



Katrin Bromber, Katharina Lange, Heike Liebau,  
Anorthe Wetzel (eds.)

# THE LONG END OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

*Ruptures, Continuities and Memories*

Eigene und Fremde Welten

Edited by Jörg Baberowski, Stefan Rinke and Michael Wildt

Volume 36

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# The Long End of the First World War

Ruptures, Continuities and Memories

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# About the Book

*Katrin Bromber, Katharina Lange, Heike Liebau, Anorthe Wetzzel*

The present book is based on the Herrenhausen Symposium “The Long End of the First World War: Ruptures, Continuities and Memories” which took place at Herrenhausen Palace, Hanover, Germany, in May 2017.<sup>1</sup> It follows on from the preceding conference “The World during the First World War—Perceptions, Experiences, and Consequences” in October 2013.<sup>2</sup> One of the most significant results of the first symposium was that shifting the perspective away from Europe, especially Western Europe, means—among other things—shifting the focus from the beginning of the War to its end and to its long-term consequences. This inspired us to take “The Long End” as the central focus for the 2017 symposium and to look more closely at the multi-layered endings of the First World War in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe. Unsettling the notion of a static and clearly defined “end” of the War, the conference discussed links between experience, historiography, and commemoration.<sup>3</sup>

The aims of this volume are threefold. Firstly, it challenges a static, mainly Eurocentric periodization of the First World War not only by glob-

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1 The Symposium was funded and organized by the Volkswagen Foundation. We are grateful to Wilhelm Krull, Secretary General of the Volkswagen Foundation, and Ulrike Freitag, Director of the Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient, for their support of the project. The programme of the Herrenhausen Symposium owed much to the helpful suggestions of the steering committee (Santanu Das, Andreas Gestrich, Jennifer Jenkins, Michael Provence, Brigitte Reinwald and Torsten Weber) for their conceptual input in preparing the symposium. We would also like to thank Catherine Atkinson and Maren Barton for their careful copy-editing as well as Jürgen Hotz and Julia Flechtner of Campus Publishers for their support.

2 For the results of the 2013 symposium, see Bley/Kremers (2014).

3 Other papers of the May 2017 symposium will feature in a special issue of *Dhan. Zeitschrift für außereuropäische Geschichte*, edited by Brigitte Reinwald and Christine Hatzky (forthcoming 2018). Thanks to Georgios Chatzoudis and the Gerda Henkel Stiftung, videos of most of the talks given are available online on L.I.S.A.: <https://lisa.gerdahenkel-stiftung.de> (accessed January 19, 2018).

alizing the picture geographically but also by foregrounding questions of social or environmental history. Secondly, it considers the critical incorporation of new sources to be very important in defining new research approaches. Sources other than official textual documents stored in state archives continuously come to the fore, such as photographs, folksongs, sound recordings and material objects. Thirdly, the editors are convinced that it is a present-day imperative to explore how historiography and politics of memory influence one another and to discuss the implications of these processes for research.

The chapters compiled in this volume are revised versions of papers discussed in Hanover in May 2017 and reflect the symposium's conceptual and structural approach, which brought together established researchers and doctoral students from different disciplinary backgrounds with representatives from museums, art and media. Accordingly, this book presents results of long-term historical research conducted by experienced scholars, early findings by young colleagues, studies on newly emerging research topics, thoughts on historiography and commemoration as well as practical and methodological observations on disseminating knowledge and research results to the public.

The contributions to this book and the new research in the wake of the Centennial focus on a more global perspective, on political ideas, raw materials, economic and ecological impacts and on social structures. They contribute to a changed understanding of the War's temporal structure and also of the ways in which scholars engage with these temporalities' diverse chronologies. Thinking about the medium- and long-term consequences of the First World War forces us to reconsider historical meta-narratives. What happens if we regard events linked to the War as part of much larger processes: colonial expansion, environmental transformations, the history of racism, the emancipation of women, the actualization of socialist ideas, the rise of internationalist movements and humanitarian interventions, or particular conjunctions of the political economy? What was the role of the War within these developments—did it act as an accelerator, a turning point or something else? Are such expanded chronological horizons accompanied by restrictions of some sort and, if so, by which ones?

