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HERRENHAUSEN SYMPOSIUM
HERRENHAUSEN PALACE, HANOVER

SUMMARY REPORT

“The Long End of the First World War: Ruptures, Continuities and Memories”

Organizers: Volkswagen Foundation, Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient Berlin, German Historical Institute London and Leibniz University of Hannover

The Herrenhausen Symposium “The Long End of the First World War: Ruptures, Continuities and Memories”, which took place at Herrenhausen Palace in Hanover, questioned the idea of a static and clearly defined “end” of the War. During their introductory remarks **ANDREAS GESTRICH** (London) and **KATRIN BROMBER** (Berlin) challenged the mainly Eurocentric periodization of the War, starting in June 1914 and ending at the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, by stressing the need to globalize not only the beginning of the War but also its end. Therefore, the conference aimed to examine the conflict’s end from the perspective of colonial actors, non-European areas and socially diverse groups. The long-term effects of the end of the War were examined in themes as diverse as (anti-)imperialism, social movements, economic and ecological developments. A fascinating aspect of the conference was its effort to bring research, historiography and commemoration of the First World War together and to discuss the interactions between research and memory since the centennial.

Session I on “**Post-war political frameworks, networks and movements**” launched debates about the impact of the end of the War on the imperial world order. **RADHIKA DESAI** (Manitoba) described the War as both climax and crisis of imperialism. Desai stressed the need for a structural and long-term analysis of the conflict to understand the War’s exact role in rethinking the twentieth-century world order. She discussed how the Russian Revolution globally unleashed anti-colonial mass movements and how the mechanisms of imperialism changed, as the increased stimulation of national economies illustrates. **CEMIL AYDIN** (North Carolina) focused on the reshaping of race, empire and nation after the First World War. Aydin stressed how colonizers and the colonized made strategic use of the notions

of race, nation and religion in service of geopolitical calculations. The pan-Asian and pan-Islamic movements, he argued, saw the emergence of anti-colonial mass movements based on ideas of racial, national and/or religious unity, as for example the Indian Muslim support for Turkey in 1919 illustrated. Colonial revolutionaries vainly embraced the allegedly universal idea of national self-determination to destroy imperial rule and to transcend Western racial generalizations of non-Europeans. In **session III** on “**Arab liberalism in the 1920s**”, **ELIZABETH THOMPSON** (Washington) deepened this topic by demonstrating how the imperial powers broke these non-European nationalist ambitions at the Treaty of Versailles and during the long aftermath of the War. Thompson used the Syrian-Arab general congress of 1920 to illustrate the continuous Western suppression of Arab liberal popular movements since the nineteenth century. Thompson stressed that the War deepened the cleavage between liberal mass movements and a corrupted elite in Arab countries.

In **session II** “**New fault lines, new wars**”, **YANG BIAO** (Shanghai) discussed history wars in East Asia from the perspective of hardly reconcilable accounts of these wars in Chinese and Japanese history textbooks. **DAN TAMIR** (Be'er Scheva) looked at the First World War as a turning point in the history of energy, stressing the development of oil-driven wars. **FELIX BRAHM** (London) examined how the difficult disarmament processes of African soldiers politically and culturally affected local communities and fueled British anxieties concerning armed African resistance.

Session IV focused on the long-lasting effects of the War on **humanitarian initiatives** after 1919. **FRANSCESCA PIANA** (Binghampton/Geneva) demonstrated how international humanitarian organizations dealt with the repatriation of prisoners of war who were then framed as refugees. She stressed how these organizations ambivalently perceived the refugees as passive victims, but also as the carriers of social, political, racial and sexual threats endangering national borders. **ALEXANDRA PFEIFF** (Florence) focused on the Chinese Red Swastika Society in the 1920s and read its combined nationalist and internationalist ambitions and its faith-based fundament as distinct from the European Red Cross initiatives.

In **session V**, long-term **ecological effects of the War** in non-European societies and landscapes were examined. **IFTEKHAR IQBAL** (Bandar Seri Begawan) revealed how the British stimulation of the invasive water hyacinth in the Bengal delta to solve the shell crisis entailed local water pollution and famine. In his analysis of the food security of the Red Sea region, **STEVEN SERELS** (Berlin) argued that

the conflict accelerated pre-war British efforts to control local food production in order to provide colonial troops.

Session VI studied the impact of the War on racial and gender interactions. **DANIEL STEINBACH** (Exeter) discussed personal interactions between African, Indian and European soldiers in Dar-Es-Salaam and stressed how these interactions led to expressions of paternalism and racism rather than to feelings of imperial solidarity. **ANDREA GERMER** (Dusseldorf) showed how the War and the peace conferences influenced Japanese feminist organizations, through taking a close look at the feminists' attitudes towards the state, their notion of Japan as an ethno-cultural nation, and their attitude towards the international community.

The symposium equally evaluated new research and commemoration since 2014. In **Session IX** on “new historiographies”, **KATRIN BROMBER**, **KATHARINA LANGE** and **HEIKE LIEBAU** (all Berlin) discussed the interactions between remembrance and research in Africa, the Middle East and South Asia during the centennial. They showed how local commemorations are taking shape in complicated political contexts. In contrast to current historiography, official Indian and Egyptian commemorations focus on a heroic remembrance of the colonial soldier and lack critical assessment of the colonial context. Liebau stressed the need to enlarge persistent national and imperial frameworks to more “glocal” and South-South perspectives. **MICHAEL EPKENHANS** (Potsdam) then turned to Europe. Although European politicians used the centennial to promote a more transnational remembrance, Epkenhans argued, national approaches were equally strengthened, especially in Great-Britain where the colonial contribution is often framed into a nostalgic imperial narrative. Official European and Russian commemorations hardly included academic efforts to shed light on the colonial perspective.

