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OLIVER JENS SCHMITT, *DER BALKAN IM 20. JAHRHUNDERT. EINE POSTIMPERIALE GESCHICHTE*. Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 2019, 336 p.

Reviewed by Dušan Fundić*

In his latest book, *Der Balkan im 20. Jahrhundert. Eine postimperiale Geschichte*, Oliver Jens Schmitt, Professor of Southeast European History at Vienna University, and member of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, approaches the subject primarily from the perspective of various imperial legacies.¹ The author analyses the history of the Balkans on interwoven imperial, national and regional levels. In this review, the focus will be on the interpretative framework of the book and its main conclusions.

Basing his theoretical approach on the past two decades of research on empires, the author accepts the views that empires and nation-states are not concepts that predate or follow each other but rather that they co-existed while significant legacies of empires survived. The post-imperial approach, according to Schmitt, can be understood simply as a period that chronologically follows the demise of empires and as a range of phenomena that stemmed from imperial legacies. These legacies can encompass some legal or administrative practices and individuals shaped by an imperial social framework. What is important to add is that the post-imperial approach has nothing to do with the notion of imperial nostalgia. Instead, it is a means to understand the nation-states'

ambitions to adapt or destroy their imperial legacies. The interpretative framework applied in the book contains three main categories of analysis: the post-imperial, the nation-states, and the history of violence.

Apart from the introductory and concluding remarks, the book consists of four chapters in which the author identifies common threads of the Balkan "short twentieth century" (1912–1989). The chapters on "two decades of war" – 1912–1923 and 1939–1949 – are followed by chapters on the "quest for a new order" during the interwar years and "post-imperial homogenisation" on the communist-dominated peninsula. Geographically, the book covers the former Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, and Albania.

During the "first decade of war", the great powers dominated the Balkans. With the exception of Bulgaria, the Balkan states were under the occupation or their sovereignty was limited by one or the other rival. Nonetheless, as Schmitt concludes, the 1918 turn brought a no less impressive change given the significant territorial gains of Serbia and Romania effectively making them into "small empires".

After the partition of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires among the self-proclaimed nation-states, the author identifies Romania and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (from 1929 Kingdom of Yugoslavia) as "composite post-imperial states". In reality, they were heterogeneous patchworks of several imperial legacies: the Kingdom of Romania inherited parts of the Austrian, Hungarian, Russian and Ottoman lands, while Yugoslavia incorporated parts of the former Austrian, Hungarian

* Institute for Balkan Studies SASA

¹ His books on Balkan history include, among others: *Skanderbeg – der neue Alexander auf dem Balkan* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 2009); *Die Albaner – eine Geschichte zwischen Orient und Okzident* (Munich: C.H. Beck Verlag, 2012); *Capitan Codreanu. Aufstieg und Fall des rumänischen Faschistenführers* (Vienna: Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 2016).

and Ottoman lands. Schmitt explains this curious concept as an adaptation of the notion accepted by researchers to describe the heterogeneity of premodern states here used to define the countries that emerged in the territories of several former empires and their integration difficulties.

The interwar Balkan nation-states were almost all adherents of French-inspired centralisation and democracy. Viewed from a macro-perspective, the interwar period was marked by the conflicting consolidation of states followed by the quest for a new regional order in an attempt to establish a new regional equilibrium and stable economies, and their eventual succumbing to different modes of authoritarian leadership. The young states failed to recover their economies or to build stable institutions, their efforts being hampered by heavy loss of life and the destruction of infrastructure and the economy in war.

The chapter on the "second decade of war" raises the question of responsibility for the Holocaust in Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia, a new wave of violence with a marked foreign role in which Germany was a decisive factor. Speaking of an especially curious imperial legacy, Schmitt mentions the leading representatives of the Nazi system in South-eastern Europe who came from the former Austria seeking revenge mainly against Yugoslavia, such as Edmund Glaise-Horstenau, Konstantin Kammerhofer, Odilo Globocnik or German or former k. und k. officers in the Ustaša regime, Slavko Kvaternik or Vladimir Laxa.

