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HANNES LEIDINGER, VERENA MORITZ, KARIN MOSER AND WOLFRAM DORNIK,
HABSBURGS SCHMUTZIGER KRIEG. VIENNA: RESIDENZ VERLAG, 2014, 328 p.

Reviewed by Rastko Lompar*

The centenary of the outbreak of the First World War once again sparked the debate in historiography about the causes and character of the first global mass conflict in the twentieth century. In the centre of this debate lay the question of the war guilt, and a vast number of works were published on this and many other aspects of the war. In the last few years, the Austrian historiography contributed numerous monographs to further the understanding of the First World War. One of the most notable works is the voluminous book by Manfred Rauchensteiner, *The First World War and the End of the Habsburg Monarchy 1914–1918*,¹ which provides an insight into multiple aspects of the Austro-Hungarian involvement in the First World War. As some reviewers have remarked,² however, some aspects of the Austro-Hungarian engagement in the war were intentionally left out of Rauchensteiner's book. Exactly those aspects are the focus of *The Habsburgs' Dirty War* authored by four prominent Austrian historians.

The author of the bulk of the monograph (five chapters) is Hannes Leidinger, and other authors (Verena Moritz, Karin Moser and Wolfram Dornik) have contributed a chapter each. Two of the authors (Leidinger and Moritz) have already collaborated on a similar project, being the

authors of *Habsburgs Black Book*.³ In *The Habsburgs' Dirty War*, the authors' aim was twofold: first, to point to and describe the scale of violence against the civilians and prisoners of war in Serbia and Galicia during the First World War, and, second, to provide an analysis of the image of the war in the Austrian film and press or, in other words, to re-examine the "culture of remembrance" of the Habsburg Empire. However, such efforts are not free of controversies in contemporary Austrian society: the official newspaper of the Austrian Armed Forces (Bundesheer) *Truppendienst* branded such critical interpretations as an attempt to "demonize our old Habsburg army and portray it as being full of warmongers and war criminals" (p. 10).

In the first chapter entitled "The Question of War Guilt", Hannes Leidinger addresses this important topic, and gives an outline of events prior to the outbreak of the war. The author mainly focuses on Austria-Hungary and its rising war faction. He points out the growing animosity towards Serbia from the Bosnian Crisis to the last days of July 1914. The Austro-Hungarian ultimatum to Serbia is thoroughly examined, as well as the crucial diplomatic activity surrounding it. The author emphasizes the "astonishing" Russian understanding for the Austro-Hungarian demands, which the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Sazonov deemed "fully legitimate". Regarding the nature of Russian efforts to de-escalate the crisis, Hannes Leidinger disagrees with those historians who see such efforts as "mere posturing". He insists on the Russian readiness for a compromise. The mobilization of the

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¹ Manfred Rauchensteiner, *Der Erste Weltkrieg und das Ende der Habsburgermonarchie* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2013).

² Stephan Lehnstaedt, *Rezension von Habsburgs Schmutziger Krieg* (<http://www.sehpunkte.de/2014/12/26312.html>)

³ Hannes Leidinger, Verena Moritz and Berndt Schippler, *Schwarzbuch des Habsburger* (Vienna: Deuticke Verlag, 2003).

Russian army was, in his opinion, not an indubitable cause of war, but merely an attempt "to secure the most favorable position" in case of war.

In the next chapter "Escalation of violence", the same author portrays the methods employed by the Austro-Hungarian government in order to prepare its own citizens for the imminent war. By analyzing the press the author reveals how anti-Serb but also anti-Russian sentiments were inculcated in public opinion. Furthermore, he describes the anti-Serb riots in Sarajevo, carried out by Croats and Bosnian Muslims, which were condoned by Austro-Hungarian officials. These tactics were, in the author's opinion, aimed at polarizing the public and creating two distinct "fronts" in the minds of the citizens before the outbreak of the war (p. 69). Leidinger observes the use of the same tactics in the content of the orders given to the Austro-Hungarian army, which was instructed to fight "a culturally inferior nation" (p. 73). The author also notes identical tendencies on the Eastern front where the Austro-Hungarians fought the Russians.

The author of the next chapter, "Captivity", is the Austrian historian Verena Moritz, the head of a project examining the prisoners of war in Austro-Hungary during the First World War (Kriegsgefangene in Österreich-Ungarn 1914–1918). She provides a very detailed account (based on the materials both from the Austrian State Archives and the Archives of Serbia) of mass imprisonment of the captured soldiers and the civilians suspected of harbouring "Serbophile and Rusophile opinions".