In contrast to these official commemorations, **sessions VII** and **VIII** demonstrated the efforts of grassroots and museum remembrance initiatives to bring colonial experiences into the limelight. The contributors of these sessions also discussed how the loss of “Zeitzeugen” (eye-witnesses) challenges practices of remembrance. In the project “Digging deep, crossing far”, **JULIA TIEKE** (Berlin) invited artists to work with oral sources from Asian POWs interned in the Wünsdorf Halfmoon Camp and confronted audiences in South Asia with the results. **JASDEEP SINGH RAHAL** (London) of the National Army Museum, London, equally involved South Asian source communities by organizing a re-enactment of a Sikh regiment that fought on the Western front for the British. Inspired by the “sensuous turn” in historiography, **FRANZISKA DUNKEL** (Stuttgart) of the Haus der Geschichte Baden-Württemberg explored the impact of the War on the senses to enter the soldiers' experiences. In the film

documentary “Antoine the Fortunate”, **NEFIN DINÇ** (Istanbul) used the memoir of an Austro-Hungarian soldier fighting in the Ottoman Empire to shed light on the complex history of the War in the Middle East. In “Forgotten Soldiers of Empire”, **MIN YOUNG-EUNG** (Seoul) was inspired by recently surfaced military songs to screen the experiences of Korean soldiers in the Russian army. **KERSTIN SCHWEDES** (Braunschweig), explained the efforts of the Georg Eckert Institute for Textbook Research to compare the diverse dealings with the War in European history textbooks. **OXANA NAGORNAJA** (Chelyabinsk) finally argued that the absence of witnesses and the state control over Russian museums enabled President Putin to manipulate the re-introduction of the First World War into Russian memories by framing it as the last heroic war of the Tsar regime.

The academic efforts to include the colonial experience in First World War historiography marked the six **PhD-projects** that were presented. **CEREN AYGÜL** (Ankara) examines the humanitarian aid of the Ottoman Red Crescent Society. **VERONIKA HAGER** (Berlin) studies how republican Turkish historiography tried to come to terms with the War. **HANNA SMYTH** (Oxford) focuses on the relationship between Commonwealth War Graves Commission sites and imperial-colonial identities. **CHRIS ROMINGER** (New York) examines the political visions of post-war Tunisian exile communities. **ALP YENEN** (Basel) recently defended his PhD on the Young Turks exiles and transnational Muslim revolutionary societies. Two recently completed projects were also presented as part of the symposium: The exhibition “**Lives from a global conflict. Cultural entanglements during the First World War**” of the HERA-project CEGC was on display and the book launch of **World(Counter)Revolutions 1917-1920** took place. This volume comprises the results of the 2016 Herrenhausen Symposium with the same title and was edited by Stefan Rinke and Michael Wildt (both Berlin).

In the **final session “Towards a new chronology”**, members of the steering committee of the symposium discussed the main conclusions and outcomes. The speakers’ efforts to put a global and long-term perspective underneath political, ecological, humanitarian or historiographic developments clearly demonstrated that in several domains the War lasted far longer than the armistice and the peace conferences suggest and that, in a global perspective, the end of the War was experienced very differently. The panel asked to replace the idea of a clear-cut end with the concept of “long endings”. These “long endings” are particularly true in the field of (anti-)imperialism, discussed in many papers. **MICHAEL PROVENCE** (San Diego) and **JENNIFER JENKINS** (Toronto) urged to reassess the meaning of the Treaty of Versailles by taking its global effects into account, as the Western betrayal of non-

European nationalism largely impacted anti-imperial movements. They argued that the War marked the end of nineteenth century imperialism and led to the rise of, as Stoler and Cooper suggest, “multiple empires” in which European powers used new instruments such as the stimulation of national economies and the soft power of humanitarianism. **TORSTEN WEBER** (Tokyo) stressed that rethinking chronology stimulates debates about causes and consequences of the War and further research should determine the exact role of the War in accelerating, introducing or diminishing pre-war social movements, ecological processes and economic structures. **SANTANU DAS** (London) underlined how the rethinking of chronology could benefit from a civilian perspective and from the inclusion of experiences of ordinary people, while further reflection on the lack of sources to fully understand personal African and Asian experiences of war is needed. The global approach, as **JOHN HORNE** (Dublin) argued, urged for new ways of thinking space and temporality. Horne suggested speaking of “multiple temporalities” and “not simultaneous simultaneity” in order to multiply our understanding of the War and to meaningfully connect global and local events. In addition to these remarks about spatiality, **BRIGITTE REINWALD** (Hanover) suggested the perspective of mobility to examine significant long-lasting social-economic consequences of War by investigating how the conflict set not only soldiers into motion, but mobilized women and workers, too. Finally, it was obvious that the symposium has stimulated the interaction between PhD-students and senior researchers and between research and memorial culture.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.volkswagenstiftung.de/nc/veranstaltungen/veranstaltungsarchiv/detailansicht-veranstaltung/news/detail/artikel/the-long-end-of-the-first-world-war-ruptures-continuities-and-memories/marginal/5006.html>

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