SUMMARY REPORT:
“World-Counter-Revolutions: 1917-1920 from a Global Perspective. Herrenhausen Symposium”

Organizers: Stefan Rinke (Freie Universität Berlin), Michael Wildt (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin), and Volkswagen Foundation

“The revolution does not need historians”, as Lenin said. The symposium on World-Counter-Revolutions, however, has certainly proven that a revolution indeed needs historians to be thoroughly analyzed. The event, which was excellently organized by coordinator Anorthe Kremers (Volkswagen Foundation) and her team, was held reflecting a truly global perspective with scholars and young scholars from Asia, both the Americas and Europe. In a total of seven panels, the conference focused on a range of topics examining revolutions and counter-revolutions. A number of questions were raised, among them: Why was the year 1917 so vital as a starting point of revolutionary movements? How can the subsequent upheavals be placed in a global context? For which reasons did the war-period become so influential for the next century to come?

In his welcome address, the Secretary General of the Volkswagen Foundation, WILHELM KRULL, stressed the importance of the international appeal of the conference. In their following introduction, MICHAEL WILDT (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) argued that revolutions were always measured by whether they have managed to sustain the power they have achieved, and STEFAN RINKE (Freie Universität Berlin) remarked that the First World War caused anti-semitism, anti-colonialism, and anti-imperialism in its aftermath.
JÖRN LEONHARD's (Universität Freiburg) keynote lecture on **1917-1920 and the Global Revolution of Rising Expectations** served as an inspiration for the following debates. He asserted that the war was a victory of both democracy and the national paradigm. Leonhard further emphasized 1918 as the end of a merely European world history since the advancing imperial overstretch led to a new wave of nation building, which was accompanied by political and cultural emancipation in various parts of the world. An essential aspect of his research, as he mentioned, are ‘glocalities’, i.e. localities which are influenced by a global consciousness. Moreover, he stressed the argument that 1917 was the watershed during which boundaries between soldiers, people and states eroded. Subsequently, the Peace Conferences saw an emerging of new semantics: “loyalty”, “belonging” or “nationality” were questioned.

The first panel on **The Russian Revolution in Europe and Beyond** clearly saw these events as a profound caesura and the inception of the twentieth century after the “long nineteenth century”. DIETRICH BEYRAU (Universität Tübingen) found it pivotal to make a clear terminological distinction between communists and Bolsheviks on the one hand and revolution and counter-revolution on the other hand. Also, he raised the question of violence and guilt in the war. Referring to Lenin, Beyrau recorded the paradox of the victory: through the force of violence the rulers succeeded in building up communism with the help of people who were no communists. He was followed by MICHAEL JABARA CARLEY (Université de Montréal), who presented Fontaine’s understanding of the Cold War already beginning in 1917 rather than 1945. In his subsequent comment, JAN CLAAS BEHRENGS (Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung Potsdam e.V.) stated that Bolshevik Russia was the first major dictatorship in the twentieth century.

In the following session, nine PhD students were given the chance to present their highly promising research, which often had a background of personal motivation. The projects covered a range of microhistoric perspectives on events in Africa, Latin America and Europe. Frequently they employed glocality, as had been advised by Leonhard. The audience took a keen interest in their research during the **poster session**.
Building on previous results, the second panel on **Anti-Colonial and Anti-Imperial Movements** was predominantly focused on the disparate counter-revolutions in Asia. **ABDULHAMIT KIRMIZI** (Istanbul Sehir University) stressed the Ottomans and other Muslims welcoming Bolshevism as an ally against the Western powers. The region was in a state of transit at that time leading from Ottomanism to Pan-Islamism and finally to Turkism. Kirmizi however doubted that Kemal, whose anti-imperial rhetoric clearly leaned toward Russia, had more than a pragmatic interest in Bolshevism. **JIE-HYUN LIM** (Sogang University, Seoul), in turn, elaborated on the situation in Japan and Korea. The Japanese were planning on further expanding their empire and using the Bolshevik Revolution for their means. However, it is of crucial importance that Lim saw “imperialism as the pioneer of capitalism” and “capitalism as the bridge to socialism”. Colonial Korea, on the other hand, took fascist Italy as its development model. In his subsequent comment, **HANNES GRANDITS** (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) went on to present the assets of both the context-driven approach (Kirmizi) and the ideology-driven approach (Lim) respectively. He agreed with previous speakers that “Bolshevism” always requires a precise definition as it may imply apparently contrasting ideas.

