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that he opposed. In the last forty years, there have been multiple perspectives on the First World War, ranging from anti-war films to

those which the author brands as an “abstruse Habsburg nostalgia” (p. 247).

MARVIN BENJAMIN FRIED, *AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN WAR AIMS IN THE BALKANS DURING WORLD WAR I*. LONDON: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2014, xviii + 294 p.

JONATHAN E. GUMZ, *THE RESURRECTION AND COLLAPSE OF EMPIRE IN HABSBERG SERBIA, 1914–1918*. CAMBRIDGE AND NEW YORK: CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2009, xii + 275 p.

*Reviewed by Dušan Fundić**

This review considers two books that deal with the period of the First World War in the Balkans, one from the perspective of Austria-Hungary’s diplomatic service, the other from the perspective of its occupation troops. The book by Marvin Benjamin Fried devoted to Austro-Hungarian wartime diplomacy and decision-making process offers as its major conclusion that the Balkans held a superior place in the Monarchy’s foreign policy over, for example, the Russian and Italian fronts. The book by Jonathan Gumz explores the mindset of the Austro-Hungarian army, its code of conduct, and its impact on the occupation policy in Habsburg-governed Serbia 1915–1918, and seeks to identify the driving motives of the occupiers.

Fried organized his book in six chapters preceded by an introduction and ending with a conclusion. All chapters with the exception of the first, “War Aims and Decision-Making in Austria-Hungary”, follow a chronological pattern. He aims to demonstrate that the Double Monarchy had vital political, economic and military interests in the Balkans, which resulted in its aggressive and expansionist policies. The book is primarily an analysis of the development and changes of Austro-Hungarian war aims and the changing definition of acceptable peace conditions in the Balkans during the First World War. Fried calls attention to the fact that Austria-Hungary’s war aims were by

no means more moderate than Germany’s; but rather, that it simply focused on different parts of the continent. For the Habsburg ruling elite, the fronts against Russia and Italy were something of a distraction, although they were not completely uninterested. One of their concerns was, for example, the Polish question, but, in Fried’s view, such aims were of secondary importance.

Unlike its German ally, the Habsburg Foreign Ministry retained control over the country’s foreign policy. Fried shows that the Emperor and Apostolic King Franz Joseph played a rather insignificant role in decision making, which also goes for domestic public opinion, since it had no influence on policy shaping.

The chronologically organized chapters cover the following time spans: July–December 1914, January–September 1915, October 1915 – June 1916, June 1916 – May 1917, and May 1917 – November 1918. Each of them presents a period in which Austro-Hungarian foreign policy faced different challenges and was forced to take new solutions in consideration. The author’s account is thick with detail, based on various, primarily archival, sources for documenting the consistency in Austro-Hungarian war aims.

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Between July and December 1914 the Empire, just like the other powers, was self-confident and acted on the assumption that the war would be short and victorious, and that its main result would be to teach the Serbs a harsh lesson. As far as the shaping of foreign policy and war aims is concerned, Fried underlines the impact of Hungarian pressure embodied in Prime Minister Istvan Tisza, which lasted until May 1917. In the Adriatic region, the notion of negative war aims prevailed, the chief goal being to prevent the Italians from assuming control over both sides of the sea. Also, Berchtold and Tisza shared the view that it was necessary to defeat Serbia and diminish its influence in the region.

The next chapter of the book covering the period from the beginning of 1915 until September the same year is dominated by the portrait of Istvan Burian, new Minister of Foreign Affairs. Fried portrays him as an independent statesman with a mind of his own, not merely as Tisza's exponent in the Ministry as he is usually depicted. Burian was fully committed to the realization of war aims in the Balkans but military defeats in Galicia and Serbia crippled his attempts. Meanwhile, Austria-Hungary came under intense pressure from its German ally to re-define its aims in order to attract Bulgaria and Romania into the war on the side of the Central Powers.

