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Marko Attila Hoare, *The Bosnian Muslims in the Second World War: A History*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013. Pp. xviii, 478. ISBN 978-0-19-932785-0.

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In his third book,<sup>1</sup> British historian Marko Attila Hoare (Kingston Univ.) makes extensive use of archival material on the history of Bosnia-Herzegovina. He advances a compelling two-part, empirically sound, but questionable thesis: from 1941 to the bitter end in 1992–95, Bosnia was the “lynchpin” of Yugoslavia, and the Bosnian Muslims were the de facto national lynchpin of Bosnia (288).

The book is a “study of the relationship between the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the People’s Liberation Movement [NOP]” (7), the Yugoslav Communist Party (KPJ)-led resistance organization (known as the Partisan movement under Josip Tito), which rapidly gained momentum in summer 1941, after the Axis invasion of the Soviet Union. Though Yugoslavia had already been invaded, occupied, and dismembered the preceding April, the KPJ did not resist Axis forces until so directed by Josef Stalin. When the fascist Ustasha regime of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH)—the Nazi puppet regime that included Bosnia-Herzegovina—launched a genocide of Bosnian Serbs, Jews, and Gypsies, large numbers of desperate Serbs joined the Partisans at least for the sake of survival. But Hoare mainly seeks to “explain how and why large sections of the Bosnian Muslim population came to support the NOP, and to trace the resulting dynamic” as the new Bosnia-Herzegovina became a constituent member of the new Yugoslavia; “this involves deconstructing the myth of a pristine, homogeneous, top-down Communist-led resistance movement” (7) by examining the complex ground-level events in Bosnia. It is not clear in whose mind that “myth” exists, yet the author’s ambition stands. Because Bosnia cannot be understood apart from Yugoslavia as a whole, Hoare promises to refer to other parts of the country where appropriate, but it is the “specifically Bosnian revolutionary dynamic that his work seeks to illuminate” (7). Finally, since the destruction of Bosnia and Yugoslavia in the 1990s cannot be understood without understanding how they were first reconstituted in the 1940s, the book attempts to “shed light” on the “fateful connection” (12) between the two periods.

Chapter 1, “The Dual Bosnian Resistance: c. April 1941–April 1943,” presents a complex and multifaceted picture of localized responses to different threats that “dual” often oversimplifies and “resistance” often misrepresents. The author means to, and eventually does, highlight a “specifically Bosnian” dynamic of Partisan resistance against the Ustasha, with the Muslims in a critical role. But this involved major activity and behavior that was neither “dual” nor recognizably “resistance.” As presented, Bosnian Serbs, Muslims, and Croats all featured distinct sociopolitical elements who resisted their perceived foreign and/or domestic oppressors in different ways: some through the KPJ, some through Serbian Chetnik groups, some through Muslim autonomist organizations, some by appealing to Hitler himself, some by joining a Bosnian SS group, and some by “resisting” within the ranks of the genocidal Ustasha (14–15, 46–54). Specifically regarding the Muslims, the author states that “Whatever form it took, this resistance was aimed at protecting the Muslim people—their individuality, interests and security, as its protagonists saw them” (14). This is a claim he does not make for any other Yugoslav group, and it clearly risks stretching “resistance” in Axis occupied Europe into something for everybody, including the aggressor states and their collaborators.

Chapter 2, “The People’s Liberation Movement Underground: c. April 1941–April 1943,” explores the shifting identities, interests, and behaviors of Yugoslavs that blurred the line between resistance and collaboration. Hoare argues that most people in Bosnian cities and towns—strategic strongholds coveted by all rival forces—just aimed to survive. Given the premodern social structure of both rural and urban Bosnia, with its patronage networks and strong familial and personal connections, Muslim, Ustasha, Communist, and Chetnik political

1. The others are *How Bosnia Armed* (London: Saqi Books, 2004) and *Genocide and Resistance in Hitler’s Bosnia: The Partisans and the Chetniks, 1941–1943* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 2006).

associations were bound to be “Bosnianized.” Resistance and collaboration, which normally carry great political weight, were often so fluid as to be devoid of ideological meaning.

