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Introduction

In Search of the German Revolution

KLAUS WEINHAUER/ANTHONY MCELLIGOTT/KIRSTEN HEINSOHN

The extent and meaning of the German revolution in 1918 was at the time and has been ever since, contested. On the one hand, in early November 1918, the editors of the Social Democratic *Schleswig-Holsteinische Volks-Zeitung* declared ‘the revolution is on the march’. That was on 5th November. A few days later, General Groener reported to the Kaiser at Spa in Belgium, how he had ‘encountered the revolution’ in Berlin and that his majesty should abdicate in order to avert Russian conditions, alluding to the revolution that toppled the Romanov dynasty the previous February. At the same time, the Social Democrat Philip Scheidemann told the chancellor Prince Max von Baden that Wilhelm had to go in order to secure the October reforms and save the country from bolshevism. After the Kaiser’s flight to neutral Holland (less in fear of the crowds and more likely to avert the grasp of the victors), Gustav Noske, at that point, like Scheidemann, still the darling of the masses and ‘crowned people’s admiral’ of Kiel by the mutinous sailors, announced the following Monday (11 November) that the revolution had been achieved; it could thus pass into history together with the dethroned Kaiser. The transfer of political power and its broadening through an expanded franchise that would validate reform through the mechanism of orderly legal institutions, as intimated by Scheidemann’s concern for the safeguarding of the October constitutional reforms, constituted for these actors the revolutionary act.¹

On the other hand, there were voices claiming that the revolution had not gone far enough and so it was far from over. Within a week of Noske’s an-

1 Anthony McElligott, *Rethinking the Weimar Republic: Authority and Authoritarianism 1916-1936*, London 2014, 15-28.

nouncement, Rosa Luxemburg published an article in *Die Rote Fahne* under the heading: 'The Beginning' in which she called for the broadening and deepening of the revolution. 'The revolution has begun', she wrote, 'Not jubilation for that achieved; not triumph over the defeated enemy are appropriate [at this time], but the toughest self-criticism and iron discipline over the energy needed to continue the work started.'² There were other radical voices, not least those of the Independent Socialist Emil Barth and Richard Müller, the leader of the revolutionary Greater Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Council. These radicals had a fundamentally different vision for Germany than that of the Social Democrats and their liberal allies. They sought a thorough-going transformation of Germany's political and economic institutions that would spell the end of the capitalist era and the inauguration of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'.

That a revolution of sorts had occurred was nonetheless acknowledged by contemporaries. Hermann Müller, who would twice serve as chancellor at the head of coalition governments, recounted in his memoirs published little more than a dozen years later, how on 5 November when Admiral Souchon gave up command of Kiel, a sailor's mutiny transformed into a revolution.³ Ernst Troeltsch noted that 'revolution hung in the air' already since the winter of 1917. He was unambiguous in his verdict that in November 'the long feared and expected revolution had broken out'. But he also noted that it was over as soon as it had taken place. Writing barely three weeks after the 9 November, Troeltsch used the past tense: 'Germany had its victorious revolution as once England, America and France had'; but unlike these revolutions, Germany's had been a quiet affair, with hardly any bloodshed spilled.⁴ His well-known contemporary, Harry Graf Kessler, the 'red count', also noted the brevity and muteness of the revolution.⁵ By mid-November, Kessler observed what he believed to be the *unrevolutionary* character of the revolution: 'The first Sunday *after* the revolution. Late in the afternoon large crowds of walkers crossed [Unten den] Linden to the Marstall to look at the marks on the buildings left by gunfire. All were very peaceful in their petty-bourgeois curiosity [...].'⁶ And when he returned from Poland in mid-

2 Rosa Luxemburg, 'Der Anfang', *Die Rote Fahne*, 18 Nov. 1918, reprinted in: Karl-Egon Lönne (ed.), *Die Weimarer Republik 1918-1933*, Darmstadt 2002, 79.

3 Hermann Müller, *Die November Revolution. Erinnerungen*, Berlin 1931, 16, 24.

4 Ernst Troeltsch, *Spektator-Briefe. Aufsätze über die deutsche Revolution und die Welt-politik 1918/22*, edited by H. Baron, Tübingen 1924 (reprint Aalen 1966), 13, 19.

5 Harry Graf Kessler, *Tagebücher 1918-1937, Politik, Kunst und Gesellschaft der zwanziger Jahre*, edited by Wolfgang Pfeiffer-Belli, Frankfurt am Main 1961, (4th printing 1979), 10 November 1918, 26-27.

6 Kessler, 17 November 1918, 35. Emphasis added.

December, there was no sign of the revolution at all! Looking back half a century, Carl Zuckmayer, who at the time was a 22 year old lieutenant, there was not a revolution at all, merely a collapse which had fleeting transitory revolutionary moments, nothing more.⁷ Nevertheless, for eleven year old Sebastian Haffner, the revolution was real and at the same time full of contradiction and confusion. 'It was never clear what exactly it was all about. One could not be enthusiastic. One could not even understand.'⁸

Haffner's memory of the revolution was partly conditioned by his bourgeois socialisation and partly by the fact that as a young boy he had a childish excitement for war and what he imagined as Germany's invincibility. And although Haffner was a child at the time, his memory expresses the sentiment of many from his class background.⁹ The revolution was the Janus-face of an imagined good world: it brought disorder and was disorientating. Such perceptions ran through parts of German society, even though many contemporary accounts, such as those found in the diaries of Thomas Mann, Käthe Kollwitz and Victor Klemperer, as well as Kessler and Troeltsch, while capturing the heady atmosphere of 'revolutionary days' at the same time caution against over-stating revolution *à la russe*.

INTERPRETING THE GERMAN REVOLUTION

Not only are revolutions always contested, their histories too. In the case of the German revolution its history was challenged from the outset, and with the notable exception of Arthur Rosenberg's two-volume work on the revolution and republic,¹⁰ remained largely forgotten or ignored after 1945.¹¹ In the decades

7 Carl Zuckmayer, *Als wär's ein Stück von mir. Horen der Freundschaft*, Frankfurt am Main 2006 (orig. 1966), 305. Nevertheless, the description that follows in his autobiography conveys the turmoil and élan of these revolutionary days.

8 Sebastian Haffner, *Geschichte eines Deutschen. Die Erinnerungen 1914-1933*, Munich 2000, 33.

9 See the autobiographical sketches collected in Rudolf Pörtner (ed.), *Alltag in der Weimarer Republik. Erinnerungen an eine unruhige Zeit*, Düsseldorf etc. 1990.

10 See Arthur Rosenberg, *Die Entstehung der deutschen Republik 1871-1918*, Berlin 1928; id., *Geschichte der Deutschen Republik*, Karlsbad 1935.

11 For a succinct summary of the current state of research see Eberhard Kolb/Dirk Schumann, *Die Weimarer Republik*, Munich 2013, especially 166-178; also Nils Freytag: *Steckengeblieben - Vernachlässigt - Vergessen. Neuerscheinungen zur Revolution 1918/19* (Rezension), in: *sehepunkte* 13 (2013), Nr. 3 [15.03.2013], URL:

following the war, the revolution remained obscured by international politics where historical interpretation played a role. In these years research on revolution was never a widely discussed topic among West German historians. For example, at the biannual meeting of the German historians in 1964, the panel on 'The Problem of the Councils in the Creation of the Weimar Republic' attracted much less controversy than the panel 'German War Aims in the First World War' where Fritz Fischer defended his provocative theses on the German responsibility for the outbreak of World War I.¹² The dominant interpretation of the revolution of 1918/19 was that of a successful struggle against bolshevism; Walter Tormin's balanced study of the role of the council movement was clearly a minority position.¹³

Nonetheless, a swathe of studies based on archival research by a rising generation of historians and political scientists emerged from the late 1950s. This generation, which included Erich Matthias, Peter von Oertzen, Eberhard Kolb, and later Reinhard Rürup, Ulrich Kluge, while critically engaging with the interpretative model put forward by authors from the German Democratic Republic, promoted the idea of the revolution as a 'missed opportunity'. Their studies set the scene until the late 1980s in which competing paradigms of 'two opportunities' prevailed: a conservative republic based on an alliance between social democrats, free trade unions and old powers of military and economy versus social democracy based on the council movement. Little original research was produced while the embers of the revolution of 1918/19 were raked over.¹⁴ The

<http://www.sehepunkte.de/2013/03/21766.html> (20.10.2014); Karl Christian Führer et al. (eds.), *Revolution und Arbeiterbewegung in Deutschland 1918-1920*, Essen 2013; for a well-balanced summary of interpretations see Andreas Wirsching, *Die paradoxe Revolution 1918/19*, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 58 (2008), H. 50/51, 6-12.