Another Leidinger's chapter, "Establishing order", analyzes the methods employed by Austro-Hungary in order to establish and maintain order in the occupied areas. The application of martial-law in occupied Serbia constituted "a direct violation of the Hague Convention", which Leidinger sought to illustrate using numerous examples. such case, a woman, Milica Mitrović, accused of verbally insulting Franz Joseph, was hanged

mere two hours after the alleged incident (p. 151). The scale of repression during and after the Toplica Uprising is also detailed. Furthermore, the author points out the problems on the Eastern front where, along with the crimes of armed militias, ethnic conflicts (mostly regarding Jews) contributed to the climate of violence and made it difficult to establish order. As the author points out, "shortly before the downfall of the Danube Monarchy the occupation troops became increasingly nervous", which led to the escalation of violence.

Wolfram Dornik begins his chapter "Reality(ies) of the occupation" with the assessment that the Italian and the Eastern front (in which he places the Balkan front) were completely different "theatres of war" and, therefore, the nature of occupation differed significantly. He explains the organization of the occupying authorities, details the differences in the occupying methods, and finally offers an assessment of the occupation regime from the economic point of view. When discussing the Balkan front, the author points out the entirely different treatment of the Albanians, who, unlike any other Balkan nation, were considered to be under Austro-Hungarian protectorate similar to that of Britain's in Egypt (p. 181). The author finds that the occupation of Romania, Serbia and Poland may be regarded as economically "successful", whereas in the cases of Montenegro, Albania and part of Italy the gains were primarily strategic (p. 186).

In the chapter "Which law?", Leidinger seeks to present the legal side of the Austro-Hungarian war effort and to place the use and justification of violence in the broader context of the First World War. He surveys propaganda efforts of both warring sides to win over public opinion in neutral countries by portraying the enemy's use of force as illegal. In the case of Serbia the author describes the report of Archibald Reiss and the subsequent reactions of the Central Powers, most notably the brochure *Lies*

about the Austro-Hungarian campaign in Serbia (*Die Lügen über die österreichisch-ungarische Kriegsführung in Serbien*). The author examines the attempts made by Austria-Hungary to justify its actions, especially in Serbia. The Habsburg Monarchy issued 360 complaints for the violation of the law of war by the Entente Powers during the war. Serbia and Montenegro were accused in 58 cases, three times less often than Russia, and as often as Britain, France and Belgium with which Austro-Hungary had little military engagement. Most of these 58 complaints concerned the treatment of prisoners of war, and only eight were made on account of the illegal military actions undertaken by civilians (women, children and elderly) and the “crimes of *komitadji*” (pp. 100–101). In particular, the Austro-Hungarian leadership believed that it needed to justify the atrocities committed in Serbia, especially around the town of Šabac, and compiled a special report to that effect. This report concluded that “the states which are at war with less civilized peoples are compelled to adjust the law of war to the scale of their enemies’ morality” (p. 201). The author argues that, despite severe repression and actions against intellectuals and politicians during the occupation, there is no evidence that Austria-Hungary intended to exterminate the Serbian nation. Therefore, the Armenian genocide remains the most drastic example of violence in the First World War (p. 204).

Leidinger’s chapter “Distortion and fade-out” focuses on the ways in which post-war Austria denied, and shifted, the blame for the outbreak of the First World War. The efforts to ascribe the blame to the Habsburgs, the German Empire and, especially, to the “Hungarian foreign policy clique” are detailed. Furthermore, this chapter offers a comparative look at the memories of Austro-Hungarian warfare in the successor states of the Habsburg Monarchy (Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes/Yugoslavia), and points out

the contradiction of memories: whereas in Austria the military “monopolized” remembrance and shaped it apologetically, in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes the main theme was “the repression and crimes of the Austro-Hungarians, brutal occupation, and the efforts to weaken and destroy their (especially Serbian) national identity” (pp. 225–228).

The author of the last chapter, “Visual remembrance”, is Karin Moser, an Austrian historian whose research interests include film history and film propaganda in Austria. She provides an overview of the First World War-related films from the beginning of the Austro-Hungarian war cinematography in 1914 to the release of the monograph in 2014. However, the author does not merely list the films; she also points out different periods in filmmaking and emphasizes their main motives. During the war, film played a propaganda role in the country and was aimed at eliciting patriotic feelings amongst the population; it thus portrayed the war as “clean”, with no casualties, devastation or blood. In the next phase, during the 1920s, films mostly depicted the House of Habsburg and “nostalgically evoked the good old times and the rule of the Habsburgs” (p. 238). With the rise of National-Socialism and Austrofascism, and the increasing militarization of society in the 1930s, the emphasis was placed on the glorification of the “heroes of the Great War”. Furthermore, films with an anti-war message, such as the USA-made *All Quiet on the Western Front*, were banned after the fierce fights broke out during their screenings. The future Chancellor of Austria Kurt Schuschnigg demanded the ban as a “matter of moral, patriotic and national integrity” (p. 241). After the Second World War the paradigm shifted: it was the history of a family reflecting the Austrian society as a whole that now became the focus of filmmakers. The leading character was usually the “black sheep” of a family, a pacifist and a prophet thrown into the war

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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