



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

# THE LONG END OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

*Ruptures, Continuities and Memories*

# The Long End of the First World War

Eigene und Fremde Welten

Edited by Jörg Baberowski, Stefan Rinke and Michael Wildt

Volume 36

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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.gerda-henkel-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

in colonial policies” and led to the First World War (Carr 1939/1989, 60–61). Carr believed that, in the two crisis-ridden decades that followed, the world did stumble toward some recognition of the reality, and legitimacy, of national economic concerns, chiefly because circumstances repeatedly defeated attempts to realise the utopian ideal (Carr 1939/1989, 54–60, 239). However, as we shall see, after the Second World War the US, seeking the sort of domination over an open and ‘liberal’ world economy such as Britain had enjoyed in the nineteenth century, sought to reverse this, though historical realities ensured that it never succeeded. Carr was substantially influenced by Marxism (Haslam 1999, 53–54) and paid the price of intellectual marginalization in the post-war discipline of international relations (van der Pijl 2014, 117).

For the ‘left dissident’ American historian, Arno Mayer (born 1926 in Luxembourg), the outbreak of war in 1914 inaugurated a second European “Thirty Years’ War” lasting until 1945 (1981, 3, 329). It was as fundamental in reshaping Europe and its inter-state relations as the earlier one that constituted the continent’s modern states and inter-state system. As a historian who insisted on the “*Primat der Innenpolitik*” in explaining international events, Mayer enlarged international history beyond diplomatic history to the turbulent social history of the era (Mayer 1959, 1967). In Mayer’s account, the Thirty Years’ Crisis of “two world wars and the Holocaust” was necessary “to finally dislodge” the old Regimes of Europe, based on landed, rather than industrial property, which, contrary to most liberal accounts, had persisted until 1914 (1981, 329). In this view, the First World War resulted from the profound internal crisis in the ‘modernization’ of European societies—with not just Germany but all European countries suffering their respective versions of the Blochian “*Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*” (a point emphasised also by Anderson 1987)—just as the seventeenth century Thirty Years’ War issued from the birth pangs of capitalism itself.

Both Carr and Mayer look backward when proposing their long ends: the developments that climaxed in the First World War did not spend themselves in it and would not do so without putting the world through another world war and the intervening crisis decades. However, Mayer focuses exclusively on the domestic, explaining the Great War as “an expression of the decline and fall of the old order fighting to prolong its life” (1981, 4). While he drew attention to a neglected aspect of the crisis—how class antagonisms between pre-capitalist landed elites and the bourgeoisie,

still the junior of the major propertied classes that cleaved to it, and the working classes contributed to the First World War and the Thirty Years' Crisis—his account remained profoundly Eurocentric. The index contains no entries for imperialism, colonialism, colonies and associated subjects. Perhaps, like Joseph Schumpeter (Schumpeter 1951), Mayer regarded imperialism as the result of the “persistence of the old regime”.

The eminent Marxist historian, Eric Hobsbawm (1917–2012), gives an account of the causes and outcomes of the First World War that incorporates both domestic and international dimensions in his *The Age of Empire: 1875–1914* (1989) and *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1989* (1992). While, like Carr and Mayer, he also united the two World Wars and the intervening decades in a single Age of Catastrophe, he proposed a much longer end for the First World War because, though he was not without his Eurocentric tendencies (on which more below), he had his ear to the historical ground. He could see, on the one hand, that “[w]ithout the breakdown of nineteenth century bourgeois society in the Age of Catastrophe, there would have been no October revolution and no USSR” (Hobsbawm 1994, 8) and, on the other, that the Revolution’s greatest significance lay in its role in hastening imperialism’s decline thereafter.

Tracing, like Carr, the origins of the First World War in broadly Marxist terms in “capitalist development and imperialism” (315), Hobsbawm specifically opposed the fashionable German guilt thesis: “The problem of discovering the origin of the First World War is [...] not one of discovering ‘the aggressor’. It lies in the nature of a progressively deteriorating international situation which increasingly escaped from the control of governments” (312).

