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Lok, M.

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Stella Ghervas's *Conquering Peace* is a bold attempt to analyze modern European history from the perspective of various attempts to 'engineer' a pan-European peace since the eighteenth century. This study builds on her earlier work on the Congress of Vienna and the post-Napoleonic international order, in particular her widely acclaimed French book on Alexandre de Stourdza, a diplomat in the service of Tsar Alexander.<sup>62</sup>

*Conquering Peace* forms part of a new trend in intellectual and political history that moves away from micro-studies, and focuses on longer term development of a concept.<sup>63</sup> Ghervas's work fits very well in the serial contextualisation approach pioneered by Harvard historian David Armitage, which endeavours to study the *longue-durée* changing meaning of concepts at specific nodal points in time.<sup>64</sup>

This study, furthermore, combines the various approaches of political, cultural, and intellectual history as well as international relations. Ghervas clearly demonstrates that the processes of war and peace, and international relations in general, can only be studied from a larger cultural context. Her positive view of the achievements of Utrecht and Vienna, and the Holy Alliance of the European kings, make her a pioneer in the current scholarly reassessment of the enlightened order that was constructed after Napoleon, which includes scholars such as Beatrice de Graaf, Brian Vicks, Glenda Sluga, and Isaac Nakhimovsky.<sup>65</sup>

The book is structured around five chapters, each of which describe a different European peace, followed by a general conclusion which deals with the most recent past. The journey starts in the eighteenth century with the Peace of Utrecht of 1713, which Ghervas credits with being the first modern European peace to the detriment of the Peace of Westphalia of 1648. A second chapter discusses the Peace of Vienna of 1815 that was brokered among allies that defeated Emperor Napoléon Bonaparte. The book's third stop is the Peace of Paris that followed the First World War in 1919. The last two moments to be diagnosed are the construction of Europe after 1945 and the enlargement of the European Union after 1989 as a result of the fall of Communism and the German reunification.

For Ghervas, the lens through which she analyzes these various moments of peacemaking is that of the "spirit of peace" (5-9). The spirit of peace supersedes the roles of individual politicians, diplomats, or the specific legal formulations of the peace treaties. For Ghervas, peace is not the work of individual politicians, who can do no more than manage the 'deeper' social and cultural movements arising from below: in this light, the task of political leaders is "to channel these energetic surges from below" (351). Her focus on the peace spirit allows her to study these moments of peacemaking from various angles, combining the study of individuals with more abstract ideas and institutions. This multifaceted approach is in my view one of the great strengths of this magnum opus.

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<sup>62</sup> Stella Ghervas, *Réinventer la tradition: Alexandre Stourdza et l'Europe de la Sainte-Alliance* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2008), English edition forthcoming with Cambridge University Press; Ghervas and David Armitage, eds., *A Cultural History of Peace in the Age of Enlightenment, 1648-1815* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

<sup>63</sup> See for instance Annelien de Dijn, *Freedom: An Unruly History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), which discusses the history of the concept of freedom from Antiquity to the present.

<sup>64</sup> For example, David Armitage, *Civil Wars: A History in Ideas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017).

<sup>65</sup> Brian Vick, *The Congress of Vienna: Power and Politics after Napoleon* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014); Beatrice A. de Graaf, I. de Haan, and Brian Vick, eds., *Securing Europe after Napoleon: 1815 and the New European Security Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); De Graaf, *Fighting Terror after Napoleon: How Europe became Secure after 1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Glenda Sluga, *The Invention of International Order: Remaking Europe after Napoleon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021); and Isaac Nakhimovsky, *A World Reformed: Liberalism, the Holy Alliance, and the Problems of Global Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, forthcoming).

