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By Gianfranco BRIA

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6/ REVIEW: Hannes GRANDITS, *The end of Ottoman rule in Bosnia: conflicting agencies and imperial appropriations*, London, Routledge, 2023, 394 pp.

By Gianfranco BRIA

By contextualizing local political and socioeconomic processes within a larger regional and supraregional framework, Grandits' book explores the events that occurred in Ottoman Bosnia in the lead-up to and during the 1875-1878 crisis¹. The underlying thesis of the book is that local and regional changes in the Bosnian *Vilayet* cannot be fully understood if they are examined in isolation from broader political processes. However, without really delving into the intricate local rationalities at play, it is equally difficult to comprehend the more general political dynamics. Therefore, the author employs a dialectical spatial perspective in examining developments in Bosnian region from 1875 to 1878, emphasizing the connections of local space to regional and global space, and vice versa.

I examine the contradictory dynamics of extremely violent local conflicts (which, on closer examination, were embedded in very specific local/regional logics) and at the same time, I will show how these conflicts quickly became part of larger power contexts. New groups of actors with different backgrounds and interests emerged and competed for influence to shape their political agenda. In the following three years, this conflict could not be contained, despite constant attempts to do so. A local affair was to develop into a regional conflict that involved more and more "players" – ultimately also almost all the major European Powers².

¹ About the end of Ottoman rule and postimperial transition in Bosnia see also: HAJDARPAŠIĆ, Edin, «Out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire: Reflections on the Ottoman legacy in south-eastern Europe», in *Middle Eastern Studies*, 44, 5/2008, pp. 715-734; TURHAN, Fatma Sel, *The Ottoman Empire and the Bosnian Uprising: Janissaries, Modernisation and Rebellion in the Nineteenth Century*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014; BALTA, Ivan, «The Development of Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Boundaries in Bosnia and Herzegovina», in *Kadim*, 1/2021, pp. 133-150; GIOMI, Fabio, *Making Muslim Women European: Voluntary Associations, Gender, and Islam in Post-Ottoman Bosnia and Yugoslavia (1878-1941)*, Budapest-New York, Central European University Press, 2021.

² GRANDITS, Hannes, *The End of Ottoman Rule in Bosnia: Conflicting Agencies and Imperial Appropriations*, London, Routledge, 2022, p. XVIII.

For this reason, this book can be considered a reference work for anyone who wants to study the late modern history of Bosnia from different points of views. First, it is a reference work for anyone who wants to understand what happens in present-day Bosnia and Southeastern Europe. But more generally, the study sheds light on the dynamics surrounding the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, and the formation of post-Ottoman states in Southeastern Europe. *The End of Ottoman Rule in Bosnia* touches many historiographical, historical and methodological issues that concern the transition from imperial governance to state-nation regulation. Grandits hands a plethora of bibliographic and archival sources that make this book methodologically and historically very solid. These sources have been arranged and categorized to convey the strength of this book. It is a goldmine of historiographical and theoretical insights that attest to the scientific and methodological depth of the work, which is the result of a long-term archive research by the author, who exhibits an excellent mastery and understanding of the sources and subject matter. The primary sources mainly consist of documents in the Serbo-Croatian language collected in state archives of Montenegro, Bosnia, Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia or in English and German in Germany and Great Britain. The author also draws on Serbo-Croatian journals from the 19th century along with diplomatic sources in Serbo-Croatian, Russian, German and English. These sources are co-authored through a plethora of secondary scientific literature in Russian, Serbo-Croatian, English, French, German and Italian. The author, Hannes Grandits, is the Chair of Southeast European History at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. He is a specialist in the history of Southeastern Europe in the late 19th and 20th centuries. His research deals with the late Ottoman era³, the socialist era⁴, and World War II⁵ in great detail, with an emphasis on the Bosnian⁶ and Kosovan⁷ spaces.

The End of Ottoman Rule in Bosnia originates from a study on the ground with a local focus to explain broader dynamics⁸. And it does so by focusing on characters, but also on events that have a defined space and time yet imply a broader spatiality and temporality. Grandits deal with precisely these issues, namely space, time, and people, i.e. the human factor. I will detail these issues in the following.

³ GRANDITS, Hannes, CLAYER, Nathalie, PICHLER, Robert (edited by), *Conflicting loyalties in the Balkans: The great powers, the Ottoman empire and nation-Building*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2011.

⁴ GRANDITS, Hannes, TAYLOR, Karin (edited by), *Yugoslavia's Sunny Side. A History of Tourism in Socialism (1950s-1980s)*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2010.

⁵ GRANDITS, Hannes, BOUGAREL, Xavier, VULESICA, Marija (edited by), *Local Dimensions of the Second World War in Southeastern Europe*, London, Routledge, 2019.

