

# H-Net Reviews

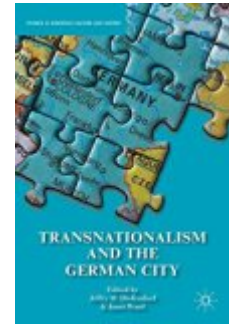
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Jeffrey M. Diefendorf, Janet Ward, eds. *Transnationalism and the German City*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2014. ix + 277 pp. \$100.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-137-39016-5.

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## Transnational Meets Local in the German City

*Transnationalism and the German City* is an important interdisciplinary contribution to the fields of transnational history, urban studies, German history, and German studies. Editors Jeffrey Diefendorf and Janet Ward have assembled an impressive range of contributions from anthropologists, architects, planners, historians, and German studies scholars. In their introduction, Diefendorf and Ward frame the volume's purpose as a caution against a dramatic turn to transnational methods that disregards the importance of national, regional, and local influences and events. To this end, the volume succeeds in its aim to "show evidence of a '(trans)nationalism': a transnational set of processes co-existing amidst and alongside local, regional, and national identities rather than supplanting and dissolving them" (pp. 3-4). While this framework lends the volume a defensive air, it also reveals the editors' and contributors' willingness to allow empirical evidence to shape their conclusions about the value of transnational analysis in the European city. For example, Diefendorf and Ward question "the seeming smoothness of the 'fit' between transnationalism and the German city" (p. 3), demonstrated by contributions from Diefendorf, Elizabeth Drummond, and Janina Fuge. Conversely, contributions from Daniel Purdy, Bettina Stoetzer, Deborah Ascher Barnstone, Tracy Graves, and John Maciuika illustrate a keen understanding of both the impact of transnational influences within the German city as well as scholarship on the public sphere, historic preservation, and museum studies beyond the German context.

The essays in part 1 support the editors' claim that a transnational lens contextualizes the local (p. 8). Indeed, cultural studies scholar Purdy argues that broad understandings of "global" enable city planners to define the "local" as "a single city, a nation, or all of Europe" (p. 13) in his essay, "Enlightenment in the European City: Rethinking German Urbanism and the Public Sphere." Purdy also engages with a transnational historiography, noting that architectural historians question the viability of "the concept of Asian and Islamic city typology," yet discourses regarding the idealized European city persist (p. 17). Building on existing scholarship of the public sphere, Purdy deftly leverages the fields of city planning and architecture as spaces where the local and the global meet. Here Purdy critiques the traditional arguments that urban public spaces must be preserved to facilitate democratic and capitalist exchange. Through his use of early modern architectural treatises, Purdy demonstrates "the history of privacy constitutes an important component in globalization" (p. 15). Private rooms, therefore, are just as critical to democratic and capitalist exchange as the public sphere. He also calls for attention to "media-defined public spaces" to meet the analytical challenges of "urban political confrontations" drawing on pamphlets or the Internet as extensions of physical space (p. 22).

Using the context of transnational potential as a benchmark, historian Drummond explores the impact of transnational cooperation—or lack thereof—in the German-Polish borderland. Her essay, "Posen or Poznan, Rathaus or Ratusz: Nationalizing the Cityscape in

the German-Polish Borderland,” reveals the city’s capacity to become a “bridge between cultures and nations” rather than the “battleground for growing hostilities between German and Polish nationalists” that dominates Posen/Poznan’s urban history (p. 39). Drummond’s careful analysis of nationalist disputes over place names and the political uses of street addresses contributes to the growing body of scholarship on the impact of imperial power and resistance in Eastern Europe. In addition, she fleshes out the role of human agency in the changing cityscape, noting, for example, that nineteenth-century individuals who self-identified as Germans could tour the “German” city despite the fact that nationally significant Polish sites stood in physical proximity and vice versa (p. 44).

Urbanist Stephan Lanz uses transnational mobility to contextualize the evolution of Berlin as a “Social City” from the Wilhelmine period to the present era. He defines “Social City” as “a city that actively seeks to solve social problems through a wide range of policies” in his essay, “Inclusion and Segregation in Berlin, the ‘Social City’” (p. 55). While historians may find Lanz’s history of Berlin as a Social City disjointed, his analysis of the term and its use as a lens to reveal urban patterns of social exclusion “that work against transnational mobility” is rather innovative. Lanz concludes that although the concept of the Social City was historically conceived in contrast to the structure of the American city, its current focus on local needs and neighborhoods is actually “tacitly informed by American models” (p. 68). Thus, the Social City itself both reveals transnational mobility and is a product of transnational exchanges.