Despite the previous chapter’s characterization of Muslim resistance, chapter 2 reveals an astoundingly volatile set of overlapping identities, networks, and personal circumstances underlying conditions in wartime Bosnia. But without necessarily minimizing the political importance and fatefulness of the decisions made, Hoare describes how the Partisans increased their control of cities and towns by infiltrating and attracting defectors from the Croatian Home Guards. The more extremist Croatian Ustasha’s sometimes brutal treatment of the Home Guards had the unintended effect of strengthening the Partisans. Hoare rightly retains the categories of collaboration and resistance, which became more sharply defined as the Partisans gained strength and Axis forces lost it in the latter part of the war.

Chapter 3, “The Muslim and Croat Rebellion: c. April 1943–October 1943,” focuses on the many Muslims and Croats who turned against the NDH and the Ustasha and toward the Partisans: “1943 witnessed the turning of the tide for the NOP in Bosnia-Herzegovina” due to “Italian collaboration with the Chetniks and the triumphalist Chetnik genocidal assault on the Bosnian Muslim and Croat population,” against which the NDH and the Ustasha were ill-equipped to offer any protection. Even the Bosnian SS “*Handschar* Division,” the “flagship project of the Muslim autonomist resistance” (103), threatened to send their fighters to theaters of war outside Bosnia. Meanwhile, rumors circulated that Hitler, exasperated by NDH incompetence, intended to subject Bosnia to the control of Milan Nedić’s Serbian collaborationist regime, which would have severely worsened the nightmare.

Chapter 4, “Bosnian Assembly and Yugoslav Federation: c. October 1943–April 1944,” concerns critical developments in the period and their short-term ramifications. To the Partisans’ gains achieved by summer 1943, the Italian surrender in September added the windfall of additional weaponry and enhanced prestige. Momentum continued in their favor in Bosnia and throughout Yugoslavia. The Partisans held top-level meetings in November to make preliminary constitutional plans for the two interconnected entities. These meetings were complicated by the irrepressible multinational character of the participants and their constituencies, which Hoare evokes very effectively. The most contentious issue, among many, was the prospective constitutional status of Bosnia within the larger Yugoslav federation. KPJ leadership was split on the matter: the leading Slovenian theorist, Edvard Kardelj, advocated a Bosnia-Herzegovina with a status equal to that of the other proposed national republics—Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Slovenia, and Croatia. Tito and two other Central Committee figures, Milovan Đilas and Moše Pijade, opposed Kardelj, arguing that Bosnia should not have equal status because neither it nor its Muslim inhabitants were a nation. Bosnian Communists favored equal status because of Bosnia’s historically multinational character and its vital role in the looming Partisan victory over all of Yugoslavia.

Pragmatic considerations prevailed and Bosnia received equal status with the other republics: “Bosnian statehood was the only solution that could win over the Muslims, trump the anti-Communist Muslim leaders and avoid offending either Serb or Croat national feeling or encouraging Great Serbian or Great Croatian nationalism” (169). Partisan successes still galvanized remaining anti-Communist opposition. For example, Draža Mihailović, the Serbian Chetnik leader, toned down (what his opponents construed as) his Great Serb chauvinism in an effort to emulate the Communists’ appeal to non-Serb nationalities, including the Bosnian Muslims. But he was losing the war for Yugoslavia, and his efforts came to naught.

Chapter 5, “Bosnian Statehood and Partisan Diversity: c. November 1943–April 1945,” covers the period when, as Hoare puts it with some hyperbole, Bosnia was officially established as a state—for the first time since the Bosnian Kingdom fell to the Ottomans in 1463. This marked the peak of Bosnian Partisan power and relative autonomy within the Yugoslav NOP. However, the further incorporation of former enemies and collaborators would internalize bitter hostilities and dilute the movement’s base. Thus, for example, when the Anti-Fascist Front of Women opened its membership to more Muslim women, it ran afoul of the pervasively patriarchal political culture of the time. The KPJ chastised the organization for its “feminist errors.” As Partisan diversity increased, the question of whether the Muslims constituted a nation, a people, or a religious group remained deliberately unanswered at top levels, where ambiguity was more expedient than clarity.

