histories of Germans Abroad:
Approaches and Methodologies to German Sources on Africa and the Middle East**

Moderator

Randall Halle (University of Pittsburgh, German/Film, Berlin Program 2004-2005)

Participants

Brittany Lehman (UNC Chapel Hill, History, Berlin Program 2013-2014)

Nick Ostrum (SBU, History, Berlin Program 2013-2014)

David Pizzo (Murray State University, History, Berlin Program 2002-2003)

Sara Pugach (CSULA, History, Berlin Program 2001-2002)

This panel set out to fill a void in contemporary discussions about methodology. As of late, the catalog of publications addressing German influence throughout the world has grown as researchers have begun to reexamine Germany's experiments in colonialism and postwar efforts to simultaneously grapple with that past while maintaining the non-coloniality of the country's past and present. Despite this, however, there has been a deficit in dialogue among Germanists – and early-career academics in particular - about the spaces this expanding body of literature is meant to occupy. Why is it that researchers who studies England or France are accepted as practitioners of global history, while those who study Germany's role in the world are still greeted skeptically when making the same claims? Why is it that, until recently, Germany as a primary actor has been left out of globally-oriented studies other than those that focus on the two world wars? How can we as Germanists counteract this trend?

It was with these questions in mind that David Pizzo, Sara Pugach, Brittany Lehman, Randall Halle, and I – all former Berlin Program fellows - congregated on Sunday morning at the Berlin Program alumni roundtable. The presentation began with David Pizzo's account of his path from German to global history in which he weighed in on the challenges of archival access in numerous countries and the resistance he encountered even at his home institution as he pursued his study of Germany, Namibia, and Tanzania. Sara Pugach next explained her own evolution from a Germanist studying Afrikanistik to an Africanist, Germanist, and global historian. Sara concluded by echoing David's points about the difficulties regarding archival access and describing several situations in which local

sociopolitical disruptions had circumscribed her ability to visit these sites altogether. I recounted my own journey from an early interest in Germany as a territorially-bound entity to a dissertation focused on the postwar pursuit of petroleum beyond European borders. This reorientation of focus introduced difficult methodological questions, including archival access (whether because of location, government policies, or linguistic barriers) and the challenges of researching and writing non-orientalist histories while having limited access to non-western sources. Brittany Lehman, who has recently defended her dissertation on West German education policy and migration, has since turned her attentions to German-Moroccan relations and migration. In explaining her approach to this stage of her research, Brittany introduced critical issues of the limits of German-oriented literature on decolonization and methods and limitations of researching transnational issues such as migration in German archives.

The discussion that followed was varied and compelling. Moderator Randall Halle quickly brought language back into the discussion and argued that linguistic acquisition was a key means to gaining access to previously inaccessible corridors of information, including archival collections, cultural artifacts (such as films), and person-to-person interactions. The conversation took off from here, addressing in turn the importance of language acquisition – both for one's own research and one's future job prospects - and the problems and benefits of using linguistic (and therefore cultural) interpreters. Even if a researcher understands a language, s/he may not enjoy the cultural clout and accessibility that an interpreter can provide. Here, members of the audience weighed in on the importance and challenges of balancing linguistic pursuits with the limitations time and resources inevitably place on a project.

The roundtable closed with a discussion of colonialism, neocolonialism, and orientalism, a discourse from which analyses of Germany's role have largely been excluded until recently. Although there was some back-and-forth above all about the usefulness of the blanket term “transnational” for studies of colonialism, anti-colonialism, neocolonialism and international relations, all panel and audience members in the end agreed on the necessity of reframing the debate from the traditional colonial powers to frequently ignored German voices; from neocolonialism as a French, British, and American phenomenon to something in which postwar Germanies took part; from histories that reinforce the hegemonial and orientalist narratives to global studies that place Germany, Germans, and *Deutschtum* - as well as subaltern actors and influences - in requisite historical and local contexts, at times far removed from the territorial and cultural boundaries of what has typically been considered German and in situations that often evade strict colonial and neocolonial typologies. All also agreed on the importance of extending the conversation into the next GSA conference.

Randall Halle is the Klaus W. Jonas Professor of German Film and Cultural Studies at the University of Pittsburgh. His books include *The Europeanization of Cinema* and *German Film after Germany*. His essays have appeared in journals such as *New German Critique*, *Screen*, *Camera Obscura*, *German Quarterly*, and *Film-Philosophy*. Halle has received grants from the NEH, the DAAD, and the SSRC. For the academic year 2004-2005 he was a Senior Fellow in the Berlin Program.

Brittany Lehman is a PhD candidate in modern European History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Funded by a fellowship with the Berlin Program and grants from the DAAD, and the Central European History Society, her dissertation "Teaching Migrant Children: The Evolution of Education Policy in the FRG and Europe, 1949-1992" is an interdisciplinary look at school initiatives for foreign nationals in Germany after the Second World War.

Nicholas Ostrum is a PhD candidate in modern European History at Stony Brook University. He received his MA in 2012. A Berlin Program Fellow in 2013-2014, he is currently writing his dissertation, "From Autarky to Globalization: The West German Pursuit of Oil in the Arab World, 1957-1974," which follows the Deutsche Erdoel AG and Gelsenberg AG - two of Germany's largest energy concerns - in their quests to acquire Syrian and Libyan petroleum to feed the growing West German demand. The research for this project has received additional support from the CES, GHI, and SBU.

David Pizzo is a professor of history at Murray State University in Murray, Kentucky (USA). His research interests include German history, modern European history, imperialism, genocide, and structures of power. He regularly leads student programs abroad and has lived and worked in Germany, South Africa, Tanzania, Italy, and Greece.

Sara Pugach is an associate professor of African and German history at California State University, Los Angeles. She is the author of *Africa in Translation: A History of Colonial Linguistics in Germany and Beyond, 1814-1945*, which appeared with University of Michigan Press in 2012. Currently, she is working on a new book about African students in the German Democratic Republic.

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