In the period from October 1915 to June 1916 the Danube Monarchy finally achieved victory in Serbia, although not alone but with the help of its German and Bulgarian allies. The Bulgarian government almost immediately increased their territorial demands, which caused new complications to Austria-Hungary and its ambition to establish domination in the Balkans. Following the Bulgarian pressure and internal divisions that sprang from Tisza's intention to establish Hungarian control over Serbia, Burian had to endure the conflict with Chief of the General Staff Conrad who had been insisting on the idea of the annexation of

Montenegro and Albania. Burian, on the other hand, was more in favour of the creation of small but viable states which would be able to check Serbian and Bulgarian influence in the future, and assigned Albania the most important role in such a geopolitical vision. Fried concludes that Burian pursued a Balkan-centric policy.

Under the new Emperor, Karl I, the new Foreign Minister, Count Ottokar Czernin, found himself in a difficult situation in the period of June 1916 to May 1917. Faced with the impossibility to pursue Burian's aims, Czernin sought to find an acceptable peace option. After the dismissal of Conrad in February 1917 and Tisza in May 1917, Czernin obtained almost complete control but was unable to pursue his new goals because he could not get Germany's consent to consider peace. After the victory against Romania, his efforts only became more futile. The last chapter is a quite short overview of the last months of the Monarchy. The old war aims in the Balkans were overshadowed by the need to secure food supplies for the population and the army, and an honourable way to peace. Because of the complete lack of resources for waging war between May 1917 and November 1918, Austria-Hungary could not resist German political and military control.

The book written by Marvin Benjamin Fried is based on an extensive body of sources and literature. Apart from Austrian primary sources, Fried was able to read and use documents in Hungarian, which lends additional credibility to his interpretations of Tisza's and Burian's roles in Austro-Hungarian policies. The author advances an important thesis by treating Austria-Hungary as a great power which was an independent actor with ambitious aims and not merely a "weight" that Germany dragged behind it.

Jonathan E. Gumz organized his book into five chapters focused on the invasion of Serbia, the Austro-Hungarian occupation policy, including the organization and implementation of the legal system in occupied

Serbia, the military view of the occupied country as a food source for the war effort, and guerrilla warfare.

One of the author's chief goals was to examine the nature of violence committed by Austro-Hungarian troops. Gumz finds that "much of the Serb historiography is on the mark" when exploring "executions, atrocities against civilians, military law, and the banishment and internment of the Serb national consciousness or at minimum Serb independence". On the other hand, he reinterprets the motives for the occupation. Rather than seeing it as the "intentional war of annihilation",¹ Gumz idealizes the Habsburg Army and suggests that it was guided by traditional, conservative values. Their mission, in his view, was to reshape Serbia into a province of an idealized bureaucratic empire, essentially supranational and free of politics and the notion of democracy. The Serbian population was to be transformed from a people of "king killers" into civilized subjects.² In line with this logic, Gumz concludes that the complete devastation of Serbia was prevented by the adherence to conservative international values for which the Empire went to war. This limited the scale of violation of international law, such as the bombardment of Belgrade undoubtedly was.

Gumz makes his assumptions clear in the first chapter, "Facing a Serb *Levée en Masse*: The Habsburg Army and War on Civilians in 1914". In his view, it was the haunting fear of the so-called *komitadjis*, special Serbian units trained for close combat and guerrilla tactics, that caused a

harsh and brutal response of the Austro-Hungarian troops. In this way, Gumz denies that anti-Serbian sentiment harboured by Austrian elites was a driving force behind the committed crimes. According to Gumz, the crimes were intended as a punishment for the Serbs who acted against the rules of war as imagined by the Habsburg officers. It seems that the author here succumbs to the apparently still lingering influence of the fear of the Serbian "irregulars" that was widespread in the Austro-Hungarian army, and to the point that one may almost be led to believe that it was them who defeated the invaders, not the regular Serbian troops.

