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Foreign Relations: Where Germans Sell

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By now there is not much resistance to the notion that historians of modern Germany should pay heed to events outside the borders of the *Reich* or nation-state (though, even now, Austria and Switzerland often remain an afterthought). At the 2006 annual conference of the German Studies Association in Pittsburgh, Michael Geyer spoke of transnational history as "the new consensus." His keynote address bore the title "Where Germans Dwell"—a clear indication that the subject matter of German history must include transplants such as Jürgen Klinsmann and Arnold Schwarzenegger, as well as the German diaspora of prior centuries.[1] In keeping with this agenda, H. Glenn Penny has played a significant role in organizing scholarship on Germans abroad, whereas Kira Thurman is exploring how African Americans experienced German musical culture.[2] The scope of transnational German history remains vast.

The time has come to think more systematically about other dimensions of German influence in the wider world over the past half-century. West Germany's culture of modesty—the *Haltung der Zurückhaltung*, as Johannes Paulmann calls it—made a convincing show of eschewing great-power ambitions.[3] West Germany was nevertheless one of the world's largest economies and a leading player in the capitalist world system. German priorities helped to shape not just the European Union (EU) but also the policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank as well. The geographic reach of German exports extended well beyond far-flung ethnic diasporas; it was more universal than even that of the United States, which was often constrained by geopolitical conflict (in Iran, Cuba, and elsewhere). German aid, investments, and wares could have a stark impact on the societies that welcomed them, as suggested by Bernhard Rieger's well-crafted study of the Volkswagen Beetle as a global product.[4]

The following reflections are not a plug for business history in the narrow sense, or for diplomatic history as practiced forty years ago. The concept of *foreign relations* is broader than either of these categories. Instead, it considers how German values, actions, exports, and money affected outcomes beyond the borders of the German states. Compared with transnational history, which focuses overwhelmingly on non-state actors, the study of

[1]Michael Geyer, "Where Germans Dwell: Transnationalism in Theory and Practice," *German Studies Association Newsletter* 31, no. 2 (2006): 29–37.

[2]See the special issue on "Rethinking Germans Abroad," edited by H. Glenn Penny and Stefan Rinke, in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 41, no. 2 (2015); Kira Thurman, "Black Venus, White Bayreuth: Race, Sexuality, and the Depoliticization of Wagner in Postwar West Germany," *German Studies Review* 35, no. 2 (2012): 607-26.

[3]See the editor's introduction to Johannes Paulmann, ed., *Auswärtige Repräsentationen. Deutsche Kulturdiplomatie nach 1945* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005).

[4]Bernhard Rieger, *The People's Car: A Global History of the Volkswagen Beetle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

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foreign relations typically involves a more sustained emphasis on official institutions—though no government could ignore the demands of civil society, the "realities behind diplomacy," for very long.[5] In what follows, the first section sketches out several facets of German foreign relations; the next one considers how and why the field of German history would benefit from more attention to international questions.

The Breadth of Foreign Relations

Skeptical readers can be forgiven for imagining that the field of German foreign relations is already well covered. General overviews of East and West German foreign policy are readily available.[6] Diplomatic history—in the sense of ambassadors talking to other ambassadors—arouses little interest; the fact that most practicing "diplomatic" historians usually ground their research in a deeper political, economic, and military context has not entirely erased the stigma surrounding the study of foreign policy as such. Although there is surely value in careful analysis of personal relationships at the top level—between Willy Brandt and Leonid Brezhnev, Helmut Schmidt and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, or Helmut Kohl and François Mitterrand—the field of "foreign relations" looks well beyond the files of the Foreign Office (*Auswärtiges Amt*) and the Chancellor's Office. Virtually every aspect of the modern state and economy exhibits European and global dimensions.

Development aid has attracted a moderate degree of attention in the past decade and a half. East and West Germany both developed extensive ties with the Global South involving capital loans for infrastructure projects and technical assistance for training workers. Research into these programs allows ample scope for a critique of the underlying assumptions: however well-meaning, development aid had "neo-imperialist" aspects and was seldom as effective as hoped.[7] Yet, regardless of the outcomes, the allocation of billions of marks points to a massive endeavor that revealed a great deal about how Germans saw the world. It also reached deep into German society, with volunteer agencies such as the German Development Service (*Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst*) deploying thousands on a worldwide basis. To date, no more than a handful of case studies about German aid programs have appeared, and the core West German institution (the Ministry for Economic Cooperation) has scarcely been touched.[8]

As a window onto West German relations with the developing world, development aid is just the beginning. For many newly independent countries, military aid was in great demand. Sometimes it was the Bundeswehr that supplied the training, which included the sending of officers to Guinea, Nigeria, and Tanzania. On other occasions it was the Interior Ministry

[5]Paul Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy, 1865–1980* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981).

