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**WAR**  
**AND COLONIES**  
**1914-1918**

CONFERENCE PAPER • PROF. DR KRIS MANJAPRA



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# A War of Illusions: German Attempts to 'Revolutionise' the Colonial World during the First World War

## **Abstract**

This paper considers the attempts by German war planners to disrupt the British Empire on a global scale, by converting British imperial subjects, and other political groups aligned against British informal empire, into anti-colonial guerrilla warriors aligned with German strategic ends. The German Foreign Office in the early twentieth century saw itself as an imperial master of the darker peoples of the earth, and believed it could orchestrate a global rebellion against British world power. Official Germany's conviction that it could instrumentalise anti-colonial struggles for its own benefit demonstrates the power of racial, Orientalist theories on German international policy and war planning. More generally, the First World War can be understood as a momentous 'reality check' at the climax of an era defined by European imperialist fantasies. The War resulted when vying European myths of global imperium and domination entered into a violent clash with global political realities that were far beyond the control of the big European powers.

## **Profile**

Kris Manjapra teaches History at Tufts University. He has published works on the Indian Marxist intellectual, M.N. Roy, and on forms of Indian anti-colonial cosmopolitanism. His most recent book, *Age of Entanglement: German and Indian Intellectuals across Empire*, explores the unequal, but potent, transnational alliances between German and Indian intellectuals during the high period of British world dominance in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.