Maciej Górny, *Kreślarze ojczyzn: Geografowie i granice międzywojennej Europy*, Warsaw: Instytut Historii PAN, 2017. 264 p. ISBN 978-83-65880-05-5

Studies on political geography and cartography have shown the political role played by geographers and scholars from related disciplines, and above all maps, in the interwar period, in border and territorialisation processes, and their legitimisation and popularisation. In Germany and Hungary, which took a revisionist attitude towards the Treaty of Versailles and the Treaty of Trianon, geographers (such as Albrecht Penck and Pál Teleki) and their maps played a prominent role in the development and popularisation of revisionist theories and border disputes. But even in the newly established or reestablished countries of East and Central Europe that had previously been dominated by the great empires, geographers such as Eugeniusz Romer in Poland played a central role in the development and popularisation of claims of allegedly just national territories. An interesting aspect of these key actors is that at some point in their careers before 1919, they had all studied, worked, or at least spent some time at the same university, the University of Vienna, where they all had contact with the same academic teacher, Albrecht Penck, who occupied the Chair of Physical Geography there between 1885 and 1906.

In *Kreślarze ojczyzn: Geografowie i granice międzywojennej Europy*, Maciej Górny devotes himself to this ‘transnational group’ (p. 41), as he calls it, of Penck’s students from East and Central Europe. As was the custom, their academic careers later took them to several major universities in France, Germany and Austria. As citizens of the great empires, most of them were accustomed to multilingual contexts (p. 15). At the end of the First World War, they suddenly found themselves not only on different sides of national borders, but also in argumentative confrontations with their former academic teacher, and quite often with each other. Thus, Górny’s study is situated somewhere between collective biography and the history of science. He demonstrates impressively that these geographers, and above all the maps they created after 1918, cannot be analysed separately, as most nationally oriented studies are. Rather, the (competing) territorial claims they developed, and the mapping techniques they applied in order to communicate these

claims, were closely interrelated, inspired by each other, and reacted to each other. Thus, their meaning can therefore only be fully understood in this transnational context.

Górny's study is not structured according to the different actors, but traces the genesis of the academic biographies of these geographers (Chapters 1 and 2), their gradual integration into national movements or nationally oriented discourses, their actions in the context of the peace negotiations at the end of the First World War (Chapter 3), and finally their cartographic work in the interwar period (Chapters 4 and 5), while the sixth chapter places its key actors in the international scientific community, and provides an outlook on the Second World War and the postwar period. This structure is the great strength of the study, since Górny's approach shows remarkably how a group of transnationally (inter)acting academics were educated and academically socialized before the First World War, how within this group 'knowledge' circulated through the practices of academic work (publications, discussions, conferences), and how research trends were formed and established that were to acquire a clear political importance after the war.

During the First World War (Chapter 2, *Wojna*), geographers became sought-after experts who could generate and provide knowledge about annexed territories, as the case of Germany shows, where the *Landeskundliche Kommission für das Generalgouvernement Warschau* (p. 50) was established by Hans Beseler, the governor-general (*Generalgouverneur*) of Warsaw, in 1916. The *Landeskundliche Kommission* was supposed to evaluate data found in the occupied territories, and make it available to the administration for government purposes. It was in this context that maps slowly became central instruments for generating, popularising and disseminating territorial knowledge for political purposes, a function that had its first peak in the aftermath of the peace treaties. The work of the *Landeskundliche Kommission* was much criticised by Polish geographers and their East Central European colleagues (p. 56). As well as the imperialist intentions of the work of the *Landeskundliche Kommissions*, they criticised its scientific methods, such as the lack of Polish language skills of its members, which did not allow for an accurate evaluation of Polish research and data (p. 55). Górny calls the controversy about the *Landeskundliche Kommission* the first of numerous German-Polish academic battles that were fought in the interwar period, in which the argument of a lack of scientific skill was used to discredit opposing sides (p. 63). As the example of a polemic about a map by the Lithuanian geographer Juozas Gabrys-Paršaitis

shows, despite all national political appropriation of maps, they were not allowed to be obviously tendentious or to lack features considered as academic standard (p. 62). This makes the 'battle of the maps' of the interwar period so interesting. It shows how academic and national-political debates were intertwined, and despite all national antagonisms, to a certain degree, these maps also always represented a transnational academic discourse.