Hoare shows that, in terms of justice, politics, and the new constitution, the Bosnian Muslim question was emerging as a major problem within the new Yugoslav edifice.

Chapter 6, “The Liberation of Bosnia and Yugoslavia: c. April 1944–April 1945,” traces the further growth of the Partisans and the crumbling of the NDH. As a purely practical matter, collaborators of all stripes swung to the Partisans in “a genuine popular revolution, one that embraced politically and socially diverse elements, ... catalysed by the even more drastic collapse of state and society in the NDH ...” (243–44). Nazi defeats certainly accelerated the collapse of collaborationist forces across Europe, though Hitler found an edge against the Croats, who, he believed “had no idea of statehood and will never have one” (245). Hoare recounts in rich detail the triumphant Partisan political and military moves on the Bosnian cities of Tuzla, Banja Luka, Sarajevo, and Mostar as well as their advance on Serbia—the final step toward ultimate Yugoslav state power.

Chapter 7, “Constructing a Bosnian Nation-State: c. July 1944–December 1946,” highlights the problem of Bosnia-Herzegovina as “a nation-state without a nation” (287), tenuously held together only by the “ideological glue” of Communism (288). A “Bosnian patriotism” stressed the idea of Bosnians as a “people” or an ethnically mixed “political nation.” Schools taught the historical-cultural legacies of the Bosnian Serbs and Croats, while ignoring those of the Muslims; this fostered political dysfunction. Hoare argues that the Yugoslav Communist effort to unify all Serbs (that is, from both Bosnia and Serbia) meant the non-recognition of the Muslims as a nation. Historically speaking, this was deeply connected with contrasting views of the “Ottoman era, to which the Muslims were emotionally attached, [but which] was ... viewed by Serbs and Croats as an era of enslavement” (318). Tension between the political nation of Bosnia and the other national republics “was never resolved during the lifetime of the Yugoslav state and was formally the issue over which the war of 1992–95 broke out” (330).

Chapter 8, “Bosnia and the Muslims after Liberation: c. April 1945–September 1950,” describes how the KPJ dealt with a diverse, impoverished, illiterate, traumatized, and often hostile population. Hoare believes the NOP won because it “expanded beyond its loyal, Communist-dominated base to become a heterogeneous mass movement reflective of all sections of the Bosnian population that were opposed to the Ustasha and Nazi order.” The “flimsiness” of the heterogeneous new state’s institutions “pushed the Communists to consolidate their dictatorship” (331). The new regime was bitterly opposed by Muslim and Catholic conservatives—imams, priests, and ordinary religious people, among others—whom it needed in order to consolidate power. Meanwhile, many Bosnian Serbs migrated to the Vojvodina, where prewar German and Hungarian minorities had been “cleansed.” This made Muslims the largest minority population in Bosnia, creating attendant political insecurities for its Serbian population. Muslim nationalists then challenged the Yugoslav regime and were recognized as a nation in 1968. Their ensuing “national cultural renaissance” instilled greater fear in the Bosnian Serbs, especially after the polarizing figure of Alija Izetbegović, a former member of the wartime Young Muslim SS division, became the first president of independent Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1990s.

In his short “Conclusion: The Rise and Fall of the Bosnian Republic,” Hoare offers a summary of his book and a polemic on the destruction of Bosnia in the 1990s, blaming Serb and Croatian nationalists, as well as Bosnian Muslim nationalists, who, he claims, were only reacting against the other nationalists. Given his mostly judicious, nuanced, and engaging historical analysis of complex political behaviors throughout the rest of the book, his attack here seems out of character. That said, his striking earlier assertion that whatever “resistance” the Bosnian Muslims engaged in during World War Two “was aimed at protecting the Muslim people” (14) amounts to a political-ethical blank check. This raises the suspicion that the author has applied a nationalist epistemology wherein some nations are essentially pathological and others virtuous, with consequent damage to the case he strives to make. *The Bosnian Muslims in the Second World War* does “shed light” on the complicated events of the 1990s, at least domestically, but it does not fully explain them. However, its author has made a fascinating and invaluable scholarly argument for the importance of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the national question of Bosnian Muslims in the remaking of Yugoslavia during the 1940s.