

# H-Diplo ROUNDTABLE XXI-28

Heidi Tworek. *News from Germany: The Competition to Control World Communications, 1900-1945.*

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INTRODUCTION BY UDI GREENBERG, DARTMOUTH COLLEGE

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Over the last two decades, historians of Germany have worked hard to internationalize their field. They have mapped how interactions with and thinking about the rest of the world deeply influenced German politics, thought, and social relations. One of the major benefits of this approach is the attention it has directed to hitherto less familiar historical actors. Just like social history resurrected the lives of peasants and workers, international history has helped to recover the work of merchants, colonial officials, humanitarian volunteers, and missionaries. The impact of these figures on domestic life is not always easy to chart, but is nevertheless significant. To take one prominent example, Germans' increasing tendency in the late nineteenth century to define linguistic and religious minorities (such as Poles, Catholics, and Jews) in ethnic and racial terms was deeply intertwined with the emergence of colonialist terminology to describe German conquests in Africa.<sup>1</sup>

In her exciting new book, *News from Germany: The Competition to Control World Communications, 1900-1945*, Heidi Tworek draws from and contributes to this methodological innovation by offering a fresh look at German news agencies. These new organizations, she shows, which were created to assemble and disseminate news at home and abroad, were not the natural product of new technologies, nor were they merely the invention of savvy entrepreneurs. Rather, they emerged from the hard-nosed desire of German policymakers, military leaders, and industrialists to establish Germany as a colonial and international power. Indeed, German elites were convinced that a flourishing German-owned press agency would greatly enhance their country's prestige across the globe. They poured considerable resources into the Wolff Telegraph Bureau, a news agency which quickly became one of the world's largest source of daily reports (alongside the British Reuters and French Havas), helped fund other agencies like Transocean, and continued to do so well into the Weimar Republic (when Wolff was nationalized under the control of the Foreign Office) and the Third Reich. As Tworek shows through a series of vivid episodes, the consequences of these efforts were often rife with ironies. While reports by German agencies did little to convert foreign readers to support Germany's ambitions, they helped accelerate the fall of the imperial regime that created those agencies: in November 1918, after Wolff's newspapers falsely reported that the Kaiser had resigned (a lie fed to them by Chancellor Maximilian von Baden), the monarch and his family decided to flee the country, leading to the end of World War I and the formation of the Weimar republic. News production, then, was where the domestic and international shaped each other.

All the participants in this forum, however, recognize that *News from Germany's* contributions go beyond the sphere of German history. Alongside their unanimous praise for the book's impressive research, decades-spanning scope, and vibrant prose, they all recognize that *News from Germany* reflects on topics that are central to public debates today, especially about the nature of technology, news, and politics. The simultaneous and recent balkanization of news consumption and the crisis of liberal democracy have led many to assume they are deeply interlinked. It is modern media's barrage of unregulated 'fake news,' many commentators claim, and consumers' inability to assess information critically, that have facilitated polarization and eroded good-faith democratic engagement. But as the reviewers note, Tworek's book shows that the border between news, propaganda, and opinions were blurry long before the rise of the internet. Many Germans took it for granted that the purpose of disseminating news was to further their country's prestige, and did not shy away from calling it propaganda. Perhaps even more striking, Tworek's evidence raises insightful questions about the ability of the news to actually shape political inclinations. While *News from Germany* has many success stories (such as Transocean's popularity in Latin America), its narrative is also rich with failures, with stories of readers ignoring Wolff's reports or drawing their own conclusions from them, sometimes in opposition to the writers' intents. The reviewers therefore comment both on the book's historical claims and its contemporary implications.

As a whole, the reviewers raise three key questions. The first, expressed most clearly by David Ciarlo, is whether Tworek at times overemphasizes the news agencies' ability to shape their agendas and visions. Wolff and Transocean, after all, were not only agents of German geopolitics; they were also the product of global economic and social conditions that determined the

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

spaces in which they could work. The success of Transocean's reports in South America, he suggests, was not simply due to the content of its reports. Rather, it was premised on a century of German ties to the region, through migration and transatlantic commerce. *New from Germany*, Ciarlo claims, "does not really grapple with how the successes and failures seen by these news networks might have hinged more fundamentally on larger cultural worldviews and developments. In short, they were as much a product of cultural history as of political, technological, and economic history."

The second question revolves around continuity and change. One of Tworek's claims is that the Wolff and Transocean's persistent significance under different regimes highlights important continuities between them. If the Nazis quickly took over Wolff in 1933 (by which time it was renamed the German News Bureau), this was in part because the Weimar government had already nationalized it and made it easy to control. Ciarlo, however, wonders how telling this continuation really is. The Nazis, after all, swiftly took over other news agencies which were not under state control (such as Telegraph Union), and did not need the Weimar precedent for their brutal regime of information control. Douglas Craig similarly wonders if the book rushes too quickly through the years of Nazism, seeing it as yet another variation in Germany's treatment of international news agencies rather than an important break with precedent.

Finally, the reviewers disagree about the specific implications that *New from Germany* offers to contemporary readers. Kate Lacey praises Tworek for offering "a powerful corrective to the prevailing amnesia of much contemporary media scholarship." She notes that Tworek's work shows how the contemporary panic about "fake news" and its implications for political culture are not the product of new technologies, but in fact symptoms of a fractured mass media market. If this is the case, perhaps we can learn from this past as we debate whether to ban false political advertisements in Facebook or even nationalize it altogether. Sarah Panzer, in contrast, wonders if Germany's history at that time is so distant and different than our own that it cannot provide us with tools for our own dilemmas. Wolff's pre-digital structure, after all, seems so different than agencies like Al Jazeera or Russia Today (RT), let alone social media giants like Facebook; its operation makes for a fascinating read, but not a clear guideline.

As these wide-ranging reflections indicate, *News from Germany* is a rich examination of timely issues. It explores Germany's specific and idiosyncratic participation in the international economy of knowledge and the very nature of knowledge, news, and politics. As Tworek notes in her thoughtful response, the book intentionally operates on both levels. On the one hand, it shows how German elites "prioritized different areas than the British or French" for news dissemination (focusing, for example, on Latin America, where British and French dominance was not as entrenched as in other parts of the world). The generals, politicians, and industrialists who stood behind Wolff and other agencies had a uniquely German vision of what international audiences mattered and which areas of the globe were worthy of investment. On the other hand, this history is nevertheless a useful tool, because it is a powerful reminder that both the hopes and anxieties we invest in the significance of the news to our politics far surpass their actual impact on readers' minds. Readers, after all, respond to certain news items and not the others not out of naiveté, but because their pre-existing social, cultural, and political backgrounds. As Tworek asserts, "fixing Facebook will not fix American democracy. But some historical perspective can help."

#### **Participants:**

**Heidi J.S. Tworek** is Assistant Professor of International History at University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. She is a Non-Resident Fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Canadian Global Affairs Institute. She has co-edited two volumes, *Exorbitant Expectations: International Relations and the Media in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Routledge, 2018) and *The Routledge Companion to the Makers of Global Business* (Routledge, 2019). She also co-edits the *Journal of Global History*.

**Udi Greenberg** is an associate professor of history at Dartmouth College. He is the author of *The Weimar Century: German Emigres and the Ideological Foundations of the Cold War* (Princeton University Press, 2015), as well as many articles on European thought, politics, and religion. He is currently working on a book on the transformation in Catholic-Protestant relations in Europe, from animosity to peace.