⁶ GRANDITS, Hannes, «Gender Relations in post-war Social Life: the Example of multi-national Herzegovina», in *Anthropological Journal on European Cultures*, 14, 2005, pp. 113-142.

⁷ GRANDITS, Hannes, FOTIADIS, Ruža, PICHLER, Robert, «Kosovo in the 1980s-Yugoslav Perspectives and Interpretations», in *Comparative Southeast European Studies*, 69, 2-3/2021, pp. 171-182.

⁸ GRANDITS, Hannes, *The end of Ottoman rule in Bosnia*, cit., p. XIX.

First of all, space is a central concern from a theoretical and methodological point of view. The book focuses on the local to explain regional, transregional and even global dynamics. Grandits wrote in the introduction: «it is not possible to understand what happened in Bosnia in the late Ottoman period if one does not look at what happens in the broader contexts»⁹. But the reverse is also true, it is not possible to understand what happens in the broader contexts if you do not also look at what happens in Bosnia. And this is a great outlook of the book, which does not limit itself to an approach typical of micro-history – of *les Annales* for that matter – but uses a multi-scalar method, typical of geography. Such approach also gives this historical book a trans-disciplinary reach.

This approach is explored when Grandits analyzes the effects of the *Tanzimat* ('Ottoman institutional reforms that started in 1839 with the Edict of Gülhane') on Bosnian territory, the spread of economic liberalism, and bureaucratization in Chapter 1. The defining characteristics of Bosnian social, economic, and political interactions in the 1860s and early 1870s are further examined in this chapter. This state-sponsored *Tanzimat* initiatives took hold in the Bosnian Vilayet, particularly in the 1860s, and profoundly altered the overall appearance and functioning of an increasingly bureaucratized administration. It also had an impact on the political hierarchies, with the aim of establishing a more “emancipated” structure for governance. This chapter also demonstrates how the *Tanzimat* affected the economic climate in both the metropolis and the rural. This spatial approach is maintained as the author deals with the spread of pan-Slavism, taking Ottomanism into account as well and the conflicts and the cooperation between the imperial rules in Chapter 2. Ottoman Bosnia is considered within its immediate regional links and placed within the political atmosphere (*Zeitgeist*) of the late 1860s and early 1870s. This chapter additionally addresses the astonishing rise in international diplomatic presence and the emergence of national imaginaries within South Slavic/Panslavic intellectual and political groups. According to Grandits, their presence can be interpreted as striking representations of the Ottoman Empire’s growing province-level involvement in the world’s politics and economy at the time.

The book focuses on individual happenings, such as the border clash with Montenegro or the socio-political instability that characterized Bosnia during this time, to consider the experience on the ground. Chapter 3 describes how the unrest in Herzegovina rapidly became linked to questions about the political status of the Principality of Montenegro, unlike the earlier unrest in Bosnia, which was over. Montenegro in the 1870s was a country of less than 100.000 inhabitants, with borders not well defined and a largely subsistence economy that was heavily dependent on certain areas of the Ottoman Empire. Montenegro’s institutional and socio-economic fragility fostered widespread unrest in the region. While all the disputes of 1874-1875 had their roots in relatively

⁹ *Ibidem*.

local and regional contexts at a first glance, the Chapter shows how different groupings of domestic and international political stakeholders hijacked these conflicts.

Grandits' book focuses on the role of the major powers, Russia, the Habsburg Empire, the Ottoman Empire as well as the Western European states. Chapters 5 and 6 analyze how British and European public discourse was influenced by emotionalized conversations about "atrocities" committed under the Ottoman rule and how these affected international diplomacy. From the beginning, there was a dispute over the future of Ottoman control in Europe, namely whether the old political system would continue, or a new one would be established. This argument was strongly linked to various interpretations of the insurgencies that occurred on Ottoman territory. The question of which positions would have the upper hand in the centers of decision making of the European Great Powers was very important. The diplomatic efforts of the Powers concentrated on demanding "reforms" from the Ottoman state leadership, while a rather incensed political public in various European cities debated possibilities for military "humanitarian intervention". For that, the author strives to assert that in the history of the end of Ottoman rule in Bosnia, it is possible to find the same imperialistic dynamics that concerned other parts of the world, such as in India, the Middle East as in Bosnia. In this sense, this book might broaden a perspective in providing different keys to understand colonial rules in different part of the world.