Ghervas's book is an important work for historians and contemporary Europeanists alike. To begin with, one of the great merits of the book is that it examines the project of European integration from a longer historical lens. The European project is often regarded by myopic historians of European integration as the result of circumstances specific to the twentieth century, thus ignoring the longer cultural and historical traditions and roots that continued to shape twentieth-century developments. Very rarely can we find research on the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, the nineteenth-century international order, and the twentieth-century project of European integration brought together in one comprehensive study.

Another strength of the book is that Ghervas devotes ample attention not only to Western Europe and America, but to the contribution of Central, Central-Eastern, and Eastern Europe as well, echoing her current position of professor of Russian history at the Newcastle University (UK). One of the book's absolute European heroes is Soviet leader Michael Gorbachev, who in her view is an exponent of the European peace tradition and to a large extent responsible for the spirit of enlarged Europe after 1989. A final merit is its overall positive, although not uncritical, attitude towards Europe and the European peace attempts. This book clearly diverges from most other historical descriptions of European history integration, often written by British authors, which usually underscore the cynical and darker agendas lurking below the lofty ideals.<sup>66</sup> Ghervas paints European history in a more positive light for a change, without omitting the darker parts.

A book of this scope, however, by necessity contains also weaknesses and problematic aspects. The use of the concept of "spirit" is somewhat opaque and not sufficiently explained. It is certainly true that contemporaries at various historical moments themselves often spoke of the "spirit of peace" and the concept cannot be considered an anachronism. Yet at times, Ghervas speaks about these "atmospheric" spirits (18) as if they have real personality with feelings, instincts, fears, and disappointment: for instance, she writes of the Postwar European Spirit that it "was already dying of weariness and old age" (342). A clearer and operational definition of the meaning of a spirit would have been welcome.

Moreover, the focus on peace spirits overemphasizes the unity and homogeneity of the peace projects. Ghervas could have devoted more time to the power relations underlying the engineering of peace as well as the conflicting visions of what war and peace meant for various groups of people. Ghervas often makes insufficiently clear that 'peace' is often also a very oppressive, violent, and imperial project. Even the 'moderate' peace imposed by the Allied armies on occupied France as early as 1815-1818, for instance, was viewed very differently from the French, British, and Prussian perspectives.<sup>67</sup> Instead, the book seems to adopt a view akin to that of the 2012 Noble Peace Prize committee, which presented the European Union as the product of an unbroken European peace tradition "over six decades."<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, the focus on intra-European development and Eastern European perspectives leads to a relative neglect of the crucial extra-European and imperial worlds. Non-state actors such as the Church and pressure groups are also largely ignored, whereas recent work by Brian Vick, for instance, has underscored the importance of religion as well as nationalism for the peacemakers of Vienna in 1815, themes which are neglected here.<sup>69</sup>

A final concern is that Ghervas does not sufficiently explain the exact relation between these five "spirits of peace" divided in time. Some questions therefore remain unanswered: Do we truly see the same spirit of

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<sup>66</sup> Desmond Dinan, *Ever Closer Union: An Introduction to European Integration* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 1999); Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (London: Penguin, 1999); and Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Penguin 2005).

<sup>67</sup> See for instance De Graaf, *Fighting Terror after Napoleon*, and Christine Haynes, *Our Friends the Enemies: The Occupation of France after Napoleon* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2018).

<sup>68</sup> Nobel Peace Prize Committee, "The Nobel Peace Prize for 2012," press Release, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2012/press-release/>

<sup>69</sup> Vick, *Congress of Vienna*, 153-192.

peace reappearing in different periods, autonomous from the agency of politicians and diplomats? Or, as seems more likely, is the idea of European peace a political and cultural tradition that is constantly being renewed and, above all, reinvented for different agendas? I would have liked to have read more in detail and in a systematic manner how the various peacemakers made use of past experiences of peacemaking, both as a model to follow or as failure to avoid. To what extent did diplomatic memories also hinder and shape the consequent attempts to build a European peace?

These criticisms notwithstanding, I recommend this awe inspiring and ambitious work for historians, diplomats, legal scholars, and Europeanists alike.