**David Ciarlo** is an Associate Professor of Modern European History at the University of Colorado at Boulder. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 2003. His first book, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany* (Harvard University Press, 2011) uses visual archives to trace the interconnected histories of commercial culture and colonial culture in Germany in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Ciarlo's new research project explores the intersection of consumer culture and propaganda in Germany during the First World War, and its implications for the formation of a fascist aesthetic in the 1920s.

**Douglas B. Craig** is a Reader in the School of History, Australian National University. He is the author of *After Wilson: The Struggle for the Democratic Party, 1920-1934* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), *Fireside Politics: Radio and Political Culture in the United States, 1920-1940* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), and *Progressives at War: William G. McAdoo and Newton D. Baker, 1863-1941* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

**Kate Lacey** is Professor of Media History and Theory in the School of Media, Film and Music at the University of Sussex. With an interdisciplinary background in German, Politics, History and Media Studies, her research centres on how emergent media forms are bound up in the formation of publics, with a particular focus on how the act of mediated listening figures in modern public life. She has published widely, including two monographs: *Feminine Frequencies: Gender, German Radio and the Public Sphere, 1923 to 1945* (University of Michigan Press, 1996) and *Listening Publics: The Politics and Experience of Listening in the Media Age* (Polity, 2013). She was a founding member of the Radio Studies Network and sits on the editorial boards of *The Radio Journal* and *The International Journal of Cultural Studies*.

**Sarah Panzer** is Assistant Professor of 20th Century European history at Missouri State University. Her dissertation, "The Prussians of the East: Samurai, Bushido, and Japanese Honor in the German Imagination, 1905-1945," won the 2015 Fritz Stern Dissertation Prize. In this project, which she is currently revising for publication, she examines the reception and representation of Japanese martial culture in Germany between the Russo-Japanese War and the Second World War as an attempt to conceptualize an illiberal 'alternative modernity' premised on the synthesis of modern industry and cultural authenticity. Her recent publications include the book chapters "Der letzte Samurai: General Nogi as Transcultural Hero" (2017) and "Importing a German Kampfsport: The Reception and Practice of Japanese Martial Arts in Interwar Germany" (2019).

## REVIEW BY DAVID CIARLO, UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO

What is the relationship between information and influence? What is the difference between providing news and disseminating propaganda? These are the sorts of intriguing questions that emerge from a reading of Heidi Tworek's deeply-researched *News from Germany*. Tworek's book delves into the history of German news networks in the first half of the twentieth century—an era which saw dramatic shifts in all realms, including the economic, technological, and political. Understanding where 'news' comes from is crucial, since scholars so often use newspapers as evidence, but as Tworek relates, "they have missed how the networks behind the news molded what newspapers reported" (7). Tworek's approach to what constitutes a 'news network' is broad: it includes the press agencies that supplied news to papers, such as the Wolff Telegraph Bureau; the technological structures of transmission (the telegraph, wireless telegraphy, radio); the international businesses agreements that guided them; and the state agencies that oversaw them. Moreover, Tworek's investigation also sheds light on the 'mentality' of the actors involved in all of these structures. This book, then, is less about specific topics in the news cycle or even the changing tides of public opinion, but rather a history of the conduits and forces that structured these cycles and tides. While dense and detailed, it provides an invaluable resource for scholars across many different fields.

Tworek's first chapter shows how German elites—generals, political leaders, and businessmen—all became convinced of the importance of news agencies, the first in Germany being the Wolff Telegraph Bureau. The chapter spans a huge swath of time, showing Wolff's rise in the new German nation in the 1870s, its international position during Germany's pursuit of *Weltpolitik* around 1900, and its fluctuations in the tumult of the 1920s and 1930s. One persistent theme across these eras is that German elites tended to blame negative opinion (whether international or domestic) on "bad press," as Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow did in the notorious *Daily Telegraph* Affair of 1908 (27). Thus, elites across these four very different eras all came to believe in the possibility of and the importance of 'controlling' news through news agencies. But Tworek argues that this was naïve. Indeed, one of the more interesting tidbits buried in this chapter is how local papers—such as the Nazi *Hamburger Tageblatt* of the 1920s—'adapted' (distorted) Wolff communiqués to fit their own political agendas (33).

The second chapter delves into the construction of the communication networks that were the backbone of these agencies, as well as their fragility. Because the British took the lead in connecting the world (and their empire) via submarine cables, the geopolitical position of Germany amid growing international tensions after 1900 helped drive Germans to develop wireless news networks. We see, for instance, how General Helmut von Moltke (the Younger) pushed for government investment in a wireless network—using the firm Telefunken—to connect Germany to its African colonies, primarily by claiming that the French were building their own wireless network (46). But I would question the relationship of rhetoric to belief, here: did Moltke's words reveal a *real* fear of French wireless, or was it merely the usual rhetoric any general might use to pry funding loose from a tight-fisted government? Certainly, with the First World War, Germany's submarine cables across the Atlantic were cut, and Germany's construction of wireless towers intensified as it sought to disseminate news to neutral countries, most familiarly to the United States, but also, rather unexpectedly, to countries such as China.

Chapter three narrows its focus to post-war Germany itself. The chapter foregrounds the Wolff Bureau's reporting on two events—the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm in 1918, and the Kapp Putsch of 1920. In the first instance, Tworek argues that we see the influence of the Wolff network when it transmitted Prince Maximilian von Baden's announcement of the Kaiser's abdication (a surprise to the Kaiser!)—and when the announcement was reprinted throughout Germany, it became a reality. Here, Wolff was "an agent of change" (73). And revolutionaries in Berlin correspondingly struggled for control of Wolff, just as they struggled to control the levers of government. Wolff did become invested in the new Republic. However, in a very interesting vignette, during Kapp and Lüttwitz's attempted putsch in 1920, Wolff 'went along' with the coup by duly transmitting the missives of this 'new government' from Berlin. And yet such missives were *not* reprinted and/or accepted as 'official' across the rest of Germany. This reveals, Tworek argues, the contingency of a news network's influence. In Berlin, the putsch ultimately collapsed in the face of a general strike in Berlin; and this whole affair cost the Wolff Bureau: "the Kapp Putsch had laid bare its apparent obsequiousness to any political master, calling its central role into question" (97).

The fourth chapter looks at wireless news services as a precursor to radio. The chapter orients around Hans von Bredow, the secretary for Telegraph, Telephone, and Radio within the Postal Ministry. Before he became the ‘father of radio,’ Bredow supported a privately-owned wireless service for economic news, Eildienst, which would transmit such news as commodity prices. The Eildienst model of wireless, then, became the model upon which Germany’s later decentralized system of regional radio companies would be built (117). This is fascinating... and was news to me. Nonetheless, Tworek’s point that Bredow believed that radio should “deliver as *little* news as possible” (113 and 116, italics mine), is a bit head-scratching, as it seems to run contrary to so much rhetoric about the importance of news as the basis to inform a democratic electorate. Perhaps a greater explication of Bredow’s politics might help to alleviate my puzzlement.