Second issue concerns the time. The book focuses on a definite and limited period. It is only three years, spanning from 1875 to 1878. However, the historical focus of the book is not limited to the three years. Grandits explains how the events of 1875 had their roots in the past. Chapter 5 argues that Serbian-Montenegrin-Ottoman War of 1876, which ultimately resulted in a crushing defeat for the Serbian side in particular, was a direct result of a long-term international Pan-Slavic and revolutionary dynamic. The chapter also demonstrates why the direction of this conflict caused concern among Austro-Hungarian politicians, as rebel organizations operating in the Bosnian Vilayet declared their intention to submit to the Serbian government's leadership. Chapter 1 explains how the vibrant transformations in the economic and social spheres of the urban fabric of the period and the faith in "progress" are linked to the previous Ottoman reforms. In this way, the book aims to confute the teleological views that see the late Ottoman period as a period of decline. The author often speaks of *zeitgeist*, which is a concept that encompasses a longer space of time, i.e. the *longue durée*. This book offers not only a spatially multiple reading, but also entails a historically multiple reading. That is, how the analysis of a short period of time can be explained in different temporalities, in different periods of the past. But this is valid also about the future, which he also does when he talks about the Sarajevo murder.

Third issue concerns the actors. Grandits explains that this book focuses on state and also non-state actors. People are rather hubs of local, transregional and global trajectories. In other words, people act as hubs of networks. Grandits also explains the story through the eyes of these authors,

such as the director of the Sarajevo hospital, Josef Koetschet, or Husejn Bračković, as a scribe in Trebinje and Mostar. Grandits shows the lives of these actors made up of values, ambitions, and uncertainties. In other words, these are non-rational actors. This is an extremely important point. Sometimes in the study of history, but also in other disciplines, some assume that actors are perfectly rational. The author asserts that some events were beyond the control of the great powers. Chapter 4 addresses how the fall of Ottoman power in the Bosnian Vilayet prompted coordinated action by Bulgarian revolutionary groups across the Vilayets of Tuna, Sofya, and Edirne. This was a brief endeavor, however, as local vigilantes and the Ottoman troops brutally suppressed it within weeks. In the spring of 1876, what had started out as a local issue in the Bosnian Vilayet in 1875 appeared to escalate into a more significant political problem that would eventually affect Ottoman governance at various levels in its European provinces.

Since history is the product of a complex interplay of human actions that are not always clear and unambiguous but are instead full of periods of doubt, ambiguity, and mistakes, it cannot, in fact, be understood along a purely teleological thread. Considering the very unpredictable nature of Great Power politics, Chapter 6 describes how, in the spring of 1877, almost all of the parties involved strove to find an “honorable” way out of the precarious position in which all forces were involved. The monarchs, diplomats, governments, and political elites concerned, however, viewed such a “face-saving” solution differently. Not only did this solution fail, but it did also spark a massive Russo-Ottoman conflict. Beginning in April 1877, the war was fought on several Ottoman-Russian front lines in Europe and Asia. For many months, the conflict progressed considerably differently than was first anticipated. With an emphasis on the Bosnian Vilayet, Chapter 7 examines how a new peace arrangement for Ottoman Europe was created in the months that followed the armistice on January 31, 1878. The Ottoman Empire held sway over the Bosnian Vilayet during the 1877-1878 conflict, even though the hardships of war and several mobilizations had left the province’s citizens much depleted. The decision made by the Powers’ representatives at the Berlin Congress in late June and early July 1878, however, was substantially different, as demonstrated in this chapter, much to the dismay of Ottoman Bosnia’s internal elites. In the summer of 1878, a sizable Habsburg army of occupation entered the Bosnian Vilayet after Bosnia was given up to the Habsburg authority. But as straightforward a “solution” as initially believed, the Austro-Hungarian “occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina” proved to be everything but not a solution.

Finally, the book is concerned about the centrality of religious issues. Grandits maintains that religious denominations were important, but they do not explain everything. Yet the book sometimes treats the actors as if they were purely secular-oriented. Including religious claims – that is, if and to what extent the individual actors’ acts were influenced by devout religious thought – would have likely added to the book’s insight. In conclusion, Grandits’ book is a cornerstone in the study of Southeastern Europe, the late Ottoman period, and the history of Bosnia. More broadly,

it represents a study that can be seen as a blueprint for further research and historiographical work that aspires to the same innovative and original scope. Indeed, this book accomplishes the challenging task of providing a comprehensive and exhaustive retelling of the post-Ottoman transition of the Vilayet of Bosnia. In doing so, the author skillfully highlights the historical split and consistency between the Ottoman and post-Ottoman periods, offering a novel perspective on the emergence of the political and social frameworks that shaped the Bosnian landscape in the 20th century. In addition, the book broadens the historiographical analysis of the processes of the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire by emphasizing both the distinctive features of the Bosnian scenario and its parallels with other cases, such as Albania.

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