

# Heroes, Traitors and Survivors in the Borderlands of Empires: Military Mobilisations and Local Communities in the Sandžak, 1900s–1920s

PhD Dissertation by **Jovo Miladinović**

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Dr. Jovo Miladinović is preparing a book manuscript based on his dissertation.

This study analyses societal mobilisations through military institutions of the Ottoman Empire, Montenegro, Serbia, the Habsburg Monarchy, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes during the Greater War. During this time frame consisting of diverse peace and wartime episodes and extensive watersheds, a substantial socio-political change occurred in the region, which many nowadays see as Central and South-Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. This time frame allows one to comprehend the shared experience of diverse areas, where people during the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), First World War (1914–1918) and the Greco-Turkish War (1919–1923) had to adjust to a new socio-political setting. States lost or expended their territories, were occupied, dissolved or newly forged. This study revisits this considerable transformation of societies and polities through the lens of the mobilisations of the five states, grasping them as one of the crucial factors for the making of today's socio-political boundaries in Central and South-Eastern Europe and the Middle East. In doing so, the work follows the actors and depicts historical episodes from Pljevlja, Graz, Istanbul and Habsburg and Russian camps for prisoners of war. To measure the mobilisations in the multi-lingual context, the work draws on primary and secondary sources kept in the archives and libraries in Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Germany, Montenegro, Serbia, Switzerland and Turkey.

The study looks at the mobilisations through the prism of the Sandžak, a tiny but crucial (post-)Ottoman imperial intersection, where the local and global dimensions of the Greater War intersected. Consisting of various borderlands, the Sandžak was located within the Ottoman Empire and squeezed between the Habsburg Monarchy, Serbia, and Montenegro before 1912. The borderlands were part of the Ottoman Empire (until 1912), Montenegro, Serbia (1912–1915), the Habsburg Monarchy (1915–1918), and finally, the Kingdom of SCS (from 1918 on). The Sandžak was one of the rare borderlands where one can examine the stimulating interaction between the trans-imperial, national-imperial and trans-local scales. The Sandžak functions in this study as a pivot, whose different elements were trans-locally connected, and offers one the chance to grasp a variety of actors and historical processes connecting Central and South-Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

Each of these five states mobilised the locals in varying degrees into their (para) military units, and the work's *first* driving aim is to show how these states achieved

that. The *second* and *third* goals are to explain the ordinary people's intentions for joining the military and the role of women and children in this societal process. In doing so, this study is not concerned with one isolated 'group,' given the many shared links that bonded the people in the borderlands, whose number amounted to 250,000 in 1912. Labelling them merely as – *the* – Muslims, Orthodox Christians and Catholics or using national containers will not suffice to understand the mobilisations. Given the high degree of the local residential mixing and peculiarities in both rural and urban areas, the mobilisations aimed at facilitating the transition of the Sandžak to a bordered land, where fixed ethnoreligious hierarchisations and the management of resources – in the hands of the state – were achieved. All states followed the global *zeitgeist* by massively reducing vernaculars of all kinds in similar and different ways. This transition was not a one-dimensional process since locals hampered these imperial projects. The end of each state was to establish cooperation with the ordinary people because oppression did not build a stable and productive order necessary for mobilising the people. Although ethnicization was noticeable on the ground, the issue was more the question of power associated with new territorial partitions than an ethnic conflict itself.

The work shows the success, limit and failure of how these polities made their subjects believe in the state's capabilities to ensure the victory of their wars. To a varying degree, these countries were innovative in defining and redefining the war necessities. However, in illuminating their abilities, the study portrays the differences and similarities between the empires and nation-states operating in the borderlands, depicting how their mobilisations engendered the socio-political change. The work also reveals the role of South-Eastern Europe as the vanguard of military innovation, a space within and from which the great powers learned on military topics. In underlining these main messages, this work intends to contribute to the new discussion on late Ottoman, Habsburg and South-Eastern European history and change the reader's general understanding of warfare in twenty-century South-Eastern Europe interested in new military and imperial history.

Rather than viewing the mobilisations as self-given, through ethnoreligious glasses, or as a result of the war ardour, as most inspiring works do, this study reveals that a mobilisation is a cascading process. It consisted of continual persuasions and renegotiations between state elites, ordinary people and influential intermediary brokers of different societal backgrounds. The brokers' angle is a missing link in scholarship on the Greater War. They identified, collected and encouraged the people capable of serving while looking after their families and legitimising the old/new state through these actions. Thus, the work studies the mobilisations from the following three angles: state elites, ordinary people and brokers. A mobilisation for war efforts was a multi-layered process, which state elites mainly launched; however, ordinary people and brokers' political, social and cultural realities steered this process. The interrelation between these three angles – called in this work 'a mobilisation field' – facilitated a mobilisation. In this field, a balance of power flows between the actors involved, through which one can better understand how a broad popular consent consisting of diverse

(opposing) layers of a given community was upheld and how the ordinary people and the brokers endured mounting war pressure and profited from these mobilisations.

Mobilisation in this study refers not only to the process of putting the peace-time standing army or militia on a war basis, which covers raising mass armies and delivering them to the barracks or the battlefield. It also indicates economic, societal, cultural and political mobilisations through which the state elites stimulated and controlled as many subjects and spaces as possible. In doing so, the study tries to show the intensity and extensivity of the Greater War. As this work dissects the multi-layered sheets of the mobilisations, the reader will see that emphasis *on* the ideological essence of a given political push was not enough to ensure the people's loyalty *if* the state elites did not provide material benefits. One's ethnoreligious loyalty does matter; however, it should not be taken for granted because it does not determine what individuals do or exclusively mobilise people. Language communities, networks, worldview interpretations, ideological drafts, loyalties, age, kinship, gender, and local standings – that functioned as socialising filters – played a vital role in grasping the agency of the locals during the Greater War. In addition, the people knew how to gain something tangible for themselves and their families in exchange for supporting a specific state and believing in the war of an imagined community.

Ethnoreligious fervours depended on the strategies of inducement (tax exemptions, land and debt moratoriums, agrarian issues, social-welfare policies) and tacit security contracts offered by the state elites, through which the latter legitimised their rule and ensured that their subjects did not lose heart during the Greater War. Failing to convince their people of the state elites' credibility and end victory led to the evaporation of state loyalties of their subjects. By counterweighting the mounting pressure of war and the expanding feeling of uncertainty on the ground, the state elites intentionally aimed at homogenising different layers of community within a dominant framework of national identification. When one adds to these strategies one's consent, the ideological projects *and* the coercive methods applied by the state elites and brokers, it becomes clear that the societal mobilisations never revolved around one factor. Instead, the interdependent use of an array of these mobilisation tools yielded results. These factors worked together in a complex interplay and had a powerful effect on the communities, albeit the varying degrees of success depended on the context. Hence, gauging which strategy counted more than the others is impossible. The state elites thus adjusted to the people's expectations and ways of acting.