Stoetzer, an anthropologist, uses “wild barbecuing” in the Berlin Tiergarten as a case study of a confluence of transnational influences in urban space in her essay, “‘Wild Barbecuing’: Urban Citizenship and the Politics of Transnationality in Berlin’s Tiergarten.” A testament to the interdisciplinary strength of this volume, Stoetzer’s sources include ethnographic material she gathered in Berlin between 2007 and 2012. For Stoetzer, barbecuing is a common lens for the study of migrants and contested ideas of citizenship in urban spaces of Berlin and Istanbul. While the majority of German Social Democrats and Christian Democrats in Berlin disapproved of barbecuing as creating uncontrolled spaces occupied by migrants, Green and Left politicians as well as the Turkish Union and some Social Democrats defended the practice (p. 76). From the migrant perspective in both cities, barbecuing became a means to take a break from everyday life and engage with nature. Stoetzer’s

transnational analysis reveals that the occupation of the Tiergarten by barbecuers is a political act and official efforts to control that space aligned with efforts to control “others” in German society. By extension, Stoetzer, like Drummond, highlights the importance of individual agency in the consumption and use of urban spaces.

Part 2 of the volume illustrates the importance of analyzing transnational networks and influences in German cities without obscuring the local. For example, the first essay explores the transnational nature of architect Ernst May’s mass housing projects in Breslau in the 1920s. Historian and architect Ascher Barnstone analyzes the transnational influences upon, and appeal of, Ernst May’s anti-modern Modernism in her essay, “Transnational Dimensions of German Anti-Modern Modernism: Ernst May in Breslau.” Drawing on social concerns raised by transnational reformers criticizing the effects of industrialization, May responded to the need for architecture that addressed post-World War I housing shortages and successfully negotiated urban politics and local living preferences. According to Barnstone, May’s Breslau projects, such as Goldschmied, are a product of his transnational awareness and attention to local aesthetics and house plans. May’s success and the longevity of his ideas about modernism and standardization, as Barnstone argues, are most clearly understood at the intersection of transnational and local architectural developments.

Historian Rosemary Wakeman’s study of Socialist New Towns in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) demonstrates the role of both past and present international networks in “Was There an Ideal Socialist City? Social New Towns as Modern Dreamscapes.” Wakeman uses the New Towns of Stalinstadt/Eisenhuettenstadt, Schwedt, Hoyerswerda, and Halle-Neustadt to show that “ideal Socialist cities were not fundamentally different from the urban utopias imagined in the capitalist world” (p. 106). She cites two main factors to support her argument: both East and West Germans were interested in utopian and regenerative visions of the future; and many GDR architects and planners such as Richard Paulick had experience with Bauhaus and *Neues Bauen* styles from their early careers in the Weimar Republic and the transnational networks that developed during exile after 1933 (p. 106). Wakeman concludes that these similarities evolved from “a complex transnational framework,” not the least of which is an idealized culture of consumption after the 1960s demonstrated in the plan for Halle-Neustadt (p. 121).

Transnational networks and conflicts in a Cold War

framework challenge the traditional dichotomies of East versus West Berlin and United States versus Soviet Union in architectural historian Greg Castillo's chapter, "Housing as Transnational Provocation in Cold War Berlin." Comparing the construction of high rises in the pre-Berlin Wall period from 1945 to 1961, Castillo traces examples of political provocation along the permeable border of West and East Berlin. Castillo's main example contrasts the development of the Marshall Plan-funded West Berlin Innsbrucker Platz high rise and its East Berlin counterpart, Weberwiese. He clearly portrays each construction project and its associated architects as the product of transnational competition between East and West, as well as lenses into US-West German and Soviet-East German relations in the 1950s. Castillo concludes that "as a source of political provocation, East Berlin's first generation of socialist housing ... succeeded all too well" (p. 137). Indeed, the urban landscape of postwar Berlin was shaped by the broader transnational geopolitical Cold War framework.

Urban planner and historian Dirk Schubert "trace[s] the origins of the neighborhood idea in Germany, Britain, and the USA" in his essay, "Transatlantic Crossings of Planning Ideas: The Neighborhood Unit in the USA, UK, and Germany" (p. 142). Schubert's analysis features as examples uses of the neighborhood unit from postwar London and Hamburg and is in good company with Barnstone, Wakeman, and Castillo as it illustrates transnational consensus and agency among urban planners in the International Federation for Housing and Town Planning during the 1920s and 1930s. Schubert also demonstrates the flawed concept of *Stunde Null* in post-1945 Hamburg, where the term "neighborhood" was tainted by National Socialism and displaced by other terms like "estate node" (p. 150). The terms were changed but the individual planners and their use of the transnationally inspired neighborhood concept was not radically different from the policies pursued under National Socialism. Schubert notes this versatility of the concept of neighborhoods as one of its vulnerabilities: that is, there was great potential for its "misuse for purposes of social control" (p. 155).

Editors Diefendorf and Ward claim the tensions between urban culture and a sense of place illustrated in part 3 is part of the central logic of the volume (p. 6). Diefendorf's essay, "Princes, Fools, Parades and Wild Women: Creating, Performing, and Preserving Urban Identity through Carnival in Cologne and Basel," demonstrates this argument well. He asserts, "the study of urban culture as a transnational phenomenon can serve as

an antidote to an excessive focus on the nation," yet "emphasizing the transnational poses a risk of neglecting the distinctive character of the culture of individual cities" (p. 162). Diefendorf, therefore, successfully utilizes the transnational practice of carnival to demonstrate how the seemingly similar festivals, both for permanent and new residents alike, "maintain the unique identity for the city," a task entrusted to exclusive carnival and *Fasnacht* [Shrove Tuesday] clubs (pp. 163-164). As Diefendorf demonstrates, carnival in Cologne remained so integral to local identity that carnival societies met as early as September 1945 to resume the annual ritual and assert the dominance of local identity over national and transnational narratives after the destruction World War II (p. 169).