Chapter Five shifts back to the international stage, namely to Istanbul, to show how Wolff employees could sometimes be also in the employ of the Foreign office. I found this to be a particularly intriguing chapter, as it offered a close and grassroots look at ‘cultural diplomacy’: namely, the efforts of the German state in close cooperation with business to influence Turkey through the supply of news. Importantly, we also see the bungling of many of these efforts, which is insightful, as failure can often be more revealing than success. (The chapter also offers a poignant glimpse of sexual harassment in the mid-1920s.)

The sixth chapter returns to Germany, focusing on the creation of Telegraph Union, a news agency began by Alfred Hugenberg. Hugenberg, a leader in the *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* (German National People’s Party), was also a radical right-wing press baron. He is usually seen as being pivotal to the early rise of the rabble-rousing politician Adolf Hitler (though overly-simplified arguments about Hugenberg’s easy manipulation of public opinion have been revised).<sup>2</sup> Tworek emphasizes how Hugenberg’s news service, Telegraph Union, stressed ‘economic nationalism’—namely, the promotion of German national economic interests inside and outside of Germany. Inside of Germany, Telegraph Union out-competed the more venerable Wolff, primarily by being faster—and this speed came from not worrying too much about accuracy. In a fascinating case-study, we see Telegraph Union spread ‘fake news’ that claimed a Soviet minister (Aleksandr Beloborodov) had been assassinated by a disgruntled monarchist: the goal was (presumably) to call into question Russian popular support for the new Soviet government. Meanwhile, the Wolff Bureau’s refutation of the (fake) assassination was *not* widely believed: fake news carried the day. Correlations with the present-day media landscape of the United States are hard to avoid.

In her seventh chapter, which covers the shift from the tumultuous Weimar Republic to the oppressive regime of the National Socialists, Tworek argues that the efforts to rein in and control news agencies before 1933 contributed to the ease with which the Nazis took them over after Hitler became Chancellor. In 1930, many government officials believed that the semi-official Wolff Telegraph Bureau was being eclipsed by Telegraph Union—Hugenberg’s right-wing news agency that was hostile to the very existence of the Weimar state. Tworek calculates, however, that subscriptions to Wolff and Telegraph Union were fairly evenly matched. The anxious Weimar government tried a number of different tacks, including cutting Telegraph Union off from official news; but ultimately, the decision was made to buttress Wolff by transforming it into a fully official news agency in 1931, under the control of the Foreign Office. When the Nazis came to power in 1933, then, they were handed the reins of Wolff, and reformed it into the German News Bureau, (*Deutsches Nachrichtenbureau*, DNB). In her argument emphasizing continuity here, Tworek corroborates recent scholarship that has traced continuities between Weimar and the Nazi Regime in such areas as censorship or radio and film production limitations.<sup>3</sup> But I wonder if the line of causality here is really so direct? Yes, Wolff was easily taken over by the Nazis; but Telegraph Union (once the erstwhile

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<sup>2</sup> Bernhard Fulda, for instance, argues that Germans read the newspapers featuring Hugenberg’s extreme nationalism more critically than we often presume. He does see the specter of violence and Communist revolution spread by Hugenberg’s papers as profoundly destabilizing to the Weimar Republic, however. Bernhard Fulda, *Press and Politics in the Weimar Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Kara Ritzheimer, *“Trash,” Censorship, and National Identity in Early Twentieth-Century Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Peter Jelavich, *Berlin Alexanderplatz: Radio, Film, and the Death of Weimar Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

Hitler-supporting Hugenberg had been dealt with) was also easily absorbed into the Nazified DNB—and Telegraph Union had been independent and autonomous. This minor quibble aside, Tworek's insights into the strengths and also the weaknesses of the DNB is an absolute must-read for anyone interested in the role of media under the Third Reich.

In her final chapter, Tworek extends her analysis of Nazi news agencies to the international stage by discussing Transocean, the news agency started by the German Foreign office back in the outbreak of the First World War. After 1933, Transocean—allegedly independent from the DNB, though very much under Nazi direction—continued to disseminate news worldwide, especially in South America. Tworek's chapter here is fascinating, delving into the tension between Transocean's business model and the growing conviction of many American officials (after 1941 especially) that Transocean was a de-facto espionage network. Indeed, the House Un-American Activities Committee investigated Transocean as early as 1940. We also see Transocean at work in East Asia, where we learn that Transocean was the number-one supplier of news to Japanese-occupied China! (219, 233) After 1945, all of these German news agencies were abolished, of course, and eventually replaced (in a partial fashion) by the German Press Agency (*Deutsche Presse-Agentur*), an independent cooperative business modeled on the Associated Press (AP). Tworek's conclusion offers a number of cautionary tales, involving the relationship between a free press and democracy, the unprofitability of providing news, the internationalization of news, and, especially, about the over-estimation of the power of news to control opinion.

There is a lot here for everyone—political historians, political scientists, business historians, specialists in international affairs, and scholars of technology. There is a tremendous amount of detail in this book, such that many of the nuances of Tworek's main arguments are not captured by the clear introduction and conclusion. Indeed, easily overlooked, the scrupulous detail buried in the chapters offer a plethora of explicit and implicit sub-arguments as well, some of which work tangentially or even at odds with others. Moreover, reference to the detailed index is advised, as certain institutions (such as the Telegraph Union) appear as actors in chapters before they are discussed explicitly; some flipping back-and-forth is needed to reveal the full range of Tworek's arguments concerning them. But the broader understanding that emerges is worth the effort: as someone who studies turn-of-the-century German media, I came away with a new and eye-opening appreciation for the connections, complexities, and contradictions of news networks.

One real strength of the book is the way that it moves between the international and the domestic. We see German 'cultural' policy in Istanbul after 1918, for instance, where Wolff Telegraph Bureau journalists worked as de-facto members of the foreign office; at the same moment in time, we see Wolff struggling to compete with Hugenberg's 'nationally-minded' Telegraph Union. It would be nice to see these two spheres, which Tworek segregates into different chapters, related to each other a bit more closely. How did different actors, such as Bredow or Hugenberg, play their *international* views and perspectives (and even paranoia) in the pursuit of domestic gains? Or, from the other direction: did the chaos of Weimar German politics in the 1930s manifest in the news summaries sent by Wolff to Istanbul?

This brings me back to the opening question: what is the relationship between information and influence? Tworek clearly shows how statesmen and businessmen alike saw news networks, whether agencies or wireless transmission towers, as conduits for influence, both internationally and domestically. She argues in her conclusion that these visions—that news sent through the networks would sway opinion abroad and at home—were often naïve. And indeed, we see as many failures (in Istanbul, in China, in defending Weimar political centrism) as we do successes. But Tworek does not really delve deeply into the other end of the relationship—that networks themselves might have emerged as the *result* of influence (both political and economic), not the cause. For example, Transocean's successes in South America were built on prior German contacts and influence for over a century.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, the rapid growth of Hugenberg's Telegraph Union, built to foster 'economic nationalism' (and right-wing politics), not only tapped into a half-century of radical right-wing pan-German political culture, but also *rode* the upsurge in right-wing, hyper-nationalist politics in the 1920s. While Tworek is adept at

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<sup>4</sup> Krista O'Donnell, Renata Bridenthal, and Nancy Reagin, eds., *The Heimat Abroad: The Boundaries of Germanness* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); Rüdiger vom Bruch, *Weltpolitik als Kulturmission: Auswärtige Kulturpolitik und Bildungsbürgertum in Deutschland am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1982).

highlighting historical contexts of news networks, from the German *Weltpolitik* of 1900 to the chaotic polycracy of the National Socialist state after 1933, the book does not really grapple with how the successes and failures seen by these news networks might have hinged more fundamentally on larger cultural worldviews and developments. In short, they were as much a product of cultural history as of political, technological, and economic history.