Through to the end of the nineteenth century, heightening competition for markets and colonies between Britain and the new powers—Germany, Japan, the US—that had risen to challenge her command over world markets had been managed peacefully. And no country specifically wanted war other than limited colonial ones. However, by the early twentieth century, “economic competition became inextricably woven into the political, even the military actions, of states” (317) while, since “the characteristic feature of capitalist accumulation was precisely that it had no limit”, it led to “the tacit equation of unlimited economic growth and political power” (318). As he put it, the great powers were

“[...] careful to keep their colonial conflicts under control. They never looked like providing the *casus belli* for a major war but undoubtedly precipitated the formation of the international and eventually belligerent blocs: what became the Anglo-Franco-Russian bloc began with the Anglo-French ‘cordial understanding’ (‘Entente Cordiale’) of 1904, essentially an imperialist deal by which the French gave up their claims to Egypt in return for British backing for their claims in Morocco—a victim on which Germany also happened to have her eye. Nevertheless, all powers without exception were in an expansionist and conquering mood. Even Britain, whose posture was fundamentally defensive, since her problem was how to protect hitherto uncontested global dominance against the new intruders, attacked the South African republics; nor did she hesitate to consider partitioning the colonies of a European state, Portugal, with Germany. In the global ocean, all states were sharks, and all statesmen knew it.” (318)

In this unlimited competition, the shifting alliances that had kept the peace in Europe for a century became “opposed alliances [...] welded into permanence” and their disputes turned into “unmanageable confrontation” (312) leading, eventually, to war.

The climax of these developments in the First World War was also their crisis, ending the nineteenth century in which the reality of imperialism was cloaked in the rhetoric of free trade and birthing the Russian Revolution which marked the century so decisively as to make the ‘Short Twentieth Century’ coterminous with the life of the Soviet Union. However, Hobsbawm’s understanding of the Soviet Union’s significance went far beyond Cold War antagonisms between capitalism and communism in the ‘Age of Extremes’. For that century contained the remarkable ‘Golden Age’ of economic growth that followed the Second World War, and assessing its significance required greater distance. Moreover, the still ongoing neoliberal ‘crisis decades’ that followed the Golden Age remained open ended. So he dismissed those who “detected ‘the end of history’ in the fall of the Soviet Empire”. “A better case may be made”, he argued,

“for saying that the third quarter of the century marked the end of the seven or eight millennia of human history that began with the invention of agriculture in the stone age, if only because it ended the long era when the overwhelming majority of the human race lived by growing food and herding animals”.

This transformation was part of the Golden Age’s “economic, social and cultural transformation, the greatest, most rapid and most fundamental in recorded history” (8). And it was connected with the Russian Revolution. On the one hand, it was



“one of the ironies of this strange century that the most lasting results of the October revolution, whose object was the global overthrow of capitalism, was [sic] to save its antagonist [...] by providing it with the incentive, fear, to reform itself after the Second World War and, by establishing the popularity of economic planning, furnishing it with some of the procedures for its reform” (7–8).

On the other hand, looking to the many Third World revolutions and governments it inspired, Hobsbawm reminded us that “the major and lasting impact of the regimes inspired by the October revolution was as a powerful accelerator of the modernization of backward agrarian countries” (9).

The *Age of Extremes* went to press soon after the USSR disintegrated and the quarter century since then would appear to have confirmed Hobsbawm’s judgments extravagantly. At the time most expected that the world would become unipolar under the undisputed sway of the United States and that it would enjoy a ‘peace dividend’ with the end of the Cold War. Both expectations were belied. Instead of a unipolar world, what took shape over these decades was a multipolar world thanks to the continued and accelerated development of many formerly colonial and semi-colonial countries, so centrally inspired by the Soviet Union, led by the most successful of the “regimes inspired by the October Revolution”, the People’s Republic of China. And, for all the West’s protestations about the desirability of the development of poor countries, it has reacted to this development with a veritable “new cold war” (Desai 2015a, 4) directed against the spectacularly developing People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation recently re-stabilized after the devastating decade of Shock Therapy (see Woodward 2017 and Kagarlitsky, Desai and Freeman, 2016). Left and critical scholarship has largely echoed this mainstream reaction, receiving multipolarity with deep suspicion and supporting—wittingly or not—Western aggression by its support for the Western discourse about alleged violations of human rights by alleged brutal dictators (Desai 2017, Johnstone 2012).

Both dominant and critical currents remain, it would appear, trapped in certain, arguably overhasty, intellectual shifts that took place in the 1970s and displaced the hitherto central theme of imperialism. In its place, the very utopian free market, free trade thinking that Carr had considered obsolete in 1939 was revived in new forms: as neoliberalism, US Hegemony, globalization and empire, each with left wing versions. Like 19<sup>th</sup> century Free Trade, these ideologies portrayed the world economy in what

Friedrich List (1856) had called 'cosmopolitan' terms, as seamlessly unified such that either no states mattered, as in Free Trade, neoliberalism or globalization, or only one did, as in US hegemony or empire.

It is necessary, next, to outline geopolitical economy as an approach to understanding the world order of capitalism and its dynamics that reaches back to the classical theories of imperialism, places the economic role of states centrally and is founded on an understanding of capitalism's contradictions. It will help us understand how the world has traversed the historical distance from the First World War to contemporary multipolarity and to appreciate why the intellectual shifts of the late twentieth century were in cosmopolitan directions.

