

Górny, M.: *Science Embattled: Eastern European Intellectuals and the Great War*. Paderborn, Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 2019. 386 p.

Drawing to various degrees on Polish, Ukrainian, German, Austrian, Czech, Hungarian, Slovak, Serbian, French, British, Italian, Romanian, Russian, Finnish, Bulgarian, and American sources, Maciej GÓRNY's masterful study provides a critical overview of the significant contributions that intellectuals from Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe made to the war effort in multiple countries during World War I. As a history of ideas, GÓRNY's work focuses in particular on the 'Krieg der Geister' – or 'war of the spirits' – that was waged in parallel with the military struggles on all fronts during the war. Noting that, until very recently, this war of ideas has been studied only in its Western European manifestations, GÓRNY argues that the involvement of Eastern European intellectuals "paralleled that of their colleagues in the West," and that these intellectuals also "matched" Western scientists "both intellectually and with regard to social standing" (p. 4). GÓRNY asserts that the similarities between the war of ideas on the Eastern and Western fronts "far outweigh the differences," and that though the differences that existed were not

insignificant, a careful comparative study of the roles that Eastern European intellectuals played is both warranted and necessary (p. 4). Such a study, he contends, not only addresses a significant lacuna in the historiography of World War I, but also contributes to a growing body of scholarship that interrogates the complex history of cultural and intellectual transfer in the region in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

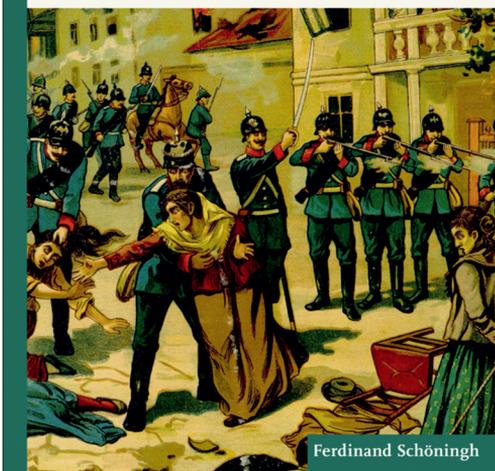
Though the principal focus of his analysis is on geographers, anthropologists, and psychologists and psychiatrists, GÓRNY dedicates the first two chapters to an examination of the broader context within which scientific ideas and practices developed both prior to and during the war. Chapter One examines the history of national characterology, in particular as this evolved as a transnational phenomenon over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As GÓRNY points out, intellectuals throughout Europe were increasingly drawn into debates over national character in the decades leading up to World War I, and not always for explicitly political reasons. As a category of description, the idea of national character as a means of better understanding self and other was well established as a social and cultural discourse across Europe, and numerous scholars working in multiple disciplines shared a broad "desire" to know not only "other countries and societies," but also "one's own community" (p. 9). Perhaps not surprisingly, the most common category that was invoked as a means of understanding national character was race. GÓRNY, however, also identifies gender as another common – even central – category, especially as this played out in terms of racial hygiene and perceptions of either sexual health or deviancy. Alongside race, attitudes towards gender and sexuality helped to shape emergent conceptualisations of national character, and thus provide an important lens for understanding the 'war of the spirits' as this erupted during World War I.

Despite the growing popularity and political utility of national characterology as a field of study (a utility that was recognised by nation states as early as the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871; see his thoughtful discussion in the Appendix), GÓRNY argues that scholars themselves tended to remain above overtly nationalist 'perversions' of human sciences prior to World War I, and instead cleaved to prevailing notions of scientific neutrality and objectivity that served as the benchmarks of professionalism in any discipline seeking legitimacy as a science. Just as Steven SEEGL (2018) argues in *Map Men: Transnational Lives and Deaths of Geographers in the Making of Modern East Central Europe*, GÓRNY reminds us that scientists widely regarded themselves as part of an interna-

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Maciej Górny



tional fraternity defined in terms of shared disciplinary standards and a largely uniform, and often collaborative, commitment both to the pursuit of ‘truth’ and to the universality of knowledge and intellectual progress. This very real community of scholars – one that was arguably even more pronounced amongst Eastern European intellectuals because of their reliance on the West for mentorship and training (see p. 244) – was put under considerable and often irreconcilable strain during the war. As GÓRNY illustrates in Chapter Two, a considerable number of intellectuals contributed quite willingly and unapologetically to state-backed propaganda efforts during World War I, in part because of the emergent market for short works aimed at a rapidly growing patriotic readership, but also because of earlier disciplinary commitments to questions of national character and identity. Noting that even non-nationalist intellectuals joined the war effort without requiring significant encouragement, GÓRNY concludes that the often enthusiastic participation of scholars in the ‘war of the spirits’ was not a “marginal phenomenon,” but rather a central feature of “intellectual warfare” (p. 52).