The second question that comes to mind also seems to me to nudge once more towards cultural history. What is the difference between providing news and disseminating propaganda? Tworek, at the outset, reflects insightfully that “there were no clear lines between news and information, propaganda, espionage, sensationalism, and opinion” (4). And she shows how many Germans definitely saw the dissemination of news-with-a-German-perspective as ‘propaganda.’ Indeed, after the First World War broke out, Germans became convinced that they were losing the “war of words,” and took technological and institutional steps to address this perceived weakness. (1-3, 53-56, 59-62). Ultimately, as Tworek discusses, the loss of the war itself was blamed on this “deficiency” in propaganda—Germany lost the war, it was claimed because it lost the battle for minds. (69) In the inter-war era, Germans doubled-down on their efforts to disseminate ‘Germany-friendly’ views, and this obsession reached its apotheosis in the Nazi state. But was this rhetoric of the power of ‘news’ or ‘propaganda’ itself *propaganda*? International opinion of Germany in 1914 was critical because of German *actions* (particularly the invasion of Belgium); the United States entered the war because of German *actions*; Germany lost the First World War on the battlefield for concrete military and material reasons. And in the Second World War, all of the enormous resources devoted to propaganda in the Third Reich neither hid the regime’s barbarity nor changed the outcome. So, I might speculate, was the very notion of ‘news/propaganda,’ and of the need to build networks to channel news-propaganda, itself a reflection of German unwillingness to face unpleasant truths? In other words, was fake news not just fake *news*, but a larger self-deception that fake news itself would or could offer some sort of insulation or buffer from the real world blunders of German leaders or insulate Germany from the weaknesses in its military, international, and geopolitical position? This is something to ponder.

This book will be very useful to a broad range of scholars, including those interested in technology, international business, international relations, and cultural diplomacy. It also has a great deal to offer historians of Germany, by clarifying many of the mechanisms through which historical actors acted. It is not a casual or light read, but it is an incredible resource, and with its truly stunning geographic breadth and depth of detail, it is a significant scholarly accomplishment.



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REVIEW BY DOUGLAS B. CRAIG, AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

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**N***ews from Germany* is a deeply researched and ambitious book that examines the ways in which successive German regimes, from the Wilhelmine era to the end of the Third Reich, sought to subvert the effective duopoly of international news agencies established by Britain (and its Reuters Agency) and France (with its Havas organization) to provide Germany with its own outlets through which to spread its news and further its interests across the world.

In *News from Germany* Heidi Tworek has contributed very significantly to previously neglected areas of communications history. Her primary objects of inquiry – European (and in particular German) news agencies that collected content rather than the outlets that disseminated it – have previously received very little attention from historians. Some scholars, such as Michelle Hilmes and Simon Potter, have examined the development of international radio and news broadcasting from American and British perspectives<sup>5</sup>, but very few have braved the archival and linguistic challenges presented by research that ventures across and beyond the Anglosphere and outside radio broadcasting to encompass the news-gathering agencies that fed it.<sup>6</sup> Tworek can thus claim to be a pioneer in this important field, and *News from Germany* reflects both the hard work and the great rewards that such exploration requires and promises.

In her acknowledgments Tworek notes that Niall Ferguson “encouraged me to think big and be bold” (315), and *News from Germany* shows the fruits of that encouragement. In eight chapters, encompassing three distinct eras of German history from 1900 until 1945, Tworek aims high:

The history of news from Germany is not a story about Germany alone. It is a story that challenges the conventional narrative of Anglo-American dominance of international media in the twentieth century. It is a story of how political and economic visions for news drove technological innovation. It is a story of how political and economic ambitions intertwined with infrastructure and information. Finally, it is a story of how communications did and did not change the course of history (16).

As beholden to the assumption that news and news agencies could powerfully affect public opinion at home and abroad as were their British and American contemporaries, and convinced that German interests could be furthered best through German-controlled news agencies, German policymakers, military leaders, industrialists, and bureaucrats worked with remarkable consistency of purpose and method through the first half of the twentieth century towards that goal.

*News from Germany* begins by describing the ways in which policymakers and elites worked between 1900 and 1918 to create a global wireless network to further German interests abroad against what they saw as increasingly exclusionary Anglo-French news agencies. Chapters two and three cover World War I and its aftermath, focussing on the development of the Wolff news agency after 1870 and the formation of the Federal Broadcasting Commission (*Reichsrundfunkkommission*) in April 1919. Chapters four, five and six cover the Weimar era, in which German news dissemination and broadcasting became increasingly centralized and bureaucratized while German news agencies grew increasingly dependent on the state and its resources. Chapters seven and eight cover the Nazi years from 1933 to 1945, in which the new regime’s imperatives

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<sup>5</sup> Michele Hilmes, *Network Nations: A Transnational History of British and American Broadcasting* (New York: Routledge, 2012), and Simon Potter, *News and the British World: The Emergence of an Imperial Press System, 1876-1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> See Derek W. Vaillant, *Across the Waves: How the United States and France Shaped the International Age of Radio* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017) for a rare example of such work.

toward propaganda and control of public opinion built upon the structural strengths and flaws that had been established over the previous thirty years.

Tworek draws upon deep research in more than twenty archival collections in Germany, other European nations, the United Kingdom, and the United States, as well as from a long list of newspapers and magazines, to produce a richly textured analysis that is often breathtaking in its scope and conclusions. From that analysis the reader learns about German Emperor Kaiser Wilhelm II's conviction even in the 1890s that Germany needed its own voice in the modern information age (he received daily newspaper clipping digests right up until his abdication in 1918), about the value of shortwave radio technology to provide Germany with a global communications network independent of Anglo-French networks and undersea cables during and after World War One, and about the ways in which Weimar leaders strove to protect and extend German global economic interests despite the strictures of the Treaty of Versailles.

When the National Socialists came to power in Germany in 1933, Tworek argues, they inherited a bureaucratized and centralized broadcasting industry and government information system that could be easily suborned to suit their own purposes. Such are the benefits of Tworek's broad historical sweep that she is able to show significant continuities between Wilhelmine foundations, Weimar consolidation, and Nazi fulfillment of domestic broadcasting and international news dissemination institutions, structures and policies.

More benefits arising from Tworek's broad time-frame, deep research, clear hypotheses, and bold conclusions are apparent in the final section of *News from Germany*. Here Tworek, sweeping and bold conclusions, ranges across and beyond the depth of her research and conceptualization to encompass more modern concerns about 'fake news' (which, she reminds us, is not so modern at all) and even policies as recent as President Donald Trump's withdrawal of U.S. involvement in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) because of its alleged anti-Israel bias.