While the present volume cannot discuss these longer-term processes exhaustively, the contributions allow us to revisit older questions, asking e.g. to what extent the First World War can be perceived as the end of the "age of empire". The multiplication of perspectives that is brought about



by global history prompts us to search for more differentiated answers. In some ways, (transformed) empires emerged from the War utilizing new instruments—the “soft” powers of humanitarian efforts, the informal empires of economic connections, new paths established by economic links with new states, thereby securing the supply chains for much-needed resources. At the same time, these very instruments were also able to serve and bolster anti-imperial and anti-colonial struggles.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, as John Horne emphasized during the symposium’s final discussion, we must not only investigate the First World War in terms of its significance for long-term historical processes, but should continue to think of the consequences of those processes for the way in which the War unfolded. Rather than making an analytical distinction between these two perspectives, a number of contributions in this volume (e.g., the chapters by Gratien, Iqbal, Rominger) suggest how to consider them jointly. The chapters by Desai and Hager as well as that by Bromber, Lange and Liebau show how non-European perspectives may help to expand the conventional (Western) chronology of 1914–1918 and to explore the War as a part of more long-term conflicts and crises.

The book’s first section addresses new approaches and themes related to the War from a global socio-historical perspective. Taking a long-term view of “The First World War as a Crisis of the Imperial Order”, Radhika Desai argues that the contemporary multi-polar world is essentially a long-term effect of the First World War. Drawing on a wide range of published analyses from a Marxist perspective, spanning the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, she makes the case for renewed attention to political economy in order to understand fully the War’s global effects.

Questions about class and inequality were already asked in First World War research during the 1970s and 1980s. Such questions have returned in the context of the Centennial – but they have taken on a new guise: inequality and class are now discussed within global social history, i.e. a social history beyond national frames.<sup>5</sup> Such a global social history of the First World War encourages both the study of entanglements and systematic comparison. Recent contributions to environmental history show that the study of inequality must include the ecological perspective, as environ-

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4 Hobsbawm (1994). For an “imperial turn” in First World War studies see: Gerwarth/Manela (2014) or Jarboe/Fogarty (2014). For the discussion of the immediate post-war period as an “internationalist moment”, see Raza/Roy/Zachariah (2015).

5 Kocka (2014), p. 355.

mental injustices often incorporate long-term (inequality) effects. This has inspired a new strand of World War research. In his essay on the “The First World War and the Global Environment: A View from South Asia”, Ifthekar Iqbal discusses the ways in which the First World War shaped new patterns in the use of global ecological resources. Taking the entangled histories of jute, the water hyacinth and timber as examples, he shows how the War altered not only economic relations between what were then colonies and imperial powers, but also led to long-lasting environmental transformations that are still felt in the region today.

Ecological changes induced or accelerated by war affected not only economic relations, but impacted the circulation of deadly pathogens, parasites and diseases. In a discussion of the emergence and spreading of “Malaria and the Legacy of the First World War in the Ottoman Empire”, Chris Gratien argues that “the First World War began as a political conflict, but [...] ended in ecological disaster”.<sup>6</sup> His analysis of published sources and archival material about “war malaria” shows that the war continued to affect the health of combatants and civilians alike years after the official end of hostilities.

Another aspect of studying the war in terms of producing or intensifying structures of inequality is the investigation of gender and generational relations. This is demonstrated, perhaps unexpectedly, by Felix Brahm’s systematic scrutiny of the arms trade and post-war global arms control in East Africa. In his contribution on “East Africa and the Post-War Question of Global Arms Control”, he demonstrates that the arms trade not only affected the fighting capacities of local communities as well as international political debates, but must also be investigated with regard to new practices and notions of masculinity in East Africa.

In the armies of the colonial powers, the production of military masculinities could challenge racialized social hierarchies through the imagined or real revision of gender relations. In his chapter on “Migration and the Long First World War in Tunisia”, Christopher Rominger uses the war photography of Albert Samama-Chikli, a Jewish Tunisian who volunteered for the French army, to show the unexpected encounters and unintended sociopolitical outcomes generated by the War and by colonialism. Rominger suggests that the War produced new opportunities for Tunisian men to engage with French society through gendered relations *and* to

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6 Cf. Chris Gratien’s contribution on “Malaria in the Ottoman Empire and Beyond as a Legacy of the First World War” in this volume.

challenge the implications and extent of colonial and racialized boundaries, both during the War and after. At the same time, he demonstrates that the War deepened political and ideological conflicts in Tunisia, such as anti-Semitism, through transnational dynamics.