In the second chapter, "Eradicating National Politics in Occupied Serbia", Gumz examines the mentality of elites in the Austro-Hungarian army. The proclaimed goal to reshape Serbia, which was possible only by force, was set in motion after the occupation. But was this really the policy of the "Army of 1848 in 1914" as Gumz defines it? The University of Belgrade was closed, the use of Cyrillic was officially banned and it was replaced by the Latin alphabet.³

As Guenther Kronenbiter has remarked: "Wasn't the Habsburg authorities' policy in Serbia to denationalize the Serbs more than just a sign of the army's traditional aversion to nationalism? To ban the Cyrillic alphabet in Serbia – and in Bosnia-Herzegovina – and to use Croats as teachers in Serbian schools can be read as an indication that some nations were considered less of a threat to the empire's and its army's integrity than others. Was it really just another example of the long-established *divide et impera* tactics the Habsburgs had used time and again? Or should it not be understood as the Austro-Hungarian version of

¹ As interpreted in Alan Kramer, *The Dynamics of Destruction. Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

² The author makes a factual mistake naming the Serbian king assassinated in 1903 Milan, instead of Alexander Obrenović. In addition to that the book has a considerable number of spelling errors in writing Serbian names.

³ Milan Ristović, "Occupation during and after the War (South East Europe)", in 1914–1918 – online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel et al., issued by Freie Universität, Berlin 2014-10-08. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10481.6>.

the quasi-colonial 'ethnic engineering' that Germany and Russia were tinkering with? To Germanize or – for that matter – to Magyarize Bosnia or occupied Serbia wasn't a realistic option, but to strengthen the position of the Croats vis-à-vis the Serbs was something that could and would be done."⁴

The chapters "Legal Severity, International Law, and the Tottering Empire in Occupied Serbia" and "Food as Salvation: Food Supply, the Monarchy, and Serbia, 1916–1918" addresses two of the most important aspects of the occupation for the Army. Gumz's central argument is that the main reason for the violence perpetrated by the military commanders was allegedly the enforcement of law and order, and not the unhidden intention to destroy the Serbian population and to force him to accept denationalization. In the chapter devoted to the question of food the author looks at the changing perspective of the military, which at first regarded Serbia as worthless, but by the end of the war came to the conclusion that it could be a source of food supplies for the war effort. Finally, the army blocked all attempts of civil authorities to use Serbia's food production for other parts of the Monarchy where civilians needed it. As a consequence, Serbian population was often on the edge of starvation.

The fifth chapter, "A *Levée en Masse* Nation No More? Guerrilla War in Habsburg Serbia", contains possibly the weakest set of arguments in the book. Without using any Serbian or Bulgarian sources, the analysis is vague and incomplete. The fact that significant Bulgarian forces were employed to crush the Toplica uprising (1917) is not taken into account at all, thus making the revolt look like a set of petty skirmishes. An illustrative example in this respect is that

of Lieutenant Kosta Milovanović Pećanac. He was sent to the region by the Serbian military at the end of September 1916 to organize a revolt in the Bulgarian zone of occupation once the Serbian army reached the city of Skoplje. But the rebellion came too early because of the Bulgarian plan to mobilize local men. After two months of fighting and some 25,000 victims the rebellion was crushed.⁵ Instead of presenting all these facts, Gumz depicts Pećanac as a lonely *komitadji* who sought to engage local Serbs to attack the Serbs employed in local administration.

In general, Gumz offers a solid portrayal of the Austro-Hungarian army and its motives, but does not delve enough into its effects on the ground, avoiding to tackle the main problems: large-scale persecutions, discrimination, mass internment of civilians, including women and children, as well as systematic attempts to denationalize the whole population of occupied Serbia. That is why the author's arguments are stronger when he analyzes the Habsburg army's preconceived notions about Serbia before 1914 than during the occupation. As a result, the occupied population is seen only through the eyes of their occupiers.

⁴ Guenther Kronenbitter, "The Resurrection and Collapse of Empire in Habsburg Serbia, 1914–1918." By Jonathan E. Gumz. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press. 2009, *War Today* 9/3, 407–409.

⁵ Andrej Mitrović, *Srbija u Prvom svetskom ratu* (Belgrade: Stubovi kulture, 20042), 347–348 (English edition: *Serbia's Great War*, West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2007).