Schmitt suggests that twentieth-century Balkan history has more common threads than usually believed. State intervention in the economy, politics of national "homogenisation" (which often meant simultaneous social levelling), marginalisation of national and religious minorities accompanied by forced assimilation and mass population relocations, charismatic leaders and unofficial power structures before 1945. But what was completely different was the actual range of

state powers. Communist-dominated Balkan societies used harsh policies to carry out forced collectivisation in agriculture and mass migration to urban centres which transformed the dominantly agrarian Balkans. After the second decade of violence, the communist-led Balkans, excluding Greece, underwent another period of reconstruction. Under the terror of secret services and enormous deprivations that bordered on famine, it was not until about 1960 that the material situation of communist-controlled societies temporarily improved.

The waves of violence in Balkan history are one of the central topics of the book. Schmitt attributes them to the weakness of nation-states to erase the imperial legacy and achieve proclaimed ethnic or religious homogeneity. There are in the Balkans, a region so often associated with violence, more traces of empires, among which the author counts Muslim populations from Bosnia and Herzegovina to Bulgaria. Such conclusions are put into context when compared to the fate of by now almost non-existent Anatolian Christians.

After producing the overview of Balkan history, Schmitt poses, among others, the question of composite states' success. Viewing them in an Eastern-European context, he concludes that only one of the „composite post-imperial states“ survived. Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia fell apart, while contemporary Poland is ethnically and geographically different from the multi-ethnic state formed in 1918. Only Romania retained most of its gains since 1918 due to a more favourable starting point and large-scale population changes.

The post-imperial approach applied in the book works best when used to point out the perspectives of areas and groups often marginalised in national historiographies. Schmitt combines such an approach with a consistent structural comparison of the region instead of offering tiresome texts on Balkan countries one after another. The constant comparative perspective offers a

unique overview while demanding more attentive reading. The value of the comparative framework is visible in the subchapters on agrarian reforms after 1918, the Balkan economies after 1945, but also in describing postimperial groups that found themselves engulfed in the process of peripheralisation: the Balkan Muslims (Turkish, Slavic, and Albanian speakers), parts of Hungarian, German and Jewish populations.

In conclusion, by consistently pursuing a comparative look at events and processes in regional and global context, Schmitt succeeds in highlighting various undervalued research perspectives, and approaches the history of the Balkans in a thought-provoking manner which opens room for further research while simultaneously offering a valuable survey of its history.

Marie-Janine Calic, *THE GREAT CAULDRON. A HISTORY OF SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE*.
Cambridge-London: Harvard University Press, 2019, 724 p.

Reviewed by Rastko Lompar*

Marie-Janine Calic, professor of Eastern and Southeastern European History at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, starts her voluminous global history of Southeastern Europe by paraphrasing Tolstoy: "All powerful empires are alike; every poor land is poor in its own way." This book is therefore an attempt to highlight what separated the "poor lands" of the Balkan Peninsula from one another and what brought them together, what was unique to each and what was shared amongst them, and ultimately what their place is within the global context. It was originally published in German in 2016 under the title *Südosteuropa. Weltgeschichte einer Region*, and translated, with minor changes, into English by Elizabeth Janik. The translation is excellent, although at times too literal.

This book is a rare attempt at a concise overview of the historical developments in the Balkans from the fifteenth to the twenty-first century. Starting with a brief outline of the region's early history, Calic describes the situation in the 1500s and the breakdown of the pre-Ottoman Balkan order. The rise of Ottoman power is also covered in detail. The struggle between the imperial powers (Habsburg, Ottoman and Russian)

for the region is looked at against the backdrop of the intellectual developments on both sides of the Atlantic. The author discusses the impact of the American and French revolutions in the Balkans and the nascent movements for national liberation in the Balkans. The rise of nationalism and the founding myths of national ideologies are also discussed. Calic follows the banishment of Turkey from the Balkans, the First World War, as well as the polycentric and complicated interwar Balkan order. Focusing on the dialectical relationship between globalization and fragmentation, the author looks at the rise and fall of communism and debates about the place of Southeastern Europe in the global world of today.

Although there are some excursions into economic and financial history, the book primarily focuses on political events, stopping short of Braudel's method. All major chapters contain subchapters named after a paradigmatic city for the period (Krüje 1450, Istanbul 1683, Dubrovnik 1776, Thessaloniki 1821, Plovdiv 1876, Belgrade 1913, Bucharest 1939 and Sarajevo

* Institute for Balkan Studies SASA

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