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Epochenübergreifende Studien

# *Jäger, Jens*: Das vernetzte Kaiserreich. Die Anfänge von Modernisierung und Globalisierung in Deutschland, 259 S., Reclam, Ditzingen 2020.

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In crisp prose and with an eye for interesting anecdotes that help crystallise complex ideas, Jens Jäger has written a fascinating book that makes abundantly clear the essentially modern and globally oriented nature of Germany prior to the First World War. As a book designed for a broader public rather than a scholarly monograph, what it lacks in detailed attention to the secondary literature, it makes up for in intelligibility, lucidity and largely persuasive argument.

As Jäger makes clear, the history of the increasing connectivity of the *Kaiserreich* is the history of the increased "Mobilität von Menschen, Dingen und Wissen" (p. 197). It was a product of innovations and improvements in transport and mobility (via the rapid expansion in rail networks and shipping lines as well as more quotidian technologies such as the humble bicycle), in communications (including postal services like postcards through to state-of-the-art telegram delivery services and the telephone) as well as through a surging print media landscape. The emerging "media society" (p. 129) brought people together virtually through serious newspapers and the accessible illustrated press. Even music and images were commodified and made globally accessible, Jäger comments, through the gradual spread of the phonograph and eventually film.

Domestically, this thickening and multiplication of the strands of connectivity also took place within the context of the struggle to consolidate the political and cultural unity of the new German nation-state, a "federal constitutional monarchy" (p. 33) in a geographical space where local and regional forms of identity and affiliation had traditionally dominated. Jäger offers an excellent summary of the political structures of the new German Empire, although his discussion of the subordination of the *Reichstag* to the *Bundesrat* and the Chancellor perhaps undervalues the sporadic

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inventiveness of *Reichstag* parties and deputies, and their capacity to move beyond the formal constitutional limits of the chamber to effect meaningful political change.

Interestingly, Jäger is able to demonstrate convincingly that part of the success in creating a national culture came not by denying but rather blending, even emphasising, local strands of identification with newer supra-regional forms. The construction of this expanded sense of what constituted the German national self was the exclusionary redefining of outsiders and a renewed emphasis on threats to this ostensibly fragile unified nation. This led to vigorous campaigns of persecution against religious, political or ethnic minorities as part of a process of nationalist consolidation. Alongside Benedict Anderson's 'imagined communities', Jäger confirms, stood equally imagined enemies.

Of course, central to the processes of fostering growing connectivity was its external form, which Jäger describes as globalisation. Commendably, he quickly fuses the term to another, less neutral but arguably more apposite one: global imperialism. At the same time, however, he is quick to quarantine the colonial from the national, claiming that "von den Verhältnissen in den Kolonien bekamen die meisten Deutschen jedoch kaum etwas mit" (p. 191). This view, it is worth pointing out, is not dissimilar to that of Bernard Porter regarding the British Empire, and one successfully called into question by John MacKenzie. It would be surprising if a careful analysis of the consciousness of colonial relations inside Germany did not yield a similar confirmation of a broad social awareness of Germany's entanglements with the extra-European world.

Part of this globalisation involved becoming enmeshed in the 'global' (but largely European) architecture being fleshed out by the global North, namely the *Weltpostverein*, the Red Cross, the International Council of Women, as well as the international Olympic Committee and football's FIFA. A more central part of this globalisation, however, was trade; not only with Germany's European neighbours but also with the colonies of Germany and, more commonly, of other European powers in Africa, Asia, the Pacific and the Americas. This colonial dimension of global trade might perhaps have been made more explicit via some well-chosen examples. When, for example the sources of many of Germany's imports are named as Argentina, British India and Brazil (pp. 56–57), the colonial conditions structuring the extraction of materials from such places might be worth dwelling on, if only for a couple of sentences.

Globalisation was also about the dynamic processes of settler colonialism, which are perhaps too benignly rendered by Jäger as "emigration". This emigration was central to the displacement and territorial losses suffered by indigenous peoples the world over, whether in North or South America, Australasia or South (and Southwest) Africa. The mobility of Europeans, that is, was predicated on the extinguishment of non-European sovereignty over land and their own affairs.

Jäger, that is, goes a long way to making clear what has long been obscured by more sanguine accounts of growing global connectivity, namely that talk of globalisation makes no sense without a discussion of imperialism. For every new export from the Global South to Europe there is a history of its connection to empire to be unpacked. Unreasonably, perhaps, I wish that he had gone further in this direction. This is all the more important in a work for a mass audience. When,

for example he states (quite strongly) "Der Erwerb von Kolonien war gleichsam die dunkle Seite der Globalisierung. [...] Ohne Gewalt kam kein Staat zu Kolonialbesitz" (p. 189), there is even more to be said. Colonialism and colonial violence are not merely a dark side of an otherwise successful process of globalisation. Rather, they are the primary structural features of the world historical conditions that enabled a small enclave of nations in Europe to enrich itself from the exploitation of the resources of the Global South, all the while explaining this process as the unfolding of economic necessity.