

# Book Reviews

## FEATURED REVIEWS

*Navigating Nationalism in Global Enterprise: A Century of Indo-German Business Relations.* By Christina Lubinski. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. Pp. 300. £75.00, hardcover. ISBN 978-1-316-51128-2  
doi: 10.1017/S002205072300030X

Not only are multinationals resilient with respect to rising nationalist sentiments and discriminatory economic rules, but their managers can even take advantage of it to expand their foreign operations. This thought-provoking assertion is at the core of Christina Lubinski's latest book, which challenges the assumption that nationalism and globalization are antagonistic forces. Based on a detailed evidence-driven historical analysis of Indo-German business relations and a rich conceptual framework, Lubinski underlines that globalization actually takes place in a world of nations and investigates the consequences of such observations for multinational enterprises' operations and strategies.

Adopting the perspective of German business is strategic in many respects. First, it allows considering India as a "heavily contested market on the world stage" and not simply a territory that was under British control until 1947 (p. 18). Second, while Germany was a major FDI provider prior to WWI, it consequently constitutes a fascinating case for understanding the varieties of informal and contractual arrangements that multinationals could deploy to maintain and develop their activities in foreign markets. Third, the accessibility to company-level archives, particularly those of the chemical company Bayer and the electric giant Siemens, was crucial in developing the nuanced and detailed qualitative empirical analysis the book provides.

To frame her analysis, Lubinski fruitfully deploys the geographers' concept of mental maps, and explores how German businesses "connected their limited and filtered knowledge about nations—constructed in the West—to the world around them, which during the twentieth century increasingly became perceived as a world of nations" (p. 16). Mental maps of nationalism therefore helped businesses make sense of the mass of information about various states, their national imaginaries, and their relationships to others, and to envision strategies to navigate and even take advantage of such complex and evolving world visions. The book emphasizes that not only do material reality and pure economic rationality matter, but that cultural and ideational representations are also a serious subject for investigation to understand actors' behaviors. Some descriptive statistics are provided, especially those of Indo-German trade for various periods, but additional numbers might have proved helpful in assessing how, over time, multinationals' strategies around mental maps materialized in economic advantages with respect to rival nations or other foreign companies in the same sectors.

The analysis is developed chronologically, from 1880 to 1980. During the 1880s up to the 1920s, businesspeople tended to apprehend the world as being divided between the "civilized" nations of the West and all others, which influenced the entry strategies of large multinationals such as Siemens and Bayer. At first, German companies relied heavily on British intermediaries and cosmopolitan business networks. These ties with the British were particularly important in the Siemens case since technologies like the telegraph often involved government contracts. It was only progressively that their cosmopolitan nature was questioned by rising nationalism in Europe and that opportunities arose for German business to capitalize on emerging Indian independence

movements. For instance, German products sold through the bazaar trade, such as cutlery and gramophones, were everyday goods for which customers' perceptions mattered and could benefit from Swadeshi nationalists' preference for buying non-colonial product alternatives.

The two world wars were marked by the rise of nationalist sentiments in Germany and the idea that German interests were opposed to those of the British. This was a challenging period for German businesses, marked as it was by the internment of businesspeople in India who were considered enemies of the British Empire. At the same time, and in the wake of the Versailles treaty, Germany started to be seen, like India, as a victim of British imperial tendencies. The loss of German colonies therefore allowed German multinationals to present themselves as strangers to imperialism and as allies in developing essential industrial sectors such as electricity and chemicals.

During the postwar period, the stage of economic development became central in classifying nations. Indeed, in the Cold War context, a Western presence was valued if it brought needed investments and technical support, so Indian policies regarding MNEs became increasingly unpredictable. While the idea of a special link between India and Germany faded, German multinationals could capitalize on their long-lasting business presence and characterize themselves as logical partners in developing critical industrial projects and the provision of training and technical knowledge.

Lubinski's book is an excellent illustration of a wider movement that aims to extend the boundaries of the business history field by intertwining analyses of political development and business expansion, and by providing theoretical interpretations thanks to interdisciplinary cross-fertilization. Moreover, thanks to its focus on German enterprises, the book is also moving away from historical scholarship that primarily analyzes British-Indo economic relationships and contributes to looking beyond formal empires. The analysis therefore reconciles the business history perspective, that is, the motivations and strategies of German enterprises, with the colonial and postcolonial history of India. While the narrative is extremely insightful, Lubinski might also have stressed more explicitly the book's contributions to this body of literature. Its empirical evidence indeed provides solid grounds for developing new and nuanced interpretations of controversies such as the relative autonomy of the Indian state with respect to foreign capital, the role of multinationals in restraining or fostering technological diffusion, or the effects of industrial policies from developmental and sovereignty perspectives. Additionally, Lubinski's accounts of the importance of various economic theories in influencing the mental maps of nationalism, such as List's infant-industry theory or the development-stage theories, have the potential to be of interest to scholars of economic thought. The fact that Lubinski's work can be relevant to various historical traditions and disciplines and goes beyond the historiographies with which it explicitly engages should be viewed as a strength of the book rather than a weakness. Indeed, this indicates evidence of its empirical and conceptual richness.

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