12 See Bericht über die 26. Versammlung deutscher Historiker in Berlin. 7. bis 11. Oktober 1964, Stuttgart 1965, 42-51 and 63-72.

13 See Walter Tormin, *Zwischen Räterediktatur und sozialer Demokratie: Die Geschichte der Rätebewegung in der deutschen Revolution*, Düsseldorf 1954; see for the following Wolfgang Niess, *Die Revolution von 1918/19 in der deutschen Geschichtsschreibung. Deutungen von der Weimarer Republik bis ins 21. Jahrhundert*, Berlin/Boston 2013, 552-573.

14 Ulrich Kluge, *Die deutsche Revolution 1918/1919. Staat, Politik und Gesellschaft zwischen Weltkrieg und Kapp-Putsch*, Frankfurt am Main 1985 still stands out as the best book-length summary of the main interpretations and research results up to this point. As a short summary see also Volker Ullrich, *Die Revolution von 1918/19*, Munich 2009. In the early 1990s some senior researchers like Reinhard Rürup (1993) and

ensuing historical debates that focused on the binary poles of ‘councils bolshevism’ versus parliamentary democracy, recalled the very same positions adopted prior, during and after the revolution of 1918/19 itself.¹⁵ Looking back on the debates up to the 1980s, Wolfgang Niess probably captures a kernel of truth when he states ‘research on the revolution clearly is becoming increasingly politically suspect.’¹⁶

Part of the problem with interpretation, at least until the late 1980s, had to do with the ebb and flow of the revolution itself. Curiously, most historians were agreed on the three phases that broadly made up the revolutionary period. The first phase roughly covering the months November/December 1918, when the political consolidation of new republic as a parliamentary system gained the upper hand over council based democracy; the second phase stretching from December 1918 until spring 1919, which saw the growing radicalization of the rank and file (mostly workers), who were disappointed because they had expected more democratic impulses from the revolution. This phase saw a “turn towards civil war” (*Wende zum Bürgerkrieg*),¹⁷ when military forces (supported by the new political leaders) constituted a privatized internal state monopoly of physical violence thus eroding the compromise between the working-classes and military administration. At the end of this phase stood the violent suppression of the Munich Council Republic (*Münchener Räterepublik*) in May 1919. The third phase from April/May 1919 until May 1920, and which for some authors does not belong to the revolution proper, was discovered fairly late and is probably the least studied period. This phase was marked by a double bind process of the actions of radicalized social protest movements and the “purifying” and “cleansing” actions of the Free Corps, culminating in the smashing of the March Revolution (*Märzrevolution*) in the Ruhr area.

There is a case to be made for approaching the German revolution from both narrow and broader perspectives. As the cold war lost intensity the old certainties about the (one and only) revolution became even more obvious, and interpretations of the (periodization of the) German revolution more flexible. Already

Eberhard Kolb (1993) published some comments on the interpretative aspects of the revolution, see the literature listed in: Niess. See also the source based case study Peter Brandt/Reinhard Rürup (eds.), *Volksbewegung und demokratische Neuordnung in Baden 1918/19. Zur Vorgeschichte und Geschichte der Revolution*, Sigmaringen 1991.

15 See Niess, 281, 563; Peter Lösche, *Der Bolschewismus im Urteil der deutschen Sozialdemokratie*, Berlin 1967.

16 Niess, 565.

17 Kluge, 83.

in 1983, Peter von Oertzen put forward a broader time frame for periodization, which stretched from October 1918 until October 1923, but his proposal went more or less unheard.¹⁸ Recent research on the war years now allows us to move in the other direction chronologically and to seek the origins of the revolution in the mid-years of the war itself. The justification for this is not only the presence of the growing social protest movement but the existence of an ideologically-delineated political movement that provided a revolutionary language to social unrest, at the same time articulating this in its program for power. Moreover, changes in historians' approaches to the period, especially with the cultural-turn, necessitate a rethinking of the revolution.¹⁹

This new interest in the revolution is long overdue. The various methodological impulses that fed into the historiography over the past three decades broadening and enriching our understanding of the past, largely by-passed scholarship on the revolution. Notably the 'history of everyday' (Alltagsgeschichte) has been conspicuous by its absence in the main studies on the revolution 1918/19. Similarly, the turn from the history of the labor movement (Arbeiterbewegungsgeschichte) to Labor History (Arbeitergeschichte) also missed the historiography of the revolution.²⁰ This omission was not only on the side of the researchers of the

18 Peter von Oertzen, *Arbeiterbewegung, Arbeiterräte und Arbeiterbewußtsein in der Deutschen Revolution 1918/19*, in: Helga Grebing (ed.), *Die deutsche Revolution 1918/19. Eine Analyse*, Berlin 2008, 68–102 (Orig. 1983). See also the periodization elaborated by Klaus Tenfelde, *Massenbewegungen und Revolution in Deutschland 1917–1923*, in: Helmut Konrad/Karin Maria Schmidlechner (eds.), *Revolutionäres Potential in Europa am Ende des Ersten Weltkrieges. Die Rolle von Strukturen, Konjunkturen und Massenbewegungen*, Vienna 1991, 9–15; see also Boris Barth, *Dolchstosslegenden und politische Desintegration. Das Trauma der deutschen Niederlage im Ersten Weltkrieg 1914–1933*, Düsseldorf 2003, 202–212; still important is Pierre Broué, *The German Revolution 1917–1923*, Chicago 2006 (orig. 1971).

19 Alexander Gallus (ed.), *Die vergessene Revolution von 1918/19*, Göttingen 2010. See also his *Revolutions (Germany)*, in: Ute Daniel et al. (eds.), *1914–1918 online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, Berlin 2014–10–08.

20 Franz-Josef Brüggemeier, *Leben vor Ort. Ruhrbergleute und Ruhrbergbau 1889–1919*, Munich 1983; Michael Grüttner, *Arbeitswelt an der Wasserkante. Sozialgeschichte der Hamburger Hafenarbeiter 1886–1914*, Göttingen 1984; Karin Hartewig, *Das unbe-rechenbare Jahrzehnt. Bergarbeiter und ihre Familien im Ruhrgebiet 1914–1924*, Munich 1993; Thomas Welskopp, *Arbeit und Macht im Hüttenwerk. Arbeits- und industrielle Beziehungen in der deutschen und amerikanischen Eisen- und Stahlindustrie von den 1860er bis zu den 1930er Jahren*, Bonn 1994; Klaus Weinbauer, *Alltag und*

revolution. The problem was also that most of these studies, which had much to say on every day history (at the shop floor and in the neighborhood) and on collective action, did not explicitly address the revolution, unlike those studies of the Russian revolution.²¹ Few historians took up the challenge of Wolfgang Mommsen to study the importance of the “social protest movement of high intensity and considerable extent” which shaped the revolution.²² With few exceptions (notably, Erhard Lucas²³), the social and ideological currents and subjectivities that fed into these local protests were ignored and instead approached vaguely as mass movements (Massenbewegungen).²⁴

Arbeitskampf im Hamburger Hafen. Sozialgeschichte der Hamburger Hafenarbeiter 1914-1933, Paderborn etc. 1994.