## Geopolitical Economy

Given capitalism's tendency toward surfeits of commodities and capital, inequalities and crises, capitalist states must manage their economies and class relations domestically and internationally, depending on the relative benefits and costs they confront. Domestically, states intervene in economies for a variety of purposes: for instance, to steady them after crises, to aid domestic industry in facing international competition or to regulate relations between capitalists and between capitalist and other classes through repression and/or concessions. Internationally, surplus commodities and capital, as well as the geographical limitations of the nation-state form, lead to imperialism. It can take the form of formal colonization, such as that of India by Britain or of informal control, such as that exercised by Britain, and then the US, over formally independent states in Latin America. The purpose of both is to secure markets, investment outlets and raw materials. While powerful states can formally or informally colonise weak-state or stateless territories easily for these purposes, stronger states can resist such subjugation (as, eventually, did the colonies, leading to the wave of decolonization after the Second World War) and mount challenges to the productive, political and military powers of stronger states through state-directed industrialization. Thus, states play a central role in capitalism contrary to the ideology of free market capitalism. Moreover, contrary to the idea that Free Trade promotes international harmony, in reality, the dynamic of capitalist international relations has exhibited a turbulent state-

centric logic from its beginnings. This dynamic is best captured in the concept of the dialectic of uneven and combined development (UCD). The dialectic of UCD, rather than free markets, has been responsible for the spread of productive capacity in the capitalist era.

Though the *locus classicus* of UCD is generally held to be Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* (1934), the idea was widely shared among Bolsheviks and underlay their understanding of their revolution's historical character. Indeed, it was ultimately rooted in Marx and Engels' writings (Desai 2013, 36–43 and 51–53). The ideas of UCD were also transplanted from its Marxist and Bolshevik sources into western mainstream scholarship by the Russian émigré intellectual, Alexander Gerschenkron (Gerschenkron 1962), in the form of ideas about “late development” and the “advantages of backwardness”. Since interpretations that have dominated since the 1970s have distorted it (Desai 2013, 11), my own interpretation may be briefly outlined.

Inherently uneven, capitalist development is concentrated in particular countries and regions, creating inequality in productive capacity and material prosperity between nations. Just as class inequality leads to class struggle *within* societies, so such international inequality leads to struggle *between* them. If the content of class struggles is the distribution of surplus income as well as control over social production, that of international struggle is the international division of labour and the position of various nations in its hierarchy. The more advanced capitalist nations seek to maintain and extend the uneven distribution of productivity and productive power, and the resulting control over the sources of surplus profit, that privilege them and permit them to impose the costs of their capitalism's contradictions on other societies.

Just as the dominant ideas about society are the ideas of the ruling classes in which their special interests are tricked out in the garb of general social interests, so at the international level, the dominant ideas are the ideas of the ruling classes of the dominant nations in which their special interests are articulated as the world's interests. Economic cosmopolitan ideas about the world, free market and free trade ideas, serve these needs very well. They dissimulate the critical role states have played in the economic advance of the dominant nations. To the extent cosmopolitan or liberal economic ideas are accepted by other nations, they keep themselves open to the commodities and capital of the dominant nations and refrain from the only type of effective challenge to the dominant nations they can

mount, namely state-led industrialization. However, not all nations accept these liberal economic ideas and such challenges can and do emerge simply because other nations do not suffer subjugation and relegation gladly: Those who can seek to challenge the dominance of some nations through combined or contender development, by hoarding industrial development through protection and planning. Thus, on the one hand, dominant states seek *complementarity* between their economies and those they dominate and seek to achieve it through formal and informal control over the dominated nations. On the other hand, contender nations reject this status and seek *similarity*, in terms of levels of industrial and technological development. They must achieve it through state-led, planned, industrialization.

The first contender powers—the US, Germany and Japan—had challenged the industrial supremacy of the first industrialiser, Britain, through their state-led industrialization around 1870. Their rise had already made the world order of capitalism multipolar, though this term was not in use then. This multipolarity coincided with the Second Industrial Revolution with its high capital requirements, explosive growth of productive forces and concentration of capital. The resulting ‘nationalised’, ‘monopoly’ or ‘finance’ capitals competed ever more aggressively for raw materials, markets and investment outlets. Such industrial competition between industrial behemoths was bound to turn into imperial competition at a time in history when weak-state and stateless territories remained available and when the advantages that a declining Britain still drew from her vast empire were plain for all to see. This is, as we have already seen, much the story of imperialism leading to the First World War as Hobsbawm told it, albeit without using the terms uneven or combined development.