During the war, it became clear that the collapse of the great empires might be a possible outcome of the war. Therefore, debates about supposedly correct borders, and therefore the political map of postwar Europe, became louder (Chapter 3, *Karty na stol*). The major belligerent nations, such as the USA or France, but also the national movements of nations claiming independent statehood, established commissions to carry out statistical, cartographic, ethnographic, etc, research, to collect material on the possible and allegedly rightful borders of postwar Europe, and thus to prepare the forthcoming political decision-making processes of the peacemakers (p. 80). The best-known examples are the so-called Inquiry, founded by the US president Woodrow Wilson, and Poland's *Komitet Narodowy Polski* (KNP). Górny shows the extent to which these commissions generated and propagated knowledge: experts from various disciplines, politicians, publishers, translators, and masses of memoranda, publications and maps, were mobilised and produced before and in the context of the peace negotiations (p. 90). Geographers such as Jovan Cvijić (Yugoslavia) and Eugeniusz Romer (Poland) acted in these commissions (p. 94), as the author shows, not as (alleged) politicians, but explicitly in their role as scientific experts (p. 101). In this context, academic expertise acquired its own political weight: whoever had the better academic experts also had a better chance of being heard by the decision makers; the formation and presentation of scientific arguments became an important aspect of the political demands. Thus, the contexts of the Paris peace negotiations became not only a place for disputes and antagonism, as Górny points out, but also of the transfer of knowledge. For example, when the Polish geographer Eugeniusz Romer met for coffee unofficially with Isaiah Bowman, the US geographer and head of the Inquiry, he discussed with him the state of affairs, and handed him atlases he had produced (p. 106).

In chapters four and five, the author gives an overview of the well-known and less-well-known developments and disputes in European cartography over maps during the interwar period, of which the German developments (German *Geopolitik*, 'suggestive cartography') and

the German-Polish disputes over adequate representations of population distributions in the German-Polish border area are the best known. He shows to what extent, as a consequence of the new political map of Europe, ethnic maps in particular were produced (and discussed), and how national antagonisms always led to the evaluation and further development of mapping practices (Chapter 4, *Kreślenie granic: narody*). From discussions about ethnic maps, as Górny shows, it was only one step towards mapping cultural borders (Chapter 5, *Kreślenie granic: ziemia*). Inherent to this strategy was a self-imposed imagined 'cultural mission' in the European east, which the author attests not only to the well-known German case (p. 178), but also to Italian, Hungarian (p. 176) and Romanian discourses (p. 182). The Polish nation, however, was not only the object of German imagined cultural missions, but also articulated its own 'cultural mission' in the east towards the Ukrainians and the Lithuanians (p. 174). In these two chapters, Górny's observations are particularly interesting when he breaks up national perspectives otherwise pursued in research, and points out transnational transfer processes, for example, when he illustrates how the methodology of German *Geopolitik* also found favour in other countries, as is shown by the obsession with geometric forms in the discussion of good and bad forms of states and borders, a momentum that had been taken up by the Romanian geographical debates (p. 203).

Despite the national antagonisms, the East Central European 'war of maps' of the interwar period can therefore be regarded as 'fruitful', in the sense that the production of maps by the other side always influenced one's own work. At an official level, however, German experts were excluded from the international scientific community. French and Belgian professional societies and institutes ignored their German colleagues (p. 208), who were consequently not represented at major international congresses. The hopes of geographers from East Central European countries to fill the now 'free' symbolic spaces in the community were disappointed when West European geographers virtually made up all the organisers of the large international congresses themselves. As a consequence, they united to form their own society of Slavic geographers, whose initial success was shown by the fact that its second congress in Warsaw in 1927 attracted about 500 participants (p. 213). Their unification was explicitly understood as emancipation from the German-speaking scientific landscape, the platform on which most of these geographers had been socialized before the First World War (pp. 213–214). Contacts between Penck and his former students were sporadic, such as with the

Yugoslavian geographer Jovan Cvijić (p. 217). Even the rare attempts at rapprochement did not lead to success, as the invitation of German geographers to the geographical congress in Warsaw in 1934 underlines. It was interpreted by the Germans as a political manifestation, and thus alienated members of the international academic community (p. 220).

Górny ends his study with a look at the late stages of the lives of 'his' geographers. Not many of his students, of whom several had careers in the interwar period, outlived Penck, who died in 1945 (p. 231). Some of them had already died tragically by the late 1920s and early 1930s (pp. 228–229), and the Second World War ended the careers of almost all the others. Only Romer, who survived the Second World War and the German occupation of Poland, partly by hiding in a monastery, continued to play a leading role in Polish geography after the end of the Second World War (p. 232).

After a number of studies that have illuminated the role of geography and maps in the context of the First World War, the peace negotiations and the interwar period from a national point of view, the clear transnational aspect of this phenomenon now seems to have become the focus of research.¹ It shows how, against the backdrop of the changing political map of Europe after the end of the First World War, academic landscapes changed as well, and once cohesive entities now stood in antagonism with each other. Górny's study takes up the transnational aspect in an outstanding way, and shows that national historiography can never capture the full content of the map production and geographical debates (or academic discourses and the 'production' of knowledge in general) of the interwar period. The wide range of sources of this study, which testifies to the author's language skills, is also worth mentioning. No one working on questions of European geography and map production in the interwar period will be able to ignore this study. It is therefore all the more welcome that translations of the Polish original into other languages, which are now appearing, promise an even wider readership.

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¹ Steven Seegel, *Map Men: Transnational Lives and Deaths of Geographers in the Making of East Central Europe* (Chicago, 2019).