- 21 Stephen A. Smith, *Red Petrograd. Revolution in the factories*, Cambridge etc. 1986; Diane Koenker/ William Rosenberg, *Strikes and Revolution in Russia, 1917*, Princeton 1989; see also Leopold Haimson/Charles Tilly (eds.), *Strikes, Wars, and Revolutions in an International Perspective. Strike waves in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries*, Cambridge 1989.
- 22 Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Die deutsche Revolution 1918-1920. Politische Revolution und soziale Protestbewegung*, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 4 (1978), 362–391, here 390.
- 23 Erhard Lucas, *Arbeiterradikalismus. Zwei Formen von Radikalismus in der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, Frankfurt a.M. 1976. His three volume study *Märzrevolution (Frankfurt 1970-1978)*, however, is nearly unreadable, as the author does not formulate guiding theses while he more and more gets lost in his sources where he tries to find a ‘real’ reality. Among the numerous local studies still important are Peter Kuckuk, *Bremer Linksradikale bzw. Kommunisten in der Militärrevolte im November 1918 bis zum Kapp-Putsch im März 1920*, PhD Hamburg 1970; id. (ed.), *Die Revolution 1918/19 in Bremen. Aufsätze und Dokumente*, Bremen 2010; Volker Ullrich, *Die Hamburger Arbeiterbewegung vom Vorabend des Ersten Weltkriegs bis zur Revolution 1918/19 Hamburg* 1976; Dieter Schott, *Die Konstanzer Gesellschaft 1918-1924. Der Kampf um Hegemonie zwischen Novemberevolution und Inflation*, Konstanz 1989.
- 24 The main study is Gerald D. Feldman et al., *Die Massenbewegungen der Arbeiterschaft in Deutschland am Ende des Ersten Weltkrieges (1917-1920)*, in: *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 13 (1972), 84–105; see also Gerald D. Feldman, *Socio-economic Structures in the Industrial Sector and Revolutionary Potentialities, 1917-1922*, in: Charles L. Bertrand (ed.), *Revolutionary Situations in Europe, 1917-1922: Germany, Italy, Austria-Hungary, Montréal* 1977, 159-169; and Friedhelm Boll, *Massenbewegungen in Niedersachsen 1906-1920. Eine sozialgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu den unterschiedlichen Entwicklungstypen Braunschweig und Hannover*, Bonn 1981; see

Finally, missing from the German debates on the revolution 1918/19 was its wider international context. Apart from reference to events in Russia a year earlier, upheavals taking place in other European regions were seldom included, let alone the revolutionary upheavals occurring globally; where a comparative approach was adopted, it was mainly by scholars working outside Germany.²⁵ As the foregoing discussion shows, most research in Germany was focused on the early months of the revolution until the spring 1919. Few efforts were made to intellectually connect this research to wider historical trends, for instance to the phase of worldwide turbulent upheavals between roughly 1916 and 1923; or to the erosion of colonial empires; or to the early phase of the Weimar Republic from 1918/19 to the stabilization of the German currency in late 1923.²⁶

Interpreting the period under consideration (1916-23) as an important period not only in European but in global history integrates three recent historiographical trends. First, we can agree with John Darwin that these years were explicitly a turbulent and decisive “great phase of upheaval”.²⁷ Second, these years of

also Tenfelde, *Massenbewegungen*, in: Konrad/Schmidlechner (eds.), *Potential*, 9–15. See as pioneering studies Peter von Oertzen, *Die großen Streiks der Ruhrbergarbeiterschaft im Frühjahr 1919*, in: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 6 (1958), 231–262; Erhard Lucas, *Ursachen und Verlauf der Bergarbeiterbewegung in Hamborn und im westlichen Ruhrgebiet 1918/19*, in: *Duisburger Forschungen* 15 (1971), 1–119; see also the early comparative study by Hans Bötcher, *Zur revolutionären Gewerkschaftsbewegung in Amerika, Deutschland und England*, Jena 1922.

25 See Bertrand; Francis L. Carsten, *Revolution in Central Europe, 1918-1919*, London 1972; Charles S. Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe. Stabilization in France, Germany, and Italy in the Decade after World War I*, Princeton, N.J. 1975; Barrington Moore, *Injustice. The Social Basis of Obedience and Revolt*, White Plains 1978; James E. Cronin/Carmen Sirianni (eds.), *Work, Community, and Power. The Experience of Labor in Europe and America, 1900-1925*, Philadelphia 1983; Hans A. Schmitt (ed.), *Neutral Europe between War and Revolution 1917-23*, Virginia 1988; Helmut Konrad/Karin M. Schmidlechner (eds.); Chris Wrigley (ed.), *Challenges of Labour. Central and Western Europe, 1917-1920*, London etc. 1993.

26 Klaus Tenfelde in his brief 1991 summary *Massenbewegungen und Revolution in Deutschland 1917-1923* mentions the inflation as an important problem which influenced the course of revolution. Due to the lack of explicit research he did not find a way to integrate the inflation explicitly into the history of the revolution in Germany. See now Martin Geyer, *Verkehrte Welt. Revolution, Inflation und Moderne: München 1914-1924*, Göttingen 1998.

27 John Darwin, *After Tamerlane. The rise and fall of global empires*, London etc. 2008, 402.

upheaval must be embedded into a broader time frame in order to make sense of them. They come at the end of an unique epoch of *relative* peace in Europe stretching from circa 1814 to 1914 while “the big excesses of violence” happened mainly outside Europe: in the colonies, in the US, China, Mexico; this is not to understate the intense waves of strikes and their bloody repression in these years.²⁸ Third, while interstate affairs in Europe were relatively non-violent, on a global scale the intra-state relations were quite turbulent, sometimes even massively violent. As Jürgen Osterhammel has put it, the long 19th century from 1765 until the years immediately following World War I was a time of revolution.²⁹ In this period he identifies three revolutionary phases: 1765-1830, 1847-1865, and the Eurasian revolutions stretching from c. 1905 (Russia, Iran, Turkey) until 1917 (Russia).³⁰ Historical sociologist Michael Mann in his analysis of proletarian revolutions also takes 1917 as a decisive year because of the impact of the Russian revolution. In this wave of revolutions in most countries except Russia (where there was a successful revolution) workers were the “leading (though again not the sole) actors in reforming capitalism and deepening democracy, generating not revolution but ... social citizenship”.³¹ This phase of turbulence in which different models of citizenship were being put forward and contested, ends in 1923.

*

There is no denying, that the revolution as a political, social and cultural event altered things. In the short term, it seemed to cast the country adrift of old certainties, which could both frighten and excite. Zuckmayer’s memoir is full of the latter emotion expressed through artistic experimentalism and expressionism, especially in the years up to 1924, before yielding to the cold rationalism of *Neue Sachlichkeit* as the spirit of the age. Meanwhile, the shifting landscape of interlocking and competing political practices during the eight years between

28 Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Munich 2009, 193. See for Latin America Stefan Rinke, *Lateinamerika und der Erste Weltkrieg. Ein Drama der gesamten Menschheit*, forthcoming Frankfurt/New York 2015 (Campus); id., *Labour Movements, Trade Unions and Strikes (Latin America)*, in: Ute Daniel et al. (eds.), 1914-1918 online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, Berlin 2014-10-05.

29 Osterhammel, 705 and 736.

30 Ibid., 777.

31 Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power. Volume 4: Globalizations, 1945-2011*, Cambridge 2013, 248.

1916 and 1923 configured the era that followed before eventually disappearing into the Moloch of the Nazi terror system. For the political right the revolution provided a discourse revolving around the twin-paradigms of the ‘stab-in-the-back’ and the ‘November criminals’. For the radical left, the revolution had been betrayed and therefore remained to be completed; for the mass it awoke the promise of a better life to come. What was left for the next four years were the ‘birth pangs’ of the republic (Zuckmayer).

This sense of a new era, understood as both the beginning of something new as well as a rupture with familiar patterns, and the impact of all that, are the focus of this volume. As we have already mentioned, our concern is not with the familiar political history of the revolution, but rather with new cultural-historical questions – questions that were already intimated in the memories of the likes of the young Haffner and Zuckmayer. Both, the child and the young man, in their descriptions of war, imperial collapse and revolution expose the existential aspect that is too often missed in conventional political historical accounts of the revolution. But what about the fantasies regarding revolution and a Republican radical future, i.e. the “dreamland” of those who wished to implement and achieve lasting political and social changes?³² What role did the experiences of disorder and insecurity play for people’s perceptions of events from November 1918 on and for the course those events took?

These are the questions that underpin the contributions to this volume. And while the volume aims at presenting cultural historical perspectives on the German revolution, this does not necessarily mean a rejection of the political historical historiography of this revolution. Quite the contrary – most of the contributors to the volume take this older historiography as their starting point for formulating new questions. Ever since the international impact of the ‘cultural turn’ in history since the 1980s, subjectivity as an historical agent has come more prominently to the foreground; thus the time has come to study the history of the revolution with this in mind. Our aim is not only to revive the German revolution as a relevant scholarly field but also to revise its labels, not least that of ‘thwarted’ (*steckengeglichen*) or ‘incomplete’ (*unvollständig*).

This volume, therefore, is an attempt to resituate the German Revolution into a broader context of recent methodological trends, particularly those of cultural history and transnational and global studies. As we have seen above, hitherto in

32 The term “Traumland” (dreamland) was coined by Troeltsch, *Spektator-Briefe*. For the evaluation of expectations about the future and for coping with war defeat see Michael Geyer, *Zwischen Krieg und Nachkrieg – die deutsche Revolution 1918/19 im Zeichen blockierter Transnationalität*, in: Gallus, *Revolution*, 187-222. See also the contribution of Kathleen Canning in this volume.