The contributions in the book's second section focus on the political implications of commemoration and history writing as well as the entanglement of commemoration and historiography, their frictions, appropriations and the porous boundaries between them. Transnational dynamics are a significant feature when it comes to remembrance, including historiographical writing and commemorative practices. The systematic search for, and use of, new types of sources is another important feature of the Centennial. Letters, visual and material objects as well as sound recordings, often already digitized and accessible to a large number of people, have become an integral part of World War studies. They challenge established, exclusively text-based methodologies. However, these new sources are not only objects of academic research. They also often assume specific functions in events and acts of remembrance. Exhibitions, art and media productions re-contextualize these sources in new ways and, thus, form a bridge between academic research and a broader historical awareness. As the chapter by Katrin Bromber, Katharina Lange and Heike Liebau suggests, these sources acquired a new value around the time of the Centennial because there are hardly any *Zeitzeugen* (eyewitnesses) of the First World War that are still alive. The chapter's scrutiny of the nexus between "The First World War in Africa, the Middle East and South Asia: Commemoration, New Research and Debates around the Centennial" shows the importance of asking who remembers and who is being remembered; who has access to the sources and who defines the direction of memory. The comparative perspective reveals that the global character of the War sits uneasily with the largely nationalistic historiography and commemoration, which is fuelled by the dynamics of centennial celebrations worldwide.

In their contribution "Between Persistent Differences and Vagueness: Textbook Narratives about the First World War", Barbara Christophe and Kerstin Schwedes, analysing textbook narratives about the First World War, take a nation-state framework as their implicit point of departure. Based on a larger project, which included the comparison of narratives on the origin of the First World War in textbooks of 17 countries worldwide, the authors here selected examples from European countries including

Great Britain, Germany, France, Lithuania and Russia. Discussing the ways in which the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, which triggered the War in Europe, is portrayed, they argue that in each case this event is represented in terms of present-day political experiences, i.e. informed by events that took place in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the textbooks were written.

The First World War led to the revision of boundaries and the re-classification of territories and broke up empires into nation states and colonies, sometimes in the form of mandate states. These processes generated questions when national histories of the War were formulated. Depending on how they were answered and by whom, historiography as well as other commemorative practices construct ruptures and continuities between the pre-war and the post-war experiences. Veronika Hager's contribution on "The Long End of the Ottoman Empire: Historiographical Discourses on the First World War during the Consolidation of the Republic of Turkey" examines this question by focusing on scholarly historiography produced within the consolidating Republic of Turkey, from the 1930s until the mid-1950s. Her analysis shows that, despite the clearly heterogeneous nature of the explored texts, one feature they all share is an emphasis on heroism and patriotic duty, while ignoring the suffering of soldiers as well as civilians. Most importantly, the writings remain completely silent on the Armenian genocide.

While the contributions to the second section of the book relate to the relation between historiography and the politics of memory, the third section investigates various angles of public commemoration by focusing on exhibitions and artistic productions. These commemorative events re-contextualize letters, visual and material objects as well as sound recordings in new ways which take on specific functions in practices and acts of remembrance and, thus, form a bridge between academic research and a broader historical awareness. Oksana Nagornaja's contribution on "2014 – An Invented Anniversary? Museum Exhibitions on the First World War in Russia" analyses exhibitions on the First World War in contemporary Russia. She casts light on the frictions within memory produced by commemorating an imperial war-time past from the vantage point of a non-imperial national present. Nagornaja argues that the predominant focus on heroism and patriotic duty displayed in the centennial exhibitions echoes older narratives by Russian exiles in the first half of the twentieth century. The exhibits thus document the travelling of interpretive frameworks not only

across time, but also travelling back and forth across national boundaries. Nagornaja also addresses the questions of curating these exhibitions, criticizing “interactive”, i.e. sensory (e.g. auditory) elements used extensively as vehicles to produce an affective closeness to the war heroes while reducing the space for critical reflection.

In contrast, Franziska Dunkel’s explanation of the concept behind the exhibition “‘Carnival of Hell’. The First World War and the Senses” that she curated at Haus der Geschichte Baden-Württemberg in Stuttgart closely describes the limitations as well as the potential of a multi-sensorial approach to exhibiting the First World War. Dunkel discusses the “balancing act between sensationalism and sensuousness” that the curators faced: while seeking to avoid any pretention of transporting the spectators “back to the historic situation”, the involvement of tactile, olfactory or auditory impressions in addition to texts and objects occasionally provoked perceptions of a more “authentic” experience of the War.<sup>7</sup>

Julia Tieke’s account of an exhibition she co-curated (“Digging Deep, Crossing Far”) presents her own engagement with commemorating and tracing the impact of the First World War through artistic productions in the present day. Her text opens up a kaleidoscopic view of how auditory sources and material of sound archives originating from the War years resonate across the intervening century. The exhibition, which was shown in three countries, presented the results of individual artistic and scholarly work using audio recordings of South Asian prisoners of war. The curators had invited contributions from Germany as well as from India and Pakistan, thus initiating a debate on commemoration beyond national boundaries.