Closer to home, Tworek points to five 'cautionary tales' arising from her research and arguments. Some of these are more novel than others, but they are all thought-provoking. The first such tale, Tworek writes, is that "[d]emocratic institutions do not necessarily create critical and independent media or vice versa" (228). The second is that it was hard to make money out of news before World War II, and the scramble for profits led German news agencies to form cartels and to sail too close to government sources and largesse in search of revenue. Tworek's third, fourth and fifth cautionary tales will be familiar to all historians who have studied the broadcasting systems of other nation states in the twentieth century: that media environments have never been "hermetically sealed" within national borders, that Marshall McLuhan was only half-right because "[t]echnology does shape the message. But political and economic aims or content shaped technological innovation too," and that media influence on public opinion has been more often assumed than shown. "Modern history is full of 'exorbitant expectations' about the media that the media cannot fulfill (229-30)." Tworek ends *News from Germany* on an even gloomier note, which perhaps simultaneously combines lessons from the German past with warnings from the American present:

When elites no longer believed in upholding democratic institutions, a free press alone could not stop a democratic disintegration. Democracy can die in full daylight, and has done before (231).

*News from Germany* is sometimes an exhilarating read, displaying depth of research and clarity of hypothesis and argument. It also has its exasperations for a reader who appreciates methodical analysis through carefully structured arguments. Tworek uses her archival research to provide finely detailed case studies—for example of media coverage of the Kaiser's abdication in November 1918 and the abortive Kapp Putsch four months later in Chapter three and the inglorious career of the head of Wolff's operations in Istanbul in Chapter five—but these case-studies are sprung upon the reader with little or no warning. They are deep dives into archival history which start abruptly without much or any connection to their preceding narratives. Better introduction, contextualization, and integration of these case studies would have added to their usefulness to the book's overall argument. The Nazi period also seems underdone; too little attention is paid to the 1933-1939 period as the book's narrative hurtles toward World War II, with relatively little detail provided on the ways in which Fuhrer of Nazi

Germany Adolf Hitler and his Reich Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels used and developed German broadcasting's bureaucratic and industrial structures that they inherited in 1933.

*News from Germany* is therefore an exhilarating, but not always orderly and convincing, ride. But its virtues outweigh its faults, and its deep research, clear arguments, and bold conclusions provide an occasionally bewildering but always interesting and informative study of a tumultuous half-century of German communications history.

REVIEW BY KATE LACEY, SCHOOL OF MEDIA, FILM AND MUSIC, UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

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It is a well-known saying that journalism is the first draft of history. Heidi Tworek's magisterial new book, *News from Germany*, opens with an epigram from Otto Groth, an early communications scholar, who in 1928 was already warning his readers not to take journalism's first draft at face value, but to consider the material and ideological infrastructures that lie behind the news. It is astonishing then, some 90 years on, that it remains such pertinent advice, and that a book like this, which brings those often invisible infrastructures into the spotlight, can be such an innovative and refreshing read.

At one level, this book relates the history of German news agencies in the first half of the twentieth century and their role in the history of the press, broadcasting, and international affairs. It charts the personalities, the practices and the politics of a sector of the news industry that is often glossed over in more conventional narratives that centre on the final product of papers and programmes.<sup>7</sup> But rather than simply adding a missing piece to the picture of news production during this period, Tworek's book offers a persuasive new reading of Germany's status in international affairs during this period, demonstrating how Germany was able to exploit new media technologies to punch above its weight in the battle to control flows of information within Europe and beyond. In putting the news agency centre stage, and examining the material infrastructures of telecommunication, she also has much to offer by way of critiquing mainstream media historiography.<sup>8</sup>

What Tworek manages to do so superbly, on the basis of painstaking archival research (the list of which in the appendix extends to seven pages (305-311) and includes national and specialist archives across eight countries, together with a long list of the newspaper and periodical archives consulted) and detailed engagement with a huge range of secondary sources, is not only to reveal those infrastructures, but to demonstrate how they in turn were deliberately forged and reworked in the crucible of powerful political and economic forces. More than this, it becomes clear that the very invisibility of such infrastructures (particularly in the form of the news agency) served the German establishment very well (18) in its ambitions to shape the public agenda at home and pursue its economic and diplomatic interests abroad. The ways in which the business of the news agencies straddled the political ruptures in German history and the changing definitions of news underlines the point. Even the comprehensive media reforms after 1945 could not entirely eradicate "continuities of personnel and cultural norms" (226).

What comes through most forcefully from Tworek's careful and authoritative analysis is that the story of Germany in this period cannot properly be understood without considering the role of modern communications; and that the shape – both material and immaterial – of our current communications structures cannot properly be understood without taking the history of empire and imperial ambition into account.

Particularly illuminating in the opening chapters of the book is how the battle over the production, ownership, and distribution of data was so clearly part of a quite brutal Realpolitik, and certainly part of international relations and colonisation policies. It is also striking to see how the establishment harnessed the disruptive potential of the new media at the end of the nineteenth century, driven by a mix of cynicism and naivety about the power of news (44). It was a similar faith in the power of news and the possibility of controlling public opinion at home and influencing public opinion abroad that would later shape the refashioned 'German News Agency' during the Third Reich, an agency that increasingly acted not only as an information service for the press, but as "an informer to the Nazi state" (195). Meanwhile, the apparent independence of the Transocean wireless news network – though it was secretly heavily subsidised by and aligned with the

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<sup>7</sup> Rudolf Stöber, *Deutsche Pressegeschichte: von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* [German Press History from its Origins to the Present], 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Stuttgart: Uni-Taschenbücher, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> For a recent overview of the scholarship on news agencies, see Terhi Rantanen, "News Agencies from Telegraph Bureaus to Cyberfactories" in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication* (2019), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.843>.

state – allowed Germany to maintain a propaganda advantage in territories far beyond its political or military control (59-63).

*News from Germany* demonstrates that it was not least the novelty of telecommunications technology that allowed the nascent German state to break through alongside the more established imperial powers – and participate in creating and reflecting the emerging idea of ‘global’ (or ‘world’) communication. As Tworek puts it, Germany’s physical colonial empire might have been relatively small, but the virgin territory of new data flows played a part in allowing Germans, fatefully, “to develop a large colonial imagination” (24) that outlived the colonial era. Of course, the physical infrastructure still had to traverse borders and negotiate territorial claims, and the book skilfully traces the fascinating and convoluted story of co-operation and competition between the leading imperial nations as they carved up the globe for data gathering and dissemination.

The three-headed cartel made up of Reuters, Havas, and Wolffs Telegraphisches Büro (WTB) dominated news for decades and must have seemed as immovable a fixture as the giant digital media companies of today. Again, the descriptions of the sheer reach, speed, and influence of these agencies and their networks is at once a revelation and strangely familiar from today’s perspective, along with attendant concerns about media concentration, media-state relations, ‘fake news’ and so on. The story of the abdication of the Kaiser Wilhelm II in November 1918, told in a chapter entitled “Revolution, Representation and Reality,” is just one of the vivid examples of the mediatisation of politics, decades before that term was coined.<sup>9</sup> The new chancellor, Prince Maximilian von Baden, had gone against the Kaiser’s authority to alert the Wolffs press agency. Within hours it became headline news across the country and therefore a *fait accompli*. The Kaiser was powerless to contradict the discursive authority of the news. Though Tworek acknowledges that the end of the war and the end of the imperial regime were inevitable by this point, the story reveals how the power of the press agency was a crucial player in shaping how the new Republic was declared.