## The Soviet Union and the Decline of Imperialism

The First World War was bound to weaken imperialism. When the Russian Revolution erupted in its midst, it strengthened anti-imperialist forces further. While the West European revolutions the Bolsheviks so fervently expected failed to materialise, nationalist forces in the colonies beckoned. The Japanese defeat of Tsarist Russia in 1905 had already energised them and the First World War’s increased colonial exactions strengthened them further. With the Bolshevik Revolution came its Decree on Peace, based

on an entirely new conception of relations between nations. It published the secret treaties, called for national self-determination for all dominated countries, in Europe and beyond, and condemned great power imperial ambitions. In response, Wilson too proclaimed his Fourteen Points if only so the US could retain its purchase in a radically altered situation (Mayer 1959, 265). However, as the Versailles settlement showed, the imperial powers reserved self-determination for the European successor states of the crumbling Austro-Hungarian Empire, disappointing nationalists in Asia in particular. It was now clear that among the major states, only the USSR stood against a re-stabilized imperial order. From here on, its support for anti-imperialist forces was crucial even though its survival required compromises with imperialism well before Stalin's doctrine of "socialism in one country" appeared (Eley 2002: 250, Claudin 1975: 253), limiting Soviet support for class and national struggles, and sometimes even hindering them.

Soviet solidarity with socialist and nationalist anti-imperialist forces, which included organising anti-imperialist forces in the imperialist countries under the Comintern until 1943, was a critical part of the reason why it was so threatening to Western imperial interests. Unlike the Eurocentric Second International, Lenin had always been aware of the potential geopolitical economic centrality of the colonised world. He had divided the world into three parts—imperial, neither imperial nor colonised and colonial and semi-colonial—anticipating the post-war Three Worlds idea (Lenin 1916). In the Comintern, the Bolshevik leadership cultivated nationalist movements and their leaders. M. N. Roy's argument that, given Western working class reformism, revolution in the West would depend on that in the East, where peasants and workers would lead socialist revolutions, modified the official position. Now imperialism was regarded as having made revolution in the West harder; communists were enjoined to support genuinely revolutionary bourgeois nationalist movements in the colonies and accept that. Finally, in certain circumstances, backward countries could achieve communism directly (Claudin 1975, 248, 265) as Marx had allowed (Shanin 1983).

Nationalists and communists mingled and linked their anti-imperial orientations at gatherings such as the Congress of the Peoples' of the East in 1920 in Baku (Riddell 1993) and the 1927 Brussels Conference of the League Against Imperialism (LAI). The latter was "the first anti-imperialist endeavour that managed to bring together [...] key players in the struggle

against colonialism and imperialism” (Petersson 2014, 69), including representatives from the Kuomintang, the Indian National Congress, Perhimpunan Indonesia, and the African National Congress. Though short-lived, the LAI inculcated a deeper appreciation of social issues among the professional middle class and bourgeois nationalist forces who found the Comintern more attractive than the Second International (Nehru, 1936/41, 123–127).

Moreover, the USSR also served as an example and model. It demonstrated not only that the power of imperial forces could be resisted through political revolution; its economic practices—of planned industrialization and development—showed how to do so economically. Until the First World War, combined development had taken only capitalist forms. After it, the Soviet Union added the powerful non-capitalist form to its repertoire. While its development was not without socialist characteristics, the most important historical task it carried out was to modernize a backward society. The Thirty Years’ Crisis of 1914 to 1945 closed, as it had opened, with a communist revolution against imperialism taking place soon after. The Chinese Revolution of 1949 added new elements to the toolkit of modernization of an even more backward society.

Though the centrality of nations and national struggles in UCD and in the broad movement against capitalist colonialism was clear to Marx and Engels, they had not elaborated on it at any length and the Second International had tended to neglect the issue. However, historical developments impressed them at least on Bolshevik practice. Originally, the Bolsheviks, like their internationalist Second International counterparts, considered national character of their revolution a deviation. However, the exigencies of sustaining their revolution ‘in one country’, running a multinational USSR, as well as the need to ally with nationalist and socialist movements in the colonial world, forced a focus on national realities. The Chinese, for their part, easily combined nationalism with communism and from then on invariably national communist movements and revolutions formed a broad anti-imperialist front with nationalist movements.

By the early years of the Second World War, the hour of decolonization had struck. This second major inter-imperialist world war witnessed great colonial powers losing, at least until 1943, with the collapse of France, and the Germans and Japanese threatening British and Dutch possessions in North Africa and South East Asia respectively. By the time the war ended, “[w]hat fatally damaged the old colonialists was the proof that white men