Germany research on the revolution of 1918/19 was heavily overridden by competing political positions, which, in some respects, were not far removed from those of 1916/23. As Ulrich Kluge put it “during the 1970s referring to one source base two substantially different images of the revolutionary and the council movement emerged”.³³ These highly politicized interpretations were about the potential outcomes of the revolution 1918/19. Thus it can hardly come as a surprise that research was mainly focused on state institutions, political parties and the council movement. The overwhelming majority of the studies followed political historical and less social historical perspectives, not to speak of cultural approaches to the revolution. Moreover, research on the revolution was strongly embedded in the cold war climate of the time and, in Germany at least, shaped by the antagonism towards Soviet-led communism. Taken together, this research was less a study of complex processes of revolutionary transition and a close reading of local interaction than a study of the end of the *Kaiserreich*, of the pre-history the Weimar Republic, of the Third Reich and of the West and East German State. The revolution as an object of study in its own right remained largely missing.

SOME TERMS OF REFERENCE

Before continuing, it might be useful to assert some clarity in the use of our terms of reference. The first point for clarification is that of ‘revolution’; the second relates to the ‘revolutionary situation’. The two are of course linked: the latter usually provides context for the former; but a revolutionary situation should not be confused for revolution.

Until the mid-1980s, few historians engaged in a thoroughgoing discussion of the key characteristics defining the German revolution. This changed in 1985 when Ulrich Kluge put forward a working definition. In his view a revolution is characterized by four elements: (i) A rupture in or discontinuity of the political system; (ii) social conflicts that were carried out violently; (iii) changes in traditional positions of power (economic, political and administrative elites); (iv) an intended and sometimes realized creation of a new political and social order.³⁴ With these criteria Kluge more or less echoed the dominant state of international research on revolution at that time, which was strongly biased towards structures and national patterns – human agency and culture were not at the forefront. In particular, these studies were strongly influenced by US-American sociology and

³³ Kluge, 20.

³⁴ See *ibid.*, 13.

political science. Particularly influential for the study of European revolutions and social upheaval were Theda Skocpol and Louise and Charles Tilly.³⁵ Skocpol's 1979 book on modern revolutions in France, China and Russia located their origins structurally between geopolitical pressures, state regimes, social classes and insurgent movements. In a similar vein and more recently, Michael Mann in his impressive overview "The Sources of Social Power" defined a revolution as "a popular insurgent movement that overthrows a ruling regime and then transforms substantially at least three of the four sources of social power - ideological, economic, military and political".³⁶

Echoing the earlier studies in a collection of essays edited by Charles Bertrand, Charles Tilly has recently restated that full revolutions have to combine two elements: a revolutionary situation and a revolutionary outcome. In a revolutionary situation there are "at least two centers of power" which not only claim to have command over a "significant coercive force" but also claim "exclusive control over the state". A revolutionary outcome is characterized by a) a transfer of power over the state in which is now ruled b) a "largely new group of people".³⁷ In some respects, these approaches of the late twentieth century were already anticipated by Zuckmayer who failed (at least in his memoir) to recognise a revolution in the events of November 1918, because for him there was neither a mass movement, nor an organised revolt, nor a victorious revolutionary party. While the historical record challenges his first observation, he was probably right about the latter two key ingredients.

These approaches, conditioned by social and political structural analysis can be useful to the historian of the German Revolution, but they have their limitations once the social and political terrain is left behind for cultural territory. After all, was not the revolution also a 'media event,' a historical event that in part had been created, even manufactured, by means of reports and news items as they were generated?³⁸

A look at perceptions and experiences on the one hand, and media and public processes of communication on the other hand, opens a window onto a better understanding of the field of emotions and the imaginary that determined peo-

35 Louise and Charles Tilly, *The Rebellious Century. 1830-1930*, Cambridge, Mass. 1975; Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions. A comparative analysis of France, Russia, and China*, Cambridge/New York 1979.

36 Mann, Vol 4, 246.

37 Charles Tilly, *Contentious Performances*, Cambridge etc. 2008, 126; for Bertrand see footnote 24.

38 This question is also raised by Axel Schildt, *Der lange November – zur Historisierung einer deutschen Revolution*, in: Gallus, *Revolution*, 223-244, here 235.

ple's actions; anxiety and fear, hope and idealism, as well as mistaken interpretations due to lack of experience and knowledge, all counted towards crystallizing not only individual subjectivity but the collective subjectivity of the revolution itself. Nearly all diarists and memoirists from that period suggest the importance of their subjective interpretations of historical events as factors shaping the readiness – or not – to become politically active and involved. As Peter Fritzsche has emphasized, the months October to December 1918 were a crucial time when many, even conservatives, harbored the hope that the collapse of the old order could lead onward and upward to something new and positive.³⁹ But as history would show, for a generation of Germans looking back on November 1918, the defining moment was an armistice that soon transformed into unconditional capitulation. Looking back on these events, their experiences became over laden by a memory tainted by the shock of defeat, and for them, this defeat and the revolution became inextricably linked.⁴⁰

These hopes burned brightly among supporters of the revolution, and historians have sometimes underestimated their driving force for energizing social movements. Moreover, the power of the imaginary, of hope or of anxiety, was also significantly manifest in the perceptions in other countries in Europe and overseas as events unfolded in Germany. From this broader perspective, the revolution also had an impact far beyond German domestic policy – not just in terms of foreign policy, as a partial process bound up with the German military defeat in the war,⁴¹ but also culturally: as a kind of 'dreamland' for revolutionaries; or as a time of mounting insecurity for those who had no explicit political ambitions; or even as a kind of spectral monstrous nightmare instilling fear in conservatives and monarchists across the world.

Today there are an increasing number of culturally sensitive international studies on revolutions, on collective action (social movements, strikes, social protest, food riots), on state building and on (political) violence. Any discussion of revolution cannot avert dealing with the state and its institutions. If we look for other innovative scholarly fields which can give research on the revolution 1918/19 a more culturally informed direction we find interesting impulses in newer studies on state power and in recent research on urban violence. As the

39 Peter Fritzsche, Breakdown or Breakthrough? Conservatives and the November Revolution, in: Larry Eugene Jones/James Retallack (eds.), *Between Reform, Reaction and Resistance. Studies in the History of German Conservatism from 1789 to 1945*, Oxford 1993, 299–328.

40 See Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Die Kultur der Niederlage. Der amerikanische Süden 1865, Frankreich 1871, Deutschland 1918*, Berlin 2001.

41 Geyer, *Krieg*.

state plays an important role in revolution it must be mentioned here that a state is neither a fixed entity, nor is it a reality in itself – it is a construction, in which social and cultural perceptions play a highly important role, which have often been neglected. As Wolfgang Reinhard reminds us quite simply, “nobody has ever seen the state”. There are only the activities of its institutions or state symbols which can be perceived and interpreted.⁴²

Partly influenced by the seminal studies by Edward P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, and George Rudé,⁴³ many of these newer studies follow an understanding of culture as a set of shared beliefs, meanings attitudes, values and symbols. Thus authors like Lynn Hunt, Arlette Farge, Eric Selbin and Francesca Polletta place a strong emphasis on culture, patterns of communication and on perceptions. They remind us that “revolutions are fundamentally about people.” While Hunt investigates the new political culture of the French revolution, Farge focuses on the important role of rumors, Selbin and Polletta pay attention to stories people tell during and about revolutions and how [revolutionary] subjectivities are shaped. These stories provide access to symbolic politics, collective memory and the social and cultural context of politics - on a local as well as on a global level, which otherwise might remain hidden to the cursory eye.⁴⁴

Scholarly approaches to the German Revolution can learn a lot from such studies, as indeed Roger Chickering’s great book on Freiburg, but also the work of Ute Daniel and Belinda Davis in their studies of women in war-time protests demonstrate.⁴⁵ Approaches to ‘revolutionary’ violence (more of which below)

42 Wolfgang Reinhard, *Geschichte der Staatsgewalt. Eine vergleichende Verfassungsgeschichte Europas von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, Munich 1999, 18.

43 Edward P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, London 1963; Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels. Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Manchester 1959; George Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution*, Oxford 1959.

44 Eric Selbin, *Stories of Revolution in the Periphery*, in: John Foran et al. (eds.), *Revolution in the Making of the Modern World. Social Identities, Globalization, and Modernity*, Milton Park, Abingdon etc. 2008, 130–147, 130 (quote) and 144; Eric Selbin, *Revolutions in the Real World. Bringing Agency Back in*, in: John Foran (ed.), *Theorizing Revolutions*, London/New York 1997, 123–136, here 132, Francesca Polletta et al., *The Sociology of Storytelling*, in: *Annual Review of Sociology* 37 (2011), 109–131; Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, Berkeley 1984.