The rapid decline in WTB’s authority and monopoly in the early years of the Weimar Republic is shown to have been an important part of the story in the bitter fracturing of the German political consensus that was so significant in the history to follow. Within this context, Tworek shows that the history of the wireless news agencies was a much more significant part of how radio broadcasting was defined in Germany than is often acknowledged, particularly in relation to how the ‘father’ of German radio, Hans Bredow, the first head of the German broadcasting service, was determined to keep the airwaves free of political news and opinion.<sup>10</sup> A close-up on the role of the German news agencies in Turkey underlines how different this was to the symbiotic relationship between the press and politics on the international stage. Meanwhile, the account of Alfred Hugenberg’s media empire, centred on his Telegraph Union, reminds us of the important role of regional politics and local news back home. Unlike the other news agencies, Hugenberg’s innovative business model of vertical integration gave him control over all aspects of news, “from paper production to news collection to advertisements” (142). By targeting regional presses and working alongside ‘second tier’ news agencies internationally, he was then able to use his press agency to disseminate his right-wing brand of German nationalism far and wide.

The familiar story of the abdication and the revolutionary times that followed Germany’s defeat in the First World War is told afresh here with a real sense of the pace and chaos of unfolding events. For such a scholarly work, particularly one that is so concerned with the intricacies of company policies and convoluted bureaucracies, this is a remarkably gripping read. Throughout, the archival material and secondary literature that undergirds the storyline is deployed with a lightness of touch which breathes life into the narrative, supported by a judicious focus on moments of scandal and controversy. But Tworek does not just reconstruct the history, she makes a persuasive case for a re-reading of that history by subtly engaging

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<sup>9</sup> John Corner, “‘Mediatization’: Media Theory’s Word of the Decade,” *Media Theory* 2:2 (2018): 79-90.

<sup>10</sup> Kate Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies: Gender, German Radio, and the Public Sphere, 1923-1945*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 47-52; Konrad Dussel, *Deutsche Rundfunkgeschichte*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Stuttgart: Uni-Taschenbücher, 2005).

with some of the most urgent contemporary theoretical and methodological debates, among them the idea of media archaeology, the question of new materialism and infrastructuralism, and the task of decolonising knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

The book concludes with a series of ‘cautionary tales’ (228-9) arising from this history to do with the relationship between media, democracy, money, technology, diplomatic power and public opinion. It certainly also demonstrates that a narrow focus on Anglo-American agencies misses an important part of the story of the globalisation of news. Most pointedly, Tworek hopes this history should remind us how important it is to protect the democratic principles of independent journalism, learning from this history of the part information wars played in the descent of a democratic republic into authoritarianism and fascism. What stands out for me, though, as a scholar of media history and theory, is how the book also serves as a powerful corrective to the prevailing amnesia of much contemporary media scholarship. To read this narrative is to discover the deep historical roots of so much of what is considered ‘new’ about the ‘new media’. It also serves as a powerful corrective to approaches that focus only on the circulation and interpretation of texts without taking the broader political economy into account, or that fail to acknowledge information as a particular form of commodity exchange reliant on an intricate apparatus of material and ideological infrastructure. And, ironically, perhaps - though by no means accidentally—this careful study of a nation’s navigation of its news supply also serves as powerful corrective to the idea that modern media histories can be contained with a national frame.

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<sup>11</sup> On media archaeology see Zachary McDowell and Nathaniel Bassett, “Introduction: Currents in Communication and the Media Archaeological” *communication+ 1*, 7:1 (2018), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7275/dp93-6853>; on new materialism see Jussi Parikka, J. “New Materialism as Media Theory: Medianatures and Dirty Matter,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 9:1 (2012): 95-100. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14791420.2011.626252>; on infrastructuralism see John Durham Peters, “Infrastructuralism: Media as Traffic between Nature and Culture,” in: *Traffic: Media as Infrastructures and Cultural Practices*, ed. Marion Näser-Lather & Christoph Neubert, (Boston: Brill, 2015); Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski, eds., *Signal Traffic: Critical Studies of Media Infrastructures* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015); on decolonising knowledge in relation to media history, see Raka Shome, “When Postcolonial Studies Interrupts Media Studies”, *Communication, Culture and Critique* 12:3 (2019): 1-18. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ccc/tcz020>; Corinna Schäfer, “Discursive Colonialism: German Settler Communities, their Media and Infrastructure in Africa, 1898-1914” in *Representing Communities*, ed. Ruth Sanz Sabido (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017): 77-93; Miriyam Aouragh and Paula Chakravartty “Infrastructures of Empire: Towards a Critical Geopolitics of Media and Information Studies” *Media, Culture and Society* 38:4 (2016): 559-75, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443716643007>

REVIEW BY SARAH PANZER, MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY

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The news media has long occupied a privileged position for historians, both as a tool and as an idea. Methodologically, it would be difficult to find a historian working on contemporary issues who does not use newspapers in some way, and this tendency has only increased as access to digitized, searchable news archives has become more widespread. As an idea, the news is so broadly associated with the pursuit, collection, and distribution of objective fact, governed by journalistic standards of verification and impartiality, that even historians can sometimes fall into the trap of taking the news at face value, hence the strict distinction commonly made between *news* and *propaganda*, or the incredulity of many at the recent emergence of the pejorative term ‘fake news.’ Whether consciously or not, historians have too often relied on the newspaper as a mirror of historical events, rather than as the product of self-interested institutions and infrastructures. Like it or not, “news was never neutral. And its production never uncontested” (7).

Heidi Tworek’s innovative (and very timely) new book thus sets out to document the “networks behind the news [which] shaped information far more consistently and consequentially than any single newspaper” (224). Although her specific focus is on the evolution of German news agencies during the first half of the twentieth century, her work is global in scope. As she documents convincingly, the ability to actively control and shape the news ‘from Germany’ was fiercely contested, both in competition with rival news agencies globally and within Germany itself, through a variety of mechanisms, including technological innovation, strategic investment, and political access. Informing and propelling this competition for control over world communications, at least in Germany, was what Tworek refers to as “the news agency consensus—the widely shared belief among German elites that controlling news could fulfill broader geopolitical, geoeconomic, and cultural aims” (14). This belief—“that the ‘right’ news could produce the ‘right’ reactions in a reading public”—“...relied on a particular set of assumptions about human nature: that people believed what they read, that they interpreted information in predictable ways, and that elites could control public reactions” (44). Control over world communications was therefore not just a matter of financial gain for corporate shareholders; it was the means by which the elites holding the reins of these news agencies could potentially intervene directly in shaping public opinion at home and abroad.

Significantly, Tworek locates the source of the “news agency consensus” not in a particular political or ideological orientation but instead within the socio-economic and political elites who owned, managed, and regulated the news agencies. Although the various individuals she discusses may have had different priorities, they all fundamentally agreed on the purported power of “published opinion” over “public opinion” (229). In making this claim, Tworek deconstructs the implicit tendency in the contemporary world to locate a “mutually sustaining relationship between media and democracy,” and thus to take for granted that democracies and dictatorships would naturally and inevitably assume different postures toward the production and distribution of the news (228). To the contrary, she contends that although “Nazis and Weimar elites disagreed about the concept of public opinion... they agreed on the mechanisms to control it. Bureaucrats and politicians alike were convinced of the ‘persuasive power of the press’ and devoted considerable energy to influencing it” (194). Moreover, although the specific approaches may have varied from agency to agency, the goal was the same: harnessing and mobilizing news media as the means to project German political, economic, and cultural influence globally. It is this understanding of the ‘political economy of the news’ and its associated agenda that provides the clearest line of continuity to Tworek’s analysis, which extends over multiple successive regime changes and myriad associated events, both domestically and worldwide.