In the final chapter on “The Material Culture of Remembrance and Identity: The Commonwealth War Graves Commission Sites of South Africa, India, Canada, & Australia on the Western Front”, Hanna Smyth writes about her ongoing research into memorials and cemeteries representing South Africa, India, Canada, and Australia on the First World War’s Western Front as sites of identity formation. Investigating the two decades between 1918 and 1938, when most memorials were constructed, she traces how intersections between individual, collective, national and imperial identities were manifested and negotiated. This links back to the

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Franziska Dunkel’s explanation of the concept behind the exhibition “‘Carnival of Hell’. The First World War and the Senses” can be found in the synonymous chapter in this volume.

questions of ruptures and continuities between imperial and post-imperial practices of commemoration that were already alluded to in earlier sections of this book.

Foregrounding ruptures, continuities and memories, the contributions to this volume speak from a variety of disciplinary as well as regional backgrounds relating to the long end of the First World War. While it does not provide a complete picture, the book presents innovative approaches towards critical reflection on the long-term repercussions of the First World War in Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Europe. As such, the book contributes to, and forms part of, the ongoing international scholarly, artistic and political debates about the War that were and still are intensified by the Centennial. It is this volume's main objective to further and facilitate the dialogue between researchers of African, Asian and Middle Eastern histories and their colleagues engaged in historical research on Europe. In this sense, we hope that the book may serve as an inspiration for more research on the global multi-layered causes, consequences and temporalities of the First World War.

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# I. New Approaches, Methodologies and Sources





# The First World War: Climax and Crisis of Imperialism

*Radhika Desai*

The idea that war between the great powers could be or was the climax and crisis of imperialism emerged in the early twentieth century in a corpus of Marxist and non-Marxist writing that lit up the hitherto murky relations between the great powers in a dazzling theoretical lightning storm. English social liberal John Hobson's early salvo (1902) was followed by works of leading Marxists: Hilferding (1910), Luxemburg (1913), Lenin (1916) and Bukharin (1917). They had their differences: Hobson and Luxemburg wrote of the formative and enduring relationship between capitalism and imperialism rooted in the former's contradictions. The others traced the intensified and competitive imperialism of their age to a new stage in the development of capitalism diagnosed in slightly different but compatible ways. Hilferding labelled it finance capital.<sup>1</sup> Lenin called it monopoly capital and Bukharin nationalised capital (Desai 2013, 43–53). However, all these works predicted and/or explained the First World War as the outcome of the contradiction-driven capitalist expansionism of the capitalist powers.

These theories were also the first theories of modern international relations, coming well before the 'Wilsonian idealism' that, according to most textbooks, is supposed to have inaugurated the systematic study of international relations. They were arguably also the best: combining the analysis of classes and nations, of class struggle and national struggles, in a single frame unlike the post-war discipline of international relations that operated in curious detachment from domestic politics. No wonder then that, as late as the 1970s, "Virtually all discussions of imperialism at a theoretical level assign[ed] importance to the Marxist theory—either as an explanation

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<sup>1</sup> Hilferding's finance capital is today often confused with financialization even though it stems from the British pattern of international finance which Hilferding contrasted to the continental pattern he called finance capital (Hilferding 1910, pp. 226); see also Desai (2013), pp. 49–50.

which is satisfactory or one which is erroneous but requiring challenge” (Owen and Sutcliffe 1972, 312).

Thereafter, a number of intellectual and historiographical tendencies have tended to displace it. Imperialism and national struggles were eclipsed as major themes in Marxist scholarship (Patnaik 1990), leaving an exclusive focus on class (Desai 2017). “Marxist economists” denatured Marxism by trying to fit it into the antithetical theoretical and methodological framework of neoclassical economics while Marxists in other disciplines sought to rid it of its quintessential materialism by labelling it “economic determinism” (Desai 2010, 2016c, Freeman 2010). In historiography, the Fischer thesis of German war guilt—that the German government chose war, “worse, planned it in advance, in the hope of breaking out of their European isolation and launching a bid for world power” (Clark 1992, 560)—replaced the afore-mentioned classical structural explanations. More generally, an allegedly a- or pre-theoretical preoccupation with the minutiae of historical events displaced theoretical and analytical concerns.

No wonder then that by the twenty-first century it could be said that “Unfortunately within the contemporary historiographical literature on the origins of the First World War, [...] the closest thing to a strong ‘consensus’ historians have reached is that the classical Marxist theories have little if anything to offer in understanding the origins of 1914. Even amongst contemporary Marxists, the theory has fallen on hard times, as many dispute its historical and more often contemporary relevance as a theory of geopolitical rivalry and war” (Anievas 2015, 104). This shift also resulted in a view of the First World War as a largely European event: imperialism was no part of this picture.