45 Roger Chickering, *The Great War and Urban Life. Freiburg 1914–1918*, Cambridge 2007; Ute Daniel, *Arbeiterfrauen in der Kriegsgesellschaft. Beruf, Familie und Politik im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Göttingen, 1989, translated as *The War from Within, German Working-Class Women in the First World War*, Oxford/New York, 1997; Belinda

can take much from recent innovative studies on physical violence that interpret it as a pattern of communication that was frequently determined by communal and spatial factors. This approach does not interpret space as a mere container in which violence occurs. Rather, following Henri Lefèbvre in particular, space is understood as a relational concept which shapes and is shaped by human actions. Space integrates urban practices (lived), perceptions/concepts (perceived), and symbolically constructed (conceived) elements. With these culturally informed insights in mind in what follows we focus on three key aspects of revolutions: violence, state and order (1); communication and imaginaries⁴⁶ (2); subjectivities and social movements (3).⁴⁷

Our starting point appears as an obvious assumption, namely: revolutions are locally based collective confrontations in which social movements and crowds are centrally involved. These local collective conflicts are transnationally influenced and in turn have their own transnational, transregional and translocal repercussions. They are enacted in several gendered arenas stretching from formal political institutions (parliament) to streets and public places. Revolutions sometimes can turn violent. Revolutions are shaped by overlapping gendered conflicts about the state, about local as well as nation-wide order, about subjectivities, about related gendered imaginaries (fear, anxiety, security) and about social practices. Obviously, revolutions are also about re-ordering time, space and the future. The interpretative framework of this volume starts from the assumption that 1916 was a tipping point for the intensification of protests, riots, uprisings and even revolutions.⁴⁸ In 1916 violent actions shook the Ottoman Empire in Arabia, in Greece but also in Ireland and the Americas, where militants committed many violent attacks. From 1916 the perceptions of the war changed. While its prosecution totalized societies, elites drew up plans for the

Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I*, Berlin/New York 2000.

- 46 We prefer the term “imaginary” to the term “imagination”. Imaginaries focus much more on the socio-cultural context than on individual feelings etc.
- 47 See Klaus Weinbauer/Dagmar Ellerbrock, *Perspektiven auf Gewalt in europäischen Städten seit dem 19. Jahrhundert*, in: *Informationen zur modernen Stadtgeschichte* 2/2013, 5–20; Katharina Inhetveen, *Gewalt in ihren Deutungen. Anmerkungen zu Kulturalität und Kulturalisierung*, in: *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 30 (2005), 28–50; also as an early study Edward P. Thompson, *The moral economy of the English crowd in the eighteenth century*, in: *Past & Present* 50 (1971), 76–136.
- 48 Donald Bloxham et al., *Europe in the World. Systems and cultures of violence*, in: Donald Bloxham/Robert Gerwarth (eds.), *Political violence in twentieth-century Europe*, Cambridge 2011, 11–39.

creation of a post war reordering of the national landscape. On the home front in national states and in empires food protests intensified,⁴⁹ and the dissatisfaction with a state grew as, on the one hand, it became more and more centralized and involved in organizing the war effort, while on the other hand it became obvious that in many countries the state was unable to deliver the goods for the nutrition of wide segments of the populace. In Germany already in 1916 a wish for peace overlapped with protests against state-military repression. These trends intensified in 1917 when news about the revolution in Russia and the important role industrial workers had played.⁵⁰ Thus the unity of the home front slowly began to erode. Most authors agree that this ‘era of unrest’ triggered by social movements comes to an end around 1923.⁵¹ What then followed in the decade from the later 1920s can be interpreted as an ‘era of authoritarian assertion’ as states everywhere expanded and tightened their grip on society.

VIOLENCE, STATE AND ORDER

Revolutions were/are not *per se* violent. Violence is/was a matter of contingency.⁵² But: political violence⁵³ is meanwhile seen as a signifier for Weimar’s

49 Jörn Leonhard, *Die Büchse der Pandora. Geschichte des Ersten Weltkriegs*, Munich 2014, 525-612.

50 See as an early study Jürgen Kocka, *Klassengesellschaft im Krieg. Deutsche Sozialgeschichte 1914-1918*, second, revised print, Göttingen 1978 (orig. 1973), 47f.; see also the summary by Richard Bessel, *Revolution*, in: Jay Winter et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the First World War, Vol 2: The State*, Cambridge etc. 2014, 126-144; id., *Germany after the First World War*, Oxford 1993.

51 See as an overview Darwin. Some still important local studies which focus on revolutionary syndicalism sketch the importance of this phase (c. 1916-1923): see Ulrich Klan/Dieter Nelles, “Es lebt noch eine Flamme”. Rheinische Anarcho-Syndikalisteninnen in der Weimarer Republik und im Faschismus, Grafenau-Döffingen 1986; Hartmut Rübner, *Freiheit und Brot. Die Freie Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands: eine Studie zur Geschichte des Anarchosyndikalismus*, Berlin 1994; see also Marcel van der Linden/Wayne Thorpe (ed.), *Revolutionary Syndicalism. An international perspective*, Aldershot 1990.

52 Martin Conway/Robert Gerwarth, *Revolution and Counterrevolution*, in: Donald Bloxham/Robert Gerwarth (eds.), *Political Violence*, 140-175.

53 Under the term political violence we summarize all, mostly collectively enacted forms of physical violence which were aimed at political enemies (groups, the state etc.) and/or which were in a process of communication labeled as being political.

political culture.⁵⁴ This paradox makes it worthwhile to ask when/why violence began to shape the German revolution and which forms of violence were practiced. This is a hitherto neglected field of research. These questions bring not only the groups into focus which practice violence but also the institutions of the state's monopoly of physical violence, like the police or the military.

The outbreak of revolution since 1918/19 cannot fully be explained by war weariness, longing for peace and defeat. It is highly important to add the fact that at the end of the war in the eyes of the populace of many countries the state (its personnel, its bureaucratic organization) had lost much of its former credibility and respect.⁵⁵ What in earlier studies has often been forgotten is that Germany had not only lost the war but also its colonies. This double loss affected the perception as well as the practice of state power (including the military and its leaders).⁵⁶ But even this erosion of trust in the state does not automatically lead to mass violence. Rather, as recent studies on violence have convincingly demonstrated, violence is only a very last resort people turn to; many barriers must be overcome to act violently.⁵⁷ We thus start from the double assumption that also in revolutions people do not employ violence light heartedly and that violence is never senseless. This has to be mentioned since many earlier studies on revolutions were influenced by mass psychologist thinking that 'crowd' action inevitably leads to destruction and thus to massive physical violence.

Mark Jones in his chapter to this volume interprets the revolution of 1918/19 as a 'spatial revolution', where space was not only physically occupied but also used for symbolic interactions. As he points out, in its initial stage the revolution occurred 'without the explosions of violence that so often characterize clashes between rulers and ruled'. He focuses on crowds in the naval port of Kiel where

54 See Dirk Schumann, *Political Violence in the Weimar Republic, 1918-1933. Fight for the Streets and Fear of Civil War*, New York etc. 2009 (Orig. German 2001); Benjamin Ziemann, *Gewalt im Ersten Weltkrieg. Töten, Überleben, Verweigern, Essen* 2013; Andreas Wirsching, *Vom Weltkrieg zum Bürgerkrieg? Politischer Extremismus in Deutschland und Frankreich 1918-1933/39*, Munich 1999; Bernd Weisbrod, *Gewalt in der Politik. Zur politischen Kultur in Deutschland zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen*, in: *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 43 (1992), 391-404; see also the contributions in: *Journal of Modern European History* 1 (2003).

