

## Introduction to Part I

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The First World War had been won by global economic force.<sup>1</sup> The global superiority of the victorious powers, foremost the USA and Great Britain, was smothering in the aftermath of the war. In the 1930s, it took the brinkmanship of states set on destroying the international system, a veritable revolution in international affairs, to challenge this strategic advantage. Their defiance of global hegemony unleashed a world-wide mobilization quite unlike anything previously seen in the history of the modern state system. There had been an arms race before 1914, but it was dwarfed by the industrial armaments process in the decade between 1931 and 1941 and the totalizing mobilization of belligerent nations between 1941 and 1945. The Second World War was, as Jeffrey Fear puts it in his essay, a ‘war of factories’ – a theme that is also echoed in the plate section. In the course of the war the practices and institutions of production, finance, research and development, logistics and consumption were all massively reshaped and redirected.

There can be little argument that the Second World War was a key moment in the process of making and remaking the national and international economy. Indeed, a case can be made that the very idea of the national economy as an object of government originated between 1914 and 1945 in an age of totalizing war.<sup>2</sup> Superficially this nationalization of the economy might appear to be counter-posed to globalization, but the more complicated truth is that national mobilization embedded the economies of

1 Adam Tooze and Ted Fertik, ‘The World Economy and the Great War’, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 40:2(2014), 214–38.

2 Daniel Speich Chassé, *Die Erfindung des Bruttosozialprodukts. Globale Ungleichheit in der Wissensgeschichte der Ökonomie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013). Philipp Lepenies, *Die Macht der einen Zahl. Eine politische Geschichte des Bruttoinlandsprodukts*, Orig.-Ausg. ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2013). Adam Tooze, *Statistics and the German State, 1900–1945: The Making of Modern Economic Knowledge* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

even the most self-sufficient and reluctant belligerents like the Soviet Union in the world economy. David Edgerton's essay demonstrates how central the control of resources beyond the nation's border was for the war effort and how the defence of access routes became a key element of war-making. Indeed, the world's economy, its choking points, became targets of war-fighting. As Volume I of the Cambridge History of the Second World War suggests, the role and place of an 'economic strategy' to defeat the enemy was debated controversially among all belligerents. The present volume makes evident that the condition of globality that had acquired such force since the mid-nineteenth century in a process of globalizing marketization continued to unfold but now through the violent and complex dynamic of belligerent mobilization and incorporation across borders. The after-effects of this embedded nationalization of the economy were only undone in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>3</sup>

It is one of the characteristics of the Second World War that it pitted not simply nation states and their armies, but competing strategies of mobilization against each other. Of course, they did have certain characteristics in common. Thus, one of the dramatic features of totalizing mobilization for war was the shift from generalized media of social circulation such as money, to a specific and direct appropriation of particular materials, people(s) or ideas for highly particular purposes. 'Appropriation' in turn now became a process not simply of extraction (of resources, technologies or ideas), but of deliberate creation, research and development, for the purpose of destruction. How these object-driven mobilizations could be achieved, depended in turn on what instruments and what intelligence was available, the configuration of alliances domestic and international, the moment in the war, and the goals that were being pursued by the combatants. In other words, mobilizations by all belligerents were driven to no small degree by the exigencies of war rather than by some kind of deliberate or planned approach. However, they were neither random nor were they the same. Despite their incidental, improvisational and often chaotic quality, they were shaped by and in turn moulded competing wartime political economies.

A distinctive mode of mobilization employed by the Western powers was a highly formalized, public and contractual model. The outlines of this strategy could already be seen in play in First World War bond finance that

3 Niall Ferguson, ed., *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010).

was taken to an extreme pitch in populist war bond drives.<sup>4</sup> These populist drives were reinforced and expanded after 1939/41 and while no less spectacular, they were now even more encompassing and a lot more coercive. And yet, because the muscular appeal to mass-participation in the war effort was so central, they ended up entrenching a model of bond-owning, democratic capitalism on the one hand and claims to participatory citizenship and a purchase into the largesse of the state on the other.<sup>5</sup> Through these practices of the public, contractual mobilization of entrepreneurs, labourers and consumers, economic liberty came to be a central stake in the war.

A second mode of mobilization is best described as ‘systemic’, evoking the organized and holistic quality of this approach. We use the term ‘systemic’ not to designate a higher stage of ‘organized’ or ‘corporate’ capitalism, but an alternative political economy, whose medium is the management of flows.<sup>6</sup> In financial terms this was the model of circuit-based, ‘internal financing’ based on a newly emergent understanding of macroeconomics and the highly developed institutions of national financial systems, but simultaneously on the power of the state to extract monetary contributions or to socialize the cost of inflation. As Tooze and Martin show, these techniques were employed by all sides in the war. In the West, Keynesianism provided the frame for the contractual model. Containing inflationary pressure enabled the war to be managed on the basis of volunteerism and social partnership. In Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union and Japan, systemic management was combined with unprecedented biopolitical coercion, the control of all aspects of human life. This was the terrain of planning – with far-reaching ramifications for the theory and practice of industrial development – discussed by Engerman in a later section, or the modes of labour mobilization surveyed by Hachtmann.

It depends on theoretical proclivities, not to be decided here, whether the systemic strategy must be considered inherently unstable and liable to overreach, or whether it was the brinkmanship of Germany, Japan and Italy and, in a very different way, the desperate catch-up mobilization cum industrialization of the Soviet Union that led them to ever-more radical and dynamically unsustainable modes of mobilization. This strategy is often

4 J. Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War and the Remaking of Global Order, 1916–1931* (London: Penguin, 2014).