Tworek ties the emergence of this consensus to two major phenomena of the late Wilhelmine era: the proliferation of a mass media marketplace which increasingly encouraged Germans to seek out national and international news as part of their daily routine; and the attempted reorientation of Germany by its leaders from a continental to a global, imperial power. Practically, this resulted in an evolving—and often complicated—partnership between the successive major German news agencies and the German state. As she convincingly demonstrates in her analysis of the role played by the Wolff new agency in the early Weimar Republic, the ability of the German state to project legitimacy and strength was dependent on its relationship to the producers of the news and vice versa. Attempts by the Weimar state to harness news agencies in support of political and economic policy, for example in the promotion and support of the Eildienst (Swift Service), may have been somewhat successful in promoting German interests abroad, but they also initiated a dangerous precedent for state-

controlled media. When Alfred Hugenberg, a right-wing industrialist, politician, and media magnate, launched his rival agency Telegraph Union as a vehicle for nationalist interests, the Weimar state chose to resort to increasingly illiberal means to maintain its control over the news, a strategy that “laid the groundwork for the Nazis to reshape the media landscape” (15). As the Nazis consolidated their control over Germany, they were therefore able to take advantage not only of the technological infrastructure which had enabled German news to be competitive globally, but also an established precedent of state intervention in ‘free media.’ Following Tworek’s analysis, the Nazi news agency Transocean thus represented the culmination of this “news agency consensus” not only in its unprecedented dominance globally but also in its ability to “buil[d] on thirty years of work on wireless and news agency” (222).

In situating her work across the first half of the twentieth century, rather than confining it to a single political regime, Tworek is building on recent scholarship intent on exploring continuities in modern German history on a range of topics, including: the German role in the production of scientific and ‘expert’ knowledge;<sup>12</sup> German images and stereotypes of non-European and non-Western peoples and cultures;<sup>13</sup> and global histories of iconic German commodities like the Volkswagen Beetle.<sup>14</sup> Much of this work is similarly transnational or global in scope, an approach that is as much informed by the increasing importance of these fields in the historical discipline at large as it is a reflection of German historians’ recent efforts to fully escape the shadow of the *Sonderweg* thesis, the claim that Germany occupied a ‘special path’ on its course through the modern era.<sup>15</sup> Although, as Tworek notes, most historians now reject this theory of German developmental exceptionalism, one legacy of this debate has been a longstanding preoccupation with German national history, a myopia that has been more or less resolved with the proliferation in recent years of work on the interdependence of the ‘national’ and the ‘global’ in modern German history.<sup>16</sup> A secondary legacy of the *Sonderweg* thesis, not articulated by Tworek directly but arguably as significant in defining the state of the field of German history over the last several decades, has been the tendency to peg periodization to domestic regime change. Thus, a majority of projects have been structured around the key dates of 1918/19, 1933, 1945, and 1989, an approach that has often imposed its own logic—an emphasis on rupture rather than continuity, as well as the dominant role assigned to politics in dictating culture, social mores, etc.—on how German history is studied, taught, and represented in public and popular media. To be sure, the periodization of German history around moments of political crisis is a more complicated legacy of the *Sonderweg* thesis than just a preoccupation with the German nation itself; it also reflects an attempt to move away from the neat continuities of German dysfunction implicit in the idea of the *Sonderweg*, and so the recent move by some scholars to explicitly highlight and examine forms of continuity, rather than change, has forced yet another reckoning with the question of a uniquely German route through modernity.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Hartmut Berghoff, Frank Biess, and Ulrike Strasser, eds. *Explorations and Entanglements: Germans in Pacific Worlds from the Early Modern Period to World War I* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019).

<sup>13</sup> H. Glenn Penny, *Kindred by Choice: Germans and American Indians since 1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Bernhard Rieger, *The People’s Car: A Global History of the Volkswagen Beetle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> For exemplary models of the *Sonderweg* thesis, see: Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht: Die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland, 1914-1918* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1961); Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich 1871-1918* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1973). Later historians have progressively dismantled this thesis since the 1980s, beginning with: David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

<sup>16</sup> Sebastian Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> One potential source of continuity that has received significant interest in recent years is that between the colonial practices of Wilhelmine Germany and the imperial-genocidal policies of the Nazi state. For some key interventions along these lines, see: Jürgen Zimmerer, *Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz: Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Kolonialismus und Holocaust* (Münster: LIT, 2007); Robert Gerwarth and Stephan Malinowski, “Hannah Arendt’s Ghosts: Reflections on the Disputable Path from Windhoek to Auschwitz,”



Like many of her contemporaries, Tworek dismisses the idea that her work represents an attempt to relitigate the *Sonderweg* debate, and yet it does raise some potentially important questions regarding how specifically ‘German’ this story of ‘information warfare’ truly is.

In lieu of a simple summation of her findings and analysis, Tworek offers in her conclusion a series of “cautionary tales”—a device that intentionally speaks to the timeliness of her work (228). The lessons that Tworek offers are all intuitively sound in their attempt to deconstruct assumptions or misconceptions regarding the relationship between the press and democracy, the profitability (or lack thereof) of the news media, the news as a potential weapon of global geopolitics, and the role of technology in shaping public opinion. The question that this reader was left with, however, is how broadly applicable the lessons of the German ‘news agency consensus’ really can be in analyzing the contemporary role of media in the world. Undoubtedly there are some broader comparisons to be drawn, but if this approach to the news was as specifically German as Tworek seems to claim in earlier chapters of her book—indeed she mentions that one precondition of this consensus was a particularly German understanding of the role of the journalist in communicating the news (34)—then one wonders whether similar lessons could be drawn through an examination of the Anglo-American and French news agencies that existed contemporaneously with her study or, alternatively, more recent models of news agencies from non-European contexts, like Al Jazeera and Russia Today (RT). Given Tworek’s truly innovative approach in thinking about the news as the product of networks of institutions and infrastructures, rather than simply a report of ‘what happened,’ one sincerely hopes that historians in other fields will take her up on this challenge.

Heidi Tworek’s new history of German news agencies during the first half of the twentieth century should be applauded for its ground-breaking approach to a subject that historians too often assume that they understand much better than they actually do. In its skillful weaving together of a diverse array of primary sources and a substantive, well-referenced body of secondary work, it offers a fundamentally new perspective on the topic that deserves attention not just by specialists on German history, but also anyone working on global business, technology, or diplomacy in the twentieth century.