55 Still important for these insights is Kocka, 132-136.

56 See as overview Robert Gerwarth/Erez Manela (eds.), *Empires at War, 1911-1923*, Oxford 2014.

57 See Randall Collins, *Entering and Leaving the Tunnel of Violence: Micro-sociological Dynamics of Emotional Entrainment in Violent Interactions*, in: *Current Sociology* 61 (2012), 132-151; Inhetveen.

the revolution ignited and then moves on to analyze crowd actions in Berlin. In the tradition of Thompson, Rudé and Hobsbawm, Jones shows how crowds employed symbolic street politics to move peacefully, sometimes in a carnivalesque fashion, from the periphery of cities to their centers. Victory parades were staged during which protestors carried red flags, pointed their rifles to the ground, and in highly symbolic acts some of the revolutionaries removed officers' cockades and swords. Arguing against undifferentiated mass psychological interpretation, he works out a pattern of five different ideal types of crowds; the crowd in formation or dispersal (1); the assembly (2); the procession (3); the curious crowd (4). Only from members of the fifth ideal type "the confrontational crowd" could it be expected that when they were confronted with armed forces they might employ physical violence. Moreover Jones argues that over the course of the winter of 1918/19 the state, mainly inspired by a fear of a fusion of bolshevism and crowd action, resorted to military force in an effort to restore its control over urban spaces. Thus, as he puts it, a Republic that was "brought into existence by revolutionary crowds occupying urban spaces" sanctioned violence "against similar crowds in the same spaces in 1919 and 1920. In the end, it was the dangerous image of dirt and revolt from below that came to define how the revolution's crowds were remembered for the remainder of the Weimar era."⁵⁸

To put it briefly: The winter months of 1918/19 marked the turning point of an up to then quite peaceful revolution. This militant military-based re-occupation of (urban) space supported the motivation to employ physical violence in collective street actions. This use of military force in domestic affairs has to be explained – was there no police to handle these tasks?

Interestingly, the history of the police and of policing in the revolution as well as during the Weimar Republic has been researched only very inadequately.⁵⁹ During the revolution the uniformed police had disappeared from the

58 The question of an unavoidable escalation of violence in the post-war years is studied in the dissertation project of Niels Ungruhe (Bielefeld University): *Gewaltkulturen im Ruhrgebiet 1916-1923*.

59 See the overview by Nadine Rossol, *Beyond law and order? Police History in Twentieth-century Europe and the Search for New Perspectives*, in: *Contemporary European History* 22 (2013), 319-330; as a monograph still important is Peter Lessmann-Faust, *Die preußische Schutzpolizei in der Weimarer Republik. Streifendienst und Straßenkampf*, Frankfurt am Main 2012; as a case study see Klaus Weinbauer, *Protest, kollektive Gewalt und Polizei in Hamburg zwischen Versammlungsdemokratie und staatlicher Sicherheit c. 1890-1933*, in: Friedrich Lenger (ed.), *Gewalt in europäischen Großstädten im ersten Drittel des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Munich 2013, 69-103; see for the

streets. The soldiers and workers councils established a number of improvised security organizations, often called “Sicherheitswehren” or “Volkswehren”. Later dominantly middle-class based “Einwohnerwehren” were also established. Since late 1918/early 1919 the state sponsored paramilitary free corps – more information on them is given below – and employed them against workers and against their collective actions. These free corps often acted very brutally. In summer 1919 a strongly militarized Security Police (Sicherheitspolizei) was established which, instead of the old uniformed police, should fight ‘bolshevist’ uprisings which were deemed to be lurking everywhere, while the ‘normal’ police should only take care of order issues. After the intervention of the *Military Inter-Allied Commission of Control* (Interalliierte Militär-Kontrollkommission, IMKK) the Security Police had to be dissolved. In Prussia its personnel however was transferred into the newly built-up uniformed police: the Schutzpolizei.

Nadine Rossol analyzes the reform discussions on and the actions of the uniformed Prussian police in the revolution and in the early years of the Weimar Republic. There were two reasons why the police propagated reforms. On the one hand it was thought that the police had to adjust to the new political and social order. On the other hand there was a fear that through the installation of the militarized Security Police in summer 1919 the police might lose its influence on domestic security issues in the new state. This double tension supported the drive to expand police trade unions, which sometimes clashed with the state’s quest for authority. Overall these early years were characterized by tensions between a state that was trying to strengthen its authority through a tough policing of strikes and upheavals and the actions of some police reformers who aimed at building a new democratic police, a new more democratic *Volkspolizei*. Her main argument is that building a reformed police aimed at having a strong institutional influence on shaping the architecture of Germany’s security organizations, including cultivating a trade union culture, failed due to the state’s strong quest for authority.

As we have already mentioned, in Europe, the years immediately following World War I saw many very violent actions of paramilitary forces, not only, but especially in its eastern regions. Recent research lists four factors that contributed to these conflicts.⁶⁰ (1) The legacy of the First World War: not the experience

broader context of gun culture Dagmar Ellerbrock, *Waffenkultur in Deutschland*, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 35-37 (2014), 40-46.

60 See for the following Robert Gerwarth/ John Horne, *Vectors of Violence: Paramilitarism in Europe after the Great War, 1917-1923*, in: *Journal of Modern History* 83 (2011), 489–513; see as case studies Christine Hikel, (Un)Sicherheit. Terror, Angst

of fighting a war brutalized postwar societies, but the ‘mobilizing power of defeat’.⁶¹ (2) The direct or indirect impacts of the revolution in Russia, mainly through the perceived menace of bolshevism. Parallel to this the Russian revolution and its inherent threats led to a counterrevolutionary mobilization that bred ‘a new political culture of the armed group’ which promised to offer an opportunity ‘to live a romanticized warrior existence’ of living and fighting together in ‘explosive subcultures of ultramilitant masculinity’, often fueled by a rough mixture of right-wing nationalism, anti-bolshevism and anti-semitism.⁶² (3) The collapse of empires and the disintegration of nation state proved to be sources for efforts to create ethnically homogenous nation states, which often initiated violent campaigns of purification and civil wars. (4) In countries which had lost the war, and where the monopoly of physical violence had been eroded and the cohesion of the state had deteriorated, the experience of defeat accelerated domestic violence.

In Germany the Free Corps can be seen as a good expression of these processes. This institution consisted of mentally tightly-knit collectives of young men who mostly had not fought in the war. The free-corps members did not accept the state’s monopoly of physical violence. Rather, in a kind of militant “Selbsthilfe” (self-help) they took it into their own hands. Paramilitary violence was group based, uncontrolled and uncontrollable from above. Their actions often followed a logic of extermination and cleansing. Although paramilitary violence recently gained massive scholarly attention, until today there are no new integrative case studies on Germany which analyze the concrete interaction between these free corps and other paramilitary units and their opponents.⁶³

und Männlichkeit in den Anfangsjahren der Weimarer Republik, in: id./Sylvia Schraut (ed.), *Terrorismus und Geschlecht. Politische Gewalt in Europa seit dem 19. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt/New York 2012, 169-190; Martin Sabrow, *Der Rathenau mord. Rekonstruktion einer Verschwörung gegen die Republik von Weimar*, Munich 1994; id., *Die verdrängte Verschwörung. Der Rathenau mord und die deutsche Gegenrevolution*, Frankfurt am Main 1999; Klaus Gietinger, *Der Konterrevolutionär. Waldemar Pabst – eine deutsche Karriere*, Hamburg 2009.

61 Ibid., 491; see also footnote 54.

62 See for the quotes Gerwarth/Horne, *Vectors*, 498; for the broader context Robert Gerwarth/John Horne (eds.), *War in Peace. Paramilitary violence in Europe after the Great War*, Oxford 2013.

63 See the case studies in Gerwarth/Horne (eds.), *War*; and as a summary see Barth, 229-254. There also is a dissertation project of Jan-Philipp Pomplun (Berlin) on Freecorps in Germany <http://www.walther-rathenau-kolleg.de/kollegiatinnen/jan-philipp-pomplun> (8 August 2014).

There were European countries where physical violence was endemic although these countries had not participated in the war. As *Florian Grafl* vividly demonstrates, although Spain remained neutral during World War I, Barcelona, one of its most important industrial and port cities, gives an example how after the First World War a climate of fierce violence developed. Grafl stresses that in the imaginary repertoire of its politicians Barcelona always was on the verge of revolution. This assumption rested on four factors: Intensified Catalan regionalism challenged the unity (and thus the power) of the Spanish Central state (all the more as in the war some 40,000 Catalans had fought on the sides of the allies); anarchism threatened the conservative political system and violent interactions shaped the conflicts between employers and workers – not only at the shop floor but also in public. Moreover, the inefficient, undermanned, disorganized, corrupt and ill-paid police (*Guardia Civil*) was not able to maintain law and order. What Grafl also underlines is that employers and the political elites had themselves strongly contributed to these violent confrontations with their efforts to form private security forces, with their inability to reform the corrupt and ineffective police and also with their stubborn resistance towards corporate regulation of industrial relations and social political measures. Already in these years in Barcelona there was both a lack of compromise and a quest for purification which later shaped the mass killings of the Franco era.⁶⁴

Grafl's contribution demonstrates that the First World War also affected the authority of nation states which had not directly participated in the fighting, especially when seen against the background of a crumbling colonial empire. Even there the impulses towards self-determination, the crisis of food supply and distribution during the war and workers' post-war efforts to increase their wages and to expand democracy to the shop-floor contributed to an erosion of trust in the state. These negative perceptions were reinforced when it became obvious that also in Spain the state was not able to put its monopoly of physical violence effectively into practice. Among the middle classes and the political elites this multifold threat was intensified by an acute fear of Bolshevik (in Spain: anarchist)-influenced revolution.