The **Role of Violence** was the point of departure for the third panel. The speakers particularly stressed the Russian role and the emerging of a new form of violence, which was proliferated by new weapons. The Japanese intervention in Siberia was the core of **TOMIO IZAO**’s (Yamaguchi Prefectural University) paper. It was the first ever defeat in a war for imperial Japan and should thus be seen as a watershed in modern Japanese history. However, this event with all its brutality was in fact completely excluded from the collective memory in Japan. The second speaker, **ROBERT GERWARTH** (University College Dublin), shed light on the use of anti-Bolshevik violence in Europe. He referred to Rosenberg’s view of Lenin as “the Russian storefront of a Jewish business”, which further fueled propaganda against Jewish revolutionaries in Europe. In consequence, it is not surprising that, after years as the scapegoat of an entire continent, Jews and communists were the first victims of the Third Reich regime. **JAN SCHMIDT** (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven) described in his comment that, after participating at the Paris Peace Conference, Japan felt betrayed by the Anglo-American dominance. He drew parallels between East Asia and Gerwarth’s depiction of “shatter zones” of fallen empires in Europe, both of which led to a new logic of violence.
The fourth panel on Nationalist Movements and Transnational Connections covered contrasting regions facing similar problems. MARÍA INÉS TATO (Universidad de Buenos Aires/CONICET) elaborated on nation building in Argentina and the crises of the European model. As in many other countries national identity was newly reflected upon. GUOQI XU (University of Hong Kong) on his part stressed that China was influenced by this revolutionary era like hardly another country. In a period of political chaos and disintegration China had struggled to become a nation state. The war can therefore be seen as both a cause of enormous unrest and a major contribution to internationalization. Chair and commentator STEFAN RINKE drew parallels between the two countries, which redefined the European concept of the nation for their own purpose.

Visions of Order and their discrepancies were discussed in the following panel. KLAUS WEINHAUER (Universität Bielefeld) dealt with the influences of the war on the mobilization of societies. To illustrate this, he proceeded to a global comparison of Hamburg, Chicago and Buenos Aires. He explained that the fear of foreign intruders and the desire to reclaim urban spaces were most often expressed by violence. ADAM TOOZE (Columbia University), on the other hand, with his macroeconomic approach chose a very different perspective. He observed that the German hyperinflation, for instance, already occurred from 1914 to 1921 and described monetary destabilization as the “root cause” of disorder. Monetary and fiscal austerity are thus the quintessential instruments of a liberal strategy of counter-revolution. ANTHONY McELLIGOTT (University of Limerick), in his comment, praised both the micro (Weinhauer) and macro perspective (Tooze) on the topic. As he mentioned, they shared common key points such as empowerment, disempowerment and shifts of power. McElligott then turned to Preuß’s concept of the people’s state as well as Schmidt’s understanding of dictatorship, the latter of which can also be seen as a counter-revolution, namely of the post-war settlement.

Another panel discussed Perils of Democracy, with Catholicism and revolution at its centre. PATRICK J. HOULIHAN (University of Oxford) voiced that the Catholic church was on a counter-revolutionary “Crusade against communism”. This development was most evident during the Spanish Civil War and the Holocaust. ENRIC UCELAY-DA CAL (Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona) then enlightened the Spanish situation, elaborating on the reasons behind the civil war and a decade-long autocracy.
He contrasted it with other European models, namely the Soviet Union, the Republic of Turkey, and fascist Italy, all of which had changed quite significantly between 1914 and 1924. In his comment, HELMUT BLEY (Leibniz Universität Hanover) remarked that both of the conflicts mentioned above in fact already have their roots in the nineteenth century.

The last panel on Cultural Manifestations of Revolution had a substantially different approach as it focused on art and culture. RICARDO PÉREZ MONTFORT (Centro de Investigación y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, Mexico) started by addressing the change of popular culture in Mexico, Russia and the US, all of which have significantly changed in the post-war era. DAVID HOPKINS' (University of Glasgow) paper positioned Dadaism, “with its distrust of borders (both geographic and conceptual)”, as a counterpart of Bolshevism, with Dada discovering the visible aesthetics of revolution. PETER GEIMER's (Freie Universität Berlin) commentary again emphasized how difficult the distinction between revolution (Hopkins) and counter-revolution (Pérez Montfort) can be and further reminded that one could easily become the other and vice-versa.

To sum up, the symposium showed that the late stages of the First World War are to a large extent responsible for how the world is shaped today. This particular period of time has caused global developments and has laid the foundation for atrocities such as the Holocaust in the Second World War. The use of localities helped working out that revolutionary ideas did not stop at borders. Fear of violence and economical consequences also had their share in shaping a world which, even a century later, is still marked by these events.

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