Though he acknowledges the obvious patriotism that motivated scholars and scientists across multiple disciplines, GÓRNY nevertheless agrees with the current scholarly consensus that the ‘war of the spirits’ waged during World War I “took place independently” of the propaganda machines of warring states (p. 90). Though clearly influenced by state-sponsored nationalist discourse, intellectuals throughout Europe exercised what GÓRNY calls “limited creative autonomy” when taking on the task of disseminating knowledge and information that was seen as essential to the war effort. As he contends, it would be misleading to equate the ‘war of the spirits’ exclusively with wartime propaganda. “Both operated according to their own dynamics,” he argues, “and although they inspired each other, they remained autonomous” (pp. 51–52).

As in Western Europe, the ‘war of the spirits’ in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans contributed greatly to the professionalisation and elevated status of the human sciences during World War I, especially when the methods and conclusions of leading scholars and prevailing schools of thought aligned with the political and military goals of the state. However, despite the important commonalities with Western Europe, developments in the East demand a partially separate treatment, not only because the history of intellectual warfare in Eastern Europe has been generally neglected in the historiography until quite recently, but also because the differences that do exist force scholars to think in more nuanced terms about the ‘intellectual combat’ that was waged during the war.

First and most obviously, by including Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European developments into an intellectual history of World War I, historians are compelled to rethink the periodisation of the war

itself. Having arguably begun with the First Balkan War in 1912, World War I lasted longer in the East than it did on the Western Front. With actual combat in parts of Eastern Europe and the Balkans only coming to an end in 1922–1923, the ‘war of the spirits’ not only spanned a broader period, but also largely “anticipated the post-war situation” within the region (p. 91). Moreover, the lines of intellectual warfare did not align as neatly with the military fronts in Eastern Europe as they did in the West. Beyond “criss-crossing the territories of major powers,” intellectual combat in the East not only brought supposed allies into conflict with one another, but also required the support of established authorities in the West to help legitimate the scientific claims, and thus also the nationalist causes, of Eastern European and Balkan scholars (pp. 90–91).

One of the most important claims that GÓRNY makes is that the war had a constructive and even formative impact on disciplines that were still relatively new at the beginning of the twentieth century (a fact that was as true for Western Europe as it was for Eastern Europe). Looking first to the nascent discipline of geography (Chapter Three), GÓRNY underscores the multiple opportunities that opened up for geographers upon the outbreak of hostilities in Europe between 1912 and 1914. Given the usefulness of geography to nation building, geopolitics, and military strategy alike, geographers were able to present themselves as being indispensable to the fulfilment of a wide range of state interests. As GÓRNY argues, the “ethnopsychological” characterisations of the nation and its neighbours that had become commonplace by the fin de siècle “found new life” during the war (p. 119). Oriented increasingly toward the nation, geography rose to prominence throughout Europe during World War I, and by “providing geographers with new responsibilities,” not only “hastened” the professional careers of individual scholars (p. 123), but also sharpened discipline-specific skills and spawned innovations that greatly enlarged what Ferenc GYURIS (2014) usefully calls the methodological ‘tool kit’ that geographers would continue to draw upon throughout the interwar period.

As it did for geography, World War I served as a critical juncture for anthropology, in large part because anthropologists began thinking more exclusively of the nation in racial terms, but also because the war contributed to the growing visibility and perceived importance of anthropology as a discipline useful to the state. Despite lingering questions of professionalisation within the field and the lack of an obvious military application of the discipline, anthropology nevertheless coalesced as a science during the war, in part as a result of racially-linked ‘scientific’ studies conducted on sizable prisoner of war populations, but also because anthropologists could be mobilised both to promote the importance of racial hygiene, and to measure the effects of malnutrition on

the people (especially in the Central Power Nations near the end of the war). Anthropological arguments proved useful, moreover, in the ‘war of the spirits,’ and this for two main reasons. First, and perhaps most obviously, race as a category could be mobilised to construct disparaging and often monstrous images of enemy nations, and could thus be employed to exclude these nations “symbolically ... from the civilised European community” (p. 205). In this light, the discourse of ‘Mongolisation’ mobilised primarily on the Eastern and Balkan fronts (pp. 173–196), coupled with widespread fears of racial miscegenation and degeneration (pp. 196–205), proved particularly potent as intellectual weapons.