64 Helen Graham et al., Review Forum on the book written by Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust. Inquisition and extermination in twentieth-century Spain*, London 2012, in: *Journal of Genocide Research* 16 (2014), 139–168.

COMMUNICATION AND IMAGINARIES

As we intimated earlier in this introduction, revolutions are shaped by intensified processes of communication. Not only media reports but also orally transmitted stories and rumors spread the news of a coming change. With the news came hopes and positive expectations about the future but also complex fears and anxieties.

In the dominant research on the German revolution these processes of communication, the related emotions and imaginaries are only mentioned in passing. As one recent study of rumors and patterns of communication, however, underlines, revolutions are strongly influenced by them.⁶⁵ In early November 1918, the military unsuccessfully tried to shield Berlin from incoming news by blocking access to railway stations and by cutting private telephone and telegraph communications. This in turn stimulated the production and distribution of leaflets and other informally printed materials and intensified the spread of rumors, which in turn grew steadily more dramatic. All these processes contributed to a further erosion of the authority of the state. This was the hour of informal meetings and discussion groups eager to collect all available information. As one author has put it: “(T)his demonstrative curiosity proved to be something like an unintended plebiscite against the existing order as it questioned the continuance of the latter.”⁶⁶ Such patterns of informal communication were not the sole preserve of those who welcomed the revolution. In the winter of 1918/19 fear of bolshevism was widespread among the ruling elites as well as among social democrats.⁶⁷ Moreover, among soldiers and free-corps members rumors existed about planned anti-military insurrections of the left, about a clandestine, omnipresent and well-equipped red army or about the coming of a second revolution.⁶⁸

65 Florian Altenhöner, *Kommunikation und Kontrolle. Gerüchte und städtische Öffentlichkeiten in Berlin und London 1914/18*, Munich 2008, 291-301; more general is Jörg Requate, *Medien und Öffentlichkeitsstrukturen in revolutionären Umbrüchen. Konstanten und Veränderungen zwischen der Französischen Revolution und dem Umbruch von 1899*, in: Kurt Imhof et al. (eds.), *Kommunikation und Revolution*, Zurich 1998, 17-34. For the broader context see Thomas Mergel, *Propaganda in der Kultur des Schauens. Visuelle Politik in der Weimarer Republik*, in: Wolfgang Hardtwig (ed.), *Ordnungen in der Krise. Zur politischen Kulturgeschichte Deutschlands 1918-1933*, Munich 2007, 531-559.

66 Altenhöner, 297. See also Weinbauer, *Protest*.

67 See Lösche.

68 Barth, 287-290.

While there are some fine studies on female activities during the First World War,⁶⁹ we still miss gendered studies on the revolution. This is not to argue that we should only focus on women since gender is a relational concept that has to include masculinities, an aspect already broached by Klaus Theweleit in his path-breaking psycho-analytical study of the Free Corps.⁷⁰ *Kathleen Canning* in her chapter focuses on the experience, imaginary, and emotions of the 'prolonged revolutionary moment of 1918-19' in which Germany's war, defeat and revolution became inextricably entwined. Her key argument is that the revolution was a gendered 'social imaginary' which started a process of imagining the future of Germany – be it a longing for or a fear of change. Thus revolutionary circumstances led individuals and groups to dream of new opportunities and a very different social order. New actors entered the stage of politics in 1918, especially women, who gained the right to vote through the revolution, after the women's movement had fought for it since the end of the 19th century. Moreover, war and revolution influenced and changed also the traditional gender-order or, at least, many contemporaries were afraid of such a change. Canning presents material from personal sources (ego-documents) as well as art works which clearly indicate a more or less open debate on the future of gender and social order in Germany. There was, however, an absence of women in the leading institutions of the revolution, such as the 'Räte'. Canning suggests we look closer at those places and institutions where women took part actively to develop a 'new form of political subjectivity'. To become a citizen of a Republic – or to reject this offer – meant different things for men and women after 1918. A gendered perspective on the revolution and the following years is therefore necessary to understand the new gendering of politics and nationhood after the war.

The fears and anxieties of revolution after the First World War did not only affect European countries, but also US-American society. In her comparative study *Norma Lisa Flores* addresses how the images of bolshevist revolutions and uprisings in Europe influenced domestic policy in the United States. For many US-Americans, Germany was seen as a modern advanced society, if such a nation should succumb to bolshevism, it also had the potential to overrun the USA. Flores argues that both in Germany and in the United States the responses to the threat of bolshevism were fundamentally similar. Her contribution demonstrates the importance of imaginaries of threat in three aspects. First, the fear of bolshevism and of the revolution it might breed was a transnational phenomenon. Second, in the US, similar to other post-World War I societies, the fear of revolution was not only a fear of bolshevism, it was class-based. It was the fear

69 Daniel, *Arbeiterfrauen*; Davis.

70 Klaus Theweleit, *Männerphantasien* (2 vols), Frankfurt am Main 1977/78.

of a radical working class, its unions and strikes. Third, in the years immediately following the First World War, the tendency to purge communities of any unwanted foreigners, could not only be found in Europe, similar imaginaries and practices characterized US-society. What becomes obvious from Flores study as with Jones, is that urban settings are the main terrain where these conflicts occurred.⁷¹

Oliver Haller's chapter indicates the meaning of communication and perception from a very different perspective. His investigation is located in a classical field of history, namely the military history of World War I. But he re-reads the story of the German defeat in 1918 as caused by illness and misperception, in which the outcomes of the influenza pandemic played the main role. Because thousands of German soldiers suffered from a severe form of influenza in 1918, but were diagnosed only as afflicted with a common cold, it spread on the war fronts in spring and summer 1918 causing acute 'manpower difficulties' during the German offensives in the West. Nonetheless, German military leaders were not prepared to 'see' what the influenza 'really' meant to their plans, argues Haller. This misperception was led by the 'iron will' of the military leadership to start an offensive on the one hand, and by missing knowledge of the disease at that time on the other hand. Both, the will and the misperceptions, led to fatal military decisions. As Haller clearly argues, it was only after the non-successful offensive in summer 1918, conducted by sick, tired and weak men, that 'German soldiers began to surrender in large numbers' and morale declined rapidly. Hence, the German revolution had its origins probably also in so-called environmental factors, which had a transnational character.⁷²

SUBJECTIVITIES AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The third part of this volume focuses on a highly important collective actor in revolutions: on social movements and on subjectivities therein. Definitions of

71 The importance of local (mostly urban) settings in this revolution is also stressed by Weinbauer, *Protest*; Pierre Purseigle, *Beyond and Below the Nations. Towards a comparative history of local communities at war*, in: Jenny McLeod/Pierre Purseigle (eds.), *Uncovered Fields. Perspectives in First World War studies*, Leiden/Boston 2004, 98-123; Stefan Goebel, *Cities*, in: Jay Winter et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, Vol. 2: *The State*, Cambridge etc. 2014, 358-381.

72 See for an innovative discussion of the influence of ecological factors on colonial warfare John Robert McNeill, *Mosquito Empires. Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620-1914*, Cambridge 2010.

social movements mainly focus on social change, on collective actors and on their networks. These studies also pay attention to patterns of communication among the members of these movements and between movements and the state.⁷³ The actors of social movements are often excluded from formally organized institutions (like political parties). Movement research, which mainly is conducted by social/political scientists and thus lacks explicit historical perspectives, was often influenced by structural approaches where the activists and their concrete actions only played a minor role.⁷⁴ As a consequence, knowledge about the members of social movements and about their subjectivities still is rare.⁷⁵ The contributions to this section focus on such often neglected cultural aspects of social movements.