[6]Helga Haftendorn, *Coming of Age: German Foreign Policy since 1945*, trans. Deborah Kaiser (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); Hermann Wentker, *Außenpolitik in engen Grenzen. Die DDR im internationalen System 1949–1989* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2007).

[7]Hubertus Büschel, *Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe. Deutsche Entwicklungsarbeit in Afrika 1960–1975* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2014); Young-sun Hong, *Cold War Germany, the Third World, and the Global Humanitarian Regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[8]Bastian Hein, *Die Westdeutschen und die Dritte Welt. Entwicklungspolitik zwischen Reform und Revolte 1959–1974* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2005); John W. Weigel, "Dramatizing Development: The Celebration and Reality of West German Village Projects in West Africa, 1962-1977" (PhD Diss., Carnegie Mellon University, 2016).

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that equipped local police units—as in Afghanistan before the overthrow of the monarchy in 1973. Military ties were especially significant for relations with Germany's Mediterranean allies—Portugal, Greece, and Turkey—and this, in turn, generated impassioned domestic resistance. As with most aspects of foreign relations, East Germany's foreign military engagements have attracted greater attention from historians.[9]

Nor was aid (military or otherwise) the only form of West German economic engagement beyond Western Europe. Many companies made substantial investments overseas—including, of course, Mercedes and BMW plants in the US South and Volkswagen factories in Mexico and Brazil. Other German firms specialized in selling complete factories, a particular favorite among development dictatorships from Libya to the Soviet Union. Few of these private transactions came to pass without "Hermes" guarantees, a kind of government export insurance program whose files might, if consulted by historians, open wide the story of Germany's export machine. The prospects become more intriguing when one recalls just how controversial many projects were: the export of nuclear reactors to Iran and Brazil in the 1970s, or the sale of "dual-use" chemical factories to Iraq in the 1980s. Meanwhile, research into the international role of Bonn's (and later Berlin's) Ministry for Research and Technology would surely cast important light on the strategies of the German nuclear, chemical, and aviation industries.

One could go down the roster of a typical West German cabinet and find foreign relations projects relating to every seat. The Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture? Europe's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), backed by German contributions, had global ramifications.[10] The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs? A whole nest of bilateral agreements governed the treatment of guest workers and their remittances. The Ministry for Economic Affairs? For many years, this was the body coordinating efforts toward European integration. The Ministry of the Interior, and later an independent Ministry for the Environment, cooperated intensively with Western counterparts in fighting pollution and climate change. A cabinet committee oversaw the work of the Bundesnachrichtendienst (Federal Intelligence Service, BND)—another West German institution intimately involved in foreign relations. Thus far, the BND has, like several other West German bureaucracies, been examined mainly from the standpoint of personnel continuities with the Nazi past; study of the agency's external work is only just beginning.[11] Here again, the international reach of the East German Ministry of State Security (Stasi) has garnered more attention, thanks to Douglas Selvage and his colleagues at the Federal Commission for Stasi Records (BStU).[12]

[9]Hans-Joachim Döring, *"Es geht um unsere Existenz." Die Politik der DDR gegenüber der Dritten Welt am Beispiel von Mosambik und Äthiopien* (Berlin: Christoph Links, 1999); Klaus Storkmann, *Geheime Solidarität. Militärbeziehungen und Militärhilfen der DDR in die 'Dritte Welt'* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2012). On West German military aid and export policies, see William Glenn Gray, "Waffen aus Deutschland? Bundestag, Rüstungshilfe und Waffenexport 1961 bis 1975," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 64, no. 2 (2016): 327-64.

[10]Kiran Klaus Patel, *Europäisierung wider Willen. Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland in der Agrarintegration der EWG 1955-1973* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2009).

[11]On the work of the "Unabhängige Historikerkommission zur Erforschung der Geschichte des Bundesnachrichtendienstes 1945-1968," see http://www.uhk-bnd.de.

[12]See, e.g., Douglas Selvage and Christopher Nehring, *Die AIDS-Verschwörung: Das Ministerium für Staatssicherheit und die AIDS-Desinformationskampagne des KGB* (Berlin: Der Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 2014).