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*Central European History* 42, no. 3 (2009): 279-300; Matthew Fitzpatrick, “The Pre-History of the Holocaust? The *Sonderweg* and *Historikerstreit* and the Abject Colonial Past,” *Central European History* 41:3 (2008): 477-503; Thomas Kühne, “Colonialism and the Holocaust: Continuities, Causations, and Complexities,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 15:3 (2013): 339-362; Shelley Baranowski, *Nazi Empire: German Colonialism and Imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

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RESPONSE BY HEIDI J. S. TWOREK, UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Great reviews engage deeply and constructively with a book. It is a privilege to receive four such reviews and to respond to them. What an honor to have one's work described as "ground-breaking" (Sarah Panzer), "a remarkably gripping read" (Kate Lacey), "an invaluable resource" (David Ciarlo), and "a richly textured analysis that is often breathtaking in its scope and conclusions" (Douglas Craig). I am grateful to H-Diplo for organizing this roundtable and to Udi Greenberg for writing the introduction.

Media history is now a flourishing field. But it too often remains siloed from other disciplines of history and from international relations. Newspaper quotations are used merely to illustrate arguments, and news is implicitly dismissed as a form of 'soft power.' In fact, news is a subject that scholars should take just as seriously as historical actors did in the past. News is not a niche interest, but an integral aspect of business, technology, the military, diplomacy, and international relations.

This response focuses on two points raised implicitly and explicitly by all four reviewers. First, all point to the challenges of structuring a book that toggles between the national and the international, the global geopolitical and the local news story. Second, there is the question of contemporary relevance. How do we write history that so resonates with the present?

The biggest challenge of this book was to structure a narrative interweaving the national and the international. Before I went into the archives, the historiography on media had led me to assume that I would find a fairly national story about German news. I also had not expected to find a story that continued into the Nazi era. The archives proved me wrong on both counts. This was an international story where elites across the political spectrum and across three political regimes used news agencies to try to influence global affairs. This meant that I had to conduct research in archives across Europe and North America in order to understand how other major players interacted with German ambitions.

At the same time, I would never have uncovered these international ambitions without careful attention to German domestic affairs. For example, the German Press Department was located in the German Foreign Office, which meant that the Foreign Office provided many of the subsidies to German news agencies. This structure explains why the main semi-official news agency, Wolff's Telegraphisches Bureau, could operate abroad and why it chose to operate in the places that it did. I could not explain sustained German investment and interest in news without understanding the domestic bureaucratic incentives and how they interacted with larger international structures. Moreover, domestic events like Chancellor Max von Baden's use of Wolff's agency to abdicate the Kaiser in November 1918 reveals why German elites continued to believe in the power of news to change the course of history.

German news agencies were multi-scalar. They affected local events in cities like Berlin. They affected national politics. And they were a vehicle for international competition. The trick was to structure a book that could explore all those scales while providing specific stories to show how news worked on the ground. To solve these problems, I intersperse stories of individual journalists like Hermann von Ritgen and events like the Kapp Putsch with a more structural view of news agencies and wireless technology. The chapters switch between geographical perspectives as they move forwards in time to show "significant continuities between Wilhelmine foundations, Weimar consolidation, and Nazi fulfillment of domestic broadcasting and international news dissemination institutions, structures and policies" (Craig). I also tried to choose carefully *where* international examples took place, ranging from Istanbul to Eastern Europe to China and Latin America.

Perhaps a little too implicitly, this structure was meant to convey that cultural beliefs guided German attention to particular places, as Ciarlo suggests. Germans prioritized different areas than the British or French. This history is, in part, about how we end up with a German view of the world where Paramaribo could sometimes matter more than Poland. This, I hope, is an insight that international historians can apply to fields other than news. Too much international history underplays national incentives or omits how national priorities structure the geography of the international.

All the reviewers point to my conclusion where I trace five cautionary tales that emerge from the history of German news agencies. By calling them cautionary tales, I argue implicitly that the tools of history can dig up the structural explanations for our current problems, ones that were relatively easy to foresee when taking the longer view. The more abstract cautionary tales about technology, money, and politics in media make clear that our contemporary ails are not unprecedented.

My cautionary tales applied just as much when I started this project as when I finished it. When I started working on this book, internet utopianism was in its heyday. Journalists, many politicians, communications scholars, and social media companies hailed the internet for fueling Barack Obama's successful presidential campaign in 2008 and the initial phases of the Arab Spring. Only a few lone voices, like Evgeny Morozov, suggested that the tale was a little less rosy.<sup>18</sup> My historical work seemed out of place with contemporary sentiment and scholarship.

As I finished the book, the present caught up with history. Far-right, anti-immigration groups in Germany revived Nazi terminology like *Lügenpresse* (lying press) or *Systempresse* (system press) to denounce the media. News was falsified for political and economic reasons. It turned out that the internet was not just a free-wheeling environment of many-to-many communication, a space that gave voice to the voiceless. As with radio, internet technologies designed with utopian aims became tools for demagogues and dictators. The internet became a platform economy where a few companies acted as the bottlenecks for information. Certain media outlets became mouthpieces for particular political points of view. Infrastructure like 5G was now seen as a national security concern. Parallels with the past and path dependencies seemed omnipresent.

This presented both opportunities and challenges. As Ciarlo notes about the false news story I trace in chapter 6, "correlations with the present-day media landscape of the United States are hard to avoid." Lacey calls my history "at once a revelation and strangely familiar from today's perspective, along with attendant concerns about media concentration, media-state relations, 'fake news' and so on." I chose to write about this topic long before 2016. Now interest in this historical topic from scholars, policy-makers, and journalists had increased dramatically. The attitude change is remarkable.

Yet I did not choose my examples in order to exploit apparent parallels with the present; I used them because they best illustrate points about the past. I had completed the vast majority of my archival research before 2016. I decided to insert more quotations from historical actors to show that this was not a history book written to address the present, even if it turned out to be more prescient than I could have imagined. I leave it to readers to decide what is strange, what is familiar, and what is strangely familiar.

Beyond the book, different publication venues offer an avenue to address the present implications of historical work. Panzer wonders how we can apply these lessons from Germany to contemporary media outlets like Russia Today (RT). I decided not to address those questions in my conclusion partly to give the book longevity and also to make clear that the cautionary tales address bigger structural questions than particular contemporary news outlets. Instead, I have explored these parallels in articles for various media outlets, for example arguing that countries which feel encircled or internationally weak may use communications to project international prowess. This was as true for Germany in the past as it is for Russia today.<sup>19</sup> Many

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<sup>18</sup> Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Heidi J.S. Tworek, "Information Warfare is Here to Stay," *Foreign Affairs* (25 April 2019), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/germany/2019-04-25/information-warfare-here-stay>; Tworek, "A Lesson from 1930s Germany: Beware State Control of Social Media," *The Atlantic* (26 May 2019), <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/05/germany-war-radio-social-media/590149/>.

other historians like Nicole Hemmer or Quinn Slobodian have taken a similar approach to combining serious historical scholarship with commentary on the present.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, the book is as much about failure as it is about success, as much about flawed interpretations of the media as about skillful manipulation. As Ciarlo notes, the book also explores “the bungling of many efforts, which is insightful, as failure can often be more revealing than success.” In media history the burden is often to prove that media changed something. Can it not be equally, if not more, important to push back against over-inflated beliefs about what media can achieve? This is one of the key debates of our own time. Our contemporary media landscape is in deep trouble and needs reform. But we should not invest all our hopes there, while ignoring broader political, economic, and social problems. Fixing Facebook will not fix American democracy. But some historical perspective can help.

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<sup>20</sup> Nicole Hemmer, *Messengers of the Right: Conservative Media and the Transformation of American Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).