Historian Fuge examines the topic of fallen soldiers in her essay, "The Local, the National—and the Transnational? Spatial Dimensions in Hamburg's Memory of World War I during the Weimar Republic." Fuge focuses on the commemoration days of *Totensonntag* and *Volkstrauertag* as representative of the potential of transnational memory during the Weimar Republic. She acknowledges German efforts to honor British and German war casualties on *Totensonntag* as "transnational particles" in a broader national memory culture, yet Fuge argues, "the Weimar Republic lacked the prerequisites necessary for the construction of war memories on a transnational level; and it ran out of time to achieve more" (p. 183). What those "prerequisites" were and how Germany's status as a losing nation in World War I affected its participation in a "transnational cultural memory" remain underexamined, however, as Fuge concludes that efforts to establish a transnational memory in interwar Germany were a failure.

The final essay in part 3, by urbanists and architects Nicole Huber and Ralph Stern, turns the discussion of transnational influence to films by Wim Wenders. Huber and Stern argue in "From the American West to West Berlin: Wim Wenders, Border Crossings, and the Transnational Imaginary" that Wenders "uses different genres to construct a transnational space of human experience, a space characterized by the continuous search for belonging only to find in the end one's own otherness" (p. 192). Huber and Stern, like the authors in part 2, emphasize the importance of Wenders's individual agency as a filmmaker in constructing a transnational dialogue between Cold War Berlin and the American West.

Part 4 outlines new trends in historical preservation in German cities. Planners Grischa F. Bertram and Fried-

helm Fischer's essay, "Post-Postwar Re-Constructions of a Destroyed *Heimat*: Perspectives on German Discourse and Practice," engages with the practice of recreating historic landmarks destroyed in World War II rather than preservation of their post-World War II state. The authors define re-construction as "projects that undertake to build something new on the site of a destroyed structure with conscious reference to what was there before" and provide an excellent chart of re-construction projects (pp. 207-208). Here, Bertram and Fischer interweave planning history and re-construction projects with dominant narratives of "Zero Hour/*Stunde Null*," denazification, and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Bertram and Fischer also offer an evenhanded discussion of re-construction debates and typologies in the FRG as well as the GDR and importantly continue their analysis through reunified Germany.

Like Bertram and Fischer, the third chapter in this section, "The Historic Preservation Fallacy? Transnational Culture, Urban Identity, and Monumental Architecture in Berlin and Dresden," by art and architectural historian John V. Maciuka, also takes multiple urban sites into account. Maciuka juxtaposes trends in historic preservation theory, including the world heritage movement, with popular movements surrounding the reconstruction of the Dresden Frauenkirche (Church of Our Lady) and the Berlin Stadtschloss (Hohenzollern Palace). Ultimately citing an evolving expansion of the field of historic preservation, Maciuka's arguments pair well with German studies scholar Tracy Graves's examination of the Berlin Museum Island.

While Maciuka, Bertram, and Fischer concentrate on several major cities such as Berlin, Dresden, and Frankfurt am Main, Graves narrows her focus to the Berlin Museum Island as a "site of negotiations between the actual and imagined past" (p. 223). Graves's contribu-

tion, "Berlin's Museum Island: Marketing the German National Past in the Age of Globalization," considers the "three key construction projects of the *Masterplan Museuminsel 2015*: the proposed 'Archaeological Promenade,' the planned entrance building to Museum Island, and the new fourth wing of the Pergamon Museum" (p. 224). She critiques the planners' lack of effort to engage with the colonial and Nazi pasts in the Archaeological Promenade and debates the symbolism of the glass and concrete construction of the Simon and Pergamon buildings. Graves's site-specific study reveals the connections and disconnections of the Museum Island's complicated past, as well as its future at the intersection of local and global in the heart of Berlin.

Diefendorf and Ward's *Transnationalism and the German City* brings needed attention to the intersection between the local and transnational in German urban history and German studies. While the contributors could engage more fully with relevant scholarship on transnational, national, and local urban identity outside of the German context, such as Evgeny Dobrenko and Eric Naiman's *The Landscape of Stalinism* (2003) and David Glassberg's *Sense of History* (2001), the volume remains grounded in its stated focus on the German city and effectively connects local processes with mainstream narratives in German history. This local emphasis is both a strength and weakness of the volume: at times the editors obscure contributors' diverse and innovative applications of transnational methods in an effort to downplay the impact of transnational narratives, framing them, for instance, as context for local processes (p. 8). Nonetheless, this interdisciplinary volume represents an important intervention in German and transnational studies, raising questions about the relationship between transnational and local influences in the context of the German city and laying foundations for future scholarship.

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