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German philanthropies add yet another layer to the consideration of foreign relations. Because foundation activity can appear as an expression of civil society, scholars have tended to categorize East and West German fundraising for the Global South as a "transnational" topic rather than as a dimension of foreign relations.[13] Institutions such as the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS) nevertheless relied on federal budget appropriations for their funding, marking them as quasi-governmental entities. In many cases, representatives of these foundations quietly supplemented "official" policy—for example, by signaling support for the anti-Portuguese rebels of the Liberation Front of Mozambique at a time when Willy Brandt's government in Bonn wished to avoid giving offense to Portuguese authorities. The "democracy-promotion" agenda of both the KAS and FES extended into party-building activities, influencing the course of events in many targeted countries and generating much controversy along the way.[14]

The sum total of these activities suggests that East, West, and united Germany had significant interactions with just about every country on earth. The impact runs even deeper when one considers the role played by German representatives in helping to define basic capitalist principles at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), trade policies at the World Trade Organization (WTO), lending practices at the World Bank, and financial and currency regimes at the IMF. At the United Nations, the Federal Republic played a reasonably prominent role upon joining in 1973, sponsoring resolutions against terrorism and helping to promote the cause of Namibian independence.[15] Not surprisingly, German policy toward European integration has garnered somewhat more attention from historians, but even here the emphasis lies more on institution-building than on demonstrating how German initiatives shaped European policies over time. There is much to be learned from poring over records from the finance and economy ministries in Koblenz, as well as the deliberations of the Central Bank documented at the Historical Archive of the German Bundesbank in Frankfurt am Main.

The Significance of Foreign Relations

Why should scholars with an interest in German history—particularly those writing for an English-language audience—concern themselves with how divided Germany, and, for that matter, united Germany, helped to shape events in near neighbors or distant lands? A rash of bilateral case studies (Germany-Spain, Germany-Togo, Germany-Mexico) would probably not, by themselves, revolutionize the field.[16] But a problem-oriented approach could yield significant insights. How did Germans attempt to stabilize resurgent democracies in Southern Europe in the 1970s? Did German aid programs and export credits tend to

[13]See Gregory Witkowski and Arnd Bauernkämper, eds., *German Philanthropy in Transatlantic Perspective: Perceptions, Exchanges and Transfers since the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Springer, 2016).

[14]Volker Vinnai, *Demokratieförderung in Afrika. Die Zusammenarbeit der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung mit politischen Parteien und Befreiungsbewegungen in Afrika* (Berlin: LIT, 2007); Detlef Nolte and Nikolaus Werz, eds., *Internationale Parteienverbände und parteinahe Stiftungen in Lateinamerika* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2014).

[15]Bernhard Blumenau, *The United Nations and Terrorism: Germany, Multilateralism, and Antiterrorism Efforts in the 1970s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[16]Franco-German relations are something of a special case; the literature in that area is enormous. Some bilateral case studies have indeed proven worthwhile; see, e.g., Tim Szatkowski, *Gaddafis Libyen und die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1969 bis 1982* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2013). Also see Sandrine Kott's remarks on their "relational history" in her contribution to this commemorative issue.

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increase the longevity of authoritarian regimes; did German human-rights activism help to stimulate humanitarian reforms in targeted countries? What role did German capital and the example (or legend) of the "economic miracle" play in the emergence of the Asian Tigers in the 1980s? To what extent did the German penchant for austerity measures inspire or reinforce a hard line at the IMF toward debtor countries? How did the work of the Trustee Agency *(Treuhandanstalt*) in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) relate to privatization efforts in other post-Soviet countries?[17] Historians have written about West Germany's return to global markets in the early postwar era, but they have yet to treat the Federal Republic as a significant actor in shaping the texture of global capitalism since the 1960s.[18]

Is it an anachronism to focus specifically on German policy, given that West Germans often preferred to act in tandem with other Western allies? Many scholars have opted for *international* history, examining the dynamic interaction among a number of states that happen to include the Federal Republic. Such work reveals a great deal about, say, rivalries within the European Community (EC) or competing development approaches in India; yet, by definition, the narrative emphasis of international history points away from German history as such.[19] The great advantage of a foreign-relations approach is that it can speak to questions German historians have long been asking: How did the legacy of a lost colonial empire shape German behavior in the postcolonial world? In what specific ways did the Nazi past constrain East and West German foreign policy options?[20] How did the breakthrough of feminism and other "new social movements" inflect German priorities for developing countries? A foreign relations approach can throw German values into sharp relief.