However, as GÓRNY points out, racial argumentation also proved useful in a second way, in that it was often employed by combatant nations either to delineate wider communities of kinship and potential friendship beyond the nation state, or to legitimise and consolidate strategic ties with allied nations. The case of Turanism in Hungary, which overlapped significantly with geographical arguments, is provided by GÓRNY as a good example of the former, while theories of Bulgarian ethnogenesis serve as a useful illustration of the latter. Bulgaria’s entry into the war on the side of Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy sparked a renewed interest in racial theories that highlighted the supposed Germanic roots of Bulgaria’s national origins. German scholars like Georg BUSCHAN, for example, “took pains to remind his readers” that, though “the racial character of Bulgarians was significantly mixed ... the incidence of tall blondes in Bulgaria suggested a remnant of Gothic blood” (p. 207). Gancho TSENOV, “the *enfant terrible* of Bulgarian historiography” took such thinking even further by promoting a racial theory that not only reduced Germanic and Bulgarian origins to Thracian roots, but also positioned the Bulgarians as “the most ancient of all European nations” (p. 208). As GÓRNY concludes, the war itself, and in particular the intellectual battles that were waged alongside military engagements, provided a space for anthropologists “to partake in a discourse more venerable than their own.” “Without the ‘war of the spirits,’” he suggests provocatively, “there would have been no ‘war of the races’” (p. 210).

Alongside arguments related to national space and the body, questions of mind and the relative mental capacities of combatant nations were also front and centre in the ‘war of the spirits’ that was contested by intellectuals in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans during World War I. Whereas geography “described the shape of the national organism” and anthropology looked “under the skin” to discover the biological determinants of racial health and national difference, the disciplines of psychology and psychiatry focused on “the problem of mentality,” and gave voice to theories that articulated the purported “spiri-

tual specificity of the national organism” (p. 244). As GÓRNY suggests at the beginning of Chapter Five, psychologists and psychiatrists throughout Europe seemed at the outset of hostilities to be perhaps the least likely to engage in intellectual warfare along nationalist lines. Noting that prior to the war “there were almost no attempts in professional journals at fashioning hierarchies of psychological health by nationality,” GÓRNY argues convincingly that this changed significantly once fighting broke out, and that after 1914 notions of “mass hysteria and susceptibility” were mobilised by practitioners and theorists alike in order to develop and promote nationalist conceptualisation of ethno-pathology (p. 228).

However, these developments within the still new fields of psychology and psychiatry did not go uncontested from within the discipline. While critics of the politicisation of geography and anthropology remained rather marginal within their respective disciplines, prominent figures like Sigmund FREUD were critical of the role that their colleagues were playing in the catastrophic struggle between the world’s ‘most civilised’ nations. Though FREUD himself did not remain above the fray entirely, GÓRNY points to a critical essay published in 1915 in which he very accurately observed that science had forsaken its “dispassionate impartiality,” largely because scientists themselves had weaponised their respective disciplines in order “to do their share in the battle against the enemy.” As FREUD lamented, “the anthropologist has to declare his opponent inferior and degenerate, [while] the psychiatrist must diagnose him as mentally deranged” (p. 238).

Though FREUD restricted his critique to anthropologists and psychiatrists, his critical assessment of the complicity of professional scientists in the ‘war of the spirits’ can obviously be applied to geographers, especially in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe, where the geopolitical stakes were arguably higher than in the West, especially after the war. Hungary provides GÓRNY with a particularly acute example of this, and though he does not draw extensively on Hungarian sources, he does a good job of situating the work spearheaded by Pál TELEKI both during and after the war within a broader international context, one that underscores the complicity of geographers in the nationalist projects that exploded throughout Europe during World War I. Hungarian specialists might find the author’s treatment of the Hungarian case a bit thin, and will no doubt question the veracity of his occasional reference to a common Austro-Hungarian “project,” or to the shared imperial “aims” of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy during the war. However, to get hung up on what GÓRNY might be missing with regards to the Hungarian case would be to miss the broader importance of his study more generally. Working in the same vein as scholars like SEEGL, S. (2018), TRENCSENYI, B. *et al.* (2016, 2019),

and others (see, for example, LEBOW, K. *et al.* 2019), GÓRNY insists that the point of a study like his is not necessarily to probe deeply into individual cases, but rather to seek out the broader trends and patterns that infused ‘nationalist’ science with a common set of ideas, methods, and applications. In this he is without a doubt successful, and beyond making an important contribution to a growing body of work on the intellectual history of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe, his study opens up the possibility for new and exciting research on a wide array of topics.

Expertly translated into English by Antoni GÓRNY, Maciej GÓRNY’s *Science Embattled* is a remarkable scholarly achievement, and serves as a testament to the importance of comparative and transnational approaches to the history of World War I in particular, and to studies of disciplines like anthropology, psychology, and geography more generally. This is not to suggest that examinations of individual countries or intellectuals are no longer warranted or useful. In fact, quite the opposite is true, especially in cases like Hungary which, because of the difficulties posed by language, are at risk of being left out of comparative analyses like this one. As noted above, Hungarian specialists need to continue to think in broader terms, and to produce work that situates the Hungarian case within regional, continental, and global contexts. Like other recent studies, GÓRNY’s work leaves no doubt that this is both a productive and necessary way forward. Given its ambitious scope and originality, I am certain his book will become essential reading in multiple fields, and that a number of disciplines – historical geography and the history of geography among them – will be all the richer for it.

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