While the classical theories of imperialism could have been corrected, elaborated, developed and updated, their summary displacement was certainly an intellectual step backward. No wonder that some of the most prominent historians refused to take it (Hobsbawm 1989). In recent years, moreover, Christopher Clark’s major study has come to support the Marxists’ structural account through the apparently opposed path: a most intricate study of the details of the events that led up to it (Clark 2012).<sup>2</sup> According to Clark, “the outbreak of the war was a tragedy, not a crime” and “the Germans were not the only imperialists and not the only ones to succumb to paranoia” (561). Not only did he relate the war back to imperi-

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<sup>2</sup> Geoff Eley (2015) is a critique of important details that nevertheless supports the broad ‘decentered’ and therefore structural thrust.

alism but shifted the focus back to structural causes, rather than conscious intentions of the actors: The “protagonists of 1914 were sleepwalkers, watchful but unseeing, haunted by dreams, yet blind to the reality of the horror they were about to bring to the world” (Clark 2012, 562).

In this chapter, I argue that we must return to the classical theories of imperialism and their understanding of the First World War in relation to imperialism if we are to locate one important Long End of that catastrophe: contemporary multipolarity. By that term, I refer to the shift in the world’s economic centre of gravity away from the west and towards fast-developing formerly colonial or semi-colonial countries that formed what came to be known in the post-war period as the Third World, with China leading the way. This shift is unprecedented in the history of capitalism. Only by constructing an outline of the century-long and tortuously winding decline of imperialism since the First World War can we discern how it has led to contemporary multipolarity and understand that, in one important and real sense, the historical fruits of the First World War are ripening only now.

In this Long End, moreover, the Russian Revolution, which broke out amid the crisis of imperialism, played a critical role. The war tested the domestic sway of ruling classes of all the great powers and broke it in the case of Tsarist Russia. The Revolution’s makers as well as contemporary observers initially saw the Russian Revolution as a largely European event, albeit an aberrant one—a revolution against capitalism that was also a ‘revolution against *Capital*’ as Antonio Gramsci (1917) famously put it. It went athwart the schematic understanding of Marxism in which Russia had to develop capitalism fully before it could advance toward socialism.

However, events in the earliest years of the Russian Revolution of October 1917 were already reorienting its significance eastwards and southwards. They included the failure of revolution in Western Europe, the requirements of sustaining revolution against imperialism, consolidating it in Russia’s own vast eastern territories and the anti-imperialist ferment in the colonies. And the century since has settled the matter. The October Revolution inspired anti-imperialist revolutions—both nationalist and socialist—across the former colonial and semi-colonial world and, as the states they created constituted themselves as the Third World, informed its developmental strategies. Their successes laid the foundation for the growth that is today leading more and more observers to concede that we are living in a “multipolar” world. If this simple relation needs to be re-

established today, it is because intellectual shifts since the 1970s (including the aforementioned shifts in the understanding of the First World War) have tended to direct our attention away from it.

In what follows, I first review three Long Ends of the First World War. While two, in their different ways, put it at the end of the Second World War, the third, Eric Hobsbawm's (1989 and 1994) is a longer, open-ended and prescient one. I go on to introduce the new conception of the dynamics of the capitalist world order I recently proposed, geopolitical economy (Desai 2013 and further elaborated in Desai 2015, 2016a and 2016b). It permits us to link the classical accounts of imperialism and the related concept of uneven and combined development (UCD) to contemporary multipolarity. I also dwell on the intellectual shifts that have made it difficult for this to be more widely appreciated.

### Three Long Ends

The idea that the First World War did not end when the guns fell silent in 1918 but continued to reverberate down following decades is not new, though writers who proposed it were all touched by Marxism.

The early pioneer of international relations, the English historian Edward Hallett Carr (1892–1982), famously linked the First and Second World Wars with his concept of the “Twenty Years’ Crisis” of 1919 to 1939. In doing so, he challenged the liberal illusions that dominated the understanding of international affairs in the English-speaking world. Instead, he explained the First World War broadly along the lines of the classical theories of imperialism and argued that the Twenty Years’ Crisis was marked by the difficulty the world had in abandoning the utopian nineteenth century liberal notion that free trade creates international harmony. This fundamentally erroneous idea had successfully cloaked nineteenth century industrial and imperial rivalry only because “[t]he international economic structure bore considerable resemblance to the domestic economic structure of the United States” in which “[p]ressure could at once be relieved by expansion to hitherto unoccupied and unexploited territories; and there was a plentiful supply of cheap labour, and of backward countries”. This understanding unravelled into “the transparent clash of interests [...] about the turn of the century”, “found its first expression