5 James T. Sparrow, *Warfare State: World War II Americans and the Age of Big Government* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

6 Robert A. Brady, *Business as a System of Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943).

described as ‘totalitarian’ due to certain formal qualities of the state’s control over the process.<sup>7</sup> But what really matters is something else. Huff’s discussion of Japan’s rapacious war finance in occupied Asia (much as Hachtmann’s and Hellbeck’s essays) is a stark illustration of a slash and burn logic of mobilization. It was not plain robbery or extortion, although that existed as well on a scale that is still difficult to fathom.<sup>8</sup> It depended rather more on Japan’s ability to tax the holders of currency, who had to be persuaded or coerced into holding the asset to be taxed in the first place. This was a dynamic spiral of a self-consuming mobilization that reached beyond the nation into occupied territories and relentlessly pillaged and eviscerated what Hannah Arendt calls superfluous populations, for whom the naked violence of this scheme of mobilization was up front and centre. This could take the form, as Collingham shows, of the rapacious exaction of food. It might involve, as Khan shows in a later section, the contingent redistribution of populations and spaces on a continental scale. It could also, as Sabine Frühstück describes, be enacted on the body of a woman forced into sexual slavery in a military brothel whose services were paid for with a special type of currency token. What we capture here is mobilization as an act of destruction and ultimately of self-destruction.

A third, grand alternative of mobilization is far more difficult to capture. Beyond the realm of the industrial and urban war, the agrarian history of the war, surveyed by Tooze in ‘The War of the Villages’ (in the next section), but evident also in Collingham’s essay on food, points to a radically different and, indeed, revolutionary model of mobilizing a population for war. This was the ‘green’, ‘red’ and ‘black’ mobilization based on the promise of land redistribution through revolutionary war that had its pivot not in the city but in the countryside. This was mobilization by expropriation and redistribution that made only tactical distinctions between internal and external war. If it is true that the two World Wars were the great levellers of the twentieth century, flattening the wealth and income distributions, as Piketty suggests, this was radically true of the mode of mobilization in revolutionary peasant wars, in which the distinction between the political and social goals

7 The idea of a self-destructive dynamic of totalitarianism was introduced by Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (new edn, New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1966 [1951]).

8 While we know a great deal about certain aspects like art theft, land reform or asset redistribution in liberated countries (from Czechoslovakia to Korea), the entire theme of world-wide property redistribution during and in the aftermath of the Second World War is still awaiting its historians.

of war – a more equitable political and economic order dominated by the rural masses – and the military resources deployed to obtain those goals – the mobilized peasantry seizing control of the land and its resources – were blurred in the extreme.<sup>9</sup> In this mode of combined military, political and economic struggle the Maoist and Yugoslav movements would come to serve as a model for revolution throughout the ‘Third World’ after 1945, with Spain as a dire warning of catastrophic failure.

If the discussion of modes of mobilization summarizes and pinpoints the research of the past century and demonstrates that there are still considerable lacunae to be covered, the last three essays of the section on political economy point into the future. Michael Miller’s essay on ‘Transportation’, sketches the outlines of what must become the systematic study of sea, land and air transport and its major hubs as well as of communication and communication networks – in short the study of the (embattled) infrastructure of war as it stretches across the globe. Whether we chose a war-centric, a civil society or a market approach to make sense of the global condition of the twentieth century, the 1940s clearly emerge as a pivot of infrastructure-globalization. In turn, this departure will highlight the strategic role of the battle over control in all three oceans – the Atlantic, the Indian and the Pacific – and not least help to decide the geopolitical debate between Mahan and Mackinder, over the future of land- vs. sea-power, that started off the century.

Equally important are the technological shifts tracked by Cathryn Carson over the transwar period from the 1930s to the 1950s. As the wartime struggle unfolded, the logic of mobilization and immobilization triggered a series of vaulting moves by both sides that had the effect of hugely enhancing the combatants’ range of vision and reach and, above all, destructive power. If the U-boats tried to cut the transatlantic supply lines, the key to defeating the U-boats were the invisible beams of sonar and unprecedented long-range air power. Radar would find the bombers in the dark night sky. And when conventional air defences failed, the answer to crushing Allied air superiority would be the jet, the cruise missile and ballistic missile. In military terms these latter developments proved to be inconsequential in the context of the Second World War. By contrast, the development of the atomic bomb had an immediate, if still debated impact. Of course, the military use of nuclear

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014). Eric R. Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

weapons as an instrument of war was rejected after 1945 into the present. Still, what gives these wartime technologies their world historical significance was the way in which over the decades that followed they would alter humanity's relationship to the planet.<sup>10</sup>

Taken together, the human appropriation of resources in the Second World War was quite unprecedented and Pearson in his essay challenges us to think about the implications of this drama for humanity's natural environment. He thus points us toward the question that must surely be front and centre at the beginning of the twenty-first century: where is the world historic event of the Second World War to be located in relation to the great rupture of the Anthropocene, the age of the preponderant human impact over the Earth's ecosystem? It is commonplace for environmental historians – ecological research uses a much more extensive time frame reaching back to the rise of agriculture in the Neolithic Revolution – to demarcate the advent first of the industrial revolution and second of ultra-rapid economic growth after 1945, thus unselfconsciously aligning the Anthropocene with the 'post-war'. It is time to rethink this shorthand and to take 1937/41 as a more compelling starting point. Even the ecological research on the Anthropocene would do well to consider the dramatic armaments-fuelled recovery from the Great Depression as a critical threshold in the grand transformation that made our world today. War did not make the Anthropocene, but it made a crucial difference.

<sup>10</sup> Günther Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2002).