German viewpoints can also supplement (or challenge) the vibrant subgenre of US history focused on international problems. Institutionally, this field is represented by the Society for History of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR). Its flagship journal is still called *Diplomatic History*, which may sound dated, but much of the work it publishes is culturally inflected—exemplified by Frank Costigliola's strong push for the consideration of emotions in foreign relations.[21] Not surprisingly, articles and conference papers in this

[17]Some work in this direction is underway at the Berlin office of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte, which is running a team project on privatization policy in the former GDR, Poland, and the Czech Republic. See Dierk Hofmann, "Im Laboratorium der Marktwirtschaft: Zur Geschichte der Treuhandanstalt 1989/90 bis 1994. Ein neues Forschungsprojekt des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 66, no. 1 (2018): 167-85.

[18]Ludolf Herbst, Werner Bührer, and Hanno Sowade, eds., *Vom Marschallplan zur EWG. Die Eingliederung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in die westliche Welt* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1990); Reinhard Neebe, *Weichenstellung für die Globalisierung. Deutsche Weltmarktpolitik, Europa und Amerika in der Ära Ludwig Erhard* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2004).

[19]N. Piers Ludlow, *The European Community and the Crises of the 1960s: Negotiating the Gaullist Challenge* (London: Routledge, 2006); Corinna Unger, *Entwicklungspfade in Indien. Eine internationale Geschichte 1947–1980* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2015).

[20]See, e.g., Susanna Schrafstetter, "The Long Shadow of the Past: History, Memory, and the Debate over West Germany's Nuclear Status, 1954-69," *History and Memory* 16, no. 1 (2004): 118-45. For a taste of his forthcoming study on the ways in which the Nazi past affected East and West German reactions to genocides that took place in other countries after 1945, see Andrew I. Port, "Courting China, Condemning China: East and West German Cold War Diplomacy in the Shadow of the Cambodian Genocide," *German History* 33, no. 4 (2015): 588-608.

[21]Frank Costigliola, "After Roosevelt's Death: Dangerous Emotions, Divisive Discourses, and the Abandoned Alliance," *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 1 (2010): 1-23.

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subfield are often critical of US foreign policy; yet, they nevertheless tend to reinforce a perspective of "America and the rest," with US actions assumed to be the central defining characteristic of the world since 1945. Examining the world from the horizons of Paris or Bonn or Oslo is no more complete, but these European angles do help to "decenter" the narrative focus on America that imbues a large proportion of writing on international topics.

Projects on postwar German foreign relations may also contribute to an understanding of political, economic, and social circumstances in countries that otherwise receive little scholarly attention. Historians steeped in European historiography might not claim particular expertise in Sri Lankan or Ugandan affairs, but, in examining German interactions with such countries, they can bring to bear a wide array of German-language sources that offer a unique perspective on that other society. The more that Germanists develop parallel language skills gauged to those countries, the richer, of course, the contribution. Meanwhile, attention to German behavior in the wider world—or even vis-à-vis near neighbors in Scandinavia and the Low Countries—can help stimulate novel questions beyond the kinds of *Sonderweg* topics that have characterized a good share of the "nation-state-driven" German historiography.[22]

To date, the research on various strains of German foreign relations has not been grouped together as a common enterprise. Banking historians may write about the Deutsche Bank's branch on Wall Street; business historians may write about adapting German products to the North American market; diplomatic historians may ponder the effects of Bonn's "offset" purchases of US weaponry—all without referring to one another's work or attending the same conferences.[23] To some extent, this probably mirrors the tunneled perceptions of the actors involved. But scholars seeking to transcend the horizons of their historical subjects may find it worthwhile to piece together broader patterns in German international behavior, exploring the interconnections among military, diplomatic, and economic issues in a wide variety of geographic and institutional contexts. There may not be scope for an entire journal on German foreign relations, but interested historians could use existing conference frameworks to canvass more deliberately for a clear definition of the field's most urgent themes and questions. The remit of foreign relations extends to wherever Germans sell, in the broadest sense of the word—that is, practically everywhere.

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[22] See Jürgen Kocka's discussion of the *Sonderweg* in this commemorative issue.

[23] Christopher Kobrak, *Banking on Global Markets: Deutsche Bank and the United States, 1870 to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Susanne Hilger, *"Amerikanisierung" deutscher Unternehmen. Wettbewerbsstrategien und Unternehmenspolitik bei Henkel, Siemens und Daimler-Benz (1945/49–1975)* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2004); Hubert Zimmermann, *Money and Security: Troops, Monetary Policy, and West Germany's Relations with the United States and Britain, 1950–1971* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

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