Following a transnational perspective *Gleb Albert's* case-study looks at how the German Revolution was perceived by regional and local communist activists in the early Soviet-Union. These activists played a highly important role in the establishment of the Soviet state and in its defense against opposing forces. Active solidarity towards revolutionary movements stood at the centre of their subjectivisation⁷⁶ as “true” Bolsheviks. As the author points out, the German Revolution had an enormous importance for these activists. They were united by

73 See Jürgen Mittag/Helke Stadtland, *Soziale Bewegungsforschung im Spannungsfeld von Theorie und Empirie*, in: id. (eds.), *Theoretische Ansätze und Konzepte der Forschung über soziale Bewegungen in der Geschichtswissenschaft*, Essen 2014, 13-60, here 14f.; Roland Roth/Dieter Rucht, *Einleitung*, in: id. (eds.), *Soziale Bewegungen in Deutschland seit 1945. Ein Handbuch*, Frankfurt/New York 2008, 10-36; Donatella della Porta/Mario Dini, *Social Movements. An introduction*, Malden MA 2006; Charles Tilly/Lesley J. Wood, *Social Movements, 1768-2004*, Boulder 2009. As an innovative case study still important is Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, “Die Phantasie an die Macht”. Mai 68 in Frankreich, Frankfurt am Main 1995.

74 See the critique put forward by Andreas Pettenkofer, *Radikaler Protest. Zur soziologischen Theorie politischer Bewegungen*, Frankfurt am Main 2010.

75 See as innovative contributions about the relationship between left intellectuals and left-wing radical social movements the publications of Detlef Siegfried: *Revolution und Sozialforschung – linke Sozialwissenschaftler am Kieler Institut für Weltwirtschaft*, in: Gallus, *Revolution*, 140-159; *Das radikale Milieu. Kieler Novemberrevolution, Sozialwissenschaft und Linksradikalismus*, Wiesbaden 2004; *Der Fliegerblick. Intellektuelle, Radikalismus und Flugzeugproduktion bei Junkers 1914-1934*, Bonn 2001.

76 In Albert's contribution subjectivisation is understood as an active and perpetual process in which a social identity is assumed that is intelligible both for him-/herself and for others.

a self-perception of “dedicated revolutionaries” for whom “world revolution” became a “charismatic idea”. Their identification with revolution abroad could help bridge the manifold patterns of social isolation these party activists had to face at the local level. The revolution in Germany sparked an intense response from below: A vast number of solidarity telegrams were sent, the local press discussed the events in Germany and many activists planned to join the revolutionary struggle in Germany. The German revolution was the first significant revolution abroad after 1917. Moreover, the German working-class seemed to be a strong ally in the world-wide revolutionary struggle. This was all the more important as Germany was not any far-away country.

On a general level Gleb Albert’s chapter teaches us two facts. As the Soviet and US-American case demonstrates, the German Revolution fueled imaginaries (fears and hopes) nearly on a global scale. Moreover, the social movement in the early Soviet state was not the product of centralist orders but a lively locally rooted social entity where activists’ subjectivities and imaginaries were fueled by a local translation of transnationally entangled flows of ideas.⁷⁷

Meanwhile *Ian Grimmer* goes back to the events in Germany itself. Although much research was done on the councils during the 1970s, it is surprising that one section of this social movement was neglected until recently. Grimmer presents a survey of the development of several councils of ‘intellectual workers’, mostly writers and publishers, in Germany in 1918/19. Leading figures, such as Kurt Hiller, searched for a cultural revolution besides a political one (as did Carl Zuckmayer who we cited above). Hiller and his followers believed they had the moral authority to accompany and lead a cultural revival of Germany after the war. Their aim was to educate the ‘new people’, seen as important for the stability of the new republican order. Based on Pierre Bourdieu’s writings on modern intellectuals and extensive research on the council movement, Grimmer demonstrates the peculiarities of these ‘intellectual’ councils. On the one hand, the activists were well-known personalities with a strong self-awareness; on the other hand, they failed to unite their efforts on the national level. Very different political ideas were discussed between Berlin, Munich and Vienna, but all council members felt united in their belief of having moral authority. Similar to the social imaginary of women in the revolution studied by Canning, Grimmer states that the councils played an important role in creating ‘an institutional space in

77 See on the often underestimated interaction of local and transnational factors the special issue of the journal *Historische Anthropologie* 21:1 (2013), Felix Brahm/Angelika Epple (eds.), *Lokalität und transnationale Veflechtungen*, especially the article by Angelika Epple, *Lokalität und die Dimensionen des Globalen. Eine Frage der Relationen*, 4-25.

which men and women of letters could advance cultural reforms outside the parameters of the traditional labor movement and its parties.’ Therefore the councils of intellectual workers searched for a way to act as political subjects but with the notion of intellectualism. They tried to establish an autonomous political group alongside parties and unions. It was this peculiar situation that gave the councils their ‘moral power’ and simultaneously fixed their political marginalization.

By the end of the war the map of Europe had changed dramatically. The old empires of Ottoman Turkey, Austria-Hungary and Russia had collapsed and were now divided into a multitude of successor states. The German empire had gone too and was under pressure from ethnic-national calls for its own ‘amputations’. One of the old/new states was Poland, which [re]gained independence in 1918/1919. *Jens Boysen* demonstrates in his chapter the impact the German revolution had on this development. He investigates how the Polish national movement in the eastern parts of Prussia acted during the autumn 1918, especially in West Prussia and Posen. Boysen notes how ‘the drawn-out war and the accompanying political changes created a situation in the Prussian east by which a long-term, but rather inactive tension between the ethnic Polish population and the German-Prussian state was gradually heated up and turned into a sort of post-war ‘front’.’ The revolutionary events in Berlin and elsewhere thus provided the community of Prussian Poles with a specific new opportunity as a power vacuum opened, and which enabled the Polish-national movement to gain more influence. Boysen, as other authors in this volume, points also to the change in perceptions: During the heyday of Prussian authoritarianism Poles and Social Democrats were both seen as enemies of the state; they perceived each other as fellows or comrades. When the Social Democrats became the leading force in German politics during the revolution, they didn’t change attitudes towards the Polish national movement. Boysen states this was a misperception that created a blind spot. As a result, tensions between ‘Germans’ and ‘Poles’ rose in East Prussia as a national conflict emerged that poisoned daily life and led to violence.

CONCLUSION: THE GERMAN REVOLUTION MISSING AND FOUND

The contributions to this volume offer fresh insights into the nature of the German revolution, without claiming to have the final say on its historiography. Indeed, each of the authors would agree that many of the issues raised in this

volume remain understudied and thus require further and more intensive attention. Nevertheless, we can agree on a number of points in our search for new patterns of interpretation of the German Revolution. The first point concerns the revolution's periodization: its origins broadly can be dated to 1916. The waves of social protest from 1916, created a 'revolutionary situation' or atmosphere that went unrequited by the limits of the political 'compromise' of 1918/19. This was then articulated through violent confrontation between state agencies and the crowds comprising the politicised social movements. The mobilisation of a 'revolutionary moment' in October/November, created the cultural-imaginary moment that was formed by and formed (the revolutionary) subjectivities that lasted beyond 1923.

The second and related point we hope this volume demonstrates, is the importance of cultural aspects such as perception and imaginaries. On the one hand the fear of bolshevism – however diffuse the understandings of it might have been, was strongly present in these years. Its menace did not only grow out of its potential as a political idea but was also – perhaps even mainly – related to its social movement potentialities. On the other hand, the German revolution for many 'progressive' internationalists served as a powerful beacon of hope. These hopes were not only focused on political changes, for not least among the aspirations and results of the revolution were newly-created gendered imaginaries about citizenship, about new social and cultural orders and institutions.

The third point demonstrated by this volume, is that the shape and direction of the German revolution (as any other) was strongly influenced by the collective actions of 'the crowd'. As crowds and social movements took to public spaces (streets, market places etc.) as their field of action, the police or the military as important actors inevitably were challenged. This in turn, raises questions about the perceptions and practices of the state, especially its monopoly and use of physical violence. If violence is understood as a communicative act this enables us to rethink the meaning of the evolving often violent confrontations between the crowd, social movements and the state.⁷⁸ Finally, it should be clear that studying the German revolution cannot continue without taking into account its transnational context. Revolution does not necessarily follow the strictures of political borders, but is often transgressive, as between 1916-23. Indeed, the period from the Mexican Revolution (1910), to the Irish Easter Rising (1916), to the Russian Revolution (1917) through to the Central European revolutions (1917/1920), through to the waning of revolutionary impulses in Europe by 1923/24, must be regarded as an era of transnational upheaval.

78 This is not to assume that there is an inevitability for collective action to lead to violence.

As the German revolution approaches its centenary, the above points (and they are not exclusive by any means) may offer some fresh impetus and possible avenues in researching its history. In this context only, we argue, is it possible to search, find and understand the German revolution. Finally, given the greater intellectual awareness today among historians of global history, newer studies of the German revolution might self-consciously leave national borders behind and employ translocal, transregional and transnational gendered and space related perspectives. This volume is only a beginning of exploring these dimensions.

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